

This is an edited transcript of the February 4, 2015 SmallBusinessTalent.com podcast interview titled [Smart Lead Generation - Brian Boys on 'How To Write A White Paper In One Day'](#).

Announcer: Are you a hard-working, self-employed professional striving for small business success? There is help. Welcome to the SmallBusinessTalent.com podcast featuring candid conversations about successful self-employment.

Stephen Lahey: Welcome to the SmallBusinessTalent.com podcast. I'm Stephen Lahey, and I'll be your host.

My guest on the podcast today is [Brian Boys](#). Brian is a seasoned advertising and marketing copywriter who has worked with entrepreneurs and companies throughout the world over the past 25 years. He's also the author of a fascinating new book, [How to Write a White Paper in One Day](#), which he wrote to help people like us to take advantage of the marketing power of white papers.

In his book, Brian takes the nonprofessional writer step-by-step through the process of creating a concise and convincing white paper. [How to Write a White Paper in One Day](#) is built around an innovative template which takes the guesswork out of how to structure your paper for maximum impact.

In my experience, most independent professionals are looking for better ways to quickly build credibility with prospective clients. One highly effective approach is writing white papers that help prospects to solve compelling problems, and that's exactly what Brian is here to discuss with us today.

Welcome to the podcast, Brian!

Brian Boys: Hi, Steve. I'm excited to speak with you today.

Stephen Lahey: Well, I'm excited to have you join me. Just to kick things off, tell us a bit about your professional background, which I found very interesting, and then what triggered you to make the leap and become self-employed.

Brian Boys: Sure. I started in the early 90s, I got a job as a junior copywriter in Portland, Oregon, kind of right out of college, and I wrote for ad

# SmallBusinessTalent.com

more ideal clients >> more profit >> more fulfillment

---

agencies for about 15 years. I kind of did the typical thing, radio, TV. When you're young, you really want to win awards, and we won a bunch of awards and stuff.

But then I was about 15 years into my career and Portland had grown tremendously and the commute was getting really crowded and kind of getting old. And my wife and I, we had two kids. We just said, man, we would just love to be able to move rurally, out into the country where there's some more room, so that was kind of my motivation to go solo. I probably could have used your help at that time. I was too chicken to jump.

Anyway, I finally worked out a deal with my employer where they made me a contractor and I was able to move over 100 miles away and continue working with a lot of the same clients and that made the jump a lot easier. Since then I've been a freelancer for almost 10 years now.

Stephen Lahey: That's interesting. A very smart move, and I'm sure almost anyone who goes out on their own who's done it successfully will tell you, wow, wouldn't it have been great if I could have just serviced my existing employer for a while since I was on good terms.

Brian Boys: Yes.

Stephen Lahey: So, anybody who's listening to this who isn't yet self-employed but thinking about it seriously, there's a tip for you.

Now, today we'll be discussing how solo consultants and other professional service providers can use white papers as part of their marketing mix. So, why don't we start here in terms of differentiation. What's the difference between white papers and other marketing tools, Brian?

Brian Boys: I'll tell you how I discovered the difference. As a copywriter I had a client in the financial services industry. Their customers are financial advisors, so, many of them are solo entrepreneurs. This client asked me to prepare a seminar, like a one-day seminar for financial advisors on how to write their own white papers. At that point, I had edited a lot of white papers, but I wouldn't consider myself a white paper specialist.

Well, being faced with teaching a white paper seminar in a couple months, I totally jumped in and immersed myself in the world of white papers.

I had to learn, first of all, exactly what they are and how they're used. Eventually, I started dissecting them. As a writer, I would go through and say, all right, argument A is here and argument B starts here and this is kind of a straw man argument and, okay, they're citing these different sources, etc. And eventually I ended up with the eBook we're going to talk about, which is called [\*How to Write a White Paper in One Day\*](#), and that was the target for the seminar.

The difference between a white paper and other kinds of marketing materials is that in a white paper you really don't talk about yourself in the way you're used to. Let me explain that. In a brochure, you kind of talk about, hey, here's why you want to do business with us. In an article or a blog post, you're writing and you're saying, hey, this is my experience. You can kind of talk from personal experience. In a press release, you are probably talking in the third person about your company. They're saying, hey, ABC Widgets, it's this great company, but you're quoting yourself or you're quoting your executives. But in white papers, and especially in really good white papers, you actually don't cite yourself at all. And, in fact, you don't even mention yourself specifically until maybe at the very end.

White papers can be extremely powerful marketing tool because they hold the promise that the person that reads them is going to learn something very useful and solve a problem. If you structure it correctly, you can hook people in so that the title of your white paper and the promise of your white paper is going to solve a huge problem for the person reading it. Good white papers are taken seriously, but you've got to be very disciplined in writing them so that you don't fall back into your brochure type of voice or your press release type of voice because we all kind of want to tout ourselves and quote ourselves.

Stephen Lahey:

That's interesting on several levels. First of all, you and I had spoken briefly before the interview about how when you were doing research on white papers years ago and saying, all right, what is this animal called a white paper, you got into the "white paper expert" scene and learned how they're teaching this art.

