

5 Reasons Versatile White Papers Can Improve Your Marketing Mix

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In today's difficult economy, marketing management is faced with challenges on two fronts: return on marketing investment and effectiveness of marketing mix. Management is demanding that marketing activities produce the most measurable value possible from every dollar spent. At the same time, marketing must cut through communications clutter in the marketplace to deliver a credible message to the right audience.

White papers are versatile, credible and cost-effective tools to inform, educate and engage prospective buyers with low-key messaging that rises above the overt marketing noise in a target market. This paper discusses current marketing challenges and how white papers can be used in multiple ways among diverse audiences to improve marketing mix results.

Show me the money

A State of Marketing Study by Prophet, a branding and marketing research firm, found that senior management increasingly looks to marketing to enable, if not drive, short- and long-term business growth. Nearly one-third of the respondents ranked improved effectiveness of marketing spend as one of the top three priorities of their chief executives, companies, and the marketing group.

However, a full 40 percent of respondents' companies put greater emphasis on the overall budget rather than ensuring that the budget was ideally allocated — indicating that more attention needs to be paid to creating the optimal marketing mix. Yet that's difficult to achieve given the number of barriers to better understanding marketing return on investment: 57 percent of respondents acknowledged that they have neither the right models nor analytic tools; 48 percent cited a lacking in market data and research.

Marketers are responding to these problems through the increasing use of a number of marketing ROI measurement tools—from financial techniques that measure traditional activities to research methods that measure attitudes, perceptions and other intangibles.

However, marketing ROI is only one of the major challenges facing marketers today. A second significant problem is improving marketing mix by identifying marketing communications media and tools that will cut through the messaging clutter and create credibility that drives purchases.

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Sorry, can't hear you and don't trust you

Marketers today have a seemingly endless variety of channels through which to advertise their products. From print ads, collateral, and television commercials to leading edge mobile text message advertising, Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, and online banners, there is no shortage of ways to gain exposure for a product or deliver messages to prospective buyers. It is estimated that consumers see some 3,500 advertising messages a day. And the number is going up.

Consequently, buyers in both business and consumer markets are being overwhelmed with marketing communications overload. It is impossible to keep track of everything marketers are trying to tell prospective buyers. This clutter makes consumers less likely to pay attention to marketing messages.

Furthermore, clutter breeds avoidance behavior and skepticism, which makes consumers more likely to actively resist marketing messages. In the fall of 2006, comScore Networks conducted a survey¹ of 1,000 respondents representing the general Internet population:

Where would you find *trustworthy advertising* for any product or service?

Advertising Medium - Percent of respondents

- TV - 63%
- Corporate sites - 51%
- Print - 50%
- News/Media sites - 49%
- Radio - 28%
- User Generated Content Sites (UGC) - 23%
- Billboard - 19%

There are at least two significant takeaways from this survey:

- It appears the majority of people do not believe advertising is trustworthy for products and services. The lack of trust could be because many companies and ad agencies use way too much hype; focus too much on the creative and not enough on the consumer; and don't understand how to build trust elements into their advertising.

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- If a company can create trustworthy advertising, it can significantly differentiate itself in the minds of potential customers and win more business.

Faced with these challenges, successful marketers are turning increasingly to white papers as persuasive tools to rise above clutter and create credibility.

What is a white paper?

White papers have come a long way from their origins as government briefing documents. Today they are used to create a positive image of a company and the ability of its products or services to solve a particular problem and provide a business advantage.

A white paper is a cross between a magazine article and a brochure. It combines the objective and educational approach of an article with persuasive information typically found in product brochures. Its credibility comes from providing valuable information to specific audiences in a soft-sell, problem-solving context.

Because white papers are information-based and focused on problem-solving, not selling, they are effective across a wide range of industries and multiple levels of buying influences and decision makers. There are three primary types of commercial white papers:

- **Business Benefits** – Typically targeted at management-level influencers and decision-makers and address the business benefits of the application discussed.
- **Technical** – Widely used in the technology market to provide detailed information to users, specifiers, and influencers on how products and services work and details of their design and performance.
- **Hybrid** – A cross between business and technical white papers that is aimed at both of the above groups and discusses the business benefits of the application as well as its technical details.

