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White Papers

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- Plan, create, and promote effective white papers
- Pick the perfect style of white paper for your next project
- Manage a white paper project with a 12-step process

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That White Paper Guy

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OVERVIEW
INFORMATION CONTENT
SOLUTIONS
THREE FLAVORS

Chapter 2

An Exciting Opportunity for Writers

In This Chapter

- ▶ Understanding the unmet need for white paper writers
 - ▶ Breaking into the white papers as a former copywriter, journalist, or technical writer
 - ▶ Landing your first few white paper projects
-

Do you want to live an independent lifestyle as a freelancer? Make good money as a writer? Work on interesting projects about leading-edge topics? Constantly be learning, so you never get bored? Party with supermodels on your own private island? Oh, whoops, got a little carried away there. But if you answered “yes!” to the first four questions, you’ve come to the right place. (You’re on your own with the supermodels.)

As part of the huge trend of marketing with content, white papers provide one of the best opportunities to make money as a writer today. If you master how to create compelling and persuasive white papers, you can pretty much write your own ticket to fame and fortune. That’s going to take time and effort, but you’re on the right track by reading this book. If you apply yourself, you can build an independent copywriting business with a steady stream of well-paying work in white papers. How can I say that? Because I’ve done it.

In this chapter, I describe the ample opportunities for any writer who can create white papers that get results. It comes down to a simple formula:

High demand + Low supply = A great market for your efforts

This chapter also describes the three most likely paths into white papers. If you’re an experienced copywriter, journalist, or technical writer, you have a tremendous background to build on. But no matter what walk of life you hail from, this chapter lists all the skills you need — plus a few limiting beliefs and attitudes you may need to forget — to succeed at writing white papers. Good luck!

Sizing Up the Possibilities

White papers are on the right side of several strong trends in B2B marketing. Buyers want them, and many competitors have them, so they've become a standard part of the B2B toolkit. White papers have been called "the king of content" for good reason: They're the most substantial, most powerful, most respected form of content in the market today. They're riding the immense wave known as *content marketing*. And the rise of social media is another huge trend carrying white papers along, because this form of content can be promoted quite effectively with social media.

The white paper market is subject to a classic imbalance: a high demand for white papers but a low supply of writers who know how to create them. This imbalance has pushed up the rates for writing white papers and created a tremendous opportunity in this area. If you're already a nonfiction writer, redirecting your skills into this area is a smart move. If you're not yet a writer but are looking for a good opportunity to live a more independent lifestyle, there's a lot of room for you, too.

In the following sections, I explore the major trends in white papers, explain why good white paper writers are in short supply, show how much a white paper writer can earn and how vast this market really is, and discuss whether white papers are really here to stay.

Looking at three trends pushing white papers to the top

White papers have been booming ever since the web took off in the late 1990s. Today, white papers are an accepted part of B2B marketing, well funded as a form of inbound marketing, and well suited to promote through social media. Here, I review three rising trends that have brought white papers to the very top of the list for how to make money as a writer today:

- **Trend #1: White papers are expected by B2B buyers.** White papers are highly valued by B2B buyers, especially for technology products. And these days, a vast range of products have some sort of technology component, like software, embedded chips, a link to the web, and so on. Before B2B buyers make a purchase, they want to size up all their options. Where do they turn for help when making a decision? To the white papers from each company whose offering is in the running. Any company that doesn't have a white paper to promote its product or service could well be out of the running for that buyer's business.



Because so many buyers request white papers, B2B sellers have to produce them to keep up with competitors. In other words, white papers are becoming a standard piece in the marketing toolkit for more and more B2B vendors.

- ✓ **Trend #2: White papers are a key part of content marketing.** Content marketing is already booming, and it still has a long way to grow. Also known as *inbound marketing*, for years, this side of the budget has been steadily siphoning dollars away from traditional *outbound* activities, like direct mail, telemarketing, trade shows, and print advertising. And that's bound to continue for the foreseeable future. Why? Mainly because inbound marketing can generate a qualified B2B lead for far less money than outbound marketing. And content marketing is on the right side of history as the business world moves away from interruption marketing and toward permission marketing.
- ✓ **Trend #3: White papers are rocket fuel for social media.** Social media is most powerful when you have something important to say. A white paper is the ideal kind of content to promote through social media because it's free and easy to access. All you have to do is publicize the URL to the white paper's landing page. And if that content proves useful to those who download it, they can easily "like" it, retweet it, blog about it, or otherwise share it with their own social media networks. That's when your white paper can really catch fire, blast off, and travel far beyond where any B2B marketing team can send it.

