5 Steps to a White Paper that Pulls in the Perfect Prospect

by Stephanie Tilton

Letter from the Author

White papers are a tried-and-true tool for generating leads, establishing thought leadership, and educating prospects. In fact, technology marketers have become quite adept at churning them out. It's no wonder sites such as Bitpipe.com, IDG, ;F 4ge[`W&7VYW@W-[`W>FdSWBgT1a_ l TechRepublic, TechTarget, and TechWeb feature thousands of white papers.

Which brings us to the problem – how can you make sure your offering stands out in a sea of white papers? This e-book provides practical tips to help you do just that. When you're done reading it, you should be able to take your papers to the next level – and make sure they get read by the perfect prospect.

I hope you find value in this e-book. If so, feel free to pass it along to other marketers who might want to elevate the success of their white papers.

Happy reading!

Stephanie Tilton

Your company is struggling to stand out in a crowded marketplace.

How can you help your company set itself apart from all the others selling complex products, technology, or services? As the book [Get Content. Get Customers.](#) says, you need to deliver relevant, valuable, and compelling information that turns prospects into buyers.

Let's focus on those who are early in the buying process – prospects that are just exploring and educating themselves about their options. To move them from curious to committed, you need to demonstrate that you understand their challenges – and offer ways to resolve them.

Before prospects choose your company or solution, they ask three questions:

1) Do I need to solve a problem or am I overlooking an opportunity?
2) How do I make a good decision and address this issue (i.e., what criteria should I use to evaluate my options)?
3) Which is the best solution among all my options (i.e., of the vendors that offer solutions, which do I want to include on my short list for evaluation)?

In most cases, prospects will answer these questions without directly interacting with any potential solution providers. Fortunately for B2B marketers, **white papers are one of the best ways to establish expertise and shape the decision-making process.**

In fact, white papers are a critical way for marketers to feed prospects' hunger for educational information. Yet too many companies produce white papers that are the equivalent of a glorified brochure – product-focused and generic. In fact, in a report by InformationWeek – *How to Maximize the Use of White Papers in Your B2B Marketing and Sales Process* – nearly two-thirds of respondents said they regard most white papers as marketing/ sales-oriented. In other words, they see them as thinly veiled sales pitches.

Elevate Your White Papers

Here are five ways to elevate your white papers so that they stand out from the pack of look-a-like, lackluster papers:

1. Focus on your readers
2. Embed pass-along value
3. Format for readability
4. Grab attention with a compelling title
5. Give prospects a taste
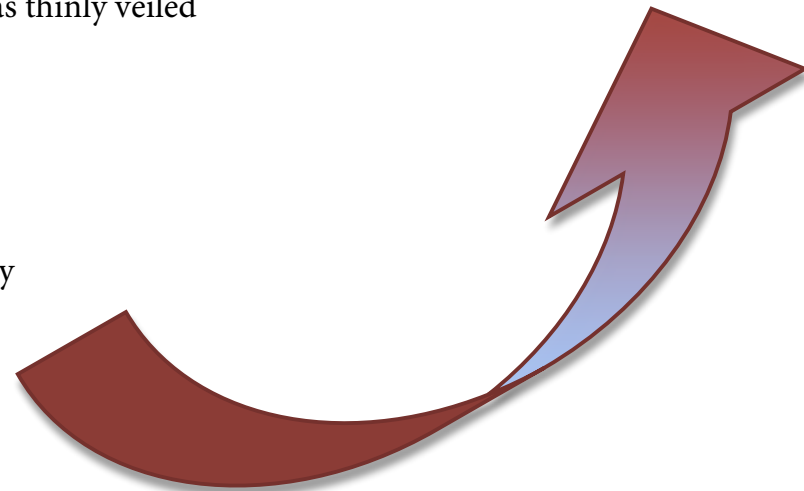
1. Focus on Your Readers

Many white papers are written as an all-purpose piece for a broad audience. This approach rarely leads to a meaningful connection with readers – after all, they likely won't feel that you spoke directly to them. Instead, you should tailor the paper for the key prospect types and their distinct pain points.

