4 Powerful Ways that White Papers Grow Your Brand

By Chris Reimann (Vice President, Principal)

To put a slight spin on a well-known Mark Twain quote, “The rumors of my demise are greatly exaggerated” is a phrase that could easily be applied to the topic of white papers. There has been talk in the industry about how the rise of e-books has made the white paper outdated. I have clients who have switched from using white papers to e-books, with perceptions that the former is too much of a book report. They are not wrong in their decision to use e-books and they benefit greatly from those assets. But, we should keep in mind that white papers and e-books are not the same type of asset and do not necessarily fulfill the same objectives. E-books are not the new (substitute for) white papers.

Yes, both can be excellent lead generators, promote one’s products/services and help to establish brand presence. But, from here, their purpose and value proposition begins to diverge. In this age of instant gratification and limited attention spans, e-books are a useful medium for presenting facts and figures quickly and without a lot of explanation; they provide a format for key headlines. White papers provide a format for more in-depth content and explanation of the topic. White papers can initiate the buying process just as e-books do; however, they are also often critical to informing decision makers throughout that journey, particularly where products and market issues are more complex. Therefore, they become an important resource that should not be mistaken as being the same as other marketing assets.

Below are 4 powerful inter-related reasons to use and benefit from white papers.

- **Your brand becomes known as a thought leader.** By design, the white paper format enables more in-depth content. This provides a win/win for both you and the customer. In industry segments that experience volatility, are complex, and/or are ever-evolving, customers need guidance for their everyday responsibilities and challenges. Where products and solutions are an investment for these challenges rather than just a purchase, the customer needs to make a well-informed decision; and, he/she often needs to sell that to other internal stakeholders. The white paper provides a platform to provide that detailed guidance and education on solutions. The result is that your brand establishes necessary credentials to be seen as the expert; your brand voice can be strategic rather than tactical. And, where you clearly convey that you understand the issues and solutions past, present and future, your brand becomes known as a thought leader.

- **Your brand establishes necessary trust with buyers.** When conducting research on key provider criteria, trust is often among the top attributes cited by purchase decision makers. Solution investments are not just about benefitting the customer’s organization – though this is the major goal; these decisions are also personal. That is often forgotten. One bad investment decision can ruin one’s career. E-books can give the facts; but, if written properly, white papers establish the connection that makes buyers turn to a provider for advice and guidance.

- **Your brand gains a competitive advantage.** As the phrase goes, “there’s power in numbers” and that is the case here. The more white papers you publish, the more exposure you receive and the more often decision makers should seek out your advice. That is critical in sectors where competitors have become fragmented, with new entrants from historically different categories entering your industry segment. An example is with technology. In the past, there was a fairly clear definition of technology competitors – these were quite often the manufacturer of the hardware or software. But now, the lines have blurred; SaaS (software-as-a-service), cloud-based applications, consultants, media content providers, and many others compete for the same space as the traditional HPs, Dells and Oracles of the world. This causes confusion for customers. A well-developed thought leadership strategy delivered through white papers can push your brand forward, through this noise.
Your brand develops followers and loyalists. In this age of social media, brands have as much opportunity to develop followers – whether via LinkedIn, Facebook, etc. – as you and I do on a personal level. That has changed the competitive game; if your brand is not out there in a meaningful way, your message can get lost in the endless number of posts. Building up a base of followers and loyalists is an essential part of staying on top of those posts.

KS&R can help. We have experience with developing engaging, client-branded white papers that marketers use to improve their brand positioning and drive sales growth. We understand the need to make white papers compelling in ways aligned with messages you want to convey, to base these on multiple, integrated sources of information that adds validity, and to make content easy to read and engaging so that your target constituents leverage the insights and share them widely.

About the Author

With 20+ years’ experience, Chris has a broad consulting background guiding clients with market opportunity analysis, fraud and financial crime assessment, customer needs exploration and new product/service development. Skilled at both qualitative and quantitative research methods, Chris applies proven creative approaches designed to unlock the functional and emotional drivers of customer behaviors and decision processes, such as through ethnography, personification and segmentation. He holds a BA from St. Bonaventure University and an MBA from the Whitman School of Management at Syracuse University.