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“Any room for another white paper?”

IS THE WHITE PAPER OBSOLETE?

It may be time to rethink the white paper as a demand generation tactic for B2B sales environments. For many, white papers have outlived their usefulness - because if marketers and sellers are honest with themselves there's little to show for their investments in time, energy and effort. In short, the ROI just doesn't add up. It's time to reassess this (now) age-old marketing ploy. Numerous alternatives have proven to be more effective and economical, one of which is recommended at the conclusion of this "white paper".

HOW THE WHITE PAPER CRAZE BEGAN

Pinpointing the origin of B2B white papers is difficult but there's no debating they caught fire in the electronic age. It's marketing content that's intended to be more dignified and less self-absorbed than its older cousin, the brochure - more informative and less freestyle than its

younger sibling, the blog post. White papers have served as an ideal medium for establishing credibility, introducing the latest and greatest or showcasing a new way of thinking about fixing common problems. These and a half-dozen other use cases are legitimate but at some point things spiraled out of control.

Over the past six years, the effectiveness of white paper marketing campaigns have declined 5% each year.

- DemandGen Report

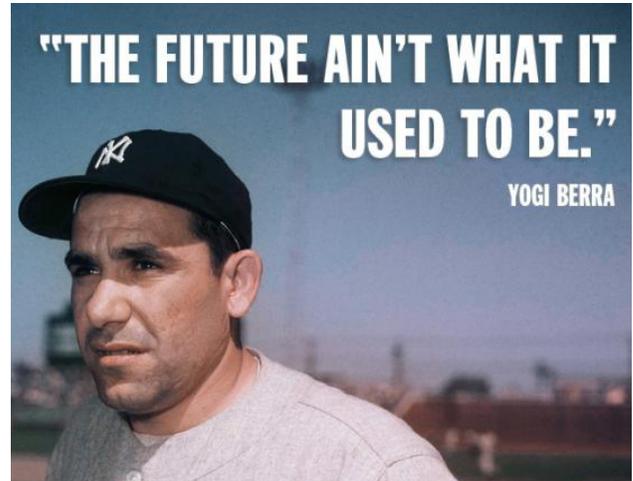


WHERE IT ALL WENT WRONG

Three Yogi Berra quotes illustrate the current state:

1 "THE FUTURE AIN'T WHAT IT USED TO BE"

White papers are failing to keep up with the market's pace of change. Today's thought-leading-position is quickly eclipsed by tomorrow's next disruptive concept. What's more, companies place an unfair burden on their best resources to keep the content current. An informal scan of white papers accessible on the sites of dozens of reputable B2B vendors reveals a painful truth...nearly all papers are stale relative to their original premise.



EXAMPLE:

In 2014, a highly regarded strategy firm published a comprehensive paper on the future of the truck industry – three years later it's still prominently displayed on their website. While many of the points remain relevant, most are stale. For example, the paper makes no mention of "artificial intelligence" – which according to many experts is now "the single most influential force for the truck of the future".

2 "NO ONE GOES THERE NOWADAYS - IT'S TOO CROWDED"

The deluge of available material makes it nearly impossible to cut through the clutter and capture attention. Prospects are inundated with ebooks, Executive Briefs, webinars, position papers and so on – And to no one's surprise it all looks and sounds the same to the buyer.

SiriusDecisions has found that buyers encounter 32% more marketing campaigns now than they did just two years ago.



3 "IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO GET A CONVERSATION GOING, EVERYBODY WAS TALKING TOO MUCH."

White papers are widely acknowledged as a part of a broad coordinated brand promotional effort. Yet, somehow marketers have lost sight of the objective to generate qualified leads. The lack of a standard format might be the leading culprit; it's led authors to jam pack their papers with unnecessary information with an unending flood of words, illustrations and uninspired prose.

BRING WHITE PAPERS TO LIFE WITH UNSOLICITED PROPOSALS

It’s an unfortunate reality that so much of an organization’s best, most creative thinking rarely gets it’s chance to influence a decision maker because it’s buried in a white paper. So, why not convert the narrative to customer-specific call-to-action stories and launch a pre-emptive campaign directly to the key people?

The Unsolicited Proposal idea taps into the same instinct to rebuff an RFP wired for the competition. But in this case the “proposal” represents Step One of the sales cycle. This is not new; for years top-tier management consulting firms have incorporated Unsolicited Proposals in their arsenal of tactics to forge new relationships - (ask any senior partner at McKinsey or Bain). Granted, their advisory capacity licenses this type of approach but that doesn’t mean

others shouldn’t adopt the thinking. In fact, Unsolicited Proposals are ideally suited for complex sales environments where common demand generation challenges such as opening doors to greenfield accounts, access to the C-Suite, and overcoming a commodity identity are mission critical.

“UNSOLICITED PROPOSALS”
- by any other name -

Other labels assigned to this demand creation tactic include ‘Big Idea Storyboard’, ‘Pre-emptive Business Case’, ‘Point-of-View Bids’, even “Door Openers.”

Despite different names each applies a “shape your own destiny” thought process.

The ideal label is typically a reflection of an organization’s sales culture.

Exhibit 1

	WHITEPAPER	UNSOLICITED PROPOSAL
MENTALITY 	Hope as a Strategy	Why Wait?
		Make Something Happen
		Win in Arena of Ideas
FORMAT 	Semi-generic	Ultra-specific
	Kinda’ Like a Fancy Report	Kinda’ Like a Well Told Story
	Predictable	Refreshing
RYTHYM 	Create Awareness	Spark Imaginations
	Static	Fluid

GOOD NEWS FOR ENTERPRISE SALES TEAMS

Enterprise sales operations' investments in industry expertise, personalized intelligence, storytelling, and Account-Based Marketing type programs are starting to pay off. These sorts of initiatives are the enablers to developing credible Unsolicited campaigns. That's good news because a proficiency for shaping the story and executing the delivery are the two basic requirements to scale the approach. The *better* news is prospects (particularly C-suite execs) are craving proactive out-of-the-box thinking. And the *best* news: once the proficiencies

are operationalized they've proven to outperform white papers at a fraction of the time, effort, and cost.

UNLOCKING HIDDEN POTENTIAL

Simply put, white papers represent a "play-not-to-lose" mentality. As a result, more and more companies are creating a new urgency in their demand generation models by replacing the status quo with bolder initiatives. It's a shift that may someday render the white paper obsolete.

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