Case studies v. white papers: Start your B2B sales journey on the right path

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Wow, 2019 is starting out with a bang! ITEXPO has come and gone. Security trade show RSA is on the horizon starting in March. Hopefully, attendees have their booths planned, signage proofed, and tchotchkes on hand to distribute.

But what content do you plan to hand out?

No, no one wants to read a white paper while standing in the middle of a trade show. But a printed case study might be a perfect read when taking a break from the hubbub.

Of course, case studies and white papers are both powerful tools for B2B sales and marketing, but when should you use each? Let’s take a deep dive into the world of case studies and white papers to help you understand when to choose one over the other.

Case studies:
- **Focus on outcomes:** Case studies highlight specific outcomes and results of using your product or service, backed by real data and testimonials.
- **Showcase success:** They are particularly effective for demonstrating the value of complex solutions and can be used to address specific pain points.
- **Use case:** Case studies can be used to illustrate how a solution works in different environments or industries.

White papers:
- **In-depth analysis:** White papers provide in-depth analysis and thought leadership, helping to establish your company as a thought leader in the industry.
- **Educational:** They are often used to educate potential customers on a specific topic or technology, helping to inform their decision-making process.
- **Neutral tone:** White papers are written in a neutral tone, which can help to build trust and credibility with potential clients.

So, when should you choose a case study over a white paper, or vice versa?

**Case Study Scenarios:**
- **Highly complex solutions:** Case studies are ideal when the solution provided is extremely complex and requires in-depth explanation.
- **Specific outcomes:** When trying to highlight specific outcomes and results, case studies are the go-to format.
- **Feature-rich solutions:** Case studies are particularly useful for feature-rich solutions where the focus is on the outcomes and how the solution worked in a real-world scenario.

**White Paper Scenarios:**
- **Wider audience:** White papers are better suited for a wider audience, as they are generally shorter and less technical than case studies.
- **Educational content:** When the goal is to educate or inform customers about a new technology or industry trend, white papers are often the best choice.
- **Neutral tone:** White papers should be written in a neutral tone, providing unbiased information and analysis.

In summary, whether you choose a case study or white paper depends on your specific marketing objectives, target audience, and the nature of your solution. By understanding the strengths and weaknesses of each format, you can make a well-informed decision to optimize your B2B sales strategy.
just make overall operations run more smoothly. Case studies are short and designed to show how your company solved a problem for another company.

2. **White papers** are written as a “pseudo-independent” piece with your company often not mentioned until the conclusion. A white paper, generally more technical than a case study, is built like this: 1) Here’s the problem many of you are facing (with stats to show); 2) Here are some solutions to this problem that failed, or only “sort of” work (with graphs to show); 3) Here is OUR solution and why it’s the best (with matrices to show).

**Why you should start your campaign with a case study**

A case study is better than a white paper at the start because case studies are:

- **Inexpensive, cheap, a relative bargain** Case studies are about 1/7th the cost of a white paper at the going rates ($1000-1500 v. $7000-8000).

- **Focused in on a specific company’s challenges and how you fixed them** Does your company have these problems? Maybe not now, but you can probably see it may be a potential problem in the future.

- **Short, concise, (almost) snack-size** Usually about 2-3 pages--or for one client, 7-8 slides. They’re short so sales can easily hand one off to a potential customer for some light reading. You can view case studies as easy-to-read with a story involved. White papers are usually dense with info and generally take longer to read than a train ride.

- **Problem-solving, not navel-gazing** A case study introduces a problem that impacted your client, then it discusses how your client addressed the challenge. It concludes by showing how your client resolved its problem--usually using your company’s solution. A white paper works in the same way, but it addresses a challenge affecting the industry as a whole and uses language that is not too promotional. Plus, a white paper does a much deeper dive into the challenges and is often more technical, catering to Solutions Architects and CTOs rather than buyers or CEOs.

- **Easy to write not just one, but many** And since case studies are both short and inexpensive, they usually don’t take more than a couple weeks to produce when all relevant info is provided. It may, however, take up to a month to produce a solid white paper.

- **Multi-deliverable-friendly** Case studies can be produced in multiple formats such as Word docs, PDFs, presentations, web pages and the old standby-by, print. You can also ask your best clients if they’d be willing to appear in a video case study.
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If you need something more in-depth, a white paper is your go-to. But if you just need a quick response to challenges that have come up in the industry, a case study should be one of your first tools.

As a long-form copywriter for 20 years, I’ve written dozens of case studies, including Uptake, Aginity, SPSS (now IBM), Catbird Networks (now Cyxtera), and others. If you want to start the case studies rolling, visit [www.krop.com/hsuan](http://www.krop.com/hsuan) to look at some case studies, then contact me at hsuanmin.chou@yahoo.com.