Generating B2B Sales Leads with White Papers

How to Build Awareness, Interest, and Sales

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Generating B2B sales leads is a challenge.

Busy managers – decision makers and influencers - are strapped for time. Focusing their attention on your product requires skill, persistence, and effort.

How do you build generate leads with a limited budget? How do you persuade decision makers to buy your products and services? Marketing and sales managers face these challenges daily.

The good news is white papers, designed to educate and persuade, can build awareness, generate sales leads, and influence purchase decisions.

The goal of this white paper is to explain how to use B2B white papers to build awareness, generate sales leads, and get the sale.

Getting Attention - A Major Effort

Busy managers – purchase decision makers and influencers – have limited time. Time is the most precious resource of all. There are several reasons for its scarcity.

- **Productivity.** In today’s business world, productivity and efficiency are the order of the day. Boards and executives direct managers to do more with less. Time shrinks and so does attention.

- **Technology.** In addition, 24/7 connectivity, calls, meetings, travel, and Web 2.0 eat away managers’ time. Priorities, technology, and gatekeepers shelter managers. Getting their attention is tough.

- **Advertising Clutter.** On top of that, advertising clutter is everywhere. Information overloads. Hundreds, sometimes thousands of ads a day bombard managers. They often resist and avoid it. Minds screen, filter, and sometimes block new information. Getting attention and building awareness is getting tougher.

Mr. J. Walker Smith, president of Yankelovich Partners, a marketing research firm, says, “The old approach of marketing saturation has created a clutter
environment that people are now resisting, in an era when people feel they have less time.”

The Paradox of the Information Age

The paradox of the information age is managers are overwhelmed with a cacophony of data and sales pitches, yet managers need to discern useful information to make important decisions.

Sometimes, important signals disappear in the noise floor.

Not being able to reach decision makers with your important information is not only damaging to them, but to you. Your prospect doesn’t get the solution. And you don’t get the sale. What could be worse for your company?

Despite their limited time, decision makers need to make the right choices to move their organizations forward. It’s what they are paid to do.

To stay on top of important trends and issues, decision makers must read or be informed about new products, services, and solutions. They simply must do it, or risk falling behind.

So how do you get decision makers to read and digest vital information and take action? What are effective ways to get managers’ attention, interest, desire, and action about your products and services?

White Papers Cut Through the Clutter

Decision makers and purchase influencers read white papers and share them.

Decision makers perceive white papers as educational documents, aiding purchase decisions.

- **Decision Makers Read White Papers.** According to a study by Eccolo Media, 77% of business decision makers read white papers.²

- **White Paper Are Influential.** In fact, 84% of businesses find white papers extremely or moderately influential in purchase decisions.³

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3. Ibid
• White Papers are Viral. In the same study, 89% of purchase decision makers and influencers share white papers with colleagues.  

What is a White Paper?

A white paper educates and persuades.

At its essence, a white paper educates and persuades readers about solutions to a specific problem.

According to Robert W. Bly, a premier B2B copywriter and author, “The white paper serves the same purpose as a brochure...to sell or help sell a product or service...but reads and looks like an article or other important piece of authoritative, objective information. Unlike a sales brochure, a white paper must contain useful ‘how-to’ information that helps the reader solve a problem, or make a key business decision.”

Let’s examine the white paper components.

• Identifies a Problem. White papers identify a business or technical problem - a need or want that demands resolution.

• Presents a Solution. Next, a white paper presents a solution, typically at the product category level, rather than the brand level.

• Educates. In offering a category solution, it educates and informs objectively, building awareness and credibility. It opens minds.

• Persuades. White papers persuade a particular solution to a problem – why a particular solution is best. The problem can be a business or technical problem or a combination of the two.

• Sets Standards. White papers can redefine a category. They are the stepping-stone to setting standards or specifications for RFPs and purchase contracts. White papers differentiate.

• Calls to Action. The end of a white paper requests action, and provides contact information.

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4 Ibid
White papers are typically six to ten pages, although some are longer and shorter.

In the commerce, there are two types of white papers: 1) the business white paper aimed at executives, and 2) the technical white paper aimed at engineers or technical operators.

Decision makers and influencers read white papers to find solutions to problems.

How White Papers Help You

White papers build awareness, generate leads, build credibility, set standards, and influence sales. Often you can repurpose white paper content into other communication formats. White papers support a wide range of sales and marketing methods and actions.

- **Generates Sales Leads.** White papers generate sales leads via several sales and marketing methods, as shown in figure 1.

![White Paper Distribution](image)

- **Supports the Sales Cycle.** White papers build awareness, interest, desire and action in the sales cycle. Decision makers and purchase influencers use...
White papers educate and persuade during each phase of the sales cycle, especially in the early stage.

white papers at each stage of the sales/purchase cycle, but typically rely on white papers in the early sales stage...the awareness and interest building stages in the sales cycle.

- **Persuades in Stealth.** White papers educate and persuade, while you are not present. Some sales cycles take weeks, months, or a half-year or more. When you are not there to persuade your prospect, you want your white paper there to do it.

