

In the same way, a backgrounder can be the best flavor to pick in three specific situations:

- ✓ To promote an undisputed leader
- ✓ To support a technical evaluation
- ✓ To supplement a new product launch

Promoting an undisputed leader

Is your company an undisputed leader in your field? Are you working for a Fortune 500 company that's a name brand already lodged firmly in every prospect's mind? Are you so well known that you usually end up on the shortlist of B2B vendors being considered for any purchase in your market?

If so, you're among the fortunate few, including companies in B2B technology, such as Cisco, Dell, Hewlett-Packard, and IBM; in software, Adobe, Microsoft, Oracle, SAP, and Symantec; in telecom, AT&T, Sprint, and Verizon. Every sector of the economy has a few leading lights — the powerful standard companies that everyone knows.

For this select number, publishing backgrounders makes a lot of sense, because most B2B buyers naturally check out what these firms can offer to help them with their business problem. In many cases, all that one of these big, well-known companies has to do is lay out its wares and wait for the prospects to flock to them, like children around an ice-cream truck. And the best way for a well-known B2B company to lay out its wares is often by publishing a vanilla flavor of white paper, a backgrounder.

Supporting a technical evaluation

As explained in Chapter 1, you can look at the sales process as a funnel. During a complex B2B sale, prospects enter the sales funnel at the top, gain the information and reassurance they need in the middle, and ultimately make a buying decision at the bottom. Throughout the process, every vendor competes against the rest to win the buyer's business.

A backgrounder isn't effective at generating leads at the top of the funnel and is only mildly effective for nurturing prospects through the middle, simply because it's too early in either case for B2B buyers to think about any product specifics. They're still mapping out their requirements, formulating a budget and a timeline, and getting everyone on the selection committee to agree on a shortlist of vendors.

But when prospects finally reach the bottom of the funnel and want to do a final evaluation of their shortlist of vendors, a backgrounder can be just

the ticket. Often, a knowledgeable staff person on the prospect's side is assigned to evaluate a handful of competing solutions, weigh them against one another, and come back with some recommendations. A backgrounder packed with details on the technical and business benefits of a vendor's offering gives that person exactly what he needs when he needs it. At that point, you can imagine how much a vendor with a backgrounder gains over those without. In fact, any vendors with no explanatory white papers may find themselves dropped from the shortlist of possible suppliers.

Supplementing a product launch

A backgrounder can be useful to round out a product launch when a vendor needs to explain a new offering to analysts, bloggers, channel partners, journalists, and perhaps even its own sales force. This is the one time when you can expect a certain amount of interest in the product itself, especially if the new product or service represents a departure from conventional approaches or any significant improvements on the past. A backgrounder can focus on what's new and how this product or service delivers more benefits for B2B buyers.



If your company is launching a product or service in a new category, with a new approach, or anything a little unconventional, publishing a backgrounder to support it is a good idea, no matter how big or small your company may be. You can also publish a white paper of another flavor at the same time, but to help tell the story of your new offering, you should likely create a backgrounder.

Looking at the Pros and Cons of Backgrounders

Nothing in this life is perfect, and the same applies to white papers. Like every flavor, backgrounders have certain strengths and limitations. On the plus side, because backgrounders are so focused, they're relatively easy to research and write. On the downside, they have a short life span and aren't effective at generating leads. Understanding the pros and cons of this flavor, which I address in the following sections, helps you decide when you should use a backgrounder for best results and when to choose another flavor that's a better match for the challenge you face.

Pro: Easy to research

A backgrounder is the easiest of all flavors to research, mainly because all your sources are already inside the company. Everyone you need to