

Utilizing White Papers to Generate Leads and Establish Industry Prominence

Now more than ever, businesses need cost effective methods to generate solid, quality leads. We have reached a day and age where the old methods of finding leads just aren't efficient. As marketing departments are stretched thin and sales reps struggle, there isn't time to sort through poor or unqualified leads. It is no longer enough to generate large numbers. Lead generation tools must target with pinpoint accuracy, educating potential clients and ultimately creating desire while encouraging a specific call to action.

In today's world of social media and instant information, potential clients now have the means to conduct extensive research before making a purchase. Businesses who educate on first contact are discovering the ability to generate large numbers of prequalified leads. Additionally, when a lead generating tool helps a potential client solve a problem, it creates a desire to return the favor which can result in increased sales.

Decision makers seek quality information which solves problems—often in the form of information products such as white papers or free reports. In a recent survey, 80.5 percent of buyers said they find white papers to be more effective than any other marketing tool in the decision making process. These same buyers also said that they rely on white papers more than any other marketing tool when evaluating possible solutions.¹

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Add the fact that participants also stated that white papers provide the highest ROI of all marketing tools surveyed and you can see the power of white papers as an important part of the sales process.²

Releasing the Knowledge

Businesses are the keepers of amazing knowledge and resources. Their employees are experts and there is a wealth of information locked within the confines of the organization. Unfortunately, this is often where the information remains.

However, when a company unlocks this information and makes it readily available to potential clients, it not only creates desire for more information, they can quickly establish industry prominence. Industry leaders aren't always the best or most innovative. Sometimes, they are simply the one who best communicates the power within their organization.

In recent years, the popularity of white papers has boomed as businesses search for new ways to unlock this knowledge and in turn, educate the consumer, generate leads and establish industry prominence. Formerly the product of IT and highly technical fields, white papers, sometimes called "special" or "free" reports, have moved into the realm of business to business and even business to consumer communications. Well written white papers are easily accessible, provide valuable information and appeal to the target audience.

White papers and ROI

As traditional forms of advertising falter and consumers turn to online media, white papers are becoming the standard for low cost, highly effective marketing in any industry requiring a researched or carefully considered purchasing decision. Unlike an advertisement in a newspaper or trade publication, which is only effective during the short period in which the publication is current, white papers enjoy a very long shelf life.

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Since most white papers today are produced as PDF files, they can be easily distributed and passed from reader to reader and colleague to colleague through social media, social networks and email. With the ability to rapidly spread information throughout the internet, top white papers can go "viral" which can result in enormous returns both through leads and industry prominence.

The Versatility of Information

Unlike traditional advertising, because they are informative in nature, white papers can be used in a wide variety of applications. Along with lead generation, closing sales and establishing thought leadership, white papers make excellent public relations pieces. Reporters often

welcome quality information provided in a white paper which can lead to interviews and valuable media placements.

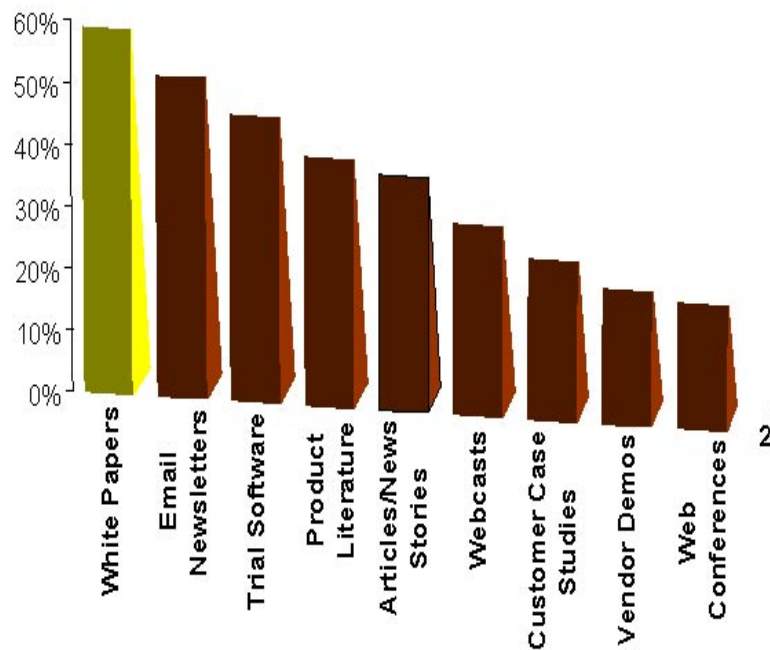
White papers can be used as the basis for articles pitched to trade publications or other media outlets. In these circumstances, the equivalent value in advertising dollars can pay for the white paper many times over.

When a white paper truly unlocks the knowledge confined within the walls of a company, it can also become an effective employee training document once again maximizing return on initial investment.

Since white papers present solutions to industry problems, they can form the foundation of powerful presentations. An informative presentation utilizing the white paper as a follow up can leave a lasting impression on potential clients and industry colleagues.

White papers can also play an important role in the sales process when used as leave behind pieces or “free offers” increasing the effectiveness of direct mail campaigns.

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In the three months prior to being surveyed, IT users claimed they used white papers more than any other media type to view or evaluate new technology information.³

It is this versatility that has led to the increasing popularity of white papers. From an ROI perspective, many businesses are discovering that just one sale can pay for the cost of a white paper many times over.

Elements of a Successful White Paper

As the popularity in white papers increases so does the use of the term. And without a written standard to define white papers, the term has been applied to everything from one page sales sheets to voluminous ebooks and more. Regardless, there are certain qualities that differentiate successful white papers from less informative, less successful marketing pieces.

