Whitepapers are a powerful but underused marketing tool. This paper will show how you how to create whitepapers that will gain willing prospects for your products and services.

Eight Simple Rules To Write Great Whitepapers

The Secret Rules Used by Great Whitepaper Marketers

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Eight Simple Rules to Write Great Whitepapers

Introduction

Whitepapers are among the most abused, miswritten and misunderstood marketing tools in the online marketer's armory today. Many businesses have come to understand that their business can benefit from the use of whitepapers.

Unfortunately, very few people can write, design and take full advantage of whitepapers. This is wasted opportunity because, when written and used properly, a whitepaper is among the most effective marketing tools available to marketers.

> A good whitepaper will lead the reader to the logical conclusion that only your business can solve the reader's business problem

- A well-crafted whitepaper will build the credibility of the business
- They position a business as a thought leader in its niche
- They educate and inform prospects making the sales process easier
- Best of all they provide objective information to help a prospect to solve a business problem

The whitepaper has a clear place within the business sales funnel. A whitepaper is an interest and preference building tool. Its strength derives from its role as a choice by the reader rather than being an imposed advertisement or promotion.

A good whitepaper will outline a business problem, explain why that problem needs to be solved, explore ways to resolve the issue and finally enable the reader to draw an inevitable conclusion only your business can solve the reader's problem.

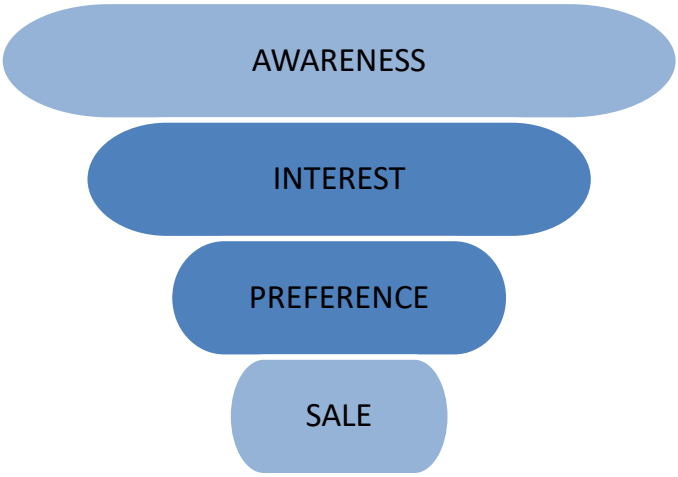

Figure 1 Positioning of whitepapers in the sales funnel

A whitepaper should always be designed to make the movement of prospects along the sales funnel easier but the document must do so by using good, thorough, objective, analysis combined with good quality information.

Sadly, it is common that documents that are described as whitepapers are not, in fact, whitepapers at all; often they are more like product documentation or technical papers or, if created by the marketing or sales team, they resemble sales brochures or data sheets and the impact of the document is severely limited.

Worse yet, too many whitepapers simply do not grab the reader's attention, they are uninteresting to read and are an opportunity wasted.

On the other hand, a well-designed and written whitepaper can be a boon to the marketing support of the business.

As long ago as 2008, Forbes.com found in a study that over 70% of respondents had contacted a reseller or vendor because of what they read in a whitepaper. At the same time, 57% reported that what they learned from a whitepaper had been an influence on their product purchasing choices.

This paper presents eight techniques that if deployed effectively will serve to make certain that your whitepapers deliver the results that you desire. With these strategies deployed your whitepapers will differentiate your business from your competitors and strengthen your sales process. Your business or organization will be a credible thought leader demonstrating a clear grasp of your niche's trends and issues.

The Eight Simple Rules Used by Great Whitepaper Marketers

ONE: Set Clear Objectives

A great whitepaper has two sets of objectives, the overarching one: to support the marketing and sales efforts of the organization, and subsidiary objectives that enable the service of the main purpose.

The most common mistake made by whitepaper writers is to concentrate upon products or services offered by the organization. To be effective the paper should only discuss the products or services tangentially, in the context of a problem solution.