Here is where familiarity with *buyer personas* comes in handy. **Personas are fictional examples of the prospects you are trying to reach.** The goal in developing them is to gain a deeper level of empathy with potential customers.

[Adelle Revella](#) – who has been using buyer personas to market technology products for more than 20 years – recommends thinking of your buyer personas in three categories:

- ➲ *Economic buyers* – Those concerned about the cost of the solution.
- ➲ *Technology buyers* – Those responsible for integrating or managing the solution.
- ➲ *User buyers* – Those who will use the solution on a day-to-day basis (or are responsible for the satisfaction of those using the solution).

Let's assume you're targeting the person <u>using</u> the solution. This may surprise you, but it's not sufficient to say your target audience is the "business decision maker at small insurance firms."

The key to an effective buyer persona? Capture as much detail as possible about the target person's background, daily habits, activities, challenges, and problem-solving approaches. For example:

➲ What sources does this person turn to for information and daily news?

➲ How does the prospect go about making business decisions?

➲ What types of organizations does this person belong to and what events does he or she attend?

➲ Does this person seek advice from colleagues, industry peers, or unbiased third parties?

➲ What is the prospect's comfort level with technology?

➲ How is he or she dealing with the problem today?

➲ What phrases does the prospect use to describe the issues he or she is facing?

➲ Does this person prefer high-level details or a deep dive into a topic?

Armed with this information, you can put buyer personas into play. Now you can move beyond talking to "those in charge of company finances at insurance firms." Instead write for the director of finance at insurance firms with 100 or fewer employees who is:

➲ overstretched on a daily basis

➲ reliant on spreadsheet workarounds for critical number-crunching activities

➲ skeptical of qualitative statements about the marketplace

➲ more concerned with the ways technology helps her do her job than understanding how it works

Those insights alone would enable you to align yourself with this prospect. You can discuss the struggles to manage a daily workload and reach critical decisions in a timely manner. You can insert relevant third-party statistics where appropriate. You may choose to steer clear of technical terms since this person isn't interested in technology details. Imagine how much deeper you could connect with the reader by better understanding his or her persona. (Refer to Enquiro Research's _Business to Business Survey 2007: Marketing to a Technical Buyer_ for a comprehensive persona example.)

Buyer personas are critical to understanding – and delivering targeted information to – your prospects.

2. Embed Pass-Along Value

Now that you know who you're communicating with, you need to keep their attention. Remember what I said about many papers being the equivalent of glorified brochures? That's because they focus on pitching the company's service or product to the reader – a real turn-off when someone is just collecting information. As David Meerman Scott says in _The New Rules of Marketing & PR_, "What works is a focus on your buyers and their problems. What fails is an egocentric display of your products and services."

Fill your paper with useful information. **Put yourself in the prospect's position and think about what he or she would find useful in dealing with the situation.** According to _Get Content. Get Customers._, "[Marketing organizations] are seeing that they can deliver tangible benefits to prospects and customers by providing relevant content that helps provide solutions to some of the toughest problems their prospective buyers are facing."

Help prospects understand what to consider as they evaluate their options.

> "Third-party credibility, sourced data and case studies bolster the impact of white papers."
>
> - *InformationWeek*
> [*How to Maximize the Use of White Papers in Your B2B Marketing and Sales Process*](#)

After briefly introducing the high-level problem and generic solution, round out the paper with the following sections:

➲ Industry trends.

This section can help establish the drivers behind the need for the ideal solution (we'll cover the "ideal solution" on the next page). For example, a paper about online conferencing might cite statistics showing the reduction in business travel budgets. Ideally, you want to include references from respected third-party sources, such as analyst firms, business publications, or a recognized thought leader.

➲ Challenges.

Establish empathy with the reader by demonstrating your keen understanding of his or her pain points. Don't just gloss over the issues – highlight the ways that they personally impact the prospect. And wherever possible, link to the discussion about industry trends.

