
The State of the White Paper, 2004

Executive Summary

Many technology companies publish white papers, and most IT buyers read them regularly. Yet there are **no accepted standards** for how to prepare a white paper or what it should look like.

Gordon & Gordon defines a white paper in this way:

In content, a white paper provides useful information for potential customers seeking to understand a certain technology. In form, a white paper is a piece of marketing collateral somewhere between a technical manual and a glossy brochure.

While there are no standards, most white papers today are:

- 8 to 10 letter-sized pages long (and getting shorter)
- Illustrated in black & white (although tending toward more color)
- Written in a neutral tone (although there is constant pressure to inject marketing hype, which readers dislike)
- Distributed through the Web as PDFs
- Prepared either in-house or by an outside writer with a solid mix of technical, marketing and writing backgrounds.

Beyond this, white papers come in **many different flavors**: technology guides, position papers, business benefits, competitive review, evaluator's guide, thought leaders and others.

Six key factors help ensure success for any white paper project: an effective in-house sponsor, an immovable deadline, a thorough understanding by the writer(s), ready access to subject matter experts, joint ownership of the project by all participants and a shared sense of urgency.

Since our research began in 2001, the number of Google hits for "white papers" has increased by nearly 600%. Far too many of these are thinly veiled sales pitches. Unfortunately the term "white paper" is becoming devalued. In the next few years, we may witness "the end of the white paper" as we know it today. Therefore, we recommend vendors **find more specific names for white papers**, such as technology guide, evaluator's guide and so on.

For more details, you can download the complete 10-page report from www.gordonandgordon.com/white_papers.html

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