

May 12, 2009

## TOOLKIT

# Showing Off Your Solutions in a White Paper

By PAUL B. BROWN

Bloggling is no longer a quick way to show how smart you are, not when it seems that every entrepreneur and his 14-year-old niece have a blog.

Writing a book would be a terrific way to show the quality of your thinking, but who has the time?

But a number of experts say there is a middle ground for showing off the quality of your ideas: write a white paper, a document that offers a specific solution to a problem or argues a position.

“White papers are an often-forgotten way for companies to share their stories — about their people, products, services, marketplace, mission and more,” said Roy G. Miller, president of RGM Communications, a marketing communications and public relations firm in Wylie, Tex. “A well-structured, well-written [white paper can help you define and differentiate](#), and build a base of loyal customers.”

The following tips and ideas can help you decide if the approach is right for you.

**WHITE PAPERS 101** You can find instructions for writing a white paper online. [This site](#) covers all the basics, from focusing on your target audience (“usually it will be a very specific demographic, such as midlevel engineers, amateur Web designers, or some other such group”) to the types of examples to use.

**WHITE PAPERS 102** Even knowing what to write, you may be baffled about how to write it. [Klariti.com](#), a technical writing consulting firm based in Ireland, [offers a template](#) to follow.

The firm also points out, slightly self-servingly, that since this is primarily a marketing document, you want to make sure it is gracefully written (and the company could do that for you).

**CHECK THE ARCHIVES** There are a number of Web sites, like [LearningTree.com](#), that [offer free white papers](#) on various topics and a equal number of sites, like [NetworkWorld.com](#), that [offer white papers of a technical nature](#). They usually require that potential readers provide an e-mail address, in exchange for getting the papers free.

Before you start typing, you may want to check to see if a white paper similar to the one you plan to create has been written .

**STRESS THE BENEFITS** Sure, the white paper is intended to be a subtle way of advertising your product or service offering. But customers are not necessarily interested in a commercial pitch, subtle though it may be. They want to know how what you are writing about can benefit them.

In other words, you want to underscore in your paper [the benefits it can provide](#) to your readers, says Michael A. Stelzner.

He offers these three tips in explaining those benefits:

¶“Ask what problems your solution solves: Let’s assume you are targeting writers and have determined that time management is a major problem for writers. If you have a solution for writers, a unique benefit might be: cuts the writing process in half or increases writer productivity.”

¶Stress what makes your argument unique. What are people going to read that they can’t get elsewhere?

¶What’s in it for the reader? “Benefits can often be taken to the next level by simply asking yourself, ‘Why does this matter?’ Simply take your existing list of benefits and go down the list and ask the question. For example, my above ‘cuts the writing process in half’ benefit could be expanded to ‘Allows writers to take on more projects without working extra hours.’ ”

LAST CALL As with any other research paper, the language in a white paper can sometimes be vague.

[Netfunny.com](#) supplies [a tongue-in-check simultaneous translation](#) for some of the common phrases you may read.

If, for example, someone writes, “It has long been known that” the writer means, “I haven’t bothered to look up.”

When you see “typical results are shown,” you should think “the best results are.”

And if you read a phrase like “it is suggested that” or “it is believed that,” you should mentally substitute, “I think.”

Copyright 2009 The New York Times Company

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [First Look](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#)