



Think education when choosing topics for articles and white papers

Articles and white papers build credibility as a content expert, but many of my clients struggle to identify compelling topics. This article will explain the difference between articles and white papers, and then provide questions you can ask yourself to choose topics that will generate results for your business.

What are articles?

Articles are compositions that appear in magazines, newspapers, academic journals, the Internet or other types of publications. They offer breadth, depth or explanatory background on an educational topic. Feature articles deal with human-interest topics.

How long are articles?

500-2,000 words (1-4 pages)

How are articles used?

Articles can be submitted to business journals, trade journals or newspapers for reproduction in whole or in part. Editors may accept, reject or modify submitted articles to suit their standards and audience. You can order reprints to use as handouts.

What are white papers?

White papers are compositions used to educate an audience on a particular point of view. The content expert communicates a position backed by credible third-party sources. The author may reveal his or her expertise in the subject matter toward the end of the document in the event the reader is interested in more information or to contact the author to obtain a product or service.

How long are white papers?

1,000-2,500 words (2-7+ pages)

How are white papers used?

White papers can be printed and distributed to decision makers, posted on a website, offered as background information, or submitted to industry trade journals for publication. They can act as a powerful door-opener to gain access to a corporation or executive.

In my work with clients I ask some standard questions to help them determine good topics for articles or white papers:

- In what area(s) are you a content expert?
- What does your primary customer want or need?
- How can you help?
- What examples do you have of customers or clients who have benefited from your products/services?

And for white papers:

- What opinions do you have about the importance of your products/services in the marketplace?
- What 3rd party evidence is there to support your point of view?
- How can your customers best utilize your products/services?
- Why are you/your company uniquely qualified to provide these products/services?

Article illustrates an expert's process

Kristin Ford of PC Training Source wanted to write an article on how to evaluate online learning, which she does routinely in her business. She wasn't sure how to approach the topic. Through the interview we discovered five criteria Kristin uses to evaluate whether any course—either online or instructor-led—will produce the performance-based outcomes her clients desire. Then, Kristin selected a topic and we reviewed two courses using the five criteria—one that meets all the criteria and she would recommend, and one that she would not, and why. The result is an article that educates the reader on the criteria used by a seasoned expert in her industry.

White paper communicates a point of view

Bill Handschin, Ph.D., L.P., of Talent Management Consulting, wanted to demonstrate his expertise in talent assessment in technology industries. His white paper topic is "Mastering the Transition from Technician to Technical Manager" and his point of view is: Using the right assessment, coaching and development strategies can increase the potential for success when a technical expert is promoted to a management position. We quoted a book that lists common attributes of scientists and engineers, and then Bill listed the skills needed to be successful as a manager (they're totally opposite). Bill describes what needs to take place to identify, hire/promote and train technicians to become effective managers of technical people. The white paper communicates Bill's point of view backed by credible third-party sources.

When you work with Projects Done Write it's best to have a potential topic in mind. Through a tape-recorded interview I will ask probing questions to get at the heart of the message and convey it in a compelling and educational manner targeted to your primary audience. Once complete, I will give you advice on ways to distribute the article or white paper to achieve your desired results.

Diane Autey is president of Projects Done Write, a professional writing firm that excels at telling a company's story from one page to a book. We specialize in success stories, articles, white papers and legacy books. Contact Diane at 612-716-7642 or diane@projectsdonwrite.com.

