



# The Power of White Paper

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## *White Paper*

Prepared for Search Engine People by Angie Haggstrom



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## Introduction

White papers are one of the most powerful and underused marketing formats on the planet. And in an economy where everyone is fighting for fewer consumer dollars, anything companies can do to stand out from their competitors. In fact, there has been a complete swing in the way the world operates, and the companies who do not recognize this and adjust their business models accordingly will simply disappear.

Advertising needs to be more powerful and convey several messages at once. It's not about having an amazing product or service anymore!

[Customers have gone from spending freely to buying into a company.](#) When they spend their money, they're looking for the business offering a complete package that can meet a comprehensive set of needs. And this requires trust, reliability, professionalism, quality, and a whole host of other traits that require proof and time to build.

There's just no jumping onto the scene and taking over without the reputation and the image to back it up. On the bright side, this has made it relatively easy for smart companies to use their creativity and experience to lead their industries.

The problem is, with so much competition, how do you accomplish all this and still run a profitable company? By designing marketing plans that include powerful components with multifaceted benefits. And while I won't get into the rest of it, I can tell you that white papers, reports, studies or whatever you'd like to call them can be definitely one of these components.

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## The Power of White Paper -- What You've Been Missing Out On

I love information and useless facts, but I love useful facts even more. And, you know what? So does everyone else. White papers, reports, studies and mini-ebooks are one of the hottest pieces of marketing power any website owner can have.

### The Benefits of Including White Papers in Your Marketing

If they're well done, white papers will provide you with so many benefits, you won't be able to count them all on one hand. Don't believe me? Here are some of the reasons why you might want to include a white paper or two in your marketing strategy (keep in mind that this is written with the understanding that your white paper isn't on some wild, obscure, topic):

- **Traffic** -- If you host your white paper on your website and you spread the word bit through your blog and social networks, you're going to get tons of people showing up to your website, and who knows what they'll click on while they're there.
- **Links** -- If you have good reference material, chances are that others will link to it because it is good reference material. You've already done the work for them.
- **RSS Subscribers & Email lists** -- Since you have all of this wonderful traffic coming to your site, and downloading something for free, get everyone to sign up to a list or subscribe to your RSS. Of course, this doesn't give you permission to spam them to death, but there's nothing wrong with sharing a great newsletter and using these mediums to sell your info products or whatever you happen to have lying around (\*cough\* \*cough\*).
- **Authority and Reputation** -- Think about it: What makes someone an 'authority' on a subject? Brace yourself: They KNOW things...things you don't know...and you can trust that they're telling the truth because they can back up what they say with proof. And, when you release a white paper, you're showing people that you know things and have the proof to back up with you say. You have to be careful here though. If you publish things you assume are factual without proving it, you're going to get yourself into a situation that will require some quick reputation management.
- **Respect** -- Along with all that authority and reputation, you earn R-E-S-P-E-C-T, and once you have that, you'll find that your business builds quickly. You'll find that your peers (a.k.a. colleagues and competitors), target audience, and current customers begin to recognize your 'place' in the industry. Getting this respect isn't easy, but every little bit helps. Producing white papers is just one of those important steps.
- **Networking Opportunities** -- When you distribute white papers, reports, and other items, you'll find that you will come into contact with lots of people. Each of the people you meet will bring with them knowledge, contacts, ideas, and skills that might benefit both of you at some point. Keep that in mind.



(Photo: [laffy4k](#))

## What Should Your White Paper Focus On?

If you were to collect a bunch of facts, throw them together in a PDF, and distribute it, you can get results, but they might not be the ones you were expecting. There's a bit of prep work and careful planning that goes into the most successful white papers.

First, consider who it is you want to attract and why. If link building is your goal, attract your competitors as well as those in complimentary industries by choosing topics they're interested in. For example, if you're in SEO or a related field, consider subjects such as how SEO and usability go together, what makes users click (PPC, Titles, etc), conversion factors as they relate to keywords, or some carefully planned, in-depth SEO testing.

Statistics are great for linkbait, but you can also create a massive resource like a book of online tools where you test and rate them all, for example. Just be sure to make the resource comprehensive with enough to make it 'juicy'.