➲ *Traditional approaches to solving the problems.*

Educate the reader on attempts to solve the problems to date. To highlight the need for a third-party solution, explain the weaknesses of in-house approaches. Then describe the drawbacks of third-party solutions that compete with yours (without mentioning names). By doing so, you set the stage for the "ideal solution".

➲ *The ideal solution*.

Present the best solution without mentioning your product or company name. For example, let's say you work for Citrix. Instead of "Citrix® GotoMeeting®", you would refer to "Online Conferencing Solutions." **By describing the solution generically, you can convey the benefits of your offering without a hard sales pitch.** If possible, include a story illustrating how the solution addresses the user's pain points. Looking for an effective way to do this? Walk the reader through a day in the life of the typical user, before and after the ideal solution is in place.

➲ *A guide to choosing a solution.*

Now outline the key elements the prospect should seek in a solution

– for example, "Top 10 Considerations When Evaluating Online

Conferencing Solutions." Here you can present the key advantages of

your offering without being product- or company-focused. For

example, you might say: "The ideal solution requires no manual

interaction once installed" and "Choose a solution provider who offers 24x7 localized support."

According to Michael A. Stelzner, author of *Writing White Papers*, this is the most powerful and

persuasive part of a paper. That's because – as the prospect evaluates possible solutions – your

competitors will be judged against this list.

By presenting a checklist for the ideal solution, you define the buying process.

You can introduce your offering at the end of the paper, but don't make it a hard sell. **Your "Top 10 Considerations" list (or equivalent) should naturally lead the prospect to conclude that your solution is the best – and only – choice.** (Besides, prospects know where to find more information about your offering – in a brochure, datasheet, or other product-specific piece of collateral.) If you choose to discuss your product or service, consider embedding a pared down case study that shows how a customer benefited by using your solution. At the very least, focus on your solution's advantages and not its features.

Focus on offering useful information and you'll be well remembered by prospects.

Follow this strategy and the reader will feel that you've proven valuable in the decision-making process. Just as important, by offering worthwhile content, you'll increase the likelihood that the reader will pass your paper along as a worthwhile resource.

3. Format for Readability

Even though prospects seek out white papers when researching solutions to their problems, you've got to get your point across quickly. After all, they likely have a pile of papers on their desk to review. So make your paper as reader-friendly as possible.

According to the respondents of an [InformationWeek report](), **the top component of a great white paper is a tight abstract**. Craft an executive summary that succinctly summarizes the paper. Make sure it presents the main points from all sections in a coherent fashion.

Next, format the paper for "power browsing." This will address readers' tendency to scan or skim content in order to determine its relevance and value. Do the following to help your reader glean the essence of the paper at a glance:

➲ Use headings and subheads to succinctly describe sections and convey the key message.

➲ Pepper the paper with call-out boxes and quotes that highlight important points.

➲ Format the paper so that these elements stand out – ideally in a column dedicated to call-outs and sidebars.

➲ Insert graphics – drawings, charts, or photos – that help illustrate critical points.

4. Grab Attention with a Compelling Title

Once you've put the finishing touches on your paper, you need to promote it. In addition to featuring the paper on your company's site and in your newsletter, you might post it on third-party sites. You may even purchase a search engine ad to get the word out. No matter how you distribute the paper, the title needs to convey the essence of your paper *and* grab the prospect's attention.

Wondering what you're up against in trying to stand out? Conduct a Google search on "technology white paper" or on a term such as "online conference software." "Technology white paper" delivers more than 51,000,000 results, while "online conference software" produces over 31,000,000 results.

Top 5 Sources that Resulted in a White Paper Download:

1. Featured in an email newsletter
2. Came across on a technology news site
3. Found using search engine
4. Found on a white-paper-centric site
5. Recommended by a colleague

- MarketingSherpa and CMP TechWeb, Business Content Study, March 2008

"White paper titles are just like email subject lines. If you pick a good one, your response rates can soar. Otherwise, you're out of luck, especially in competitive marketplaces."