Understanding why marketers can't find qualified writers

Many marketing managers want to create white papers to promote their company's offerings, but they can't find anyone to write them. It happens. A few years ago, I got a call from a marketing manager in New York City who found me on the web. She was from a little company you may have heard of: Google. "We have such a hard time finding writers," she confided. "I wanted to call and see whether you could help us." I just about fell off my chair. I mean, you can't swing a cat in New York City without hitting a writer! What she meant, I've come to realize, is that it's difficult to find writers who can research and produce good B2B copy about challenging topics, hit their deadlines, and not be prima donnas who are impossible to work with. By now, I've written half a dozen white papers and close to 20 case studies for Google.

Even the largest, hippest companies are always looking for good writers. Thousands of marketing managers in B2B companies are searching for writers who can understand their business and tell their story in a compelling way — and they're having trouble finding them. It's not really a matter of money; there's simply a big shortage of skills and knowledge in this area.

A quarter million dollars for ten pages: Considering a white paper's payoff

Imagine that you're a salesperson for Acme Scanners, sitting in the office of an executive who's thinking about spending a quarter of a million bucks on your products. "I like what you're telling me," he says. "But I'll have to run this by my technical team. What kind of white papers can you send them?"

Gulp. Acme doesn't have any. "Well, we haven't . . . um . . . seen the need to do any white papers," you start. "Our system is . . . ah . . . so easy to use that I could offer your IT people a personal demo in . . . um . . . 60 minutes." Gulp. You really hope that tiny bead of sweat doesn't drip right off your nose and land on his desk.

"No, they hate those," says your prospect, with a fierce look. "They really prefer some kind of document they can look at, you know, to size up every vendor. Don't you have anything you could send them?"

Gulp. "I'm sure we do," you manage to croak, watching your fat commission on the deal fly

out the window. "I'll shake a few trees back at the office and see what I can come up with for you." And as soon as you get out of there, you call up your marketing manager, yelping that you really need a white paper to close a deal for a quarter million smackers.

A similar scenario gets played out often. Many B2B buyers demand white papers to help them decide about making a large purchase. Many competing companies have them. And that leaves any vendor without them feeling pressured to keep up. If everyone but Acme sends those IT guys a white paper or two, what chance does Acme have to make the sale? Acme could be out of the running. A quarter million dollars lost, all for the sake of a ten-page document that nobody bothered to write. And if this happens every month of the year, that's \$3 million a year in sales lost by a single salesperson for a single company. Multiply that across the entire B2B marketplace, and you can see the huge payoff for effective white papers.

Calculating the earning potential for a white paper writer

Here's a question from Economics 101: In a market economy, what happens when you have high demand for an item but low supply? The answer is, the price goes up, sometimes way up. That's why an average white paper writer can earn \$500 a page for creating these documents, and a proven writer with a good track record can earn considerably more. That's right: You can earn up to \$1,000 a page writing a white paper if you're really good. And if you work efficiently, that translates into hundreds of dollars an hour.

Why would companies fork over that much money? Because they know that a white paper, done correctly, pays for itself many times over. They know they can likely use a good white paper for a year or two and spread that fee across many hundreds or thousands of downloads and many dozens or hundreds of leads generated. That makes \$1,000 a page a sensible investment.

But don't take my word for it. Consider the informed sources shown in Table 2-1: executives from the content networks KnowledgeStorm and TechTarget, the latest survey of white paper writers from 2007, the leading training center for copywriters, AWAI, and the leading market directory for freelance writers, *Writer's Market*. According to all these sources, the average fees for writing an average-sized white paper range from just over \$3,000 to almost \$5,000.

