
INTERVIEW WITH STEVE SLAUNWHITE:

“POSTING YOUR WHITE PAPER ON YOUR WEB SITE IS NOT ENOUGH!”

80% of companies just post their white papers on their website and dejectedly watch them gather dust.

Industry leading copywriter Steve Slaunwhite, in an interview with Sheldon Gladstein of Gladstein Consulting, discusses a comprehensive yet simple marketing plan for companies looking to drastically improve their white paper performance.

SG – Why is it that companies just post a white paper on their website and do little else to promote it?

SS – It’s inexperience.

A lot of companies just aren’t aware of just how many ways they can use a white paper. Because even though it’s been around a few years, it’s a relatively new type of document. The brochure has been around for a couple of hundred years. So when a marketing communications manager or a company produces a brochure, they know how to use it.

With a white paper, they really don’t know. They just don’t have a lot of experience.

SG – What are some of the ways to market a white paper effectively?

SS - First of all, the best practice is this: A white paper needs to be promoted and sold as if it has a price tag on it. In other words, it’s not enough to just have a white paper posted on your website, and say hey, here’s our latest white paper, download it for free. That’s it’s not enough anymore... you need to promote a white paper as if it has a price tag on it, as if you are going to sell it, and are going to get money for it in exchange.

As a matter of fact, a white paper should be written with the same mindset. When you write a white paper, you should be writing it from the viewpoint of “I’m going to charge \$50 dollars for this white paper, so I’m going to make sure that the content is so captivating that it’s worth \$50 to someone who is going to buy this.”

You should promote it with the same mindset. You need to create a separate page for it on your website, and have copy for it that persuades, and compels someone to buy the white paper. And the way they buy the white paper is they give you their contact

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information in exchange for the white paper. So you've got to sell it... just because it's free doesn't mean that people are going to beat a path to its door.

If the white paper costs fifty dollars, you know instinctively that just posting the white paper on your site and placing a fifty dollar price tag on it is not enough to sell. You are going to have to have some descriptive copy that is going to motivate them to buy. You are going to need to describe what's inside, what benefits someone is going to get from it when they download it... you are going to have to do some selling. Same thing with a white paper even though it's free. You've got to sell the free offer.

You've got to have a link on the front page to the white paper, and a separate page just promoting the white paper with a form integrated in it.

SG – OK, and the fact that you present it in a way that it's worthy of the money or whatever it is that you are paying for it adds to the customer feeling that the customer is gaining something of value. Is that a fair statement?

SS – That's right.

Now, the next thing you have to do – after you create that landing page, you have to actively promote that white paper. And the way you do it is you send a notice in your company e-zine, if the company has a newsletter, or an opt-in e-mail list if the company has an opt-in e-mail list.

Next, you need to get the white paper produced in print format. A lot of people only get the white paper produced in .pdf format. Get a nice print version done, and distribute it to your sales people. Because it is an excellent selling tool. Especially when it is used as a “leave behind.” When a salesperson does a presentation, for example, they are obviously going to have brochures available to leave behind with the prospect after the presentation. But brochures frankly end up in the garbage. A white paper has a greater chance of staying on the prospect's desk.

SG – How well produced do you think the physical version needs to be? Does it need to look slick, like a brochure, or something a little bit less than that?

SS – As a matter of fact, it should never look slick like a brochure. If it looks slick like a brochure you ruin it. It's nice to have a professionally designed cover. But the interior layout of a white paper should be plain, professional, simple. The word “white” is there on purpose. Lots of white space. Not a lot of fancy graphics, not a lot of fancy layout. If the pages of a white paper look the same as the pages of a fancy brochure or even a magazine, you ruin it.

And it shouldn't even look like the other marketing materials. It should be completely set apart. There's a lot of marketing communications people who say that they want to keep a consistent brand look on everything, so they want all the brochures to look kind of like

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the ad, and the ad to look kind of like the website, so it looks like it's part of one big brand family. But white papers should look completely different, distinctively different. It should look like it came from outside the company. And that adds to the sense that it's an unbiased piece. So the white paper looks like it has nothing to do with marketing, and marketing communications, and branding and product branding and things of that nature.

SG – How far do you go with that – do you not even put the logo of the company on the front cover?

SS – The logo of the company is important, but I always suggest putting it on the interior page or on the back page. And on the front page you should keep it as simple as possible. “Compliments of UPS Logistics Group” or “Compliments of ...” whatever the company is. And some companies put a stylized logo there, but very small. You know, compliments of. But you want the white paper to seem like it comes from outside of the company. It needs to seem as unbiased and impartial as possible. Steer clear of the brochure look.

So, you want to get them into your hands of your salespeople. That's one thing that's going to get more people actually to go to the website and download it. Because they will realize there is a white paper and they will tell colleagues about it. That's one of the things that increases downloads of the white paper. Strangely enough, when you give out print versions, people lose the print versions, they go to the website to download another one, people want to send copies to their colleagues, things of that nature.

White papers also make an excellent speaking topic. Company executives speak at conferences, at meetings, at gatherings within the industry... you can take a white paper, and very quickly turn it into a PowerPoint presentation and a speech. The executive gives a power point presentation on the topic of the white paper – and guess what the hand out is to the audience – the actual white paper. That's another way to use it.