- **Persuades Multi-Level.** Persuading many, not just one, is typical when selling complex B2B products and services. Important purchase decisions involve several people - decision makers and influencers - from various departments and levels. White papers address organizational information needs efficiently and effectively. Managers share white papers.

- **Builds Credibility.** Your white paper positions you as a thought leader who understands the prospects’ language and problems. It is a first step towards a meeting of the minds.

- **Positions the Category.** White papers can redefine a product category with your specifications. Michael A. Stelzner, a leading authority about white papers, states, “...you can redefine the marketplace by focusing in on your solution in a generic way that differentiates it from other categorical descriptions.”

- **Repurposes Content.** A white paper often contains effective marketing content. You can use white paper content for sales letters, advertising, telephone pitches, websites, articles, videos, and podcasts.

**Writing White Papers**

When credibility is at stake, writing quality counts.

According to KnowledgeStorm, a syndicator and distributor of white papers, 85% of IT professionals consider writing quality extremely important.

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7 “Connecting Through Content: How technology Marketers Meet Buyers’ Appetite for Content.” March 2007, Knowledgestorm.com
Attracting attention and getting read is an art. Engaging readers and getting your message across is your priority.

Writing must be clear, concise, and persuasive. It must be appealing to the eye. The white paper format must attract skimmers, casual readers, and detailed readers; often they are one in the same reader. Decision makers do not have time to read thick, dense tomes. And they don’t want to waste time reading poorly written papers.

Writing white papers is a practiced art, built on training and writing experience.

Who Should Write White Papers

In-house professional writers experienced in the white papers are ideal.

If you don’t have in-house professional white paper writers, using professional writers with industry white paper experience is your best bet.

Asking in-house busy product managers or engineers to write white papers can be counterproductive. It is a waste of their valuable time, if they lack training and experience in the art of writing white papers.

What to Look For in a Professional White Paper Writer

Finding the right person to write a white paper is an important decision.

Here are some tips on what to look for in a writer.

• **Professional White Paper Writer.** The writer must have experience in writing white papers. The writer must write clear, concise and persuasive white papers.

• **Excels in Qualitative Research.** The writer must have experience interviewing. The writer must be able to interview executives, subject-matter experts, product managers, salespeople, and customers, and diagnose key issues, problems, and needs. A professional focus group moderator or interviewer is ideal. In addition, the writer must be able to gather essential information via secondary research.

• **Industry Experience.** The writer should have specific industry experience and be able to understand how technical and business features translate
into solutions - benefits at the functional and higher levels. Understanding an industry language is crucial.

- **Marketing & Sales Knowledge.** The writer should understand B2B marketing and how white papers fit into the overall context of marketing and sales. The writer must help the client generate sales leads.

- **Internet, SEO & Social Media Skills.** The writer should understand Internet marketing, keywords, tags, and linking, when using websites and social media as a means to distribute white papers. Effective keyword tags help drive web traffic and white paper downloads. White papers should be interactive with links leading to video, podcasts, websites, e-books, technical data, or reports.

- **Organizing Skills.** The professional white paper writer must be well organized. Organizing distills essential facts, ideas, and examples into effective papers that are easy to understand.

- **Project Management Skills.** The professional writer should be to handle project management or work with a project manager. Project management ensures important tasks meet deadlines. These tasks include interviews, first drafts, reviews, second drafts, approval, and final white paper in MS Word and PDF.

- **Visual Layout Skills.** Although the professional writer is not a graphic artist, the writer should understand how to layout and format white papers to appeal to busy decision makers. A white paper should be attractive, enticing, and easy to read. It must serve skimmers, casual readers, and detailed readers. There are several techniques and formats to aide readability.

- **Editing.** A professional writer should use an editor to review work for clarity and quality. An independent editor brings a critical eye to writing.

**Conclusion**

Decision makers and purchase influencers read white papers and share them.

White papers, designed to educate and persuade, can build awareness, generate sales leads, and influence purchase decisions.
Henk Hoets – White Paper Author

A B2B marketing expert focused on wireless, Internet, and communications electronics, Henk specializes in writing industrial-strength white papers.

He is a market research interviewer and author. He has extensive experience interviewing subject matter experts - CEOs, executives, board directors, analysts, trade magazine editors, association heads, engineers, sales executives, and industry consultants. He is a trained focus group moderator and has interviewed thousands of people.

Henk is the author of Instant Focus Group Questions a 248-page e-book. The e-book is a practical handbook about qualitative marketing research, packed with tips, techniques, and hundreds of interviewing questions.

In addition, he is the publisher and editor of FocusGroupTips.com, http://www.focusgrouptips.com a leading industry website about qualitative research and marketing. It generates several thousand unique visitors a month, using SEO techniques. He is trained in SEO and Social Media.

Clients and projects include blue chip, medium, and small companies: MSS-Multi Sponsored Studies, PCC, ESPN, Motorola, NTT DoCoMo, Microsoft, Research In Motion, LG, Diamond Management and Technology and more.

Before founding his company, Henk was a vice president of marketing in the communications electronics and wireless industries, holding marketing positions at Motorola, and E.F. Johnson Company. He has worked and lived in Asia, Europe, and the United States. He holds a BA and MBA.

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