<i>Source</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Average</i>
Interviews with content networks	\$3,000	\$5,000	\$4,000
<i>WhitePaperSource</i> survey of about 600 white paper writers	\$2,000	\$10,000+	\$3,300
<i>American Writers and Artists, Inc.</i>	\$2,500	\$6,500	\$4,500
<i>Writer's Market</i>	\$2,500	\$10,000	\$4,927
Average of averages			\$4,180

Beyond what you see in Table 2-1, the white paper writers' survey showed that one in four white paper writers charges between \$5,000 and \$10,000 for a single paper. My conclusion: A typical white paper for a reasonably big company, done by a reasonably experienced writer, costs about \$5,000 today. And the more experienced the writer, the more he can charge.

Using these numbers, I created three earning scenarios for white paper writers: A beginner who works slowly but diligently can likely do 12 to 15 white papers for \$3,000 each to gross around \$40,000 a year. At the other end of the scale, a proven white paper expert who charges \$6,000 a project and works quickly can probably complete 30 projects to gross about \$180,000 a year. And an intermediate writer can come in somewhere in the middle, probably topping \$100,000 a year. Of course, these are back-of-the-envelope calculations, and your mileage may vary. For details, see Chapter 4.

How many white papers are published?

Sometimes an earnest writer thinking about going out on his own or a marketing person working on a business plan asks me, “How many white papers get published every year?” Honestly, I don’t know, and I don’t think anyone else knows, either. No one tracks this number; that would be like tracking how many press releases or B2B case studies are published every year. What’s the point?

With some digging, you could come up with a few data points, like how many white papers are syndicated every year with the main services like KnowledgeStorm and TechTarget.

But then what — multiply that number by 10, 20, 50, or 100 to cover all the white papers that aren’t syndicated?

If I had to guess, I would venture that scores of thousands of white papers are published every year. And that number is growing. But instead of trying to put a precise figure on it, here’s a better way to look at this: More B2B companies are looking for good writers than you and I and all the other readers of this book will ever be able to uncover if we spend the rest of our lives trying. And you can put that in your business plan, and tell them I said so.

Discovering who uses white papers

A common market-sizing question that often pops up is, “How many companies need white papers anyway?” I did some market research into this a few years ago, and then updated that just before this book went to press. Table 2-2 shows what I found, based on the latest available data.

<i>Domain</i>	<i>NAISC Codes</i>	<i>Number of Companies</i>
Equipment Manufacturers	333, 334, 335, 335122, 3363, 3364, 3365, 336611, 3372, 3391 (excludes 333112, 3351, 3352, 336612)	62,369 (U.S.)
Scientific and Technical Service Providers	541 (excludes 5411, 5412, 54132, 54141, 5418, 5419)	365,867 (U.S.)
Software and Information Providers	5112, 517, 518, 51911	26,008 (U.S.)
Potential white paper clients in U.S. only		454,244
Add 35% for similar companies in Australia, Canada, Finland, Ireland, Israel, New Zealand, Norway, and U.K. that do business in English.		158,986
Total potential clients for white papers in English		613,230

Sources: U.S. Census 2008, OECD 2011

In the column labeled *Domain*, *Equipment Manufacturers* includes any company making computers, peripherals, medical devices — you know, hardware — but not household appliances, cars or trucks, smaller boats, lawn equipment, or lighting. *Scientific and Technical Service Providers* includes any company doing technical consulting, measuring, or testing (but not accounting, advertising, interior design, landscaping, or law firms). *Software and Information Providers* includes anyone publishing apps, databases, or syndicated media. I've done white papers for companies in all three domains from all over the world.

The column labeled *NAISC Codes* lists the North American Industry Classification System codes I counted or excluded under each domain. Only firms with employees are included; I didn't count a self-employed person or couple, because these tiny businesses don't often hire a white paper writer.

The column labeled *Number of Companies* shows how many companies existed in each domain in the United States at the time of the 2008 census. I took the comparative GDP for several other countries that do business in English to bump up the American numbers by about one-third for a global total.

As you can see from the table, well more than half a million companies in the English-speaking world could use white papers. And that's counting only the science- or technology-driven sectors where white papers are an established tradition. Many other sectors could benefit from white papers, too.