- MarketingSherpa, New Research Data: How to Title Your White Papers to Generate More Downloads From Best Prospects

In *The Well-Fed Writer*, Peter Bowerman says, "A title is a lure. It's the hook of any article, book, or white paper. A good one will draw a reader in; a weak one will have that reader turn the page, move on to the next shelf and click the next link."

Consider the 3-30-3 rule: **You have 3 seconds to grab attention, 30 seconds to engage readers, and 3 minutes to give them a strong sense of the paper's content.** That means prospects will decide whether or not to consider your paper within 3 seconds of viewing the title.

Find out what's been successful to date. Here are titles for some of the most downloaded white papers on TechWeb Digital Library in 2008:

➲ 17 Ways to Reduce IT Cost

➲ How to Recover an Entire Laptop in Minutes

➲ How to Use the Six Laws of Persuasion During a Negotiation

Notice how these titles promise practical information? This reinforces my earlier point about readers seeking useful information. In fact, according to MarketingSherpa research entitled *New Research Data: How to Title Your White Papers to Generate More Downloads From Best Prospects*: "…the most popular were the papers the prospects clearly felt would be the most useful for their jobs. They had a particular educational need or vendor-shopping problem and those white paper titles promised to solve it."

As you brainstorm on title ideas, keep in mind the following based on findings from the MarketingSherpa study referenced above:

➲ **Choose keywords that will resonate with the prospect**. Conduct research to find out how prospects are finding white papers such as yours. According to MarketingSherpa, prospects search on terms related to their problems far more often than they search on terms related to a solution. As an example, papers with the term "spyware" in the title were 77% more likely to be downloaded than those with "anti-spyware" in the title. Consult the table below for words or phrases that IT professionals search for at each stage of their buying process.

	Awareness Stage (Problem identification/ Technical research)	Consideration Stage (Vendor Research)	Decision Stage (Vendor comparison)
problem/issue/troubleshooting	22.6%	11.6%	5.0%
"solution"	11.2%	18.5%	18.0%
brand phrases	14.1%	30.3%	43.0%
comparison/review phrases	1.7%	2.9%	52.0%
white papers/document	1.5%	0.5%	1.0%
how-to	3.7%	1.3%	1.0%
average query length	3.2 words	3.2 words	3.8 words

Source: The Google/TechTarget Research Project: How IT Pros Search Online During the Purchase Process

⮑ **Avoid a clever play on words.** Titles such as "Hook, Line and Sinker: Phishing attacks going professional" do not prove popular. Instead, MarketingSherpa recommends titles that are easy to scan and understand, and are written with the audience in mind.

⮑ **Keep titles short.** In MarketingSherpa's analysis of white papers on CNET Networks, the most downloaded titles were 20% shorter than less successful titles. If your topic warrants a longer title, consider breaking it up with a subtitle that provides additional detail. Or include a colon to separate the key words from the description. For example, "*Blu-ray Disc Live: Capitalizing on the New Opportunity to Attract and Engage Consumers.*"

⮑ **Use action verbs.** Including words such as "Eliminating", "Accelerating", and "Expanding" in your title conveys the practical value of your information. You also hint at how your paper will help the reader overcome his or her challenges.

⮑ **Refer to your ideal reader.** Want to make sure the most relevant prospects download your paper? Include the ideal reader's role in the white paper title – for example, "Six Ways HR Directors Can Trim Training Costs."

A good title is *ultra-specific, unique,* and *useful* to the reader.