Sell the information, not the product

First and foremost, successful white papers provide useful information. The focus is on informing the reader, not selling a product. They present a solution to a problem and in the process, engage and build trust with the reader. They are objective and the company producing the paper often won't mention products until the very end of the report if at all. It is the trust and connection with the reader built upon the value of the information provided that creates a desire for more information and in turn, qualified leads.

Unfortunately, many white papers fail to accomplish their intended objective due to an over emphasis on company name, product features or empty sales jargon as opposed to quality, researched information. Successful white papers overcome the lack of traditional salesmanship by ending with a powerful call to action. This call to action can be very effective due to the reader engagement and trust which has been established by the end of the document.

Engage the reader

Second, a white paper needs to be engaging. The copy must lead the reader through the document starting with the opening paragraph. It is also important to mention length at this point. While white papers were once long, technically dense documents, modern white papers hit their mark somewhere between 6-11 pages. Longer than 11 pages and you decrease the chance the white paper will be read. Too short and the white paper will fail to provide the information needed to build rapport and connection with readers.

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Clean, Simple Design

Finally, successful white papers rely on tested design elements that guide the reader through the paper. They accommodate the initial need to skim yet draw the reader into the paper through a limited number of informative graphics and highlighted information which add to the discussion at hand.

Creating Successful White Papers

As white papers increase in popularity, more and more businesses are turning to outsourced professional writers who specialize in white papers as opposed to in-house IT specialists, engineers or copywriters. Aside from recent studies demonstrating the cost effectiveness of outsourcing, the highly specialized nature of white papers has created an entire niche of writers who specialize in the unique demands of the white paper. These white paper specialists combine the ability to conduct efficient, thorough research with the skills to translate complex information into accessible, persuasive text.

White papers require highly engaging, persuasive copy which encourages the target audience to read, absorb the information at hand and take a specific action. As businesses turn to white papers, a model has evolved which can be modified depending on target audience and the defined objectives of the white paper.

For this reason, a high value is placed on finding a professional writer who specializes in the unique demands of the white paper and also can research and translate complex information for the target reader. Businesses who utilize professional white paper writers quickly discover the advantages of a white paper professional as opposed to the in-house technical specialist who understands the information but struggles with the written portion of the paper.

White paper specialists also understand the complexities of marketing with white papers. This includes syndicating and maximizing return on the stated goals of the white paper. Often, a quality white paper is unsuccessful due to poor distribution or ineffective landing pages which fail to capture contact information.

“Professional writers specializing in white papers take an average of 24 hours to produce a white paper while in-house writers take an average of between 46-50 hours depending on their knowledge of the subject and their abilities as a writer.”⁴

White paper specialists can also help maximize return on white papers by modifying the information into other mediums such as PowerPoint presentations and video scripts. A good white paper specialist will serve as a marketing consultant ensuring that you receive maximum ROI on the project.

Finally, in terms of man-hours required to produce a white paper, outsourcing can prove cost effective due to the amount of time required to produce a white paper in house. According to a recent study, professional writers who specialize in white papers take an average of 24 hours to produce a white paper while in-house writers take an average of between 46-50 hours depending on their knowledge of the subject and their abilities as a writer.⁴ Outsourcing often proves a much more cost effective solution than pulling company experts away from job responsibilities allowing them to focus on what they do best.

Finding the Right White Paper Professional

Although growing, white paper specialization is still a fairly new field. Unfortunately, this can sometimes make it difficult to find copywriters trained in the unique demands of white papers. While it is best to find a writer who specializes in white papers, copywriters with a background in journalism, education and research often hold many of the skills required for writing white papers.

When seeking a white paper specialist, be sure to ask these five basic questions:

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- 1) Is the writer trained in the production of white papers?
- 2) Does the writer have a set process for researching and writing the white paper and what is the process?
- 3) Can the writer provide marketing consulting in order to maximize return on the white paper?
- 4) Can the writer provide writing services other than the white paper such as web copy and PowerPoint scripts?
- 5) Can the writer help develop a plan for syndication, distribution, lead capture etc.

While many copywriters can take on the basics of a white paper, the above questions should help you find a copywriter who can maximize returns on your white paper efforts.

Discovering White Paper Opportunities

Any business involved in B2B marketing which involves a considered purchasing decision can usually benefit from a white paper. However, without prior experience in the use of successful white papers, opportunities are often overlooked and marketing opportunities missed. Consultations with white paper specialists can often reveal unexplored white paper topics and in turn, open a number of marketing opportunities.

Due to their ability to educate potential clients on first contact, develop quality leads, establish industry prominence, and maximize ROI, businesses looking to move forward in today's difficult economy should fully explore opportunities for white papers.

Contact Us Today for a Free White Paper Analysis

If you are looking to take full advantage of the power of white papers and information marketing, contact Jim Lodico, white paper specialist and marketing consultant, at jalodico@whitepapersolution.com. He can help you develop your current white paper ideas, explore new avenues or analyze your current white paper marketing efforts.

*Mention this report and receive a 10% discount
on your first white paper project.*

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¹Tech Target, "Tech Target 2008 Media Consumption Benchmark Report; Perception Versus Reality of the IT Pro and IT Marketer." 2008 7-19. 25 Feb 2009 <<http://www.techtarget.com/downloads/studies/TechTargetMediaConsumptionQ108.pdf>>.

²(Ibid)

²(Ibid)

⁴Stelzner, Michael. "White Paper Writer Industry Report." *White Paper Source Publishing* (2007): 17