

A Different Kind of White Paper

Once upon a time, Joe, the CEO, was stressing out to the max. His company had wonderful products and services, but few were buying them. His chief engineer, Stan, told him that they solved all of the problems the customer could ever have, but still few were buying them. When he talked to the marketing team, they thought the products and services were exactly what the customer needed, but still few were buying them.

One day over the weekend, Joe was talking to Sally, his neighbor, about his rapidly sinking company. Sally asked, "What products and services does your company provide?" Joe started giving a list of all the bells and whistles his products could do. After listening patiently for 5 minutes, she asked, "But what's in it for me?" Joe stopped. He paused and asked, "What's the biggest problem you have with products like what my company sells?"

"Well," began Sally, "I need a product that does this, that and the other."

Joe said, "Our products do this, that and the other...,"

But she interrupted. "And I need it for this price and it can never break."

Joe felt his spirits sag. How could he do all that, for that price and the product never break? Then Sally broke out into a grin. "Now that I have your attention...here is the real problem I need to solve." As she laid out the biggest problem her company has in this area, he listened intently. At the end, she turned to him and asked, "So, can your products solve this problem?"

Joe paused. "Of course, but allow me to get the details from my chief engineer." He went back into his house and sent a quick e-mail outlining the problem to his chief engineer, telling him to see him first thing in the morning to discuss developing a proposal.

So, Joe went in to work the next morning and called Stan, his chief engineer, into his office. Joe laid out the problem in depth as described by his neighbor. Stan listened patiently.

At the end, Stan said, "Of course our products can solve that problem. I will get a team together within a week and we'll have a top notch paper for you to give out in six weeks."

Joe looked back at him with astonishment. "What is so difficult about putting together a 6-15 page white paper on a particular problem with a real solution, using our products? I need to give this information quickly, otherwise we lose the sale."

Stan complained he didn't have time or the people to write out compelling white papers. None of his people were ever trained to write for non-technical people. Technical people are the only logical people on earth. He ranted and raved for a few more minutes, before Joe stopped him.

"Look. I want you to spend some time writing this and I want it in my Inbox by end of day tomorrow." Stan sulked out of his office and complained for the next few

hours to his staff. Finally, he turned to Leiko, the newest member on the team, fresh out of college and said, "Okay, looks like you get the short end of the stick this time."

Leiko said, "Of course I can do it. I went to Smart-Alec U. I'll fill it with so many facts and figures, they'll never know what hit them. By the time they are through reading it, we'll sell them a dozen systems. But first, I have to meet a few of my old girl friends for lunch at the wings place. I'll start right after lunch."

Well, after a few wings and several games of pool, our young staff member waltzes back into the office in the middle of the afternoon with a swagger. "I have it all figured out." And she proceeded to type furiously and entering all kinds of numbers into spreadsheets, creating very pretty graphs and charts. Three hours later, she emailed the "finished" document to Stan.

42 pages! There was some gibberish text on the first page and a line or two under each picture and graph, but in a word, was quite worthless. There were even mentions of products that weren't part of the solution, but she had thrown them in there to bump up the sale. Stan blew a gasket. He roared, "Go get us a pizza and soda. You are staying with me here tonight until we get this done right."

Our young hero was about to protest that she had a hot date, but zipped her mouth when she saw the look on Stan's face. He punched the speed dial on his phone and told his wife, she would have to pick up little Johnny, Emily and Billy from their respective basketball, karate and ballet lessons.

When Leiko got back with the food and drink, Stan was gingerly laying the phone down from the blistering he had just received from his wife on his parental responsibilities. He growled, "Let's just get this over with."

They pored over their product descriptions and data sheets for several hours, typing some stuff into the computer, but more times than not, hitting the "Delete" key. Every time they thought they would have something, they would read it aloud and it would sound too weird. Finally, around 2 AM, they had a masterpiece any PhD would be proud of, although it came in at 24 pages. With a flourish, he printed out several copies and saved it to three CDs.

Late the next morning, Stan gave it to the mail delivery guy and asked him to read it. This bright enterprising young man, working his way through college took one look at the document and mumbled he was late on his deliveries. Before Stan could stop him, he was already out of sight.

Oh well, he had meetings he needed to go to, so Stan left the paper copies on the Joe's desk and was gone. When Joe came back to his desk, late that afternoon, he just scooped up the material and planned to read it on the way home. Unfortunately, a valued client called him on the train ride home and he didn't even open his briefcase. As he pulls into his driveway, he saw Sally and decided to give it to her, sight unseen.

Sally had a few minutes, so she started reading the material right then and there, although, she was surprised at the heft of the document. After a minute, she had a quizzical look on her face and had to re-read a page several times to get the message. Another five minutes passed and her eyes started crossing. In the fading

daylight, Joe saw Sally's eyes glazing over and swore she was fixated on a particular page for almost two minutes. Finally, Joe cleared his throat to break her of the catatonic state. Sally was startled. She looked up and said, "What in the world is this? I don't understand a word of it. It's so complicated, my nerd of a son wouldn't be able to figure it out. I read as far as I did, more as a courtesy to you being my neighbor, but if I received something this daunting in my inbox at work, it would have been chucked."

Joe apologized profusely and mumbled as he took the document back. "Maybe I can get my marketing team to put together what you need."

