

“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 background pitches the technical or business benefits of a vendor’s offering.

To many marketing executives, the background 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 background 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 background, including how to spot one and why certain B2B buyers like this flavor best.

Defining a background

A background 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 background is also known as an *evaluator’s guide* or *product briefing*.

A background 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 backgrounds 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 background 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 background, you can’t go far wrong.