If your goal is traffic and conversions, you're going to have to take a completely different route. After all, customers generally hire you to know things, not to teach them about things. This means you have to think like your reader.

As an SEO aiming at new websites, for example, a report on the most effective beginner SEO tips isn't going to work. Instead, try a comprehensive white paper on how to bring traffic in using alternative mediums or types of landing pages with some great statistics.

Your final step during the initial stages is to plan your white paper out by drawing up an outline and providing some short points about the things you'd like to cover in each section. And, while you're drawing it out, make sure that you stay aware of things like potential boring areas, over crowded sections, and where you'll put your emphasis. This will give you a good idea of what sort of information you'll need and what to be cautious of while writing it up.

## Write White Papers Like an Expert With These 10 Simple Steps

If you've decided to write a white paper on your own, you'll find that things will get pretty overwhelming very quickly, if you don't keep a handle on what's going on. And, the bigger the white paper you decide to produce, the harder it's going to be. That's why my advice to you is to keep things organized from the start and follow a process. By following these 10 simple steps, you'll be able to cover all of the important aspects that make all [the difference between a poorly written piece and an expertly written one](#).

### 1. Determine Exactly What Problem You Intend to Solve

Regardless of what your topic is, it has to solve some kind of problem or answer a specific question. In other words, it has to have a point. Even if you decide not to address this issue directly, you need to be aware of what the problem is throughout the entire piece.

Write it down, make it the title, or discuss it throughout the paper, but don't lose sight of it while you're writing. The reason for this will become clearer when you're finished. (On a personal note, I prefer to discuss the issues surrounding the problem in an introduction because it gives me the perfect opportunity to connect with and hook my readers early on).

### 2. Choose the Style Your Target Audience Listens to Best

Chances are, if I'm addressing academics on a serious subject, I'm not going to write the same way I do when I write a blog post for you. If I was creating a white paper for you, I'd write a bit more formally while still maintaining the personality to keep you from falling asleep by the time you reach the end of the paper.

Find out what your audience prefers before you start writing, and make sure you carry it throughout the entire piece. Otherwise, it will sound like you have multiple personalities and be about as comfortable to read.

### 3. Get the Facts Straight

Once you start writing, you don't want be stopping and starting because you have to find missing info, [fact check](#) or put everything in order. So, before you start, [organize and check all of your information](#) and finish by matching it to your white paper outline (if you didn't write one before, do it now).

To keep everything straight, print everything out and physically put it in order, use an app like OneNote or EverNote, or assign each file a number and add those numbers to the corresponding points in the outline. This should also include links, required images, graphs, and anything else that absolutely has to make it into the final product.

### 4. Start Writing the Piece

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Getting started can be difficult, but so long as you follow your outline, things should flow rather smoothly. Also, keep items such as where you are in the piece, where you need to end up, and the purpose for writing the white paper while you write as well as later on when you edit.

- Don't delve too far into the boring stuff. Detailed histories, highly detailed explanations, and other extensive bits are too much to read all at once. As a general rule, if you're bored writing it, chances are your reader is going to get bored with it too.
- If you're writing about a particular item, technique, or feature, don't forget to relate everything back to the reader. Remember, [it isn't about you; it's about them](#). Add value to their lives and they'll remember it.
- Don't get all markety and pitchy-like while writing. Your target audience has already demonstrated some trust in you by downloading the white paper, all you have to do is tell the story. If you forget all about selling, you'll connect far more easily with the reader and he'll be more willing to buy from you when he's finished (unless, of course, your white paper really does suck beyond repair).
- Don't assume too much and be sure to explain concepts thoroughly before moving on. If you assume your audience knows about a particular process, and they don't, the effects are devastating. Industry jargon and phrases are important, but not as easily understood, so you'll want to be careful. If you find that there are a lot of terms you need to explain, or a number of terms that people may or may not know, you might even consider adding a glossary section to your paper. This also works well when speaking to a mixed audience with various levels of industry familiarity.
- Make sure you explain and label any visuals such as graphs clearly. You'll find this works best for everyone and your readers will gain a higher understanding of the topic. If you need to, don't be afraid to assign the image a number and explain it further elsewhere on the page.