All three types of papers are useful in generating leads and supporting the business development process and can be used to support a value proposition targeted to a particular audience.

White papers have credibility and marketing usefulness due to their semi-third-party objectivity and emphasis on problem identification and problem solutions. They are not brochures, case studies, or technical specification sheets, although they effectively support the use of these and other tools at the appropriate time in the sales process.

Research indicates that major disappointments among white

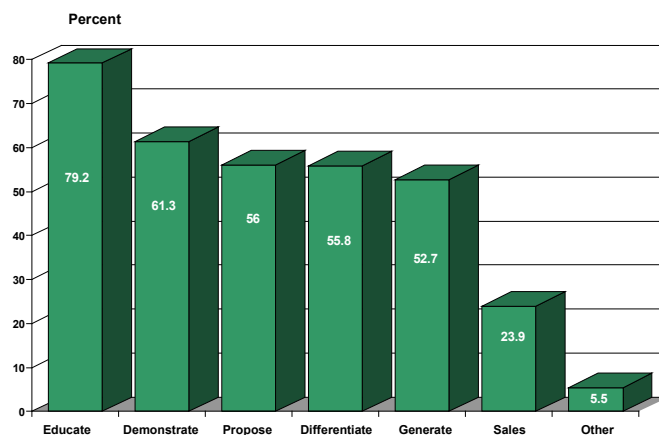
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paper readers relate to their being too product-oriented, not focused on problem-solving, or too long, depending on the audience. The length of white papers has been decreasing, and today they tend to be from 5 to 12 pages, with an average of 6 to 8 pages.

White papers are versatile and effective

White papers are used for a wide range of applications to support business development. Depending on the communications objective and target audience, they are useful to educate, demonstrate thought leadership, propose ideas, create competitive differentiation, generate sales leads, and as a sales closing tool. The chart in Figure 1 compares applications.

Figure 1 - How white papers are used



Source: White Paper Writer Industry Report

White papers have multiple uses in the purchasing cycle. Beginning with the perception of a need, and moving through research and evaluation to the purchase decision, a white paper is typically viewed by both influencers and decision makers. This is particularly true of hybrid papers that discuss both business benefits and technical characteristics of the product or service.

Based on the buying cycle characteristics of a particular industry, a related series of short papers addressing needs at each phase of the cycle can be targeted to specific buying influencers and decision-makers as the cycle develops.

In terms of marketing collateral costs, white papers outperform traditional collateral such as brochures in terms of their credibility, their production costs, and their consumption.

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In August 2008, Eccolo Media, a content strategy services company, fielded a research study of 155 buyers, all of whom said they'd made or influenced a buying decision in the last six months, asking

specifically about how they consume marketing collateral.

Among the insights into the marketing collateral mix:

- White papers remain the most effective piece of marketing collateral, with 86% of respondents finding them moderately to highly influential in the purchasing decision.

When asked to rank order the importance of white papers, case studies, podcasts, videos and brochures, survey participants overwhelmingly ranked white papers as the most important collateral they use when making buying decisions.

- Product brochures and data sheets were the most frequently consumed collateral type, yet they were also most frequently ranked as the least influential.

TechTarget recently released its Media Consumption Benchmark Report, a very comprehensive analysis of white papers as a marketing tool. While the survey addressed the technology market, the highlights below are relevant in many other marketing environments.

- White papers are number 1 for people evaluating a solution. The white paper still sits at the top for evaluations, with 59% saying they rely on white papers more than newsletters (51.8%), trials (46.2%), product literature (40.7%), articles (38%), webcasts (47.7%), case studies (25.7%), podcasts (9.3%) and virtual trade shows (8.4%).
- Buyers read numerous white papers. 52% read 5 or more white papers in a three month period of time. In addition, buyers consume more white papers than any other type of media.
- Two big disappointments with white papers: The two biggest turn offs to buyers are white papers that are too product focused or too long.
- White papers are the most effective information source to buyers. 80.5% of buyers find white papers to be either very effective of somewhat effective in the decision making process, more so than any other marketing tool.
- White papers are number one for building awareness and consideration among buyers. 47.6% of buyers use white papers to gain awareness and 35.7% use them when considering a solution. This places white papers above all other forms of marketing for gaining awareness and consideration.
- White papers are the most forwarded material among buyers: 41.6 percent of buyers either frequently or very frequently forward white papers to friends or colleagues.