Wondering whether the white paper opportunity will last

Some people accept that a lot of companies use white papers today, but they worry about the future. Won't something else come along to replace them? What about video? How long will this wonderful market opportunity last? Don't worry. If you can help a B2B company describe some relatively new, complex, and expensive offering in compelling terms, you'll never be short of work. If you polish your skills so you can dig up and present useful information to help a B2B buyer understand an issue, solve a problem, or make a decision, you'll never be short of work. To see why, consider these points:

- ✔ **White papers have already stood the test of time.** The white paper has existed as a useful format for more than 100 years now. Originally, white papers were short, factual reports and policy papers from the U.K. government. Many of these reports covered industries, and as business people began to see them, their popularity grew. Executives liked the authoritative voice and vast sweep of research in these documents, so businesses began to imitate the same format and issue white papers of their own.

Since then, white papers have become a standard tool in the B2B marketer's toolkit. These documents are incredibly useful for building recognition for a company or product, generating leads at the top of the sales funnel, nurturing prospects through the middle of the funnel, and supporting technical evaluations at the bottom of the funnel. Do you imagine that any companies will still need to do those things in the future? I do.

- ✔ **White papers provide the latest and greatest information.** Today's white papers are ideal for describing any B2B offering that's relatively new, complex, or expensive. Do you suppose any B2B offerings of tomorrow will involve new breakthroughs that take some explaining? Certainly. Do you think next year's B2B products and services will be remarkably simpler and cheaper than what's on the market today? Perhaps, but only if they involve some sort of breakthrough that takes some explaining. So any way you look at this, vendors will need a persuasive and thoughtful way to publish their latest information for B2B buyers.
- ✔ **White papers contain information that business people seek.** An effective white paper can help a B2B buyer understand an issue, solve a problem, or make a decision. Do you suppose business people will still have issues, problems, or decisions to make in the future? I do. And do you suppose that watching a video will ever be as effective as reading and thinking? Some people believe that. But here's the kicker: Who do you think writes the script and often directs the entire production for a video? That would be the writer who understands the content, probably because he already wrote the white paper about it.



Any way I look at this issue, I come to the same conclusion: The white paper market is going to be healthy for a long time. And even if some new media forms eventually come along to replace it, the skills you develop writing white papers will be transferable to these new media. See Chapter 3 for a longer discussion on the past, present, and likely future of white papers.

Coming into White Papers from Three Common Paths

Most of the white paper writers I've met entered the field by accident. No one goes off to college thinking, "I'm going to graduate and become a white paper writer!" No degree exists for white papers anyway. The most useful courses you can study are all over the map, perhaps a smattering of computer science, English, history, marketing, philosophy, rhetoric, sociology, and any of the sciences that you're curious about.

But the white papers writers I know do have a few things in common. For one, they're all accomplished communicators who enjoy building an argument

with facts and logic. For another, many have worked in a few similar roles. In fact, the three most common careers people work in before they start writing white papers are copywriters, journalists, and technical writers.

Depending on the path you've traveled so far, you've likely developed some great skills that can help you succeed in this field. You may have some areas where you need to pick up some new skills. And you may have to get rid of some unhealthy attitudes that won't serve you well as a white paper writer. If you come from one of these paths, flip through the rest of this chapter to find the section that fits you best.

How do I know so much about these fields? Well, I spent many years working in each one. As a freelance journalist, I wrote close to 1,000 magazine articles for everyone from accountants to woodworkers. I worked full time and then on contract as a technical writer for more years than I care to remember, producing software manuals and online help. Most recently, I've worked as an independent B2B copywriter since the late 1990s. And I've won awards for writing in all three domains. So if you come from any of these domains, I've walked a mile in your shoes.

If you don't have experience as a copywriter, journalist, or technical writer, don't worry. No matter what other jobs you've held, if you can present a compelling argument backed up by solid evidence, you can figure out everything else you need to know to succeed in writing white papers. For tips on researching and writing white papers, see Chapters 14 and 15, and use the index to find specific notes on these skills. Also see the many free articles available on my website at www.thatwhitepaperguy.com/articles.html.

Copywriters and white papers

If you've worked as a copywriter, you probably understand more about marketing than people from any other career path. You may have seen content marketing in action. You already know how to do research, interview experts, write smoothly, and meet short deadlines. You can follow a house style guide and handle reviews and comments. So you already have some wonderful skills you can apply to this field.

