



HOFFMAN MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS, INC.

**THE STEAK BEHIND THE SIZZLE:
EFFECTIVE MARKETING USING
WHITE PAPERS**

White papers offer unique value by providing unbiased information and analysis

THE STEAK BEHIND THE SIZZLE: EFFECTIVE MARKETING USING WHITE PAPERS

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Companies that sell complex technology products and services face different marketing challenges than those selling easy-to-understand commodities. Sometimes the features and benefits of a company's offerings are too complex to be readily apparent at first glance.

White papers can be an effective way to educate potential customers on the merits of such products and to explain the complex technologies involved. Although they aren't the most exciting kind of collateral, white papers offer a benefit that more glamorous advertising and marketing materials cannot provide. They lend validity to product claims and help prove that there's "steak" behind the marketing "sizzle."

Why a White Paper?

White papers offer unique value to potential customers by providing unbiased information and analysis regarding a business problem that they may be facing. Decision makers are more likely to read a high-quality white paper in detail than a brochure that simply pitches a product's features and benefits, even if the white paper is several pages longer than the brochure. A well-written white paper that contains business-case information as well as technical material is likely to be disseminated within a company—sometimes beyond department borders—as different divisions enlist each other's support for new initiatives.

More strategic uses and distribution methods exist for white papers than for other kinds of collateral because of the wealth of information they contain. White papers can:

- *Educate prospects before they talk to a salesperson.* White papers posted on a company's Web site help prospects determine whether a product meets their needs before they talk to a sales representative; it's easier to close a deal with an educated lead.

**High-quality
white papers
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prose**

- *Generate new leads.* Companies can require that readers register (providing contact information) to receive a white paper. This practice delivers interested prospects directly to the sales force.
- *Reach a wide audience.* Publishing white papers at third-party information sites such as Bitpipe.com generates goodwill and “mindshare” by making research and analysis widely available. In addition, it drives interested prospects to the company—prospects that might not otherwise have known that such an offering existed.
- *Educate employees.* High-quality white papers serve important educational functions within a company as well. They explain complex technologies in accessible prose, bringing non-technical employees (such as business executives) and new hires rapidly up to speed on the company’s competitive offerings. In addition, they can supplement sales guides with the real-world technical and business-case details that the sales force needs to effectively close deals.

Common Objections to White Papers

Some marketing departments shy away from developing white papers, despite the many benefits they offer. Common objections to white papers include the following:

- *“White papers are not marketing collateral, so why should the marketing department be involved?”* In the past, white papers were written by technical staff to explain the intricate details of new technologies to those charged with implementing them. But times have changed. According to some analysts, corporate decision makers rely on white papers more than almost any other source of information available to them. The solid technical information contained in such collateral helps decision makers understand the business case of the offering. This goal fits squarely in the bailiwick of marketing, not engineering.
- *“We already have sufficient marketing collateral. Look at our data sheets and product brochures!”* White papers combine with brochures and data sheets to provide a comprehensive portfolio of collateral. Product brochures generate interest in the offering. Data sheet specifications demonstrate that the offering can be integrated into a potential customer’s environment. But only the depth of detail

***An effective
white paper
communicates
a wealth of
technical
detail without
condescending
to the audience***

available in a white paper can convince technical decision makers that the offering actually works.

- *“White papers take forever to write. We need to go to market immediately.”* It’s true that an effective white paper can take longer to develop than some forms of collateral. But with a committed team of developers and content providers, it can be written, edited, illustrated, laid out, and distributed in as little time as three weeks.

Why White Papers Fail . . . and Succeed

People often view white papers as bafflingly complex documents that only engineers can understand. Sadly, this reputation isn’t entirely unearned. Some companies that recognize the potential benefits of white papers publish documents that create more marketing harm than good. Some white papers fail because they:

- *Lack objectivity.* Biased information alienates readers and instills doubt about the paper’s validity. Instead of making unsubstantiated claims about a specific offering’s suitability and benefits, a high-quality white paper educates the audience about solutions to their problems. Writers should cite outside sources such as analyst research or industry reports whenever possible to strengthen the credibility of the business case and to demonstrate the technical prowess of the offering.
- *Provide inadequate or inappropriate technical detail.* A white paper that glosses over the details of how an offering helps solve a business problem is little more than a lengthy brochure. By contrast, a document that focuses solely on technical detail without placing the offering in a larger business context fails to make a persuasive case. Effective white papers explain innovative technologies in a compelling way that helps potential customers understand both how and why the offering will improve their business climate.
- *Offer subpar writing.* An effective white paper clearly communicates a wealth of technical detail without condescending to the audience or making unreasonable assumptions about their prior knowledge. The communication skills needed to write white papers differ significantly from those required for marketing and advertising copy or for technical documents such as user manuals and training materials.

***Ideally,
the writer
will possess
exceptional
writing skills,
technical
savvy, and
marketing
experience***

Building the Best White Paper

Developing a high-quality white paper can be challenging. It's important to begin by clearly defining the roles of the team members and achieving consensus on goals and strategies. Here are some typical roles in a development team. The same person may assume more than one set of responsibilities—for example, the project manager may also be a content provider—but no roles should be omitted.

- *Project manager.* As in any development process, the project manager is the “glue” that holds the project together. The project manager’s responsibilities include setting the schedule; arranging meetings; locating and delivering background documents; coordinating document review, design, and production; helping resolve disputes amongst team members; and more.
- *Technical and marketing content providers.* Technical content providers should be willing to deliver existing documents (such as specifications or presentations), including internal documents, and should be available to answer questions that arise. Marketing content providers should be able to communicate key product messages as well as the business case for the product, including information about return on investment and other factors that influence decision makers. They also should submit existing marketing documents or collateral related to the product to ensure messaging consistency.
- *Writer.* A white paper is doomed to failure if the writer is not experienced at writing the concise, convincing prose that this unique document requires. Ideally, the writer will possess exceptional writing skills, technical savvy, and marketing experience, as well as the ability to extract meaningful information from a variety of sources and translate it into coherent, compelling prose.
- *Copy editor and proofreader.* Skilled copy editors almost always improve a white paper. They do more than check spelling and punctuation. They point out flaws in logic, identify ineffectively developed concepts, and ensure clarity and continuity within the document.
- *Illustration, design, and production staff.* Visual appeal is as crucial for white papers as for any other marketing document. Effective white papers employ illustrations and diagrams that simplify and

communicate complex information in a way that complements the text. The visual design of the document as a whole should accurately reflect the company's brand and image, and adhere to any existing guidelines.

Developing white papers requires skilled resources. Consequently, companies often outsource some of the responsibilities to skilled contractors. With the exception of marketing and technical content providers, outside personnel can effectively perform all of the roles described. By hiring short-term contractors skilled in developing white papers, companies reap the benefits of a highly qualified, dedicated professional who can devote full-time resources to the project without increasing headcount or red tape. As a result, companies can rapidly develop high-quality white papers that prove their products' technical validity and improve their chances for success.

Hoffman Marketing Communications, Inc. provides strategic writing services to global high-tech, consulting, and energy companies. Now in our 18th year of operations, we specialize in developing sales guides, white papers, and other strategic marketing collateral. Hoffman writers offer a unique combination of technical savvy, marketing skills, and writing talent to translate the most complex technologies into accessible prose that bolsters your sales and marketing efforts. Satisfied clients include Cap Gemini Ernst & Young, Cisco, Hewlett-Packard, and Symantec. For more information, visit www.hoffmanmarcom.com



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