The information above is representative of the large body of research and literature indicating the value of white papers as

marketing tools.

Summarized below are 5 compelling reasons why marketing professionals should increase their development of marketing programs around white papers as powerful components of a cost-effective marketing mix.

5 good reasons to use white papers

What follows are 5 validated reasons why marketers should seriously consider adding white papers to their mix of marketing tools:

1. **Top source for lead generation:** The vast majority (74%) of professional services companies ranked white papers as an excellent source of lead generation according to a RainToday.com study.

White paper lead generation is growing in popularity for several reasons. In the digital age, web presence is no longer an option but mandatory for any company's growth. Capturing valuable information from visitors who are looking for information and are willing to subscribe to read it, can only mean that they have serious interest in this product. Customers coming to a company for information are the strongest leads obtainable.

2. **Most consumed form of marketing communications:** Research by KnowledgeStorm indicates that white papers are read more than case studies, product literature, articles from industry journalists, analyst reports, company websites, webcasts, blogs, online video and podcasts.

Buyers frequently read a wide variety of web content with more than 60% of respondents indicating they often read case studies, product literature, articles from industry journalists and analyst reports. White papers are frequently read by the largest number, 71% of respondents. Barely half read corporate website, which makes the product and service information in the more objective format of white papers increasingly important.

3. **Highly viral marketing tool:** Nearly 3 in 5 readers (57%) pass white papers along to colleagues and coworkers, also according to KnowledgeStorm.

Only white papers are passed along this frequently. Two possible reasons are the large number of individuals who may be interested in the typical content of white papers and the fact that their PDF format facilitates sharing.

4. **Number one way businesses evaluate solutions:** For evaluating technology, the TechTarget Media Consumption Benchmarking survey mentioned earlier found that white papers are used more than email newsletters, product literature, articles, software downloads, webcasts, and case studies.

According to the study, the top three reasons people read white papers are:

- To stay on top of new and emerging markets/technology (64%)

- To obtain preliminary information about products and vendors (60%)
- To find solutions for solving problems (54%)

In the three months preceding the study, respondents downloaded between 1 and 10 white papers. Downloads primarily occur early in the purchase cycle to research products and vendors. However, white papers are also used by a majority of respondents in both mid and final stages of the buying cycle – to identify technical features and compare products as part of a competitive analysis process.

5. Popular for people looking to solve problems: The majority of people use white papers to find solutions for solving problems, as noted above.

For both usage and effectiveness, white papers get high ratings. They are used early in searching for problem solutions and have significant credibility and acceptance among readers for the manner in which information is presented.

White papers ranked highest in information source usage, above search engines, trial downloads, and vendor websites, and ranked above everything except software downloads in effectiveness.

The value of external resources

Based on the facts above and a vast body of credible literature and experience, white papers are valuable and versatile marketing tools. They are cost-effective to produce and deploy, respected for their credibility and information, and relied on by buyers throughout the purchasing cycle.

If your marketing organization is not using white papers now to improve its marketing mix, selecting an outside white paper resource based on their ability to effectively translate complex technical data into clear and concise business-oriented information should be an important consideration when starting or expanding a white paper project.

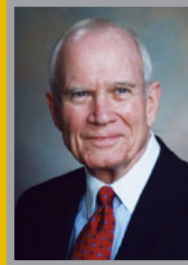
Outsourcing white paper writing projects offers several advantages:

- Saves time
- Improves white paper quality
- Frees staff for other important tasks

Since an external white paper writer has not been exposed to the same product biases as the internal subject matter expert, there is a higher likelihood that the information will be presented in a more straightforward fashion. This increases its appeal to a wider audience, especially to someone completely unfamiliar with either the company or the solution.

The bottom line is this: You and your staff are paid to be good marketers. White paper writers are paid to be good writers. We complement each other. Internal subject matter experts don't always make great communicators, so use your internal subject expert(s)

for content input and to validate technical accuracy. Employ a competent and experienced external white paper writer to present that information in a clear and concise fashion so that it can reach the broadest audience and make the greatest impact possible.



If you are interested in finding a good white paper writer to lend you a hand, contact James Salter, the author of this paper.

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