# How to Write an Effective Technology White Paper



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## Introduction

White papers are an important part of the sales and marketing process. By effectively educating prospects, vendors can get attention and credit for this as well as follow up with a more direct sales pitch later.

Creating an excellent white paper can take time – often time away from engineering pursuits that may seem more important to the technical experts asked to write the paper! The hope is that this white paper will help give your technical writers and experts a start, and help them produce a white paper that is going to be most effective for you. This paper may also be helpful in explaining what types of sales collateral material are not appropriate for a white paper lead-generation campaign.

#### **Executive summary**

What are white papers anyway? Wikipedia states that "a white paper is an authoritative report or guide that helps readers understand an issue, solve a problem, or make a decision." In the IT world, buyers know that most white papers are created by vendors, companies who ultimately are using this white paper to sell the reader a product or solution. The contents of the white paper, though, are generally educational in nature, not explicitly a sales document. IT professionals who read white papers are searching for trustworthy information, not marketing literature. These IT professionals want to become educated on the subject at hand. Through lead nurturing, some white-paper readers may become buyers.

A well-written and thought-out white paper will bolster the vendor as both a knowledgeable authority and a trustworthy vendor -- an authority on the subject at hand. By contrast, a poorly written white paper, lacking solid educational information or one that is clearly sales and marketing literature, will detract from the vendor's reputation.

## Types of white papers

Common informative white papers include

- A description of solutions to problems, such as a bulleted list of tips or tricks. Often labeled as "the six best ways to...," or a list of "best practices," or even "worst practices to avoid."
- Discussion of a new technology or methodology with advantages or disadvantages, as well as suggestions for adoption.
- Descriptions of common technical problems, presenting genuine solutions that do not require the vendor's products or services.

Common uninformative white papers include

- A specific discussion of a vendor's products or services. This is seen as marketing.
- A specific guide on how to switch from a competitor's technology. This is seen as marketing.

• A false guide to competitive products, describing why the vendor's solution is better. This is seen as marketing.

Marketing documents that are not white papers

- Descriptions of your products or solutions are not white papers. Those are data sheets.
- Customer case studies are not white papers. They are case studies.

• Tips and tricks for using specific products are not white papers. They are product documentation.

- Lists of reasons why your offerings are better than competitors, or that claim to fairly compare your offerings to competitors. Those are marketing pieces, not white papers.
- How-to sheets on how to move from a competitor's offering to your offering. Those are technical documentation, not white papers.

All of these collateral are important, and should live on every vendor's website. However, not all of them are white papers suitable for use in a lead-generation campaign.

## Benefits to white papers and how to maximize effectiveness

A strong white paper can establish a vendor's thought leadership position, generate sales leads, and create preference among a group of potential buyers.

Establish thought leadership: Vendors that produce the best white papers will gain most in this area. What distinguishes one white paper from another in this regard? First of all, **thought leadership is never established with blatant sales pitches.** If the white paper is about a specific product, it is not a white paper – it is a marketing data sheet. The goal is to honestly educate the potential customer, presenting the vendor's expertise and credibility as a trusted advisor, not as a high-tech used car salesman pushing whatever car is on the lot.

<u>Generate sales leads</u>: IT professionals are constantly seeking the latest information on changing landscapes or new technology. To be most successful at generating leads, you should produce white papers about the hot topics of the day. The more effective the white paper is, the easier it is for a third-party provider, such as SD Times, to generate leads, which could mean quicker lead production and/or lower costs for future projects.

<u>Create preference</u>: The audience for a specific white paper is self-selecting, and therefore, choosing the right subject matter can mean a high likelihood that the reader will be interested in buying products or solutions in that particular market. Since many white paper readers are searching for educational material to determine future directions or anticipate future needs, the leads may not represent ready buyers right away. The leads need to be nurtured, not turned over to a telemarketing team for a quick high-pressure attempt to close the sale.

# Techniques of creating and delivering a superior white paper

Think of the white paper as the meal in a restaurant – with products or specific solutions being the dessert offered at the end of the meal, which IT professionals may choose to order, or may pass on for now.

• The white paper is not about marketing your solutions. It is about satisfying the reader's needs for trustworthy information.

• Know the audience. Is the white paper written for the CIO in a Fortune 500 company or the software development manager at a division? Don't write for the programmer or systems administrator; programmers and sys-admins rarely read white papers. Write for decision-makers who have a solid technical background.

• Set the table. A discussion of the technological background of the subject matter is fully appropriate, but stay focused on the educational needs. Present only as much history as is relevant. The reader is looking for actionable information to help solve a current or projected problem – not for a dissertation on the evolution of modern computer technology.

• Be subtle in the sales pitch. IT professionals are not stupid. They know the game and are willing to exchange their time and a mild exposure to a sales pitch in exchange for solid technical information that will help them understand the solution to a problem. However, IT professionals are not looking for a straw-man pitch that ends with, "The only/best solution to your problem is to buy our product or service." The less the white paper blatantly sells, the higher its credibility, and with that, the position of the vendor as a thought leader.

• Give a real education. What will IT professionals learn by reading the white paper? Did they learn something beyond a list of reasons why they should buy your product or a list of your product, or solutions' specifications?

• Be honest. IT professionals know that a vendor produced the white paper, or paid an analyst firm to write it. They know that there will be bias. Offset that bias and gain credibility with the buyer by pointing out the full range of ways to deal with an issue. Get extra credit for pointing out those scenarios where competing technology would be the way to go.