- Robert W. Bly, *The White Paper Marketing Handbook*

5. Give Prospects a Taste for Better Results

If you offer the paper on your site, you'll likely require prospects to register before downloading (this is also referred to as "gated" content). However, you may want to offer the paper without registration and let it go viral. According to David Meerman Scott, author of *World Wide Rave* and *The New Rules of Marketing & PR*, a white paper will be downloaded up to 50x more when no registration is required. If you <u>do</u> require registration, that's fine – as long as you first give an idea of what the paper is about.
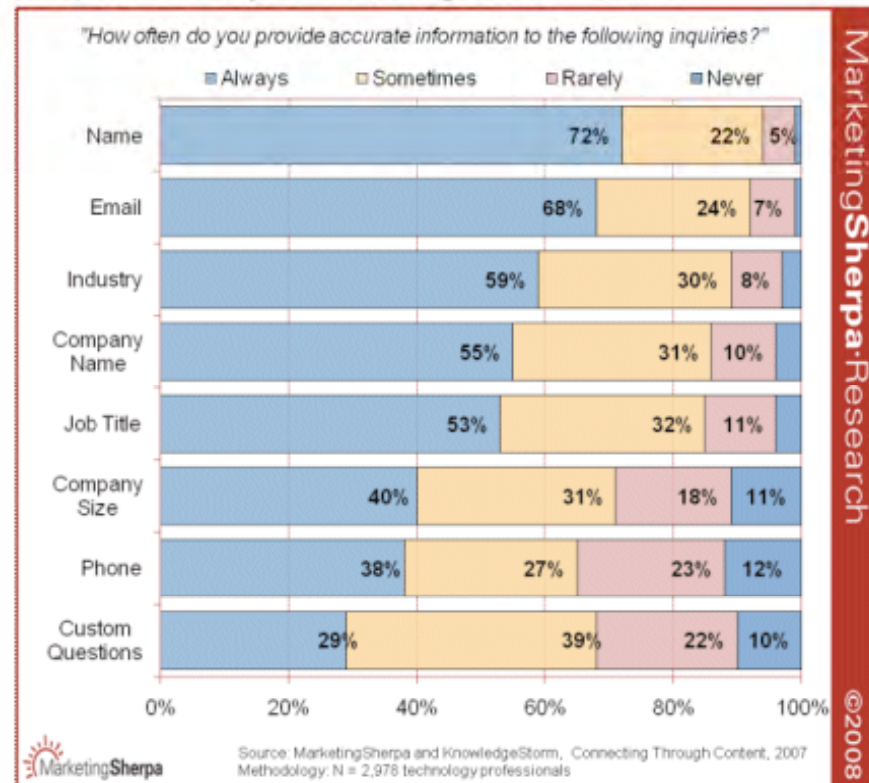
If the only thing that prospects see is the title, they won't be able to decide whether or not it's worthwhile to exchange their personal information for access to the download. If you offer an abstract of the paper, you increase the likelihood of registration. But **the best option is to offer the first page or two directly on the landing page.** Once you've hooked the reader, she or he will be more likely to fill out a form to receive the entire paper. And because that person has expressed such interest in the paper, it's quite possible this is a high-quality lead. Just as important, the search engines will crawl this content, which could lead to higher rankings in the search engine results pages.

A white paper or e-book WITHOUT a gate in front of it will be downloaded up to 50x more.

- David Meerman Scott

Fair warning – don't ask for too much information from your prospects. According to [MarketingSherpa research](#), registration forms that ask only for name and email get substantially higher conversion rates than those that require contact and intent information. This jibes with findings in the [*The Google/TechTarget Research Project: How IT Pros Search Online During the Purchase Process*](#). According to the report, "accuracy drops to about 66% with company name and title…And, only about 25% claim to leave accurate telephone numbers and time horizons to purchase."

Chart: Do Tech Buyers Fib on Registration Forms?

"How often do you provide accurate information to the following inquiries?"

