

“deep dish” about the features and benefits of a certain product or service. Best used for prospects near the bottom of the sales funnel, a backgrounder pitches the technical or business benefits of a vendor’s offering.

To many marketing executives, the backgrounder is what white papers are all about. Once upon a time, all B2B white papers came in this flavor. In those days, white papers were used mainly to deliver technical information to prospects. By now, marketing has come a long way. B2B buyers have evolved, and new flavors have emerged that are better suited for certain marketing challenges. But a backgrounder can still be powerful if you use it at the right time for the right purpose.

In the following sections, I explore the ins and outs of the backgrounder, including how to spot one and why certain B2B buyers like this flavor best.

## Defining a backgrounder

A backgrounder is a B2B white paper with a tight focus on one offering from one vendor. This offering is most often a product or service, but it can also be any sort of methodology or business process. The backgrounder is also known as an *evaluator’s guide* or *product briefing*.

A backgrounder does one or more of the following:

- ✓ Explains the key features, functions, and benefits of an offering to give B2B buyers more detailed information than they can find in a brochure, data sheet, or website
- ✓ Explains a new, unfamiliar, or misunderstood technology to a technical audience
- ✓ Supports a product launch by explaining a new offering to the world

Prospects deep in the sales funnel download product backgrounders to get technical details they can’t find anywhere else. They don’t want brochure-style copy; they’re looking for precise technical details. But they don’t want 120-page operations manuals, either. The trick is to be selective and hit the high points without getting bogged down in arcane details that matter only to your own engineers, not to your prospective buyers.

A backgrounder is relatively easy to prepare because it includes mostly technical information that’s easy to find within your own company. The tone is factual, and the graphics can be simple boxes and arrows. (No need for special effects; “all we want are the facts, ma’am.”) If you think *vanilla* when you think of a backgrounder, you can’t go far wrong.



## Spotting a backgrounder

To identify a backgrounder, look for a product or service name in the title and a lot of information about that offering in the body. In fact, the actual name of the product or service likely occurs dozens of times, often more than once a page. Also look for descriptions of proprietary features, functions, interfaces, methodologies, modules, technologies, workflows — the kind of technical details that used to be called *feeds and speeds*. If you see all of that, you can be sure that you’ve spotted a backgrounder.

You won’t likely find much discussion of any industry-wide problem or much attempt to point out the drawbacks of any other vendor’s solution to that problem. You won’t find any levity, provocative language, or trash-talking about the competition. And you won’t see many question marks in the title or section headings. A backgrounder is all about facts, figures, throughput, total cost of ownership, return on investment, new features and innovations, and how that offering does what it does better than anything else on the market.

## Understanding this flavor’s appeal to sales and marketing types

Backgrounders appeal to sales and marketing types within a company for an obvious reason: They mirror the way these people usually think, focusing on their company’s offering and how it’s the best thing on the market. A backgrounder highlights the unique selling points (USPs) and competitive advantages that they’re always talking about. The first instinct of most sales and marketing people who’ve never worked on a white paper before is to create a backgrounder. Because it’s what they know, it’s the most natural flavor to use.

Of course, this instinct isn’t always correct. Sometimes a backgrounder is the right flavor to use; other times, not so much. In the next section, I describe three specific situations where a backgrounder can work very well. In any other circumstances, think twice before you pick this flavor — even if you have to push back against other people in your company. The white paper you save may be your own.

## Deciding When to Use a Backgrounder

To me, nothing is like a scoop of vanilla ice cream melting all over a big piece of fresh-from-the-oven strawberry-rhubarb crumble — unless you’re talking a double scoop of vanilla melting over a big piece of warm pumpkin pie. No doubt you have your own favorite ways of eating vanilla ice cream.