But you'll need to develop some new skills, and you'll need to erase a few attitudes that could hurt your white paper writing. Above all, you'll have to master writing to persuade by using facts and logic rather than appeals to emotion as in business-to-consumer (B2C) copywriting. And you must master how to write to explain an issue or prove useful information, without selling anything. These challenges aren't insurmountable. But whenever you sit down to write, your habits from the past may tempt you to gloss over any holes in your evidence with glib statements and fluffy promises rather than

solid facts and arguments. If you can get past that, you can have a wonderful future as a white paper writer.

Table 2-3 shows the skills you likely have as a copywriter and those you may need to work on.

<i>Skills You Already Have</i>	<i>Skills You May Need to Develop</i>
Analyzing an audience	Writing to explain
Doing in-depth research	Handling quotes and sources
Understanding why B2B buyers buy	Proving all your claims with evidence
Interviewing experts	Formatting documents for quick scanning
Writing to persuade	Telling an engaging story
Following house style	
Meeting short deadlines	
Handling reviews and comments	

Most copywriters have a few things drummed into their heads at college, on the job, and in bull sessions with colleagues. Here are some habits you may need to rethink to succeed in white papers.

Appeal to logic, not emotions

The best copywriting calls to the consumers' emotions, making them ache for the product you're describing. This kind of writing paints a detailed vision of all the wonderful benefits people will enjoy after they buy. Great copy holds out the promise of things like stunning beauty, radiant health, untold wealth, and a lifetime of leisure.

White papers are different. They're not directed at consumers buying shampoo, vitamins, or chewing gum. They're directed at people making a serious business decision worth a lot of money. In a white paper, you write mainly to explain. And when you do persuade, you use facts and logical arguments, not appeals to emotion. White papers are in the same league as press releases and annual reports. These business documents are expected to deliver facts and arguments, not fluff and pipe dreams. So copywriters need to tone down the adjectives, superlatives, promises, and emotional appeals. If you can't do that, you won't last long as a white paper writer.

I'm not saying business buyers are heartless automatons with no feelings. But few business people can afford to spend millions of dollars on impulse or because they heard a cute jingle on the radio. They buy because they're convinced that a vendor has something that will help their company make money,



save money, beat the competition, or serve their customers better. Nothing else really matters. So drop the calls to emotion, stick to the facts, and everyone will be happier.

Sell the steak, not the sizzle

A copywriter must give his work pizzazz. Any successful ad, brochure, jingle, or sales letter needs to be snappy to make an impression. But white papers are different. They're serious business documents that should be dignified and helpful, not packed with zest and zing. To write an effective white paper, tone down the hype, delete all the fluffy adjectives, and abandon the worn-out gambit of "selling the sizzle." In fact, you could say that a white paper needs to work much harder than that. It needs to set the table, present the menu, suggest a good wine, deliver a fabulous meal, bring coffee and dessert, and then give the reader a coupon to bring them back for another visit. That's more than just a little sizzle.

Talk features, not benefits

When writing copy, you're supposed to link every feature to the benefits it delivers. You don't often have to describe how anything works, just how much better people's lives will be after they buy it. You can sketch in a few highlights or cherry-pick the most appealing features to touch on as you build to your stirring conclusion — buy now!

In a white paper, you may need to spend most of your text describing how some feature is implemented. Maybe the product uses a completely new approach to solve an age-old problem. Maybe its materials are more durable, or its algorithms more precise. Many readers download a white paper specifically to discover the technical details about a company's offerings. They want to understand the nitty-gritty about each key feature. So skimming over the features and focusing on the benefits often isn't enough.

Don't ask for the order

Copywriting is often defined as "salesmanship in print." But this definition is dangerous for a white paper writer. You never "ask for the order" in a white paper. These documents are used for complex B2B sales, where numerous people come together to make a weighty decision. This decision can take weeks or months to complete. Your goal in a white paper is to provide useful content that positions your company as a trusted advisor and engages prospects for the long haul. At the end of the document, you encourage readers to take the next step in the sales cycle, something like visiting a website to use an online ROI calculator. You seldom ask readers to pick up the phone and call customer service to place an order.