An effective whitepaper will always be informative rather than promotional. The following items are the subsidiary objectives that are the essential building blocks of the entire document:

a. **An effective whitepaper must interest the right people.** Not every sales lead can be the right audience for a whitepaper. The document consists of several pages of highly audience relevant, detailed, content. Each group of leads, or stakeholders, should be provided with whitepapers aimed at the specific needs of each group.
b. **The whitepaper must be an engaging read.** When your content is interesting and the audience become engaged with your narrative you will gain your reader's full attention. Show your readers that you empathize with them, 'feel their pain', gain their trust by showing that you are on top of the technical issues inherent in their problem. Demonstrate your understanding through clear writing – the ability to write clearly on a topic is a strong signal of clear understanding. Where possible avoid the overuse of technical jargon as this can set a barrier between the reader with incomplete knowledge and the writer.

> Your whitepaper must engage its readers. Show your readers that you understand the issues they face.

c. **Be informative.** A well written whitepaper reads something like a magazine article, it should not be reminiscent of corporate sales brochures. The power of the whitepaper is in its objective presentation of a business problem, the need for finding a solution to that problem and methods by which the solution to the problem can be attained. The reader should feel that they are gaining knowledge from their reading of the paper. If the reader believes that they are being sold to then the document is failing in its task.

> Whitepapers are not brochures, do not use them to make sales pitches

d. **The paper should be convincing.** This step can only occur if the first three steps have been accomplished. After you have gained the attention of the reader, engaged with her and informed her, you are ready to convince her that your organization is worthy of consideration as a provider. If your document has presented its case effectively then the choice to consider your business should be a logical progression in the mind of the reader. For example, if there is a need for highly qualified software engineers to carry out upgrade work on a software platform then your analysis of the needs of the case should show that your business has personnel of the right caliber.

Whitepapers are often particularly effective in markets that are complex and technology oriented, typically with long sales cycles. Your reader should set the whitepaper aside feeling informed and not sold to.

TWO: The Title Is Your Key to Unlocking Whitepaper Success

A whitepaper's purpose is the maximization of the number of relevant leads and prospects who will read it. The title is the entry point into the paper and so a well-crafted title will drive readership no matter how the document is distributed.

To get ideas for titles it is worth checking out the titles on other whitepapers and magazine articles. Seek out titles that you find interesting and that arouse your curiosity and adapt them to fit your requirements and topic. The title should be focused upon user benefits and be written in an easy, positive style. For example: *'Ten Secrets of Successful Digital Signage Content Systems'* is much better than *'All About Content on Digital Signage Systems'.*

> A good title is the key to unlock the door to your whitepaper. Choose the title carefully!

The title needs to indicate the benefit to the reader of taking the time to read the whitepaper immaterial of the opinion of the prospect about your product offerings. Avoid, at any cost, a self-serving title, particularly if they mention your brand name. Readers will take these to be sales pieces and ignore them without giving them a chance.

Lastly, the benefit offered by the title should be appealing to the targeted audience. For example:
'What Do Car Thieves Know About Security That You Don't' might well appeal to car service managers whereas:
'Five Ways to Cut the Cost of Car Theft' will probably go down much better with the manager responsible for managing company car fleet costs.

Likewise, the content under the title needs to be relevant to the target audience even if most of the information contained in both versions of the document is the same. In short, address your writing to meet the needs and preferences of the different stakeholders in the purchase process.

THREE: Learn and Use The 3-30-3 Writing Rule

The 3-30-3 rule is commonly used in good quality short form writing such as advertisements, reports, magazine articles, whitepapers etc. The rule states that: You must gain a reader's interest within the first three seconds after first reading your words. If the reader's snap judgement suggests that it is worth reading further,

then you have 30 seconds to demonstrate that your work has the credibility and information to make spending longer reading the document. If that is positive, then you have 3 minutes to build your argument.

Malcom Gladwell wrote in his bestselling book, *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*, that readers will make a snap decision within just a few seconds of encountering a document as to whether to bother reading further. The 3-30-3 rule addresses the issue from a structural perspective but it is down to the writer to make the words interesting and the argument compelling enough to ensure that the reader continues reading.