Sally stopped him right there. "I don't need pretty pictures and hype. I don't need a sales job with a lot of fluff that doesn't really address the problem at hand. Your products can do what I need. What I have to have is clear explanations from someone who understands technology, but won't try to overwhelm me with techno speak."

After letting that sink in, Sally continued, "Let's call a good friend of mine, Krishna Avva. He can help you understand what I need and how you can tell me your products can help. He has written several white papers for me that have my company as the "hero" of a story. We always come across looking like we knew what the customer wanted. They even passed the papers on up the chain for their management to read. We made several sales on these papers alone, because the customer saw us as value-added. We have also used him to introduce new concepts, kind of like a trial, before doing heavy development and resource commitments, to see what the potential interest of our customers was."

So, the next day, Sally and Joe had coffee with Krishna Avva, www.thebizstoryteller.com. Sally started by saying, "My friend, Joe, has a set of products that could probably solve a predicament I am having at my company, but his staff doesn't seem to know how to write a compelling, yet engaging white paper that tells me how their products can solve my situation."

Krishna said, "No problem. Let me lay out a few basic steps on how a paper like this is created and then explain the benefits of white papers and this approach."

In Stage 1, I:

- Understand the target customers for your products from material your marketing folks can provide.
- Read your existing marketing material to see if I understand what you offer and whether it aims at your target customer. I have a technology background with a marketer's eye, so we'll see if it conveys the message you want. I can make some recommendations at this stage for cleaning up the wording and meaning.
- Do a high-level market analysis, to understand your market and competition.
- Meet with your technical staff and marketing folks to understand what they hear from your customers as their problems.
- Discuss your products and services with some existing customers to see what they like and dislike about your products and the solutions they have implemented using them.

In Stage 2, I:

- Create a list for your review. Discuss the final problem list with you and your staff.
- We then prioritize the list from a customer perspective.

In Stage 3, I:

- Develop an outline for the top priority problem or outlines for a series of white papers, each one addressing a specific problem with a comprehensive solution.
- After I have reviewed this outline with you, I will draft the first solution paper for you and your staff to review. Of course, this solution will steer the customer to your products and services, but in a subtle manner, i.e., a soft sell. It will be the foundation for a paper ultimately of only 6-15 pages, so not a time-consuming reading effort and will address only one problem, so it won't be overwhelming.
- After any changes you wish to make to the document, I will revise it and you will use it as part of your marketing and sales collateral.
- We then continue with the next priority problem."

Joe mulled over this concept and likes it, but he still has questions. "I understand your approach, but why are white papers important to me and especially why would potential clients take the time to read them?"

Krishna responded, "Now you are hitting the key benefits. Let me outline them for you.

The benefits for you:

- Positions you strongly as THE company to provide the solution
- Shows you "get it". You feel the customer's pain and are doing everything you can to solve it
- It's an easy read, so they feel comfortable passing it on up the line of management for their approval.
- You can jump ahead of your competition, by publishing the solution first
- It's timely
- Easy to add to a website as a downloadable document
- It's a nice additional piece of documentation to include in a direct marketing campaign
- Trade journals will use it as an article, versus you paying for an advertisement

The benefits for your customers or potential customers:

- White papers are directed at their key problems - not overtly trying to push your products.
- The customer is engaged, because the paper is for them.
- The focus is on the problem and solution, not the products or services, so there is less sales type verbiage for them to wade through.
- By giving a comprehensive solution, they feel more confident that you have their best interests at heart.
- Keeping it short (6-15 pages) is easy to read
- It informs, not sells."

Joe nods his head. "I understand your points and it makes sense, but why should I use you? Can't I just train someone in my company to do it?"

Krishna responds, "Of course you can use someone internally, but here are the benefits you gain by using me:

- You would have to train someone to write for the customer in this format. They would have to be devoted to this task in order to do it justice.
- I am not biased about your products
- I am used to writing for a customer's perspective

- I am cheaper. Your technical staff can be over \$150/hour at a loaded rate with benefits and such. I am far less than that and you don't worry about my benefits.
- You can use me whenever the need arises
- I can turn a paper around much quicker, because I have the writing mindset and don't "dread" writing.
- With my varied background, I can draw upon many industry experiences to give a more complete picture
- I am technology trained, but market focused, in other words, I have both the ability to understand technical products and services with the skills to translate them into words that most people can understand
- My style is to engage the reader with compelling copy, preferably in a story format. If you prefer other styles of presentation, I can adapt to them very easily.

Joe said, "Great. Let's set up a meeting with my staff and get going."

Krishna responded, "Sounds good. I can be there tomorrow to start. In the meantime, I will start looking at your website to learn about your products and services. We should be able to help Sally out real quick."

The End

Of course, your staff isn't like this, but wouldn't you rather have your staff producing new products and focusing on their core competencies? Let The Biz Storyteller handle your white papers in an engaging and compelling manner (like this story).

Before your neighbor (or customer) has to tell you their biggest problem that can be solved with your products or services, let me sit down with your technical and marketing staff and design a series of white papers you can use as additional material to drive home the point that your company is the one for your prospective customers. We'll take a series of specific problems with a comprehensive solution, using your products and services, of course. I'll take these ideas back with any supporting material your staff can provide and develop a compelling yet engaging white paper that will sell to your customer without them noticing they were sold to.

Please contact me at requestinfo@thebizstoryteller.com or 678-935-7343 and we'll get started right away.