

Getting ideas from prospects and clients

If you're stuck for ideas, you can always turn to a ready source: anyone in your company who talks directly to prospects or clients. For most companies, that includes the sales force, channel partners, customer service, technical support, and possibly marketing. Sit down with a few of these people and ask them some simple questions: What are the prospects and clients you deal with asking about? What are they curious about? What big problems are they grappling with? What do they need help with? Listen carefully to the answers, and you'll hear some rich topics for possible white papers.

What's more, this conversation doesn't have to be a one-way street. If you have a customer advisory board, user group, focus group panel, or any other way of getting hold of some typical prospects or customers, try out some possible white paper topics on them.

Chapter 6

The Backgrounder: As Basic As Vanilla

In This Chapter

- ▶ Getting to know the original flavor of white papers
- ▶ Figuring out when to use a backgrounder
- ▶ Defining the strengths and weaknesses of a backgrounder
- ▶ Planning the typical contents of a backgrounder
- ▶ Using graphics and rich media in a backgrounder
- ▶ Recycling a backgrounder into other formats

To delve deeper into the three flavors of white papers that I outline in Chapter 5, the natural starting point is the backgrounder. This flavor is as plain and predictable as vanilla ice cream. But just like vanilla, it's amazingly popular. For example, all the leading technology companies with household names like Apple, Google, Hewlett-Packard, Oracle, and so on produce mainly this flavor.

In this chapter, I define this original flavor of white paper, show how to recognize it, and reveal when to use it for best results. Then I sketch in the pros and cons of backrounders and provide a sample list of contents and recommended page counts. I also cover how to repurpose a backgrounder into other types of content, especially a press release, slide deck, demo, or webinar.

Introducing the Granddaddy of All White Papers

You don't get any surprises when you order vanilla ice cream. The same applies to a backgrounder. Your readers know what to expect when they pick up a white paper of this flavor. You can think of the backgrounder as a