Well, when they do it it's very convoluted. It's kind of crazy how convoluted they make it.

Of course, they're specialists and they're being paid like \$4000 per white paper; but their approach was very difficult to master. You'd have to be an outstanding writer, business thinker, whatever.

But what you did, from what I am hearing you say, is you distilled that process down into how I could do this. I mean, I see myself as a non-professional writer. I'm a business guy, but not in the writing business. And to be able to produce an effective white paper in one day? That, I think, is a huge benefit.

Now, when I think of white papers, I also think about exactly what you said, credibility. Because a white paper isn't about me, me, me, me, here are my claims or my testimonials. A white paper is about solving a problem that you probably hear your audience talking about, or they're asking you about it, on a regular basis.

You've talked a little bit about the benefits of white papers. Those are some of them. What are some of the other benefits that you've seen people get out of having a white paper on their website? One of them I can think of is capturing email addresses when prospective clients download it, but that's not the only one.

Brian Boys:

Absolutely. With a good white paper, you have a thing that's got perceived value so, yes, you can give it away to get people's information. But white papers don't work for every kind of business. You have to have kind of a unique take on what you do. You have to be unique enough that you can build an argument around it. I've found that white papers are used quite a bit in businesses where things are changing rapidly and there's a lot at stake, a lot of money at stake relating to the decision that needs to be made. White papers are a way of kind of distilling, hey, here's the lay of the land. You educate your reader on the market situation, and now they can make their decision or internal recommendation to their company based on more knowledge because they've read your white paper.

So ideally, in addition to just the person reading it and educating themselves, let's say they're going to go to a meeting and they're going to say, wow, we really need to make a decision on customer relationship software soon. Well, that person walks into their

# SmallBusinessTalent.com

more ideal clients >> more profit >> more fulfillment

---

meeting and they've printed out your white paper and your white paper now becomes kind of an authority tool that they can use to help bring about a decision. And if you've created a good white paper, then the decision also points to you. They're going to pick you.

Stephen Lahey: So, it's viral, albeit maybe with a small V.

Brian Boys: Yes, and let me add to that. For solos and small business entrepreneurs, there are *three additional reasons* why you might want to write your own white paper. So aside from, okay, yeah, white papers are great, here's three reasons why you might want to write your own.

One of them that we talked about is budget. If you don't have a couple thousand dollars to pay a white paper writer, you can do it yourself and save that money.

The second one is, and this is really cool, is that by writing a white paper because they are taken seriously, you build some authority for yourself. White papers will also have some longevity. They'll be around for a couple of years and still be authoritative. As the author of the white paper, that adds to your authority in whatever business you have.

Third, aside from all the marketing benefits, going through the process of planning and writing your white paper makes you very knowledgeable in your topic category as it applies to your kind of business, and you're going to be better at talking to clients. You're going to know a lot more than your competitors because you've done this kind of due diligence in the world around what that the white paper is covering.

Stephen Lahey: One of the greatest benefits, which you've just hit on, and I'm so glad you did, is that this process gets you to think in a disciplined way through a subject. I think that leads to so many benefits when you're going to be communicating with prospective clients later on. It's really interesting from that standpoint.

Okay. So, Brian, how can we identify the most compelling subject that we might want to write about in a white paper?

# SmallBusinessTalent.com

more ideal clients >> more profit >> more fulfillment

---

Brian Boys: Yes, that's actually the most important question. Probably the headline of your white paper, which might be seven words, is the most important thing you will write. If it's wrong, then the whole white paper might be a waste of time. And your subject has to be the thing that is compelling to your client. If you're using this white paper to get more clients, it has to connect with why a client would hire you, except from the client's perspective.

So your white paper subject really needs to be a problem that you or your product or service solves for the client, and it's got to be a subject that they're going to drop what they're doing and want to know more about when they hear that there's a solution to this particular problem.

But how do you find out what the best subject is? Well, you can talk to some of your new clients, recent clients, some of your loyal clients and just say, hey, why did you choose me? What's the most compelling thing about working with me? If you're in a little bit larger organization, talk to salespeople or customer service people, especially salespeople because they're dealing with customers and they get paid based on making a sale and they can tell you, okay, yeah, here's what we think is cool about our company, but here's really what makes customers' eyes light up and makes them choose us. So something along those lines has to be the subject of the white paper.

Stephen Lahey: That makes perfect sense. The funny thing about that is that it's also quite nuanced. Meaning that if I am a financial planner I may have somewhat different issues that plague me versus, let's say a sales trainer, or whomever. There are just different words and phrases that I use in the financial planning industry, whereas if I'm a sales trainer, then I'm more comfortable with other types of descriptive phrases about my situation and industry. So I think you've hit on something really important – you must ask your clients. Ask your ideal clients. The ones you'd like to attract more of.

Brian Boys: Yes.

Stephen Lahey: Not your worst clients. [laughs]

Brian Boys: Right.

# SmallBusinessTalent.com

more ideal clients >> more profit >> more fulfillment

---

Stephen Lahey: Most of us, we're not information marketers. We actually talk to our clients. But don't take things at face value, dig deeper. Ask them, why do you say that?

