

# 12 common mistakes to avoid when writing white papers

By Sophie Chalmers



Want to sell more? One way to do this is to attract more prospects to your website and then use something that will convince them that you are *the* people to deal with. One good 'something' is a white paper.

However, there are twelve basic mistakes to avoid when it comes to white papers.

## 1. *Selling*

Using a white paper as a sales brochure in disguise will destroy your reputation. No matter what your boss says, do not be tempted down this road.

Think how you feel when, at a workshop or seminar, the lecturer suddenly launches into a sales pitch. I can almost see your blood rise to the boil.

Similarly, a white paper is there to convince someone of your authority in a subject. If you use it to sell, people will discount everything you write. Worse, you will find it hard to regain their trust. They wanted advice, not a sales pitch, when they downloaded your white paper.

However, you can make it easy to approach you.

## 2. *Lack of contact information*

To make it easy to approach you, you need to include your contact details in your white paper. Include them on every page. Don't assume readers will skim to the last page for your details. Rather, assume readers will keep only the page with the particular quotation that affects them, and ditch the rest.

## 3. *Tough links*

Make sure your links are easy to type in (remember, people may have printed your white paper out and won't simply be able to click on the link). If you have a long one, especially one containing numbers and guff, consider shortening it to something meaningful using snip url: <http://www.snipurl.com>

#### **4. KIS registration forms**

Keep It Simple. Ask for their name, phone number, email address and country. You might stretch to job title and company. The more questions you ask after this, the fewer downloads you will get.

Avoid being tempted down the road of using registration forms as an information-collection device. That's the sales person's job when they follow up.

#### **5. Barbed hooks**

You caught people with a good hook. Now you might invite them to register their details to allow them to download your white paper. But some marketing directors cannot resist turning the registration form into a call to action for a 'free no-obligation consultation'.

Avoid this trap. It's deceitful and will destroy trust. All you promised, and all people want at this stage, is your white paper.

Again, be sure that you haven't written a brochure in disguise. Big no-no.

#### **6. Spam fears**

When people register for your white paper, tell people clearly that you will not rent or sell their email address.

Nor can you spam them yourself with your e-newsletter, unless they have opted in. You must ask for permission to send them your newsletter. Simply ask: 'Click here if you would like to receive our ezine. This offers regular tips to...'

#### **7. Failure to archive**

People don't buy just because your white paper has been published. They buy when they are ready, at which point they will go on an information hunt and download anything and everything relevant. So archive your white papers on your website. And remember to keep them up to date.

#### **8. Missing opportunities**

Include a 'tell a colleague about this white paper' link in your registration page, download page and on the white paper itself.

And if you have an archive, include the titles on your website and include links to them in your white paper — people may want to download several.

#### **9. Using your brand**

Unless you are Microsoft, no one is interested in your business name or product name. And even if you are Microsoft, half the world hates you and won't download your white papers, so you will have lost an opportunity to build trust. Do not be coerced into including your brand in the title.

#### **10. Overloading the pdf**

Colourful pictures and logos on every page can turn a small file into a humungous file that takes an age to download. Many a time I myself have closed a page in frustration at the download time; I simply don't have five minutes to spare to download a file of, as yet, dubious quality.

### **11. Lack of promotion**

You've written a great white paper, but no one will download it if they don't know it exists. For a start, tell your customers and prospects.

Identify publishers (paper and electronic) for your field, and send them a press release. Consider pay-per-click. Tell people in your network. Announce it on Twitter and in your blog. Find other relevant blogs and comment on them, and leave details of your white paper in a brief signature. Exchange links on other people's websites. You might even register your white paper with syndication sites.

### **12. Failure to follow up**

The whole point of producing a white paper was to sell more. Once people have downloaded the file, you have their details. So follow them up if you have asked them to register to download the white paper.

Call them and ask the obvious question: 'What prompted you to download our white paper on...?' They may only be at the information gathering stage, but you have an opportunity to shape the proposal.

At the very least, invite them to sign up for your ezine. Tell them about your other white papers. Invite them to a workshop or seminar.

### **Do they work?**

The simplest white paper I ever wrote was *How to start a business* when I was editor of *Better Business* magazine. It resulted in tens of thousands of pounds worth of business over the years. Oh yes, white papers definitely work! Used wisely, they will help drive people to your website. What are you waiting for?

### **Get help now**

I have created thousands of white papers for blue chips down to one-man-bands over the years. I know the questions to ask and how to capture information fast so you can get on with the important work of selling.

If you want help creating white papers for your business, give me, Sophie Chalmers, a call on 01291 641 313 or 07711 951 343 or email [sophie@activeinfo.co.uk](mailto:sophie@activeinfo.co.uk). Your investment will repay itself over and over as you grow your business.