

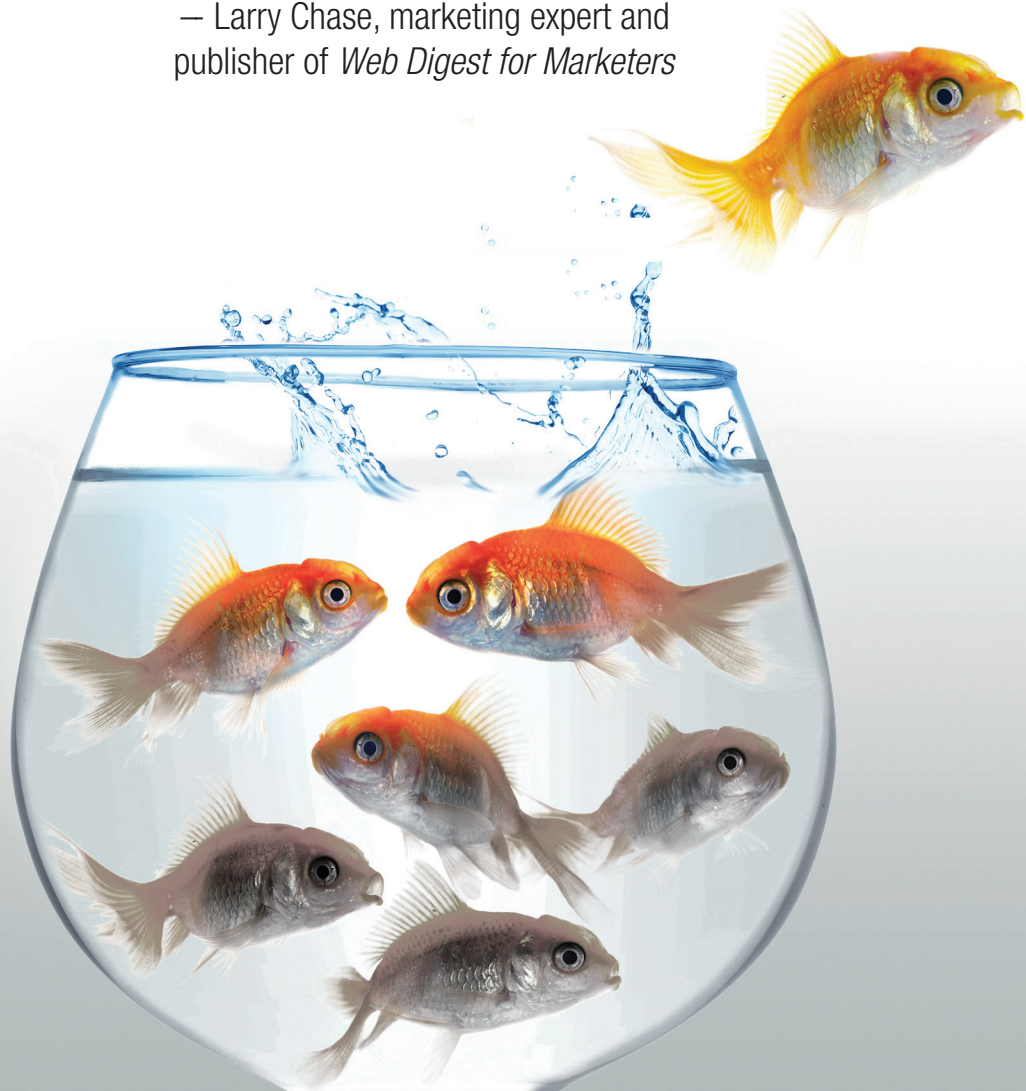
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Ways to attract more qualified leads with your white paper

by Mark K. Brewer

***“When done right, nothing pulls in qualified leads
like a well-targeted offer for a juicy white paper.”***

— Larry Chase, marketing expert and
publisher of *Web Digest for Marketers*





Studies confirm that now, more than ever, a well-written and well-positioned white paper can generate qualified leads, build brand awareness, expand mindshare, shortlist your company and may even help seal the deal. White papers are one of the most important marketing communications you can publish. Perhaps the most important.

White papers still reign supreme in the tech buying process

According to “2014 B2B Technology Content Survey Report,” by Eccolo Media, a leading tech marketing company, 69 percent of decision makers in large tech companies and 57 percent of decision makers in mid-market tech companies believe that white papers are the most influential content they use when making buying decisions. This survey of 500-plus tech executives, directors, engineers and managers also shows that white papers are more influential than product brochures, case studies, videos, trade publication articles, webinars, email newsletters and blogs.