■ Always □ Sometimes □ Rarely ■ Never

	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Name	72%	22%	5%	
Email	68%	24%	7%	
Industry	59%	30%	8%	
Company Name	55%	31%	10%	
Job Title	53%	32%	11%	
Company Size	40%	31%	18%	11%
Phone	38%	27%	23%	12%
Custom Questions	29%	39%	22%	10%

Source: MarketingSherpa and KnowledgeStorm, Connecting Through Content, 2007
Methodology: N = 2,978 technology professionals

MarketingSherpa·Research @2008

Reap the Rewards of Reciprocity

Those who deliver information-rich white papers will be well rewarded. According to SEO News, **69% of prospects that like your white paper will actively pass it along to their colleagues.** This is right in line with what KnowledgeStorm and MarketingSherpa discovered in their study _Connecting through Content: How Technology Marketers Meet Buyers' Appetite for Content_. Their findings show that nearly 3 in 5 technology professionals pass white papers along to colleagues and coworkers. But the benefits don't end there.

In _Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion,_ Robert B. Cialdini, a respected social scientist and specialist in the area of compliance psychology, says that the rule of reciprocation is one of the most powerful weapons of influence. Essentially, humans feel obligated to repay a favor. The best way to tap into this strong urge is to give your prospects something valuable, substantial, and helpful.

Successful salespeople make use of this law to ask prospects for reciprocal exchanges throughout the sales cycle. For example, the sales rep may ask for the prospect's mobile phone number after providing a datasheet or brochure. Further along in the engagement, the sales rep might request access to key decision makers after handing over a rate card.

If you produce white papers full of valuable information, you'll be empowering your sales rep to negotiate for something of equal value with the prospect. Perhaps that could be the opportunity to demo your company's solution or be introduced to the technical evaluator.

By offering valuable content, you set the stage for a positive interaction with prospects.

Even if you are offering your white papers online (in other words, with no face-to-face interaction), you can reap the rewards of reciprocity. One simple way is to ask for the prospect's name and email address in exchange for the white paper. Because you are offering them valuable information, they'll be more willing to share their details.

Checklist for Success

Don't delay – consult the checklist below as you start working on your next white paper. By implementing these best practices, you'll be well on your way to helping your company's papers pull in the perfect prospect.

White Paper Checklist	
1. Identify ideal reader(s)	
2. Create buyer persona(s)	
3. Embed practical information	
4. Develop a "what to look for" list	
5. Include an executive summary	
6. Format the paper for power browsing	
7. Find out what search terms prospects are using	
8. Write a short, compelling, targeted, and action-packed title	
9. Offer prospects a taste of the paper before registration	

What You Should Do Next

Grab your key team members and join me for a private 30-minute consultation to ensure that your papers pull in the perfect prospect. Leverage this no-nonsense session to achieve the following:

⮕ **Map to Current Trends:** Your white papers will fall flat unless they speak to current competitive and market conditions. I'll outline the foundational steps that will help you deliver the right message to the right prospect – and stand apart from the competition.

⮕ **Increase Reach and Visibility:** Beyond your own Web site is an ever-changing landscape of white-paper promotion options. I will share the latest and greatest opportunities – and best practices – for maximizing your papers' reach and visibility.

Please note – there's no charge for this consultation so please be advised the call must be strictly limited to 30 minutes. To secure a time, please email stilton@tentonmarketing.com.

I look forward to helping you elevate the effectiveness of your white papers!

About the Author

Stephanie Tilton is an expert case study and white paper writer who crafts compelling, persuasive copy that inspires decision makers to buy. Drawing upon nearly 20 years in the world of B2B marketing, she helps technology companies advance the sales cycle.

Stephanie's finely honed project management and interviewing skills enable her to solve clients' workload and time-crunch problems – and quickly produce powerful marketing tools. Harnessing her unique blend of technical knowledge, marketing savvy, and writing skills, Stephanie has crafted nearly 150 case studies and white papers for leading brands such as Akamai Technologies, EMC, Macromedia, Novell, SAP, and Symantec.

Her best-practice marketing articles have appeared in productmarketing.com magazine, and on sites such as the American Marketing Association, BNET, eZineArticles, and SalesVantage.

To find out how she can help you produce case studies and white papers that educate prospects, demonstrate thought leadership, and ratchet up the results of lead campaigns:

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WHAT YOU CAN DO