

Generate Leads and Make Sales with Epic White Papers

a guide for B2B marketers

by Jessie Kwak



An Effective Marketing Strategy

More buyers are conducting self-guided research before making purchasing decisions – making content marketing tools like white papers more important than ever. As the manager responsible for content marketing for your B2B retail company, you're in a prime position to accelerate your company's lead generation and sales growth.

This white paper teaches B2B marketers who want to get more inbound leads how to write clear, engaging white papers as part of their effective content marketing strategy.

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The Changing Climate of B2B Sales

Buyers are shopping for vendors differently these days – and today’s B2B marketers need to adapt their strategies to match. Content marketing and audience engagement are the new norm, and as a rule buyers are conducting their own research well before they speak to the sales department.

Buyers are educating themselves, and they’re using white papers, blog posts, case studies and other content marketing staples to do it. Even after the sale, 72% of buyers say it’s important or very important to receive ongoing content from the vendor, and they rank white papers as the content they’re most likely to read.¹

Translation? Your marketing materials need to be educational, and to focus on solving customer problems – not pushing a company’s agenda.

When done right, a white paper is entirely educational, with only the gentlest of nudges toward the sponsoring company’s solution. That soft-sell approach explains why buyers rank white papers among the most helpful assets in every phase of the sales cycle,² and why the role of white papers in a B2B content marketer’s toolkit is more important now than ever.

“*Buyers are educating themselves, and they’re using white papers, blog posts, case studies and other content marketing staples to do it.*”

1. “B2B Technology Content Survey Report,” Eccolo Media, 2014, p. 24.

2. “B2B Technology Content Survey Report,” Eccolo Media, 2014, p. 18

How Buyers Are Using White Papers

Buyers are research more before making a decision to contact a vendor, which means the B2B sales cycle is lengthening considerably. Savvy B2B marketers must work hard to pave buyers' paths with content that guides them toward their company's solution. In 2013, white papers were in the top 10 content marketing techniques that marketing managers used to get their message out,³ and were the top assets consumed by buyers and influencers.

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CONTENT TYPES BY FREQUENCY OF CONSUMPTION

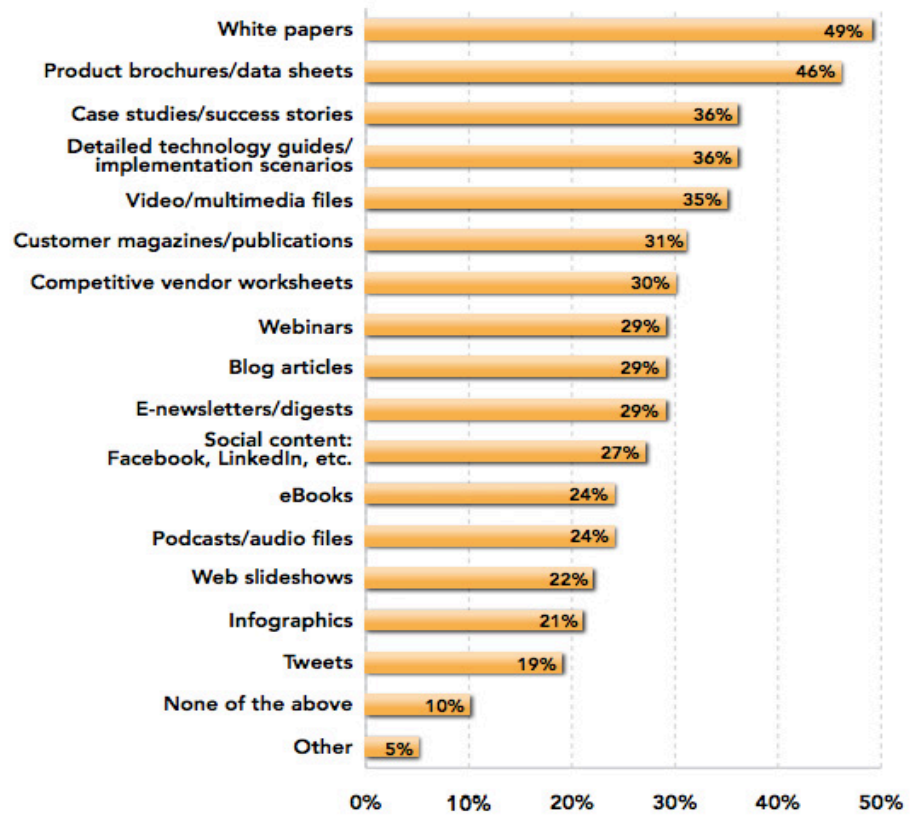


FIGURE 5: Which vendor collateral types have you consumed to evaluate a technology purchase in the last 6 months?

