

WordBiz Report

<http://www.wordbiz.com/archive/whitepapertips.shtml>

Q & A: 7 Tips to Craft a Downloadable White Paper

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You know how it works: Acquiring a sales lead means *give to get*.

Your hoped-for lead provides you contact information - and perhaps answers qualifying questions - in exchange for something of value.

And that "something of value" needs to be a qualifier in itself. Something only a person in your target audience would want. Something that shows you know a thing or two about the topics that matter to them.

Eureka... give them a downloadable report! This can be a white paper, tip sheet, how-to guide, case study, or any other information product. Yes, there are lots of white papers out there. But people love them. They're tangible and have perceived value.

Now comes the intimidating part: Putting one together. Here are the answers to 7 commonly-asked questions about effective white papers.

1. What approach should my report take?

A good report:

- Answers a pressing question
- Distills a fuzzy topic
- Clarifies a misunderstood topic
- Explains a trend, and/or
- Gives step-by-step advice to help the reader accomplish a specific task—or, several levels higher, illustrates how a larger business activity can be improved

That's just a few examples. Whatever approach you choose, you want your target reader to come away thinking, "That was well worth reading. This company certainly 'gets' what I do."

Now you're probably not the first in your industry to produce a downloadable report. So before you start, look at reports your competitors have put out. You'll undoubtedly see ads for them in publications you and your audience read (maybe even WordBiz Report!). And you can also find them via directories such as <http://www.bitpipe.com>.

Take notes. What do you like? What don't you like? What's missing? From the perspective of a member of your target audience, do you think you would have learned something? What you discover will help you write a report that stands above the pack.

2. How much can I promote my own products and services?

Beyond some "About Us" copy at the end, you don't need to promote them at all. Here's why.

By definition, whatever topic you're talking about reflects what you do. After all, you wouldn't offer a tip sheet with "ten ways to improve the ROI (return on investment) of your next direct mail campaign" unless you sell direct marketing services. You wouldn't write a white paper about protecting a wireless LAN (local area network) unless you're in the wireless networking business. And so on.

Plus, YOUR company's the one with its name on the report...

Finally, remind yourself: Most of your potential leads aren't ready to buy. And they may not be for awhile. So they're not looking for one vendor's sales pitch. They're looking for information that will help them do their jobs more effectively and make better decisions.

Give them what they want and your company's name will stick in their minds.

3. How long should my report be?

As a general rule, subscribe to the "less is more" philosophy. Consider 5-10 pages a good benchmark.

A tip sheet might be a few pages or less (given the name "tip sheet"). I've seen white papers that push 15-20 pages.

Why 5-10? You can cover a lot of ground yet you're forced to focus.

More importantly, you need to think long term. One report won't fulfill your needs - you're perpetually looking for new leads and so you'll need to offer new incentives.

Plus, your content may have a limited shelf life. Particularly if you're writing a technology-focused white paper.

So don't cram everything into one report. Save ideas for future ones.

4. What other guidelines should I follow?

Use visuals wherever appropriate. Whether it's a screenshot, graph, chart, or timeline, a good illustration will help your reader understand and absorb your material.

And for the same reason, break up sections into subsections. (This of course may not apply to a tip sheet or other report shorter than 5 pages.)

Also: Use lots of white space. Wide page margins and generous gaps between text and visuals will ensure your report is easy on the eyes.

5. OK, I'm ready. I know what I want to write about. Yet I can't get beyond a blank screen. Help!

Start by outlining your report in as much detail as possible. Write bullet points. Try to define your report's major sections.

Don't worry about whether anything "sounds right." Most of it won't. But you'll get there. At this point you're just trying to put down raw ideas and organize them.

Do this as long as you need and eventually your rough notes will evolve into sentences, paragraphs, and completed sections.

6. How long is it going to take to get this thing done?

Depends on 1) the type of report and 2) whether you're starting from scratch.

Regarding #2, you probably aren't. If you haven't already, look at content you already have, from PowerPoint presentations to internal email discussions. Maybe there's material you can reuse or repurpose.

But generally speaking I'd suggest giving yourself 5-6 weeks. Minimum.

Sound like a lot of time? You'll need it.

For one, your first draft will take longer than you think (it always does). Then you'll want to solicit detailed feedback from colleagues inside and outside your company.

And even if your first draft achieves the thrust of what you want, you'll still go through a few more before you're satisfied. Plus extra rounds of feedback in between.

After you reach THAT point, you'll need to incorporate everything into an appealing PDF design template.

And before you know it, you've hit your deadline.

7. I'm all done. I've written this report you'll consider an essential read. And it's FREE! Just answer a couple of questions for me.

Surprised that I slipped that in? Don't be. This is one way you might get direct feedback based on your white paper. Remember *give to get* at the top of this article?

If you're giving away valuable information, it's appropriate - even respectful - to initiate a dialogue with your reader. Ask for her take on your topic. Offer an easy way for her to give it to you (a fax number, a phone number, a form on your Web site, an easy-to-spell email address).

And now you've created a relationship with a potential customer.

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White Papers: B2B Email Marketing's Best Friend

http://www.clickz.com/em_mkt/b2b_em_mkt/article.php/844601

By Debbie Weil, Publisher WordBiz Report

"Worried about keeping sales up in a down economy?" Then, "Get some free therapy. Get the Aberdeen white paper on using e-mail to boost revenues. *Click here.*"

Irresistible, isn't it? I bet you couldn't stop yourself. The subject line in this message from [e-Dialog](#) ("keep sales up in a down economy") is dead-on for almost any audience you're targeting. Click on "Register now" and you go to a landing page where the solution, "free therapy," is offered. It promises an awfully good read in the free white paper. And of course, "email" marketing is the magic bullet, isn't it?