According to “Technology Buying and Media Consumption Survey, Report 2” by TechTarget and CMO Council, white papers continue to be one of the most common channels that buyers use to evaluate new technology and ideas, and one of the most effective sources of information for technology buyers making career-shaping decisions. Specifically, the study indicates that:

- 60 percent of respondents downloaded five or more white papers in the last three months
- 58 percent said they use white papers to find solutions for business problems
- 29 percent rated white papers as “very effective,” with 57 percent rating them as “effective”

White papers are effective because of the complexity of choices available to buyers today. Because buyers have more choices, they also have more information to process. Audiences are overwhelmed. They’re thirsty for relevant and reliable information that’s easy to read and absorb.

“White papers are one of the most important marketing communications you can publish.”

Today, as more influencers become involved in buying decisions, white papers can be helpful in addressing the concerns of each buying influence.

With the proliferation of white papers, it's important for marketers to ensure their white papers cut through the clutter and position their product or service as the only logical solution. Getting it right has never been more important.

The following time-tested tips and best practices will guide you in some of the most critical aspects in the development and writing of white papers that deliver real leads from qualified buyers, leading to sales and growth.

“A winning white paper is about solutions, not products.”

What to Do. What to Avoid.

1. Avoid: Promoting the product

Reading a product brochure disguised as a white paper is one of the top two complaints from users of white papers according to the TechTarget report. Readers expect reasonably unbiased insights and reliable, vendor-neutral information. A winning white paper is about solutions, not products. Stay focused on the technology or innovation discussion and make a business case for your solution.

Don't mention your product or company in the title or body of the white paper. But I do recommend ending white papers with a “pitch page” that can include company and product information along with a strong call to action. This should be separate from the technology discussion.

2. Avoid: Focusing on something other than problem solving

This is the second of the top two things that really bug white paper readers according to the TechTarget report. It's common to get sidelined by “feature myopia” because most marketing communications are, rightly so, focused on features and benefits. Stay focused on how your unique solution solves a business problem.

“Select a compelling topic — it must be of high importance to the reader.”

3. Do: Select a topic that positions your company as the go-to provider for your solution

One of the top two keys to attract qualified leads is to position your company as the go-to provider of your technology or innovation. Select a topic that focuses on a significant business benefit of your unique, proprietary solution. To drill down to this, ask questions like, “What is it about your product or service that is innovative, advanced, different or a game changer?” Focus on that aspect and tie it to one big benefit.

4. Do: Select a topic that is of high importance to the reader

The second of two keys to attract qualified leads is selecting a compelling topic — it must be of high importance to the reader. Common pitfalls in topic selection are that the topic is too broad or that it’s not relevant to the buyer.

A focused topic helps focus the text. Winning white papers make one key point that drives the reader into your prospect pool. The topic should be memorable and angled so that it attracts qualified leads.

If you’re not clear on your white paper topic, you’re not alone. Many struggle to get clarity. Thankfully there’s a process for developing a high-interest topic.

5. Do: Target a narrow audience

You’ll make a stronger and stickier point if you can clearly identify your audience beyond “B2B,” which isn’t really an audience, or a specific industry, which is too broad for a white paper. Think job title, technology platform, sector or a narrower niche within a sector. A well-targeted audience will help focus the text and help grab the attention of your ideal prospect.

6. Do: Attract the right reader with a strong title

With a well-targeted audience, it's easier to create a title to attract them. State a clear benefit to the reader in the title. Consider including a job function for clarity about who benefits such as development directors, vice presidents, development services directors or whoever reaps the benefit of your innovation. For example, "How XYZ Solution Helps Streamline Development Services Operations by Automating Common Steps."

Don't decide on a final title too early. It's best to start with a working title and develop a final title later in the process.

"State a clear benefit to the reader in the title. Consider including a job function."

7. Do: Be clear about the benefits to the reader

What's the biggest problem that your new technology solves? What's the biggest opportunity that your prospects are missing out on without your new innovation? If you're a training company, what's the one thing you teach that they can't get anywhere else? If you're a consultant, what's the one thing you can provide to clients that they can't get anywhere else?

8. Do: Pay attention to the length

White papers should fall between 4-8 pages, or 2,500-4,000 words. That's just enough space to make a detailed case for a solution without stressing the reader's attention span. If you think you need more space, you may be trying to say too much. Say enough to attract and capture a quality lead.

9. Avoid: Boring layout

Nobody's quite sure where the term "white paper" comes from, but one thing's for sure, you don't need to take it literally! Like all important marketing touch points, the paper should be designed by a professional graphic designer well-versed in the fine art of illuminating the message and creating a pleasing rhythm of color, type, images and white space. It should be designed to accommodate both detail-oriented readers and

skimmers. The text should be broken up with multiple points of entry including subheads, sidebars, bulleted lists (yes, bullets are still ok) and graphics with cutlines that illuminate key points in the text.

However, it shouldn't be overdesigned so that it looks like a product brochure. Somewhere in between is just right.