## 5. Choose a Title, Craft a Summary, and Add an Introduction

Once you've written everything out, you have a clear idea of where the white paper is going and will be quite familiar with the contents of the piece. This will make it much easier for you to choose a title and create a summary.

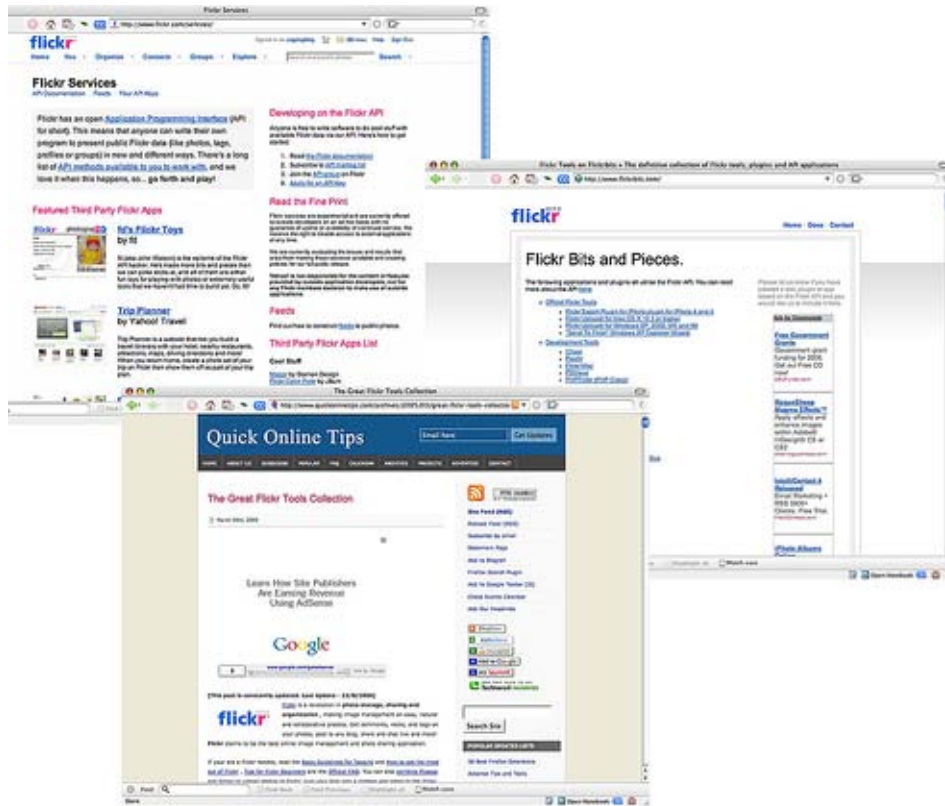
It is also time for you to decide how you'll introduce everything to your reader (and use the questions you listed earlier). You can do this before you write the body of the white paper, but I find it far too difficult to come up with anything of quality at this point and often have to rewrite the entire thing. When I write this part last, however, I'm familiar enough with the subject that it's effortless.

## 6. Edit, Edit, Edit

You'll want to make a series of edits before calling the writing portion of your white paper complete. It doesn't particularly matter what order you do each edit in, so long as you edit for each thing separately...don't expect to catch everything all in one pass because you'll never do it.

First, I check [grammar](#), spelling, and punctuation. Why? So that when I do the rest of the edits, I'm not stopping to fix the stupid stuff. It also means that I'll have less chance of missing anything simple like that because there will be less of them to wade through (you'd hope, anyway). With the second edit, you want to remove absolutely any content that doesn't answer the questions you chose at the start. The third edit should be for flow, and a fourth and final look over should ensure everything's perfect.

## 7. Add Graphics and Layout



(Photo: [cogdogblog](#))

The next step is to finalize a layout and [choose your graphics](#). The general idea is that pages full of text make your reader feel overwhelmed, which also makes them more likely to skim or skip the document entirely. Therefore, add just enough graphics to break things up without drowning out your text and the point of your piece. You should also consider having all of your images be in a consistent style or type to help unify the piece. Finally, remember that perfection is in the small details. Ensure that all the titles stand out and that the sections fall in the proper places on the page.