In fact, the number-one mistake too many writers make in too many white papers is too much selling. White paper readers aren't looking for a sales pitch. They're looking for useful information to help them understand an issue, solve a problem, or make a decision. If you make your white paper a

thinly veiled sales pitch, you'll distort its purpose, confound your readers' expectations, and perhaps turn off your prospect permanently. By pushing for the sale too hard in a white paper, you can lose the sale.

Journalists and white papers

If you've worked as a journalist, you likely have the makings of a great white paper writer. You already know how to write fast, write well, and tell a compelling story to a specific audience. You're used to interviewing and making a quick study of new material. You can sift through a 50-page report and come up with a few choice nuggets and quotable quotes.

Here's how U.K. brand journalist Ashley Curtis explains the value of a journalism background:

Delivering engaging, interesting, and relevant content is the beating heart of content marketing, a focus that journalists can identify with. . . . Journalism by nature involves tracking the latest events happening in a particular industry, so firms hiring a professional journalist know they're going to get a return on their investment in the form of highly developed writing skills, engaging written content, and an eye for a story.

So you certainly do have some fabulous skills to apply to this field. You'll probably have to pick up a few new things and drop negative attitudes that could hurt your white paper writing. But all in all, as a trained journalist, you have better-than-average chances of success in white papers. Table 2-4 outlines the skills you likely have as a journalist and those you may need to work on.

Table 2-4 Journalism Skills and White Papers

<i>Skills You Already Have</i>	<i>Skills You May Need to Develop</i>
Understanding an audience	Analyzing an audience
Doing quick research	Understanding why B2B buyers buy
Interviewing experts	Doing in-depth research
Telling a story	Writing to persuade
Handling quotes and sources	Formatting documents for quick scanning
Meeting deadlines	Handling reviews and comments
Writing in a concise and lively style	Parking your ego (you'll never get a byline for a white paper)
Following house style	
Working with an editor	

Most journalists have a few things drummed into their heads at college, on the job, and in bull sessions with colleagues. Here are some self-limiting beliefs you may need to rethink to succeed in white papers.

Marketing isn't evil; it's essential

Saying “marketing is evil” makes about as much sense as saying “breathing is evil.” When a company makes something, how is the rest of the world supposed to know it exists? That’s marketing. Journalism has been supported by marketing, in the form of advertising, for the past 175 years. The recent bloodbath — in which close to 50,000 newspaper people have been laid off in the United States alone — happened for one simple reason: Advertising dollars moved from newspapers to the web. If you ever worked as a journalist, your job was propped up by marketing. Sure, some marketers are dishonest, and some ads are misleading. But some journalists make up their sources and some fabricate their stories. The failings of a few don’t make both fields entirely corrupt. So get over yourself. Get rid of this attitude, or you can forget about writing white papers.

Forget both sides of the story; tell your client's story

Journalists are supposed to get both sides of the story, which results in a lot of phrases like “on the other hand . . .” or “but critics say . . .” that are designed to inject the opposite point of view. It doesn’t matter whether that view is that dinosaur bones are only 6,000 years old or that global warming is a myth. No matter what you think about objectivity in journalism, it doesn’t exist when you’re writing to persuade. In a white paper, there’s only one side of the story: your client’s. In a problem/solution flavor of white paper (see Chapter 8), the other side of the story sums up every other attempt to solve a problem and the failings of each attempt. You never write “on the other hand . . .” in a white paper, so get out of that habit.

You're not in a race; get it right the first time

Journalism is a constant race to see who breaks the story first, which can lead to shoddy work, where fraudulent tweets or media hoaxes are picked up without being checked out. But you don’t have a second edition of a white paper. You have to get it right the first time. Speed isn’t the most important thing; explaining and persuading with facts and logic is your top priority. Don’t rush out a white paper like it’s front-page news. Take your time, check and recheck your sources and build a thoughtful piece that gets results. Yes, you can always upload a corrected version of a white paper, but any B2B buyers who saw your first edition with mistakes in it have already formed a poor impression of your company that you can’t easily repair.

