



White Paper Best Practices: *Three Essential Steps to Creating Content that Connects*

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Stephanie Stahl explores the value of white papers to technology decision makers. She also shares her checklists for producing white papers that educate the market about key technology trends and ultimately compel these decision makers to investigate your solutions. Read on to learn how to position your content for credibility and get specific tips so your content will be noticed and shared.

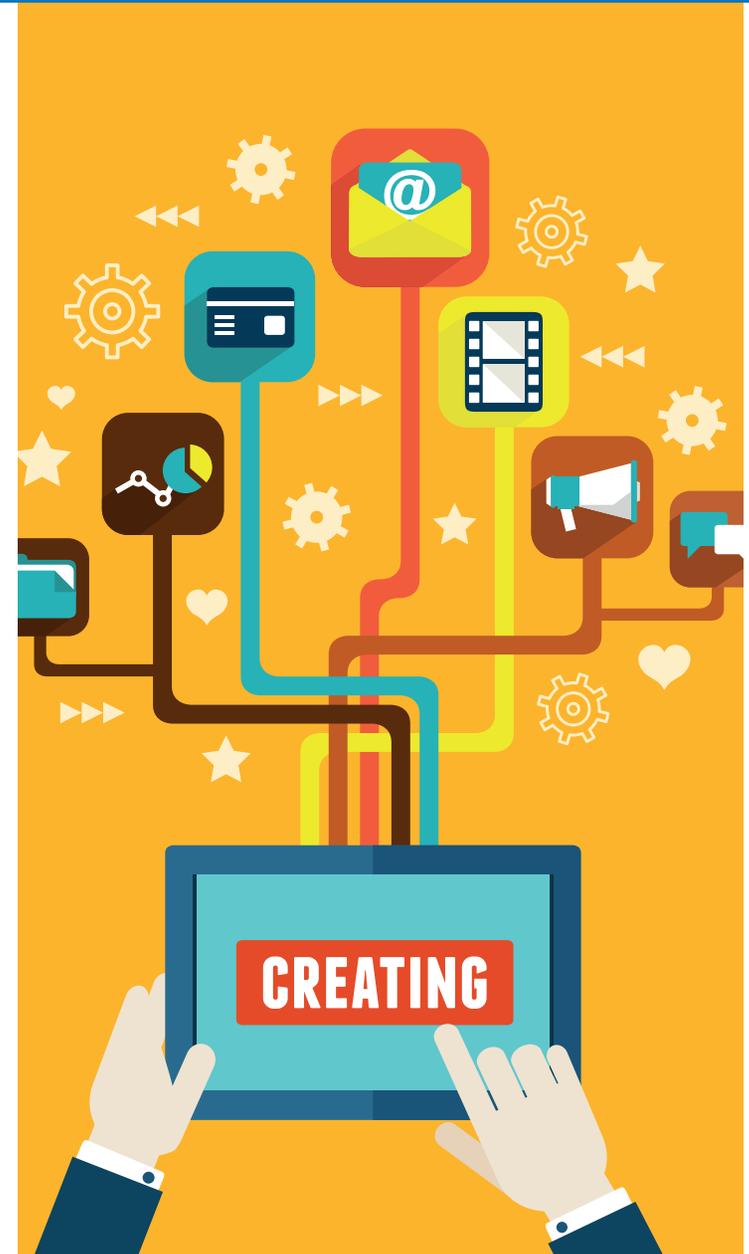
White papers are an essential part of the tech marketer's toolkit. According to recent UBM Tech research, 69 percent of technology marketers rate white papers as effective for reaching IT decision makers¹. From our research, we also know that IT decision makers place a high value on white papers to form the basis of their decision making. They are read regularly and often passed along to colleagues to explain complex ideas or make a business case.

What we know:

- **41% of technology buyers use white papers weekly or monthly for their jobs.**
- **64% of IT professionals have shared white papers with a colleague².**

White papers can showcase thought leadership, provide technical information, compare products, build a business case and share best practices. An information-rich white paper that's well written and visually interesting can be an invaluable asset to help marketers move the decision-making process forward.

What does it take to get your white paper noticed and shared? Use these three checklists to create white papers that provide value to your audience.



Step One: The Outline

Don't just start throwing words on a page! The best white papers are planned, researched and written with the information needs and business objectives of your target audience front and center. Start by thinking about how your white paper will help the person who downloads it. What's the value proposition?

Frame your topic to clearly define what the IT buyer will gain from reading the white paper. This is critical to getting a prospect to even download the asset, let alone read four to six pages of your writing. Phrases such as "the business benefits of ..." or "5 tips for ..." will help communicate the value to the reader quickly.

Seventy-seven percent of technology marketers target multiple unique audiences. Instead of taking a one-white-paper-fits-all

Step Two: The Content

The words and phrases you use, the people behind them, the length and the visual appearance of your content matter. Choose wisely.

Cut the Fluff

The biggest complaint from tech professionals is that the information they receive includes too much marketing "fluff." To avoid that, lead with specific applications of your technology and how it will help their business [see the "Outline" section above].