Graph from Eccolo Media's 2014 B2B Technology Content Survey Report.⁴

Blog posts currently rank as the most influential content in the pre-sales phase (when buyers are yet unaware of a problem), but as buyers begin to research they're primarily looking for long-form content like case studies, white papers, and articles. Many B2B companies are still falling short in

3. "2014 B2B Content Marketing Research: Strategy is Key to Effectiveness," Content Marketing Institute, October 2013.

4. "B2B Technology Content Survey Report," Eccolo Media, 2014, p. 7

providing that content – 54% of buyers report frustration at not finding long-form marketing collateral on vendor websites.⁵

Buyers report that white papers are most helpful in the research stages of the sales cycle, when they're unaware of their problem, looking to understand their problem, and identifying solutions. White papers present a prime opportunity for marketers to reach potential leads, but as buyers are becoming swamped with a deluge of blog posts, case studies, infographics, and reports, it's more important than ever that your white papers shine.

Should Your Company Use White Papers?

Depending on your company's goals, producing a white paper can be incredibly effective. White papers are built around the concept of helping a buyer find a solution to her problem, and are especially helpful for companies who need to provide extra information to help buyers make decisions. For example, a company that sells an expensive product or service, or a company with an innovative solution or product.

White papers work best for companies that:

- Have longer sales cycles
- Sell expensive products or ongoing services
- Are introducing innovative solutions to the market
- Want to attract investors
- Are launching new products or services
- Are looking for greater exposure

White papers aren't an easy solution. The time and effort required to produce a high-quality white paper is significant, and with poor execution, a company can spend \$3,000-\$10,000 to produce a white paper, only to have it flop. Ask yourself these questions before tackling a white paper project: is your company able to take the time to produce a professional white paper, are they willing to put the power of marketing behind it, and do you have a team assembled that can do the job?

5. "2014 B2B Web Usability Report," Dianna Huff and KoMarketing Associates, February 2014, p. 6.

5 ways white papers help companies get leads

- 👉 They grow qualified email lists by acting as an exclusive free download to subscribers.
- 👉 They educate buyers about trends.
- 👉 They gain media coverage by serving as sources for reporters.
- 👉 They publicize a company's new solution to a common industry problem
- 👉 They establish a company's expertise, and build a company's position as an industry thought leader.

Elements of a Successful White Paper

Think of a white paper as a cross between a magazine article and a brochure – it can be service-oriented, analyze an industry trend, or address a specific complaint, but it should always be heavy on the educational aspect and very light on the sales pitch. A successful white paper blends fact with persuasive argument, explaining technical concepts and features in plain language to help move along the sales process.

“*Buyers read white papers because they want to be informed – and the larger the purchase, the more informed they will want to be.*”

A successful white paper is:

🎯 **Educational.** Buyers read white papers because they want to be informed – and the larger the purchase, the more informed they will want to be. A white paper should offer clear, concise ways to help your customer, rather than coming off as a lengthy sales pitch. Prove that you’re a source of intellectual capital, and buyers will seek out more information on your product on their own.

🎯 **Targeted to the correct audience.** A white paper should have a very narrow audience – it shouldn’t try to be all things to all people. Decide exactly who you’re writing the paper for, and exactly what you want to persuade them to do, then target the desired audience in your content, title, and marketing efforts.

Choosing white paper topics that actually get read

- Ask the sales team to point out gaps in buyers’ knowledge of the product
- Mine customer service for frequently asked questions
- Go behind the scenes of your products or services
- Analyze new trends in the industry
- Forecast future trends
- Debunk industry myths or rumors

👉 **Granular.** The trend for white papers these days is short and specific. Most B2B buyers prefer white papers that are 6-8 pages long, although technical white papers can go as long as 12 pages without losing readership. Make your topic as concise as possible, and consider break up larger ideas into multiple white papers.

👉 **Written to solve a problem.** Pain is a basic motivator in life, and a powerful tool in writing copy. Your white paper's target audience is experiencing some sort of pain, and the goal of the white paper is to point out that problem, along with a basic solution that ideally leads the reader to consider your company's solution.

Crucial questions to ask before you start writing

- *“What’s the goal of this white paper?”* Is it to generate leads? Upsell current customers? Get registrants for a webinar? Provide resources to launch a new service? Demonstrate your expertise?
- *“Who is my audience?”* Are they prospective buyers, existing customers, or even journalists? Where are they in the sales cycle? What questions are they asking?
- *“What problem will this white paper solve?”*
- *“What message are we trying to convey?”*
- *“How does this project fit with the messaging we already have in place?”*
- *“Will we write it in house, or hire an outside writer?”*

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A successful white paper is educational, targeted to a specific audience, concise, and written to solve a specific problem.
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Common Mistakes in Failed White Papers

A poorly-conceived and -written white paper may simply drop into the seas of marketing without making so much as a splash – or it may actually turn buyers off your company. Buyers react negatively to white papers that read too much like marketing pieces, which add no value to their research, or which they perceive to be a waste of their time.

