

Knowing your target readers

The first rule of any good communicator is to know your audience. Having a clear idea of the age, sex, education, job role, size of company, industry, location, experience, interest, stresses, and viewing devices of your ideal target readers gives you a better shot at reaching them with language and imagery that resonates with them.

For example, many men in business — especially old-school men — appreciate the language of combat and sports: bashing, crushing, defeating, stomping, winning, and so on. But to many women, these metaphors are a complete turnoff. Worse yet, people from other cultures may not even know what you mean by football or NASCAR. If you know in advance, for example, that 50 percent of your audience for a background are women in Europe, would you still use that same

language? Or would you appreciate the chance to find another frame of reference?

Another even simpler example is readability. People's eyes begin to change around age 40. As most people get older, they find it harder to resolve small print. So your designer should be aware of the intended age of your audience. If your readers are all 20-something, you can probably get away with gray text at a smaller point size. But if they're all 50-something executives, your designer should pump up the point size and make all the text crisp black on white.

Knowing your audience isn't about being sexist and ageist; it's about having a better clue of how to tailor your message to make it easy to decipher and understand.

A backgrounder, like all white papers, includes three parts: front matter, main body, and back matter. The following lists discuss briefly what to include in each part of a backgrounder and how many pages each should run. For more tips and discussion, see Chapter 10. You can also check out sample backgrounders at www.thatwhitepaperguy.com/sample-white-papers.html.

Front matter: One to three pages

The front matter of a backgrounder shows what your paper is about and how it's structured and includes the following elements:

- ✓ A **cover page** is optional in a backgrounder, and you can often combine the cover with the contents and copyright page. A text-only cover page shows the title, subtitle (if any), vendor, and sometimes the date the paper was published. You can include all this info in a few lines of text or expand it typographically to fill an entire page. Some backgrounders have visual covers, with a photo of the offering in action, the intended reader, or something else that suggests the contents.
- ✓ The **contents and copyright** sections often appear on the same page, sometimes with the cover page. The contents section provides a quick overview of your document that many readers use to skip to the pages they want. It usually takes up about half a page, certainly no more than one page. In the contents, you typically list the main headings and perhaps the secondary headings, if any. In a longer document, you may