Bringing New Color to the Gray World of White Papers
By Jonathan Kranz

One of the most powerful ways B2B marketers can attract qualified leads is by offering expertise in exchange for contact information. Whether you call the resulting deliverable a "report," an "e-book" or a "white paper," the net effect is the same: You build credibility and trust by creating valuable content your prospects respect.

White papers have been with us for a loooong time. But innovations in printing and distribution – and even in the way we conceive of white paper content – have dramatically changed the game. Let's take a look at the ways we can bring color to the white paper – and multiply the impact of our efforts:

It's no longer linear, but *modular*
Traditionally, the white paper obeyed a formal model that presented a thesis, an executive summary, a persuasive "argument," and a conclusion followed by appendices of research and data.

If my primary purpose were to impress my college Expository Writing instructor, I might be tempted to comply. But my real goal is to attract and hold the attention of busy prospects with short attention spans and a single question burning in their minds: What's in it for me?

That's why I prefer a modular approach that favors scanning. That allows readers to pick and choose the sections relevant to them. That packages the content in small, stand-alone sections that have meaning in themselves – without requiring readers to absorb the entire paper end-to-end.

Hence the beauty of papers such as The Nine Noble Truths of Customer Experience. You don't care for six of them? Fine. But you might still find value in the other three. And that's enough.

It's no longer a heavy entree, but a *pu-pu platter*
The traditional white paper gives you a lot to chew on – perhaps more than you can swallow. Today, few of us have an appetite for long, uninterrupted blocks of text.

The alternative? Format your work in bite-sized pieces. The text body of any section can be "tenderized" with subheads and bullets. Better still, you can accompany the main dish with smaller appetizers, such as:

- Pull-quotes framed in graphic boxes that reiterate important points from the text
- Customer quotes relevant to the topic in the main body
- Call-outs of relevant, "did you know?" type statistics
- Sidebars of real-life anecdotes or mini case studies that illustrate the main point
- Illustrations, photos, charts, graphs that support your text

See this idea in action: 7 Savvy Practices for More Efficient and Effective Resident Screening.

It's no longer dry, but *rich and flavorful*
Moses earned the right to speak from the mountain top. But for the rest of us, the voice of commanding authority – the dry, distant tone affected by too many businesses – is a pretentious relic. Today's white paper breaks the mold in two important ways:

- The *tone* can be conversational, informal, collegial. It's me to you. As if we're having a coffee and sharing terrific ideas sketched on the backs of paper napkins.
- The *look* is no longer confined to black text on white or beige paper. Innovative marketers are using design and illustration to create themes, attract attention and complement written ideas.

Even if you choose not to download this ebook, I think you'll be impressed by the quality of its cover: St. Jacques Big 30 Benchmark Report on Franchise Marketing.

It's no longer confined to paper, but open to *PDF distribution*
And that changes everything! Now that white papers are available electronically, they can be distributed online with ease. Once online, viral marketing via blogs, Twitter and other social media resources can play a major role in getting the word out – and your white paper in the hands of thousands of readers.

Take a look at how Daniela Barbosa promoted her ebook on her blog. *The Conversational Corporation*, written in collaboration with Robert Scoble, Shel Israel and Greg Merkle, is not only a provocative written document, it's a catalyst for media events, webinars, video roundtables and open social media conversations.

It's no longer passive, but incorporates a *call to action*
Were you to download any of the white papers I've linked in this article (and I hope that you read or see at least one), you would notice that none of them conclude with a traditional summary. Or worse, that prevalent call-to-inaction, the notorious, "…for more information, call…"

Instead, each ends with a checklist that recites every distinct idea in the white paper, and invites readers to ask themselves if they're applying or using that idea within their own organizations. This concluding checklist serves three purposes:

- It's a reminder of the value of the white paper itself, of just how much the authors (the business behind the paper) gave generously of its expertise.
- It moves readers from the abstract realm of "best practices" to the particulars of their organizations – to imagining the impact of these ideas (and by extension, the author's business proposition) on their lives or companies.
- Most importantly, it gives the reader a reason to take the next step, a reason to call the company – to get answers and insights on specific issues and how they can change the reader's life or business.

Get colorful

White papers can be extraordinary tools for establishing authority and expertise. By adding new color to a tried-and-true tactic, you gain a more powerful way to generate leads, attract favorable media attention and move prospects further along your sales pipeline.

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