Avoid these mistakes:

☹️ **Too pushy.** Buyers rate “too much marketing hype,” and “lack of truly independent, unbiased information” among their top content problems.⁶ A white paper isn’t the time for emotional marketing language – buyers won’t read far if they suspect the white paper is simply a lengthy brochure touting your products. Like a knowledgeable salesperson, a good white paper should guide buyers through a purchasing decision without coming off as overly pushy.

☹️ **Title linked to a product.** Linking a white paper to a specific product is a fantastic idea, but keep in mind that buyers read white papers to educate themselves, not to learn about your product. Leaving the product out of the title increases the chances that the white paper will be read and shared.

☹️ **Too much jargon.** Drop the industry jargon and esoteric acronyms when writing white papers, and write for a more general audience. Although the topic should be narrowly targeted, don’t exclude readers and miss out on potential leads by cloaking your message in jargon. Use clear language and keep things simple – you can’t educate if readers can’t understand what you’re saying.

☹️ **No call to action.** While the bulk white paper should focus on the reader and their problems, the goal of the paper is to funnel them toward your company’s solution. Before you even start writing, you need to know what the desired outcome is. Do you want them to make an order? Sign up for a consultation? Register for a webinar? Download trial software? Forward the paper to their colleagues? You need a call to action at the end to point them in the right direction. Make it crystal clear what a buyer’s next step should be.

☹️ **No marketing.** Don’t spend all that time, effort, and money on a white paper only to post it on your website without fanfare. Create a sales page, send out a press release, email it to your network of subscribers, and submit it to white paper distribution sites. Announce it in presentations, hand out copies at events, and promote it on your social media outlets. If you’ve produced a stellar white paper, people will start talking.

⁶ “Customer Engagement: The Role of Content in the IT Purchase Process,” IDG Enterprise, September 2013.

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Like a good salesperson, a successful white paper should guide buyers through a purchasing decision without coming off as overly pushy.
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Should You Produce In-House, or Outsource?

A white paper is a fantastic persuasive document, but if it's not well-written it can have the opposite effect: muddying the waters instead of clarifying them, confusing the reader instead of providing a clear call to action that leads them to your product. B2B buyers will make judgments about your company based on your white paper's quality, so it's crucial that you make it the best that you can.

In-house production

To produce a high-quality white paper, you need to manage a team of specialists that includes the writer, copyeditor, and graphic designer, as well as consulting with subject matter experts and other stakeholders within your company. It can be a daunting project for most marketing teams, and relatively few B2B companies have the in-house staff to tackle a white paper. Without a clear deadline in-house projects are often back-burnered, and can sometimes drag on for years.

Some companies believe that the only ones qualified to can write about their products and services are themselves, but that's rarely true. Clear, persuasive writing is crucial in order for your white paper to succeed. While a company's product experts may know the most about a topic, it's unusual that they also possess the professional writing skills needed to explain and persuade.

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Outsourcing

A practical solution is to outsource the writing, copyediting, and graphic design to a freelancer – allowing you to manage the project and review deliverables without taking up too much room in your schedule. Since your team isn't taking time away from their everyday work for such a huge project, it's more likely to stay on target rather than stretching out for months.

Ideally, you want to hire a writer who understands the B2B retail industry, and understands how inbound content marketing works.

Although some writers specialize in certain niches, the majority focus on styles of writing within a broader industry, like retail, health, or technology. The majority of a writer's skill is in research and assimilation, so it's important not to get hung up on whether or not he's written for your specific product line.

Whether you choose to write a white paper in-house, or outsource to a freelance writer, remember that it's a critical part of your marketing. Make it the best it can be.

Getting ready to step up your inbound marketing with white papers?

Contact me for a free half hour consultation about how I can help your company generate more leads, position itself as a thought leader in the industry, and start conversations around your brand. Email me at: Jessie@jlkwak.com

Don't let your white paper fall on deaf ears. With each white paper, I'll add on a **free press release and marketing email** that you can use to help your white paper get the attention it deserves.

About Jessie Kwak | Freelance B2B Writer

Jessie Kwak writes compelling white papers and other content marketing collateral for B2B retail companies who want to generate more sales leads, educate their customers, and position themselves as credible experts.

www.jlkwak.com/white-papers

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