

White papers: a surprisingly powerful sales tool

If what you offer involves a lengthy decision process, white papers are a very powerful tool. In a recent survey of managers, 84 percent said white papers influenced their decisions. 89 percent share them with colleagues.

The biggest mistake when creating white papers is making them overtly promotional. Focusing on facts is far more compelling (besides, you get to choose the facts you use).

An effective structure begins with a short section describing your customers' problem or challenge. Next, explore available solutions, and examine the advantages and disadvantages of each. Then include concise information about your product or service and your company.

White papers are amazingly versatile. You can use them as leave-behinds for sales calls, mail them to prospects, pass them out at trade shows, and offer them on your website or through email marketing.

While you can develop them internally, outsourcing to a professional writer is a smart approach. You'll end up with a higher-quality product. Plus, outsiders will have fewer preconceived notions and internal prejudices, so they can help you shape the most effective messages.



Skip the shorthand to communicate more clearly

A local car repair shop's changeable sign was promoting a special on something called LOF. I've eaten lox, but not lof. Is it an animal?

No, it's actually auto technician shorthand for "lube, oil and filter," which most of us call an oil change. How many potential customers who drove by realized there was a great deal on oil changes? Far more glanced up, figured they didn't have a hankering for LOF, and drove on.

That kind of shorthand is common these days in nearly every industry and profession, and using it with the public is nearly always a mistake. If you want to communicate effectively with prospects, customers, or any other stakeholders, you need to speak in their language. Don't make the mistake of assuming that they understand your language. Save the shorthand and the jargon for your co-workers or employees.

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