> People make decisions about your paper within seconds. Use the 3-30-3 rule to manage their choices!

This 3-30-3 structure is maintained throughout the document in 'slices' using a process called 'thin slicing'. Gladwell suggests that the best decisions are often made from the information contained in that first slice of thought. In those first 3 seconds the reader will make a snap judgment about your organization:

- Are you credible as an information source?
- Are you saying anything worthwhile?

If you have used that first slice effectively then your readers will give you the 3 minutes. If the first three minutes works out for them then they will give you another 3-minute slice of time.

This insight makes the initial paragraphs of paramount importance to the success of the whole document. The introduction must speak to your reader about her business need while, at the same time, provide the opportunity for a payoff – an opportunity or problem solution attainable through a feasible and clearly defined action.
Many whitepapers fail at this point. You must build your case in that first three minutes, no matter how complicated or challenging the business problem under examination is. If you cannot make your point here the rest of the whitepaper will be wasted.

How can you set out a complex case in just three minutes?

- Understand that people are not buying products or services but solutions to problems. They want fast and easy solutions to make problems go away as fast as possible.
- See the prospect's problems from the reader's viewpoint rather than your own.
- Present statistics relevant to the problem, use graphical means where possible, to show the benefits of your problem solution.
- Use quotation blocks to highlight the words of industry experts, research studies and, subject authorities.
- Break the text down from large blocks to easy to read sections using subheadings that signpost the following content
- Use illustrations to make key points, images and graphic devices tend to be well remembered by readers.

FOUR: Write at the level of your readership

Before starting to write, at the initial planning stage ask yourself:

- Who is the whitepaper for?
- Who do you want to persuade with your whitepaper?

If you identify more than one audience, think about writing a paper aimed at each audience. The content might well overlap but each paper will need to have a very different title and body copy should address the specific audience 'pain points'. Your sales team can help the groups within their prospects and potential clients where a whitepaper can be helped to move through the sales funnel. Check the most significant sales objections within each identified group so that the document can address those questions.

> Consider writing different whitepapers to address different stakeholder groups

I. What are the concerns that the prospect group has about make a buying choice?

II. What information do the prospects lack?
III. What are the prospects hoping to achieve with their purchase decisions?

When you have this information, you can target your paper's content directly at these points by opening a conversation with the reader of the whitepaper through your words.

The stakeholder groups that you will identify

Commonly we find three stakeholder groups; each needing a tailored approach in the whitepaper's content.

These groups tend to reflect the levels of each within the company hierarchy. Thus, we find a **strategic level**; senior managers and directors who are considering the broader picture. They are keen to improve the financial performance of the business, increasing efficiency and competitive advantages in their business area.

Next we have the **technical level**, this group is concerned about the detailed issues of functionality, features and benefits. They want to know how a proposed solution will fit into the existing systems, the life of the system, scalability – overall about how the proposed solution makes a good investment in the short and longer terms.

Lastly, we have the **user level.** These are the people within the business who will be working, on a day to day basis, with the chosen solution. The users want to know about how easy the solution is to use, about increases in efficiency, company morale and job satisfaction.

People want to feel they make objective choices so use statistics, facts and numbers when making your case

People trust statistics, facts and numbers when learning about a topic. This makes concrete, well presented data, very persuasive. For this reason, wherever possible provide numeric support for any points being made. To strengthen the case further, try to use supporting data from 3rd parties outside of your organization. If

external support is not available internal research and data is still better than adjective filled hopes and expectations.

FIVE: Use graphics to illustrate the text

When preparing a whitepaper avoid using brochure type, branded, images in the text; this will reduce the credibility of the overall piece as readers scan the document. Forget about using clipart or generic stock images, readers can recognize these for what they are even if they do not consciously recognize them.