## 8. Links and Additional Content

Most white papers will contain links to sources, supporting evidence, and additional content. So, if you'll be including any of this in your white paper, be completely certain that they are all in place and going to the right place. Check each of them carefully because, unlike a blog post, there's no going back to edit it after it's been distributed.

You'll also want to go through everything and make certain that anything you've quoted and used in your white paper is given the proper accreditation.

## 9. Add Your ROI Element

You need some way of determining how successful your white paper actually was. For some, this might simply be tracking the links to your white paper to see how many downloads and clicks there were. Others might want to track when the document is opened as well as other details about the viewer, or you simply might be happy enough to watch your website's traffic levels increase. Regardless, be sure that you know for certain what you'd like to do and take any of the necessary steps to get that set up.

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## 10. Prepare for Distribution

By this stage, you'll need to know how you'll distribute your white paper and if there will be any special requirements. Will you host it on Scribd? Make it downloadable from your home or services page? Or, will you create a special landing page for it? Each option has its own set of pros and cons, so be sure to weigh them carefully and ensure you set it up so that you can get the most benefit from it.

Congratulations! You've just finished creating a beautiful white paper that would make any expert copywriter ooh and aaah. It really isn't as difficult as it seems is it?

## Distributing and Marketing Your White Paper

After writing your white paper, you might have the urge to just publish it on your website or blog and leave it there. Well, this just defeats the purpose of putting all of that work into it now, doesn't it? You need to get the word out about what an awesome resource you have created and about how much everyone will benefit from it just by looking past the cover.

So, how are you going to manage this? Simple. Use what you already know and have access to the fullest advantage. You just need to learn about a few clever tactics.

### Leveraging Your Blog

If you have a blog or article section on your site, you have a ready made market already seeking the information you provide. Therefore, this should be the first place you go. You should definitely write up something about your amazing report. But don't just write 'Uh...yeah, we needed a new marketing idea, so we...uh...we did up this thing... and you can download it.' Nope. You know what you're going to do?

You're going to find some great, juicy bits of information and you're going to build your post around them. It could be a few lesser known tips or hints, a handful of the stats you discovered, or a portion of your 'story' that adds a bit of mystery to your white paper and makes readers want to read it...they'll be waiting for you to publish. Trust me.

Some of you might argue that you're defeating the purpose of releasing the white paper in the first place. Well, for me, this isn't a valid argument because, if this little bit is all you have of value in your white paper, you need to reconsider your approach.

Providing your readers with a few bits of juicy information will help improve the attention your blog post gets, but it will also make them want to download the white paper. They won't be able to resist. It's like that old practical joke where you hang a paper bill out the top of an old purse filled with... never mind. It's tempting. Let's put it that way.

### Make Use of Your Email & Newsletter Lists

You have these wonderful lists of email addresses that you send information to all the time. So, now that you have this wonderful white paper filled with premium information, why not send it out to your loyal followers early? Give them the first opportunity to get the information. They'll feel special and love you for it.

You might also consider adding materials to your white paper and supplying them with something else that isn't available to the public such as stats, resources, and other great information that you collected along the way. You'll find that, if you keep giving your email list the advantage of getting

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better stuff than everyone else, your email list will earn an air of prestige and improve the number of signups you have as well.

## Remind Current Customers of Your Presence

They may have already purchased from you, but you want to make sure you continue to remind your customers of your presence while building on that provider-customer relationship. Use the white paper to remind them -- either send it to them, or send them an update letting them know that it's going live. You'll find that they'll enjoy this information just as much as those who haven't bought from you yet.

## Leveraging Social Media

The real time effects of social media make it one of the best ways to generate traffic and buzz around your white paper. Tweeting can be a great start, and if you do it wisely, you can really boost the interest. How? Pull short quotes or good information from the paper to tweet with the URL. This makes people realize the kind of information they will get from the report and they'll want to have a look to find out what other juicy tidbits you reveal.

With networks such as Facebook and Myspace, post about your white paper in the notes or blog section in the same way you did with your blog. Then, change your status to match your tweets. You will also want to make sure the landing page is properly optimized for social media: add the page URL to some of your important social networks, offer pre-shortened URLs and messages, custom descriptions and quick tweet buttons.

## Syndication

By submitting your white paper to various databases, you are able to have your work viewed by thousands, and even millions of people who are looking for the exact white paper you've created. Then, it's syndicated into various databases, picked up and distributed by various businesses extending the viral power of your content even further.