And the real answers, and the way they talk about them, may not be what you think. I remember asking clients in a survey years ago what they valued most about working with me and I was thinking, oh gosh, they're going to say he's articulate, brilliant, fairly good-looking, all these things. Nope. That's not what they said. What they really said was words to the effect of he helps us sleep at night. He's the guy we can count on. He never drops the ball.

Brian Boys: Yes.

Stephen Lahey: It was very interesting how reliability, which I thought was boring—was actually very, very powerful as a differentiator. They were comparing me to others in my particular profession who weren't reliable, which I found interesting.

Brian Boys: Right.

Stephen Lahey: We all want to convince prospects that our services are unique and valuable. How can we make the strongest case for that, Brian?

Brian Boys: Well, working on that white paper seminar, and eventually on the eBook, I came up with a template. It's almost a paint-by-numbers guide that you can follow. You fill in paragraph by paragraph to write your white paper.

The best white papers, the most compelling ones, back every argument with an authoritative citation. So if you, in whatever you're writing about, can cite something from *The Wall Street Journal* or *Forbes* or *The New York Times*, then it's not just you making the assertion. Yes, you're laying out the argument, but it's third-party authoritative sources that are bolstering your argument.

And then another thing that makes white papers compelling is that you will present the alternatives. You will present, in my system, two other alternatives they have, but then you'll also, because you want the flow of the argument to go in your favor, you'll also quote some authoritative sources on why maybe those aren't the best choices.

# SmallBusinessTalent.com

more ideal clients >> more profit >> more fulfillment

---

There are three kinds of white papers basically. There's the kind that's a backgrounder. It's kind of here's the lay of the land, and it's just kind of like, okay, here's the state of the industry right now. And then there's a second one which is kind of a list. It would be like seven ways to get more web visitors or six things your IT guy doesn't want you to know, three ways you're wasting time with, or whatever. They're kind of lists and they're good, but the list doesn't really follow through and that can tend to be a negative type of white paper. It's a little more combative.

The third type, and the type I believe is most compelling, is the problem/solution type, where, in fact, within the headline you give a problem and then you promise that there's going to be a solution. It kind of draws from both of the other kinds. By reading it, you sort of get a lay of the land and you learn some practical things, but what's different about it is you take an argument from beginning to end. So if you hook the person in reading the white paper, they're going to want to read the whole thing because they're going to want to see how you deliver on that promise, which they'll have to read the whole thing to see how you can do that by the end.

Stephen Lahey: Everything you're doing and the way it's structured leads to building credibility. You're heading off skepticism at the pass.

Brian Boys: Exactly. And you know what? Even if they don't go with you, if you've done a good job, by the time they've read it, they feel like they've gained something and so that's a plus too.

Stephen Lahey: Without a doubt. So, Brian, I'll just say this as we're beginning to wrap up the interview, I really like what you're doing online and I think it's very interesting. I like how you've differentiated yourself on your website with a sense of humor.

A lot of the people who are coming to the website probably aren't deadly serious professional writers. No, they're people who are kind of feeling a bit burdened at the thought of taking on a writing project, but they know that they need to do some writing. So perhaps it's a solo entrepreneur, saying do I have time to figure this white paper thing out? I'm not a writer, how can I write an effective white paper? But you approach it all with a sense of humor and you have a really useful way of approaching it that doesn't waste time. So, I'm sure a lot of listeners would love to

# SmallBusinessTalent.com

more ideal clients >> more profit >> more fulfillment

---

learn more about you and what you provide, including your eBook. How can they do that, Brian?

Brian Boys: Well, go to the website you're talking about. It's called [MakingMeWriteThis.com](http://MakingMeWriteThis.com). It's a site for people who aren't professional writers who get stuck with a writing project. They just want step-by-step instructions from a professional copywriter on how do I even start this thing? On my site, you can look under books. The book on [\*How to Write a White Paper in One Day\*](#) is under there. [You can also find it on Amazon Kindle](#).

When you visit the site, I've got almost a dozen tutorials up there and a bunch of blog posts kind of on writing for non-professional writers, and I would love to know what tutorials you would like to see. So from the site you can contact me and just let me know. Say hey, Brian, I've got to give this speech, could you write some instructions on how to give a 15 minute speech, for example. So I would love to hear from listeners.

Stephen Lahey: Great! And, of course, when you go to [MakingMeWriteThis.com](http://MakingMeWriteThis.com) do opt-in by email so that you don't miss out on his blog posts.

Thank you so much for joining me on the podcast, Brian.

Brian Boys: Oh, it's been my pleasure, Steve. Thank you very much.

Stephen Lahey: And to our listeners, thank you for spending some time with us today. If you like what you heard, I encourage you to visit SmallBusinessTalent.com now and subscribe to the podcast by email. When you do, you'll be alerted whenever I post fresh podcast content, of course, but you'll also receive special resources for email subscribers only, including my LinkedIn guide and much more. Thanks again for listening today and best wishes for your success.

Announcer: The SmallBusinessTalent.com podcast is a production of Lahey Consulting, LLC. Thanks for listening.