

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 stand-out 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