Technical writers and white papers

If you worked as a technical writer, you've probably seen a few white papers in your time. You may have reviewed or even written some yourself. You've interviewed technical experts and business executives and handled their comments and reviews tactfully. You already know how to write precisely and explain how things work. You know how to work smoothly in a team. You've mastered the software you use for publishing, so you can design pages, insert graphics, and use text enhancements like tables and headings. And to top off everything else, you have experience in the kind of technology-driven firms that make up the ideal market for white papers.

Although you can apply all these fabulous skills to this field, you'll probably have to figure out a few new things and lose a few negative attitudes that could hurt your white paper writing. In particular, you must let go of the fierce restraints imposed on every tech writer. Don't be afraid to be more passionate, opinionated, and forceful in your writing. Writing to persuade demands all of that. If you can break free from these constraints, your background gives you a good chance of success.

Table 2-5 lists the skills you likely have as a technical writer and those you may need to work on.

<i>Skill You Already Have</i>	<i>Skills You May Need to Develop</i>
Analyzing an audience	Understanding why B2B buyers buy
Interviewing subject matter experts	Doing in-depth research
Writing to explain	Handling quotes and sources
Following house style	Telling a story
Mastering software for publishing	Writing to persuade
Formatting documents for quick reference	Meeting shorter deadlines
Handling reviews and comments	

Most tech writers have a few things drummed into their heads at college, on the job, and in bull sessions with colleagues. Here are some things you may need to rethink to succeed in white papers.

Sales and marketing aren't "the dark side"

Tech writers often encounter mistrust of sales, marketing, and business in general from the engineers and scientists they rub shoulders with. Moving

from R&D or engineering into marketing is called “going over to the dark side.” Marketing people are called *suits* or even *weasels*. What the name-callers forget is that without sales, no company would have the money to pay their salaries. Without marketing, no one would know about the wonderful products they’re building. So if you ever worked as a technical writer, your job depended on sales and marketing to bring in the customers.

And another thing: When you write a white paper, no one is going to ask you to lie, cheat, or steal. You won’t be writing breathless infomercials (“How much would you expect to pay?”) or ditzzy sales letters (“Act now: This limited-time offer is available only to the first 250 buyers!”) In fact, part of your job as a white paper writer is to resist plunking the same old sales pitch or marketing speak into your document. Does that sound like “selling out”? Banish this attitude from your mind, or there’s no point trying to write white papers.

You must let your voice be heard

Did you ever try to use a striking turn of phrase or a lighter tone in a technical manual? Or point out that one feature was superior to another? I bet you were slapped down like a misbehaving child. Then you got a lecture on how a tech writer must be invisible, neutral, detached, and unemotional; a veritable Spock of the writing world.

But white papers are different. You may need to write about an industry challenge or tell a story about people in a place with a problem. To write in a compelling way, you must take a reasoned but passionate stand. You must express your position forcefully and eloquently. You must take off the tech-writing muzzle and find your voice. If you can’t, your white papers may sound too cold and unpersuasive and may not get the results you need.

White papers require both content and style

As a technical writer, your success depends on writing effectively about “things.” This involves explaining how to use a product to perform a task or accomplish a goal. Conveying that content accurately is your top priority. How well you express it is much less important. As you know, most documentation follows a house style that determines everything, from your headings to nomenclature to your choice of tenses and pronouns.

But white papers are different. Yes, you need to keep your facts straight, but no style guide can tell you how to express those facts. And because you’re writing to persuade, an effective white paper must get the argument exactly right. That means backing up all your assertions with proof. I bet you never had to do that in any technical manual. And you must rewrite and polish like never before. One draft or two for technical accuracy won’t be enough. You must labor over your words to craft a message that explains and persuades. You must control your material and build a convincing case. You must ignore

many of the confines you're used to from writing documentation. In short, you must let your style take flight in a way you never could in any technical manual. If you're up for that, you can do very well writing white papers.

Finding White Paper Clients

Suppose by now you're convinced that the opportunity is there, you're excited about the earning potential, you've studied up on white papers, and you're all set to take on your first project. The only question is: Where do you find a white paper client?