And, seriously, cut out the buzzwords! Your technology may be "innovative" and "the leading solution," but these terms have little to do with how your product will help your customers achieve their business goals. You need to prove it to them.

White Paper Outline Checklist

Will the white paper explain how to:

- Promote greater efficiencies and better performance?
- Solve a specific business challenge?
- Evaluate competing technologies?
- Anticipate the next big thing?

approach, consider which tips and data points can be aimed at specific verticals or personas during the outline stage. The same outline can form the basis of multiple papers — each targeting a niche audience through headlines, abstracts and examples that speak to a specific target's information needs.

The Value of Peers

Make your story more compelling by conducting interviews with your customers, business partners, industry analysts and consultants. Eighty-six percent of IT professionals say they rely on content from their peers and that technology professionals are their most valuable resource. These sources can add valuable case studies or expert commentary to support your perspective. In addition to peer interviews, look for relevant third-party studies from analysts and technology publishers, or invest in new research. Original research will not only help you determine customer challenges and opportunities, but it can help you speak as a thought leader on a key topic.

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THE RIGHT LENGTH. The technology audience expects valuable, detailed information from white papers, but readers don't want a dissertation! Our research shows that the ideal length for a white paper is six pages. The longer the white paper, the less likely your audience will read it in its entirety. Make it easy to consume; use bullet points, sidebars and compelling graphics.

White Paper Content Checklist

- No more than six (fluff-free) pages
- Peer or research-backed claims
- Byline of credible author or organization
- Graphics
- Call to action

THE WRITER. Marketers are time strapped, and many struggle to find the internal resources to create and manage compelling content. Consider hiring a professional writer or content marketing firm to help produce your white paper once the outline is finalized. They can ghostwrite on behalf of one of your experts. Technology writers have resources, skills and contacts that you may not have in

your company. They'll know which questions to ask, how to gather research and find sources, and how to package the product.

THE GRAPHICS. Use charts to show data and graphics to illustrate business and technology processes. Callout quotes and tips make your document less daunting and easier to navigate. These features will also simplify for your readers the process of explaining the information to their colleagues and managers; plus they will help with sharing it on social media.

THE CALL TO ACTION (CTA). Your white paper is incomplete without an action plan that spells out what readers should do next and how to do it. Include concrete steps to help them put what they've learned to immediate use. If applicable, present the plan as a timeline with action items and dates. Don't limit this CTA to a "contact us" box or a company URL. Let your readers know how they can:

- Learn more
- Evaluate your product against their business requirements
- Build a business case for procurement and deployment
- Meet your experts at an upcoming event
- Perform a test or on-site evaluation
- Launch a pilot program

Step Three: Discoverability

Sharing your new white paper involves much more than posting it on your website. Repurposing your white paper content can extend your original investment in time and money and maximize your ROI. With minimal effort and expense, your white paper can be used as the basis for a variety of other marketing and sales tools, including:

- A slide show that presents topline data, which can be posted to your website and presented during webinars and/or at live marketing events
- Short videos featuring interviews with the white paper author that can be posted to YouTube and featured on your website
- An infographic for those who prefer a visual approach to content

White papers are tried and true communication vehicles and essential educational tools for professional technology buyers. They help drive sales, establish thought leadership and build brand credibility. Follow the master checklist on the next page, and you'll create an engaging asset that your prospects will want to download and share with their teams.

White Paper Discoverability Checklist

- Promote the white paper (or an executive summary) on all applicable social media networks.
- Write blog posts that reference the white paper.
- Alert your partners to the white paper and encourage them to share it.
- Issue a press release.
- Syndicate the asset in a white paper library.
- Distribute the white paper at trade shows and other marketing events.
- Include a link to the white paper in company newsletters.



The Master White Paper Checklist

- ✓ Choose a topic that's aligned with your marketing campaign.
- ✓ Define the value proposition for your readers. (Remember, it's about them, not you!)
- ✓ Create an outline.
- ✓ Choose credible sources.
- ✓ Identify relevant research material or invest in a new market survey.
- ✓ Select (and hire) a writer and/or expert content marketing team.
- ✓ Include a technical review of the content, if needed.
- ✓ Work with a designer who can lay out the white paper in a visually appealing format.
- ✓ Identify key takeaways or quotes to call out.
- ✓ Create an action plan to guide readers' next steps.
- ✓ Plan your distribution strategy.

About Stephanie Stahl

As vice president of content marketing for UBM Tech, Stephanie Stahl provides strategic guidance on content development, content optimization, audience engagement and go-to-market platforms for UBM Tech clients. Previously, Stephanie served as editor in chief of InformationWeek, where she received numerous editorial awards and was named by Adweek as one of the most influential technology journalists in the industry.





Thank you for downloading White Paper Best Practices:

Three Essential Steps to Creating Content that Connects.

Other tech marketing research that you may be interested in:

Content Marketing Rules the World – How to balance the art and science of content marketing to get great leads.

Content Connects Research – The most effective content assets to have in your marketing arsenal.

Mobile Content Consumption Research – How IT professionals are using mobile devices for work-related content.

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