You might also want to use syndication system after your white paper has been out for awhile by bundling your white paper with others and releasing it as a huge reference package.

## Using Alternative Mediums

Just because you published your white paper on...well...white paper, or electronic white paper to be more exact, doesn't mean it has to stay that way. Here are just some of the great ways you can get extra mileage out of all the work you've done:

- Consider adding complimentary slides and make a great presentation that you can present yourself or allow others to use to compliment their presentations and studies.
- Do a podcast and invite other industry experts to discuss the findings (or distribute the white paper with an invitation to the podcast). The discussion together with the report you have meticulously put together will create a priceless magnet for attention.
- Present it in a video format. You might find visuals in conjunction with the audio of the report will catch a large portion of your target audience that you would normally miss.
- Make an easy-to-use MP3 audio format that people can enjoy while working on other things. In fact, some people will refuse to download PDF, and if that's the case, you'll miss the chance to connect with that person.

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## Measuring the Success of Your White Paper

Marketing methods become useless if you can't determine which ones are effective, which ones aren't and where they're working. White papers are no different. You want to be able to determine how many people were brought in by the white paper, what they did while they were on your site, and whether your white paper generated any additional clicks. You can determine the number of links you've gained as well as RSS subscribers, but there are several other ways to determine the success of a white paper.

### Defining and Determining Goals

This step should technically occur during the planning stage of your white paper. You need to decide exactly what it is you're hoping to gain from the distribution. This could include measurable goals such as a certain number of downloads, leads, links, signups, and many other factors. If you include these types of goals, be sure to define a realistic goal with actual numbers you can crunch and compare.

Something important you might want to consider, however, is the number of intangible goals that come with white paper distribution. Branding and authority are two of the big ones. These components are priceless and the effects of establishing them successfully can last forever.

The success of the distribution can also open up the world to a large number of opportunities, contacts and powerful recommendations that will work to your advantage well into the future. These could lead to a small project, or it could open the door to a business opportunity that will have you relaxing on the beach with a Mai Tai in no time at all.

The respect and authority you generate with a white paper can translate into tons of sales and an entire following of loyal customers, but it's almost impossible to measure and track. Often times, you can impress someone so much that, even though he isn't buying from you right now, he will come back a few years down the road and instantly buy from you. Then, there's the associated word of mouth advertising that goes along with this.

### Track Incoming Traffic

Analytics, while not exact, can give you an excellent idea of which marketing methods brought the most traffic in and the most downloads. This will also give you a better idea of what methods you should give more focus next time around. Other tidbits of information that can be helpful in determining the ROI of your white paper includes:

- Which pages did these visitors leave on?
- What else did they click while on the site?
- How many signups (downloads) did you get?

### Document Tracking

While it used to be virtually impossible to track documents, several tools exist today to help you with this part of the process. And with these tools, you'll be able to learn about the reader, whether the document was saved or printed, how long the reader spent looking at the document and which pages received the most attention, if it was forwarded, and finally, how many times it was opened.

With this kind of information, you can learn all kinds of things about your target audience. You'll be able to gain market insight, and have an idea of exactly how far your reach is.

After you've collected all of the information you can about your white paper and its successful publication, you simply need to sit down and analyze everything. It doesn't take much either. Write down a point or statistic you know is factual. Then, write down the positives and negatives for it as well as speculations you have for why you think that tidbit is the way it is. Do this point by point, and then you'll have a comprehensive idea of what worked and what didn't. Next time, you'll be able to put your focus where it counts. You may even want to take this the extra step and generate a few new ideas to try next time.

Creating and distributing a white paper isn't exactly complex, but it's a huge job that requires a lot of careful consideration and is definitely not something you'd want to rush through. It is really worth your time to go through, step by step, and chart out exactly what you want to do. The returns will more than reflect the thought put into the piece, and your entire business will grow as a result.

## Additional Resources

[Writing White Papers](#) -- Michael Stelzner

[White Paper Insider](#) -- Apryl Parcher

[White Paper Source](#) -- WhitePaperSource Publishing

[How to Write a White Paper](#) (PDF) -- Klariti