Whole books have been written on how to start up and develop a freelance writing business, so I'm not going to try to repeat all that advice here. Some especially good books are *The Wealthy Freelancer* (Alpha), *The Six-Figure Freelancer* (Paul Lima Presents), and *The Well-Fed Writer* (Fanove Publishing). All three have fantastic advice about analyzing your knowledge, approaching clients, and making money. Three excellent online resources aimed specifically at individual freelancers who may not enjoy selling are Get Clients Now! (www.getclientsnow.com), Action Plan Marketing (www.actionplan.com), and the International Freelancers Academy (www.internationalfreelancersacademy.com). All three online resources have e-newsletters, online courses and webinars, and pages with lots of helpful advice.

In the following sections, I give you a couple of pointers on what to do and what not to do to get a potential client's attention, and then I offer some insights on how to keep your business healthy and thriving.

Avoid most of what you hear

A lot of the marketing advice you hear isn't useful to you. Most "small business" marketing advisors think "small" means 50 employees. They tell you to set up a website and grow your online presence. Join groups on LinkedIn and extend your network. Tweet useful items and gain followers with Twitter. Put up a company page on Facebook and get people to like you. Publish an e-newsletter and get subscribers. Go to your local Chamber of Commerce meeting, network, and pass out business cards. Don't forget to send out hundreds of direct mail letters. And e-mail — you've got to be doing warm prospecting with e-mail.

Use the web. Use social media. Use networking. Use direct mail. Use e-mail. Will everyone *puleeeze* give it a rest! Don't buy into the hype from all these hair-on-fire, running-off-in-all-directions-at-once marketing-ninja types who

think they're advising some sort of corporate enterprise. An independent writer is a one-person microbusiness, not Acme Scanners. You can only do so much, so anything you do to market yourself has to be completely strategic, as described in the next section.

Getting started with the basics

Of course, you need a basic website and LinkedIn presence so a potential client takes you seriously. It helps to have a few sample white papers that you've already completed. Just as no one wants to be the first person a surgeon ever operates on, no one wants to be the first person you ever write a white paper for. Aside from that, finding white paper clients is no different than finding clients who need any copywriter, social media expert, designer, photographer, or other creative supplier.

To find prospective clients, focus on the three factors that help you determine whether a company can use your services: Does the company sell anything relatively new, complex, or expensive? You know your own background, and where you have domain knowledge you can draw on, what you find interesting, and what industries leave you completely cold. And you likely have some companies you'd love to write for. So make a list, and get busy.

One great place to find leads is Jigsaw (www.jigsaw.com), a huge online Rolodex of contacts. If you know a company name, odds are you can find the name, phone number, and direct e-mail of any marketing manager there through a quick search. You can pay a few dollars a month to get contacts throughout the year, or upload your own contacts, or correct existing listings to earn points you can redeem for contacts.



The absolute fastest way to check out a potential white paper client is to simply call the company, and ask "Who's responsible for doing your white papers?" In a call or two, you'll be routed to, most likely, a hardworking marketing manager who will be busy but probably delighted to speak to you. After all, he can't find good writers, remember? Just start off the call by saying you're a white paper writer who knows the industry. That will get his attention.



If you want to make it as a writer, don't get sucked into time sinks like Facebook, YouTube, or forums for sad-sack writers who never land any clients. That may feel like work; after all, you're sitting at your computer doing "research" and building your network, but you're not accomplishing much. At least, hang out on LinkedIn and look for marketing managers who may hire you, or read websites and blogs about white papers to build your knowledge.

The secret of freelance success

Here's the secret I've learned from more than 25 years of self-employment: Find a good client that you enjoy working with, get paid fairly, and do such a good job that he hires you to do it again — and he tell his colleagues about you. Then do it all over again. You'll soon have more work than you can handle. You'll have loyal clients who will stick with you for years and even put their projects on hold until you're free to work with them. That's freelance success, regardless of whether you ever send out a single tweet.

Consider this: A recent survey of close to 1,500 freelancers revealed that their top three ways of getting clients were referrals, word of mouth, and tapping their network. All three tactics go back to the basic principles of freelancing: Do a great job every time, and you'll get repeat business from the same clients, word-of-mouth referrals when happy clients tell their colleagues and peers about you, and an expanding network that brings you more opportunities all the time.