When using graphics use images that illustrate and make clear concepts and points made in the text. For example, use images that walk a reader through a process used in your product, illustrate numbers with a graph. Nowadays we know that readers absorb more information from a combination of text and images often called infographics. It is worth hiring a specialist designer to create such imagery for your whitepaper and, perhaps, even as a supplement to it.

SIX: Objectively present alternative solutions

A cardinal rule of whitepapers is that they should appear to be objective and to include more than one option as a solution. The idea is to give the impression to the reader that they are making an objective choice based upon impartial information. This will often require mentioning a competitor in a positive light. Doing so can add credibility to your case because you are showing that you understand the situation and needs of the prospect.

> Use around 2/3 of your whitepaper building an objective case before drawing your conclusion

Your paper must be well researched and information points should be referenced and possibly illustrated with relevant quotations from authoritative sources. Your argumentation should illustrate your understanding of the context of the case and thus mention of businesses and other approaches to the problem under examination. After all, if the alternative approaches

and competitor businesses had no value then they would not be in the market place. Your task is to demonstrate that when the case is examined objectively that the pros and cons favor your company's solution.

If you are writing a 3000-word paper, then spend some 2000 words on developing the objective case. Help the reader to feel that they have learned from their reading rather than having been sold to. Having read a balanced discussion over the first pages the reader will tend to give you credit for your work and easily allow you the opportunity to show how your case is optimal in the final passages of the document.

SEVEN: Hire a professional writer for your whitepaper

Allowing, or persuading, your own staff from marketing or technical departments to write your whitepapers is usually a mistake. Your technical staff can probably write a great first draft or notes on the required points but they should not be writing a document that is destined to end up in the hands of your clients and prospects.

Problems with allowing staff to write whitepapers:

1) Engineers and product managers are usually too close to the product or solution to enable them to have an objective view of the offering and its place in the market. This means they are unable to give a balanced discussion considering all the viable solutions that your whitepaper needs.
2) Technical and product staff are usually not very good at writing interesting documents. They may be great at informational documents but are less proficient at writing objectively and persuasively.
3) Your product managers and technical staff are paid well. Taking them away from their normal roles to write marketing documents is very costly. Their focus is upon the success or failure of the product rather than writing about it.

> Try to use professional writers, - but your own staff can be great information sources!

It is better to work with professional writers who can take the very useful information that the business managers can provide. Use your product and technical managers as subject matter experts, providing documents and, if possible, interviews. Your management team should also have input into the editorial review procedure. To make sure that the information in the whitepaper is accurate.

EIGHT: Use subtle branding

Your whitepaper should carry your branding but it needs to be subtle. Think of the difference between a brochure and a magazine article: the first is all about product and why to buy from your business. The second is subtle, may have a name check but is concentrated upon getting its message across in an understated manner.

Limit overt branding to the document cover and the boiler plate ‘About Us’ and contact information at the end of the paper, perhaps use house colors for page backgrounds and graphics.
In branding terms, for your whitepapers, less is most definitely more!

After Your Whitepaper Is Written

Your whitepaper will bring the highest return on your investment the more it can deliver highly qualified prospects into your sales funnel. If your paper has been written well you will have prospects who are predisposed to learn more about your organization’s offerings based upon what they learned by reading your whitepaper.

The more of these people that you can deliver the more profitable the paper will prove to be. Effective promotion and marketing of your whitepaper will be covered in a separate document. At this point we should simply note that production of a good quality whitepaper is only the start of the process of using it to generate leads or position the business in its marketspace.

How can I help?

I have been doing business writing since working for a large regional newspaper in the United Kingdom some 30 years ago. As a trained and successful marketer, I have been profitably working with words for all that time.

> An independent copywriter with the mind of a journalist with business skills – an ideal match!

Thinking like a journalist and with great business skills I can be your professional partner when it comes to explaining your business to the world and increasing the conversion of leads into prospects and finally clients.

Writing whitepapers is work that is, for me, a pleasure. I am keen to take your business and ideas, to blend them with my writing and marketing skills, to craft a call to action that will be profitable for your business.

Please contact me, Andrew Wilson, today to discuss how together we can improve your business presentation:

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