10. Do: Strive for clarity in the text

A paper that is poorly written or poorly organized won't impress readers. Use the time-proven structures for persuasive writing. Passive language is by nature vague and un-motivational. Use active, transitive verbs to help propel the reader through the text. State your case with conviction using evidence from respected sources. Position your approach as the ideal solution to the problem. Be clear about the problem. Be clear about the solution.

The best voice for white papers is business casual. Not too formal. Not too chatty.

White paper writing is not for amateurs. Your writer should be experienced in persuasive writing for business audiences.

“Use the time-proven structures for persuasive writing.”

11. Do: Open with an executive summary

Executives have too much to read. Ease into the content with a summary. Don't worry about being repetitive. A bit of repetition is a good thing. Summarize the problem and solution in one or two paragraphs — about a half page. Think of it as a collection of topic sentences.

12. Do: State a clear conclusion

Don't make the readers come to their own conclusions. Make it for them, even if it's repetitive. Executives will read the summary and then jump to the conclusion for the “bottom line.” If they have similar content, then you've just doubled your chances of your message getting through.

13. Avoid: Mentioning competitors

As an unbiased article, it's best to avoid directly comparing your company or product with the competition. Naming the competition or a competing platform or technology is a real credibility crusher.

You can, however, draw comparisons without mentioning the competition.

14. Do: Cite sources and avoid making unsubstantiated claims

Finding credible information is a challenge, according to the 1,000 IT managers surveyed for “Customer Engagement 2016” by IDGEnterprise, a leading technology media company. Thirty percent of decision makers say finding credible information is extremely or very challenging, and 50 percent say it's somewhat challenging. The biggest complaint according to half of the respondents is finding truly independent and unbiased information.

Use and cite credible sources for every assertion that you make. The best method is to embed the source in the text, similar to a magazine or newspaper article. For example, “According to the 2012 survey, ‘What Tech Marketers Think About White Papers,’ by the North American Marketing Association, white papers ...”. Footnotes distract from the flow of the text. Endnotes are better than footnotes but few readers will notice your sources as endnotes.

“The biggest reader complaint is finding truly independent and unbiased information.”

15. Do: Include a strong call to action

This is where you capture your lead. Readers appreciate your help in guiding them to the next step in the sales or engagement process. The call to action should take the reader to your next resource, such as a webinar, sales call or other prospect-nurturing medium or tactic. Be specific. Try this formula:

To learn more about how [your idea, technology, innovation or company] can help your [team, organization, company] [reap the #1 benefit in your white paper], [do something: call, email or other action].

The more specific the action, the better your results will be.

16. Consider: Targeting a stage in the sales cycle

Are you attracting initial interest? Do you want readers to short-list your company? Consider angling the white paper to a specific point in the sales process.

“Be assertive about broadcasting your message by having a clear marketing and promotional plan.”

17. Do: Have a marketing plan for your white paper

Your white paper is a big deal so don't hide it. Be assertive about broadcasting your message by having a clear marketing plan. Promote it on LinkedIn and Twitter. Mail it to key contacts, including the press. Write a press release and put it on a distribution service such as PRWeb.com. Use syndication services. Promote it in your newsletters. Consider a Google Adwords campaign. Drive interest with email and direct mail campaigns. Print paper copies for your sales team. Hand it out at trade shows. Get creative.

Conclusion

White papers can be powerful lead generators when established best practices are followed. Promote your technology or innovation, not the product, features or company. Select a topic that is of high interest to your target audience and that positions your company as the go-to provider of your solution. Create a title that grabs the attention of your target audience; include a job title and a business benefit. Use established structures for persuasive writing. Cite respected sources to establish credibility. Include a pitch page at the end with a strong call to action.

Need a white paper that resonates with your prospects and gets them to act? Contact Mark Brewer at (815) 858-3900 or mark@markbrewerwriter.com to get a no-obligation estimate.

About the author

Mark Brewer is a successful business, technical and magazine feature writer with 30 years experience in corporate and nonprofit communications.

Naturally curious, Mark is an experienced interviewer and thorough researcher, providing persuasive marketing communications for marketers and institutional fundraisers.

Corporate training and tech writing clients include General Motors, Motorola, McDonalds, Abbott Labs, Pfizer and Applied Learning Inc., where he developed video training for IBM computing platforms. Mark's writing includes successful direct mail appeals and fundraising campaign literature for nonprofits in the social service, higher education and senior care sectors.

Mark's technology feature articles are published in trade magazines such as *Advancing Philanthropy* for the Association of Fundraising Professionals and *Legal Management* for the Association of Legal Administrators.

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Mark Brewer Media, Inc.

(815) 858-3900

mark@markbrewerwriter.com

www.markbrewerwriter.com