

How I paired writing a white paper on a deadline

When handed a new project, I usually plot out what I know and what I don't know into a project plan, or in this case a doc plan. I put my name as the primary author and the PhD's name as the SME contributor. I asked my SME who the primary audience was and he squirmed a bit and gave me three. I stood firm and asked him who needs to see this paper, and why is this project in action right now. Our primary audience was our internal Plume management, but the account managers wanted to show it to their clients too.

It turns out, the way we handled data and the length of time we hung on to it, was being questioned and our leadership was giving different answers to different clients. They needed smart diagrams and agreed-upon language to stay in step with reality and stay within the law.

Then we listed the reviewers with their contact information and defined a top row to our doc plan calendar with the days of the coming weeks and holidays. On the adjacent column edge, I laid down the order of events:

- kickoff
- design
- write
- edit
- feedback
- reviewer1
- reviewer2, etc.
- final version
- release day

This way we all could see the time commitment we needed to make in order to deliver this paper by our deadline.

We automatically combined our initial planning day in with the kickoff and design days. In the doc plan, we defined the time we worked together and who was responsible for which parts; he adds technical details and I compose the overview and conclusion to support his ideas. Together we tell the story of how our company is growing and by virtue of its growth, holds more and more data and how we are protecting the data.

We decided to use Google docs as the paired writing platform, as we can write together over zoom or the phone. If we wrote separately, we could leave questions marked in comments that later we could talk about together in our following writing session. We acknowledged our respective responsibilities but allowed the other to bring in other viewpoints to focus the written thought. For instance, I added the glossary and reference section to support the ideas my SME simply knew. I represented our educated, but non-PhD-level readers. Together we worked out how best to display data in the graphics and if it made sense from what we wrote versus what we drew.

At the end of this writing exercise, we both agreed it was one of the most pleasurable papers either of us had ever written.

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