• A solid, fact-filled technical white paper is between 6 and 12 pages, including the cover page. Shorter papers can be effective, but it is difficult to deliver education in only one or two pages. White papers longer than 12 pages can be overwhelming. It may be better to break the subject up into multiple, more targeted white papers.

• Keep the educational process going. Point out genuine, impartial resources where the potential buyer can get even more information on the subject at hand.

#### Marketing your white paper

After an excellent white paper has been created, it needs to be marketed in order to generate sales leads. It is important to accurately and truthfully measure how many sales leads per week or month a sales team can effectively follow up on. Effective follow-up means more than one call or e-mail, so as a general rule, be careful about generating more than 50 leads per month per salesperson. Of course, each company has its own sales philosophy and methodology but the trend today is reducing the quantity of leads and improving the quality.

One way to increase the quality of your leads is by increasing your company's awareness among your target customers. The goal is to have the prospective customer know your company – your name, what products/services you offer, and have a sense of trust in considering whether to read your white paper or not. The higher your awareness, the better the chances that white-paper leads can be nurtured into a sale.

For example, at SD Times, where print advertising for awareness is quite common, when a vendor runs a print advertising campaign, the vendor usually generates more leads and better leads from their white paper programs. These "pre-educated" prospects are more receptive to learning about new techniques or technologies from you, someone they trust, or have at least heard of before. They are also ultimately going to be more receptive to your marketing messages, and less likely to respond negatively to your sales follow-up to a lead-generation campaign.

There are many third-party websites and media companies that will market white papers. Costs vary with the service, the reputation of the marketer, and the targeted nature of the leads. Some companies will put white papers in a Web-hosted "library," and will rely on search engines — external like Google, as well as their own internal search engines — to create leads. Others will e-mail the title of the white paper or a summary or excerpt to their customer database.

## **Examples of excellent white papers**

Here are the titles of five real white papers used for lead-generation programs in the software development market. These papers delivered real technical content, contributed to IT professionals' understanding of the subject area, and walked that fine line of advocacy without crossing over to becoming sales pitches.

Safenet: Understanding White Box Cryptography Datastax: Evaluating Apache Cassandra as a Cloud Database Safenet: Build vs. Buy: The Hidden Cost of License Management Sencha: The Development Manager's Quick Guide to HTML5 Atalasoft: 5 Day Introduction to Enterprise Imaging

To receive copies of these white papers, contact David Lyman, Director of Sales at BZ Media, at 978-465-2351, or by e-mail at dlyman@bzmedia.com.

## **Conclusion: White papers – an effective tool**

White papers are an important part of the sales and marketing process. By effectively educating prospects, vendors can get attention and credit for this as well as follow-up with a more direct sales pitch later.

But creating an excellent white paper can take time – often time away from engineering pursuits that may seem more important to the technical experts asked to write the paper!

The hope is that this guide to creating a good white paper will help you build a thoughtleadership position in the market, create trust, and ultimately get more sales from your prospects.

## White papers and BZ Media's lead-generation services

BZ Media, through its brands in the software development, SharePoint, Android and Big Data markets, markets white papers to selections of our 400,000-name database of optedin IT professionals and managers.

In each case, BZ Media lead-generation experts work with you to make a white paper campaign as effective as possible. Working as a true partner, BZ Media makes suggestions to improve the marketability and appeal of the white paper. The BZ Media marketing team creates promotional copy using the "voice" that our readers and viewers are used to hearing.

Vendors using BZ Media's lead-generation services receive a side benefit of increased awareness from the steady outbound marketing (by direct e-mail blasts, subscription efforts and newsletter sponsorships) conducted until the program reaches or exceeds the lead total.

## BZ Media targets by market

#### Software Development Market:

<u>Key Brands</u>: SD Times (circulation 70,000 print and digital), SD Times' News on Monday (circulation 105,000, electronic newsletter) and sdtimes.com (700,000 page views per month).

<u>Typical Job Titles:</u> software development manager, IT director, project manager, development team leader, software architect, software developer, CIO, software engineer, VP software development, applications development manager, Web development manager.

#### SharePoint Market:

Key Brands: SPTechCon (world's largest independent SharePoint conference and trade show), and SPTechReport (circulation 55,000, electronic newsletter).

<u>Typical Job Titles</u>: SharePoint administrator, IT manager, project manager, systems administrator, network architect, software developer, SharePoint business "power-user," VP SharePoint systems, business analyst, electronic content manager, SharePoint architect.

#### Mobile Development Market:

<u>Key Brands:</u> AnDevCon (world's largest Android Developer conference and trade show), and Android Developer News (circulation 40,000, electronic newsletter).

<u>Typical Job Titles:</u> mobile applications developer, software development manager, mobile project manager, apps development team leader, mobile strategy architect, Android developer, software engineer, firmware engineer, software architect.

#### Big Data Market:

<u>Key Brands:</u> Big Data TechCon (the HOW-TO Big Data conference and trade show), and Big Data TechReport (circulation 45,000, electronic newsletter).

<u>Typical Job titles:</u> database architect, software developer, data scientist, business analyst, project manager, database developer, VP analytics, database analyst, software development manager, data engineer, IT manager.

For more information on BZ Media white paper programs in any of these markets, please contact David Lyman, Director of Sales at BZ Media, at 978-465-2351, or by e-mail at <u>dlyman@bzmedia.com</u>.