White papers, also known as guides or reports, may be your last, best chance to get the click-through you want in business-to-business (B2B) email marketing. That is, in B2B email marketing as it's being practiced today -- often text only, sometimes HTML, bells and whistles kept to a minimum. With next-generation rich-media email around the corner, that may change.

For now, a free white paper or guide is still a powerful B2B offer that can stimulate high click-through rates (CTRs), capture essential company and contact information, and result in successful lead generation. According to February 2001 stats compiled by **eMarketer** <http://www.emarketer.com> white papers are the second most-consulted source of information by corporate end users. Employee phone directories are first; market analysis is No. 10.

It seems as if every credible B2B Web site has one, however. How do you make yours stand out? What are best practices in white papers? And where in heck does the term "white paper" come from?

Turns out that "white paper" may have several derivations. One is as an official British parliamentary report on an issue, delivered before legislative action is taken. (Thanks to eMarketer's [Jonathan Jackson](#) for this tip.)

Another, from Jonathan Kantor, president of technical marketing services firm, [The Appum Group](#), is as a World War II term for high-level, classified information. "The concept has changed dramatically in the past 30 years," Kantor says. "It used to be a company's deep, dark secrets. Today it's often more of a marketing vehicle... The audience used to be IT and technical; now readers are expected to be business decision-makers who understand how the technology satisfies business needs."

Despite being a serious fellow who can write about highly technical stuff, Kantor apparently has a good marketing sense as well as a sense of humor. An alternate URL for The Appum Group's Web site is <http://www.whitepapercompany.com>.

And a "don't follow this" example of a white paper, "[The Impact of the Plow on the Mesopotamian Era](#)" (it's filled with jargon and acronyms), is downloadable from the site. (Note : this document is no longer available.) Those of you who occasionally succumb to MBA-speak (i.e., business-school jargon) may find some of the subheads uncomfortably

familiar.

With "what not to do" in mind, here are some best practices for developing a white paper as a B2B marketing offer.

It's Not White

First, a white paper should not be just black and white. If you're using it as a marketing tool to generate leads or to brand your company as a smart-thinking one, put as much care into the look and design as you would into a print ad.

In fact, think magazine layout. Use color both in text headings and in graphics; use diagrams and flow charts. Use pull-quotes (a selected sentence or two "pulled" from your copy and highlighted in a bigger font size).

Picture your white paper printed out and lying on a decision-maker's desk. It should display your company's logo and perhaps reinforce your Web site design. He or she may or may not get around to reading every word, but you will have succeeded, nonetheless, in delivering a substantive piece of product collateral.

Make It Readable, Please

Which brings us to our second guideline: Be mercifully brief (not more than 10 to 15 pages, says Kantor), and make it easy to read. In addition to using color and an eye-catching layout, deliver your key message points in bullets, and divide your copy into topics and subsections.

Most of your target audience will skim and never read every word. "It's meant to be important, but also brief and a summary," says Kantor.

Oh, did I forget to mention the title? Like an effective subject line in an email message, the title of your white paper should be a call to action or a teaser: "Find Out How to..." or "Top Five Mistakes..."

The Content

Here's where it gets a bit trickier. You want to establish yourself as credible and as an expert, but you don't want to promote your product or service too heavily. (Hint: Remember the WIIFM rule -- "What's in it for me?")

Business users of the Internet are looking for information. They need and want information to do their jobs. Your challenge is to convey that you feel their pain -- that you understand their business need.

Then, make sure the "solution" offered in your white paper is both broad and specific enough that the reader will learn something. A busy reader needs guidance to absorb new information. In [an article on white papers](#), Kantor suggests that you include a background section on your industry and, at the end, a summary repeating all the key points.

Fulfill Your Business Objective

In a B2B campaign, your objective is usually to generate leads. As long as you capture the qualifying contact information you need, your white paper could be about almost anything. In fact, you don't even have to write it. In a recent email marketing campaign, [Accenture](#)

cleverly used a sample chapter from a new Harvard Business School Press book, "The Attention Economy," as the free [downloadable offer](#). Follow this URL to sign up for it : <http://www.attentionbook.com/atec03.asp>

Formatting

The convention is to offer your white paper in Adobe's Portable Document Format (PDF). If the end user has the free version of Adobe Acrobat Reader installed on his or her computer, the file is easily downloadable and can be read anywhere, even on a personal digital assistant (PDA).

Easy, that is, unless your prospective reader encounters a problem downloading. You might consider including download instructions on your landing page. In any case, you should always direct your reader to the proper download page [on Adobe's site](#).

Another approach is to also include an HTML version of your white paper. A good example of combining the two is a white paper on Lyris's site on the history of [email list management](#).

<http://www.lyris.com/about/company/whitepapers/historylistservercontents>

Finally, in addition to using your white paper as an offer for an email marketing campaign, you should be promoting it from your Web site, from your sig file, from an offline print campaign, and in any other way that gets you the business results -- qualified leads -- you're looking for

About the author : Debbie Weil is publisher of [WordBiz Report](#), an award-winning e-newsletter which focuses on the business of words online : improving sales conversion with your Web site content, an e-newsletter or a Weblog (blog). WBR is the winner of the prestigious Newsletter on Newsletter's [2002 Gold Award for Online Subscription Newsletter](#) as well as an [APEX 2003 Award for Publication Excellence](#).

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