It's also a very good lead generation piece. You can create a one page letter that has a picture of the white paper on it, and offer it to prospects in a direct mail sales letter campaign to generate leads. You'll typically get a very good response rate – much better than just about any other time of lead generation letter you can send. It will do very well – you can get response rates of 3, 5, 7 percent sometimes. It depends of course on how enticing the white paper is.

Also, white papers are very effective at trade shows, as a trade show handout. At trade shows people often hand out brochures. The problem with brochures is that – if you're at an industry trade show, and you go booth to booth, by the time you walk down a single aisle, you're going to collect a bagful of brochures. A white paper, however, stands out from the crowd of stuff that a visitor will collect. Because it's different, because it's not a brochure, it has a better chance of being kept and read, while frankly a lot of the brochures that get picked up at a trade show get tossed in the trash later on. It's just that there are so many of them!

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Also, depending on the topic of the white paper, if it's a particularly compelling topic, if it's something that is really new, unique and different – if it's like a brand new technology that no one has, for example – it might be worth creating a press release and sending a press release with the white paper to editors.

SG – Sending the actual white paper as well to the editor?

SS – It depends on the editor. If you know the editor send the white paper. If you don't know the editor, put a note at the bottom of the press release saying that if you'd like to review the white paper please contact us, we'll send you one, that kind of thing, just so you can measure response in some way - But a lot of trade editors, business editors, industry publication editors, both online publication editors and print publications may be interested in that news. Again, there are ways to structure a press release, it has to be newsworthy, you can't send a press release for every white paper you come out with, because you're just not going to get media attention that way. But if you have something that is truly unique, then issuing a press release can be a very valuable thing as well.

I think I covered the ways – those are the best practices.

And for every white paper you develop you should have a comprehensive plan, there should be a campaign, just like any other campaign, because white papers can generate a lot of high quality leads for a company that they wouldn't otherwise get. So it's worth leveraging a white paper in every way possible – leveraging it for all it's worth.

SG – So just leaving it there on the website to gather dust is just very wrong practice.

SS – No, and about 80% of companies unfortunately do that. They may do a couple of the things that we've mentioned, but they don't create a comprehensive campaign. These aren't complicated campaigns – it's not a fancy direct mail piece, it's just a one page letter. It's not a high quality print design piece, it's a low quality very simple print piece that you produce... so this isn't an expensive comprehensive campaign at all, it's a very simple, low cost campaign to develop to promote your white paper... taking a white paper can creating some power point slides – that's some pretty easy stuff. Much easier than creating a new product brochure and getting that out there. But a lot of companies just don't do it. Either they don't see the value in it, or they don't know what they should do. Mostly it's the latter.

SG – What do you think of pay-per-click advertising, Google Adwords and the like for white papers? Have you encountered that at all? Does it make you seem not as “big time” as you should be, that kind of hesitation?

SS – No... Google Adwords and the other forms of pay per click advertising are like any other kind of advertising. When it works, it works beautifully. When it doesn't work, it's really really expensive. I would suggest to any company to do all the other low cost

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things first to get promoted, then think of using advertising. And Google Adwords is just another, rather complex, form of advertising. Because you have to be able to choose the correct keywords, key phrases, you have to find out what you're potential customers are looking for, what they'll type into the search fields. Then you have to come up with an ad that will motivate them to click on it. And it's an expensive process, it takes a lot of testing. You're often testing two or three ads at the same time, rotating them, things of that nature. So it can be effective, because more and more people are using them, even on the business to business side of things, are using the search engines to research potential solutions to problems, potential new products and services, so it's an important one. But I would do all the other low cost things first, and see how successful that is, before you risk a large part of your marketing budget on Google. You've got to be able to do that right.

Here's another way to put it – don't just guess at the keywords and phrases, guess at the wording of an add, put it on Google and spend thousands of dollars on it – you know what I mean? There's more to it than that to get a good Adwords campaign to go properly. You have to test certain words and phrases, you've got to test certain versions of the ad. It's a process rather than an event. And when you get it working it can be very profitable. But when it's not working, or when you're during that test phrase it can be very expensive.

... A lot of people use Google Adwords to sell products, to sell information products. It's very easy to have a cost-benefit analysis, because you can directly connect how much Google Adwords is costing you versus how many sales you are getting. With a lead generating campaign like white papers, it's a little more difficult to connect the dots. You're spending \$5,000 a month on Google Adwords, for example – there are ways to connect it to how many white papers are being downloaded, but it's not an exact science – and how many of those are getting converted, it's not an exact science... it's tougher to measure the return on investment

SG – So this should be towards the end of the list of action items, if at all?

SS – Absolutely right. Saying that, some people think that Google Adwords is the begin-all and end-all of marketing. Some people think that all they have to do is do Google Adwords and nothing else to sell their product, generate leads, drive traffic to their site... It's such a competitive area now, it's very difficult to stand out, to get enough click-throughs, it's a lot of work. Don't ignore all those other things you should be doing, that often work better.

SG – Great! Thank you so much.

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About Steve Slaunwhite:

Steve Slaunwhite is an award-winning author, speaker and recognized expert in the best practices of high-response copywriting. To learn more about his work or for contact information go to <http://www.steveslaunwhite.com>.

About Sheldon Gladstein:

Sheldon Gladstein specializes in writing white papers that are clear, interesting and above all, highly effective. To learn more, visit www.WhitePapersThatWork.com, e-mail info@gladsteinconsulting.com or call (718) 874-9212.

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