THE SOURCE FOR WRITING AND MARKETING WHITE PAPERS

WHITE PAPER WRITING

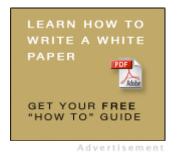## Five Ways to Ensure White Paper Success
By Sue Emond and Gwyn Finnell

Companies that sell complex technology products and services face different marketing challenges than those selling easy-to-understand commodities. Sales processes can be lengthy and complex, involving multiple influencers, evaluators, and decision makers who may (or may not) be technically savvy. White papers can be an effective way to provide the various participants in the sales process with the information they need to make an informed decision about a new purchase, especially when faced with complex business choices. In such cases, they need more than just a brochure that simply pitches a product's features and benefits. A well-developed white paper (or series of papers) is more likely to be read and influence buying decisions.

But how can a business ensure that its white papers will successfully help further the sales process? Many considerations are involved in developing a white paper that aligns with specific marketing and sales initiatives. In most cases, effective, high-quality white papers follow five golden rules:

Address the Right Topic
Too often, white papers are developed in a corporate marketing vacuum, disconnected from real-world sales contexts. And inadvertently, they address topics that neither sales people nor prospective buyers find useful. To close deals, sales people must establish value in the minds of all

stakeholders at just the right points in the sales process. White papers can play a critical role in communicating this value, particularly during intermediate sales stages, when customers are considering their options and evaluating technologies. Experience-based knowledge about what real customers are thinking, doing, and asking during the sales process is needed. This is best obtained by involving sales teams early in the white paper scoping and outlining stages.

Choose the Right Type of White Paper
White papers often fail to align with their purpose and role in the sales cycle because the wrong vehicle is chosen for delivering their message. White papers vary in their structure, and the best type of white paper to accomplish goals and appeal to stakeholders should be carefully considered. Several examples of business white paper types include business implication discussions, strategy discussions, industry trend overviews, and issues analyses. The technology briefing is one of the more common technical white paper types. In some cases, selecting a single white paper type is most suitable, while in others, combining white paper types into a single document may be appropriate.

Provide the Right Amount of 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 benefit them.

Ensure Objectivity
Biased information alienates readers and instills doubt about the paper's validity. Instead of including unsubstantiated claims about a specific offering's suitability and benefits, an effective white paper educates the audience about the problem or issue, as well as potential solutions to their problems. To further strengthen the credibility of the business case and to demonstrate the technical prowess of the offering, writers should cite third-party sources, such as analyst research or industry reports, whenever possible.

Use a Seasoned White Paper Writer
Even with the best white paper plan, a white paper is doomed to failure if the writer lacks the exceptional writing skills, technical savvy, and marketing experience that these documents require. 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. Skilled white

paper writers have the ability to select and synthesize highly technical information from a variety of sources, and then clearly communicate the wealth of detail without condescending to the audience or making unreasonable assumptions about the reader's prior knowledge. Often, a talented writer with solid white paper experience can provide the greatest benefit. If a qualified internal writer is not available, consider outsourcing the task to professionals who specialize in developing white papers.

By incorporating these five sound principles into the development of white papers, companies can produce effective white papers that prove their solutions' business and technical validity-and improve chances for success.

About the authors: Sue Emond and Gwyn Finnell are senior writers for Hoffman Marketing Communications, Inc.-a firm that specializes in writing white papers for technology companies.

DISCUSSION: Discuss this topic at the WhitePaperSource forum.