

How to Write a White Paper that Sells

Five Best Practice Guidelines
for Writing and Selling Online
White Papers, Special Reports
and Handbooks

Don Nicholas

Mequoda Team

Don Nicholas
Managing Partner

Kim Mateus
Senior Partner

Aimee Graeber
Senior Partner

Laura Pittman
Senior Partner

Amanda MacArthur
Editor & Publisher

Michael Phillips
Senior Information Architect

Roxanne O'Connell
Senior Usability Analyst
Editor-At-Large

Gail Odeneal
Senior Editor

Terri Edmonston
Information Architect
Senior Editor

Lowell Allen
Senior Information Architect

Peter A. Schaible
Senior Copywriter
Editor-At-Large

Julie Ottomano
Consulting Services Manager

Jeanne S. Jennings
Contributing Editor

Jack Edmonston
Executive Editor

Jane E. Zarem
Senior Editor

Robert W. Bly
Copywriter
Contributing Editor

John Clausen
Copywriter
Contributing Editor

Peter J. Fogel
Copywriter
Contributing Editor

Laura Logan
Copywriter

Larry Kerstein
Usability Analyst
Contributing Editor

Roger C. Parker
Contributing Editor

Advisory Board

Phil Ash
National Institute of Business
Management

David Baum
Golf Odyssey

Matthew Bennett
First Class Flyer

Alan Bergstein
RCR Wireless News

Ed Coburn
Harvard Health Publishing

Bill Dugan
The Pohly Company

Helmut P. Graf
Verlag fur die Deutsche
Wirtschaft AG

Susan Hackley
The Program on Negotiation
at Harvard Law School

Bill Haight
Magna Publications

Clay Hall
Aspire Media

Stuart Hochwert
Prime Publishing, LLC

Gregory S. Jones
Granite Bay Media

Stuart Jordan
University Health Publishing

Carl Kravetz
Cultural Assets

Pat McKeough
The Successful Investor, Inc.

Nancy McMeekin
Oakstone Publishing

Stephen Meyer
Business 21 Publishing

Robert Michel
Dark Intelligence Group

Steve Sachs
Real Simple

Charlie Spahr
American Ceramics Society

Bryan Welch
Ogden Publications

Copyright © 2009 Mequoda Group LLC

Terms of Use

All rights reserved. No part of this report may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, faxing, emailing, posting online or by any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the Publisher.

All trademarks and brands referred to herein are the property of their respective owners. All references to Mequoda™ and the seven Mequoda Website Publishing Models™ are trademarks of the Mequoda Group, LLC.

Legal Notices

While all attempts have been made to verify information provided in this publication, neither the author nor the publisher assumes any responsibility for error, omissions or contrary interpretations of the subject matter contained herein.

The purchaser or reader of this publication assumes responsibility for the use of these materials and information. Adherence to all applicable laws and regulations, both referral and state and local, governing professional licensing, business practices, advertising and all other aspects of doing business in the United States or any other jurisdiction, is the sole responsibility of the purchaser or reader. The author and publisher assume no responsibility or liability whatsoever on the behalf of any purchaser or reader of these materials. Any perceived slights of specific people or organizations are unintentional.

For More Free White Papers

<http://www.MequodaFree.com>

Contact Information

Mequoda Group, LLC

Customer Service

(866) 713-1005

530 Wood Street Unit B

Bristol, RI 02809

A Case Study on White Papers: Johns Hopkins

People ask me all the time what makes a great digital white paper, special report, guidebook or handbook... depending on what they call them. (Note: If you are new to download publishing, do some split tests to discover which label (white paper, special report, handbook or guidebook) your consumers prefer... let them vote with their wallets in a clean A/B/C/D test.... you will likely be surprised by the results (link to post on PDF product labeling).)

What should the covers look like? How should the page layout be designed? How long should it be? Is there a template to follow?

For B2C online publishers, my answer is always the **Johns Hopkins White Papers** (<http://www.johnshopkinshealthalerts.com/bookstore/digital.html>).

Johns Hopkins White Papers are in-depth special reports on major medical disorders such as coronary heart disease, arthritis, and diabetes. In addition to providing thorough background information on risk factors, diagnosis, prevention, and treatment options, each Johns Hopkins White Paper is updated annually to include new reviews of the latest, most significant research studies and clinical breakthroughs.

Edited by experts at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and written in clear, non-technical language, the Johns Hopkins White Papers help lay people become experts on the medical conditions that concern them most.



University Health Publishing (UHP) was very successfully selling white papers before the advent of the commercial Internet. For nearly 25 years it has been providing millions of readers worldwide with a variety of print and subscription-based products in conjunction with Johns Hopkins University and the University of California, Berkeley.

UHP mastered the art of selling white papers when the only feasible method of marketing and distribution was the U.S. Postal Service. Since 1984, Johns Hopkins White Papers have been sold to consumers via direct mail, never in bookstores.

A Johns Hopkins White Paper is an adult education product designed for a motivated learner who is looking for a thorough, well researched, in-depth answer to a specific question or health concern. In the case of UHP, the consumer's question is usually about a specific condition and how to live with it.

UHP Founder Rodney Friedman’s dream had always been for someone who was experiencing pain in his chest at 3 a.m. to be able to go online and download one of the white papers when he needed it most. With the launch of the Johns Hopkins Health Alerts (<http://www.johnshopkinshealthalerts.com/alerts/>) website, UHP could, for the first time, sell downloadable information products to consumers *on demand*.

What are the characteristics of Johns Hopkins White Papers that make them ideal — and a great template for your white paper product platform?

Five Best Practice Guidelines

First, at 60–80 pages, on average, they are the perfect length. They are long enough to be in-depth and credible on a single topic, while remaining much shorter than a book. Ideally, white papers are 24,000 to 32,000 words vs. 70,000 to 90,000 words for a bookstore book.

Second, depending on the topic, they can be heavily illustrated with line drawings, charts and tables — all designed to enhance understanding.

Third, the graphic design and layout is clean, stark and pristine with an “academic” feel. A white paper is — wait for it — *white*. It’s not four-color, not flashy, not overly designed. At some primal level of consciousness, its austere “look and feel” adds to a white paper’s authenticity. The medium never overwhelms the message.

Fourth, in order to be consumer-friendly, the finished document is designed to be printed on 8½” x 11” paper. In a digital age, many consumers want to be able to buy a white paper, download it immediately, and print it out on their own computer printer. Our research shows that at 60-80 pages, most consumers — regardless of age — choose to print them out rather than read them on a computer screen.

Consumers prefer holding the physical copy of the white paper to read and perhaps to mark up with pen or pencil. At the same time, they appreciate that the PDF file is saved to their computer hard drive for reprinting, if necessary.

Smart publishers, such as Amazon, UHP and Mequoda, also maintain a digital library for their customers. So, if a customer’s hard drive fails, the white paper is retrievable from the publisher’s digital archive.

Fifth, consider the price point. A white paper isn’t a book. It’s more specialized and focused on a niche topic that justifies a higher price.

If a consumer title, a white paper generally sells for \$20 - \$50. In the B2B market, white paper prices generally begin at \$97 and can be as much as \$1,500.

Conclusion: If you want to model a Mequoda best practice for white papers, you might invest \$20 or \$30 in a Johns Hopkins White Paper. Nobody does it better!

For more free white papers from Mequoda, visit:
<http://www.MequodaFree.com>