TOP ADVISOR
MARKETING

THE ANATOMY OF A WHITE PAPER

Initially, a white paper, was a British term defining a type of government-issued document. Today, a white paper is more broadly defined as a form of marketing presentation - a tool meant to persuade prospects, clients, clients or centers of influence and promote a product or service viewpoint.

Typically, a white paper is viewed as an authoritative report that informs people about a complex issue and presents the author’s philosophy on the matter. A white paper is meant to help readers understand an issue, solve a problem of make a decision.

For financial advisors, a white paper is a strong and influential piece of content marketing. It’s a concept piece that shares an idea people should know about, need help identifying (and understanding) and help solving. The paper creates credibility and authority. Most financial advisors “get” that.

The challenge becomes How to build it. Knowing you need to do something and “making it happen” are often diametrically opposed. We know that because, although most financial advisors talk the talk about the importance of content marketing, less that 1% share their own, authentic insights with their unique personality.

This white paper takes a grassroots look at the essential building blocks (The Anatomy) of a white paper - how to create it the right way as easily as possible. This paper is not about selling you on the importance of a white paper. If you aren’t convinced yet, please take a browse through our podcasts at http://topadvisormarketing.podbean.com/ - Episode #45.

*This paper takes you from **“knowing you need one”** to “**having one.”***

THE BASICS

Before getting into the anatomy, there are a few definitions or standards that are worth a few minutes.

Length:

White papers can vary between 1,500 - 3,000 words. That's just a ballpark. Much shorter and it's more of an Article. Much longer and potential readers are likely to just skim it or not read it at all. In comparison, published articles are typically 800 - 1,500 words. Blog posts range from 400 to 1,200 words.

Narrative viewpoint:

One common question is whether the paper should be in 1st person (I know, we believe) or 3rd person (it is known, there is a belief). First, I'll give you the answer, then I'll explain why. Or, said another way; first the answer will be provided, then the reasoning behind it. The answer is that both are fine and you should use whatever you feel more comfortable with. That said, if you are in a multi-advisor practice and you want the paper to add value to the firm and not you specifically, then the 3rd person would make more sense.

Here are a few pros and cons to each viewpoint:

- Writing in the 1st person is generally easier - however, a little practice and the third person can flow just as easily.
- The 1st person is more intimate and it's easier to let your personality shine through. However, once again, with practice, this can be true for the third person as well.
- The 3rd person is received subconsciously as more credible than 1st person – even using the past tense doesn't destroy this illusion.
- The 3rd person can more easily present a more global or environmental position than the 1st person,
- Using the 3rd person point of view provides the opportunity for a wider angle lens in story-teller.

Topic:

Of everything you learn reading this paper, this may be the most important. Know your topic. Don't try to write a paper about something you aren't familiar with. If you couldn't sit in front of a client and talk about the topic, unscripted for 15 - 20 minutes, it's probably the wrong topic. You'll see more about what to write about in The Anatomy sections but this was important enough to mention here.

Evergreen:

Resist the urge to date-stamp the language you use. Words like "things will change in 2010" became stale-dated somewhere around March 31, 2010. That can become a difficult challenge when calendar events are important to your topic. Your paper needs to live and provide value for 2 or 3 years. If you can talk about enduring philosophies, practices, thinking, systems, or techniques your paper is more likely to stand the test of time and feel applicable and relevant much longer.

Tone:

Be positive. Enough said.

THE ANATOMY

The term “anatomy” comes from ancient Greece meaning “to dissect”. If we stick with that definition, what follows is a dissection of the most important parts of a white paper. Consider the next five sections the essential stages for creating and publishing a whitepater; from conception to birth.

CONTENT - **Introduction**

Mr. Jowett, of Birmingham, tells of a lay preachers' conference, in which a veteran described his method of sermon preparation. "I take my text," he said, "and divide my sermon into three parts. In the first part I tell 'em what I am going to tell 'em; in the second part—well, I tell 'em; in the third part I tell 'em what I've told 'em."

— The "Sunday Strand. - Aug 13, **1908**"

Following the 3 steps, *"Tell them what you are going to tell then, tell them, tell them what you told them"* is a great way to think about how to position the content of your paper.

The Introduction "Tell them what you are going to tell them" can be the most important part. Not because it solves problems but, because it sets up the piece for the reader to understand if it's worth their time. Plain and simple.

The introduction needs to speak to specific issues; what they are and how they affect people and mention that the solutions are forthcoming. It's often easier to create the introduction in a conversational tone with a very specific person or audience in mind.

The introduction needs to outline:

- What the problem is.
- Why there is a concern.
- How the reader can recognize the issue.
- Who the issue affects.
- What solutions exist.

Stick to 2 or 3 issues/problems maximum or the reader may get confused. This is not a book. You want the reader to be able to read the paper in one sitting and absorb the problem and proposed solutions. If there is an urgency in changing behavior or making a decision, say so.

Hint to the call to action or next step but save the details for the next section.

CONTENT - **Solutions**

Start the main content, the solutions section, by listing the 2 or 3 things you will be proposing solutions for.

Then, take these problems one at a time and elaborate on them Provide use cases or theory to support the existence of the problem. Facts and figures are good here. Restate the urgency in new terms where possible.

Provide a solution, as it applies to your target audience. Support your proposed solution with resources to add credibility.

End this section with a step-by-step process of what the reader should to to either protect themselves from the problem (to avoid it in the first place) or what to do if they are already there and need a remedy. Wherever possible, provide more than one option.

CONTENT - **Conclusion**

In sticking with the theme, this is the “tell them what you told them” section.

Adults learn through repetition. Just because the problem and solution have been clearly described in the Solutions section does not mean that the reader will have absorbed it.

A common mistake any subject matter expert makes, including many financial advisors, is that people will understand what they have said because they could not have said it any clearer. Just consider how many times you have said something like “they heard what they wanted to hear”. It’s human nature, it’s normal and we all do it.

Your conclusion should:

- Restate problem(s) and its/their importance.
- Simplify, summarize and restate the steps to implement solutions.
- Paint a picture of what success look like.
- Offer your (or your firm’s) support in helping them move forward and make it easy for them to take the next step - with you. Your call-to-action.

Note - (in case this is the first time you read one of our papers): Making it easy isn’t “call to book a no obligation consultation”. Making it easy is pointing them to your social media platform, another paper, an assessment, a checklist, a video or podcast. When they understand the urgency and, once they feel comfortable with who you are, they will reach out.

TITLE - **Naming Your Paper**

Most people, when they set out to write a paper, think about a title and then fit the content to meet that title. That creates restrictions when it comes to letting the content evolve as your brain works on both problems and solutions. To avoid those restrictions, the better way to give your paper a title is to first work on your concept and content then, once the thoughts are 90% articulated, give your piece a title that accurately reflects the content. That way you are free to take tangents and let your content flow conversationally without forcing it into the constraints of a pre-defined title.

Here are a couple of pointers for finding the right title:

- It needs to be compelling to get people to click on.
- People like lists - if you can make that fit, do so.
  Something like: Top 10 …. , or 5 Ways to… or 4 Secrets to...

PACKAGING - **Making it Look Great**

The best content in the world will get almost zero response if it isn't packaged properly. People are drawn to imagery, graphics, white-space, and design first and content second.

Cover Page:

The paper should have a cover page with a relevant image. It should have your logo and the title and not much else.

Hiearchy:

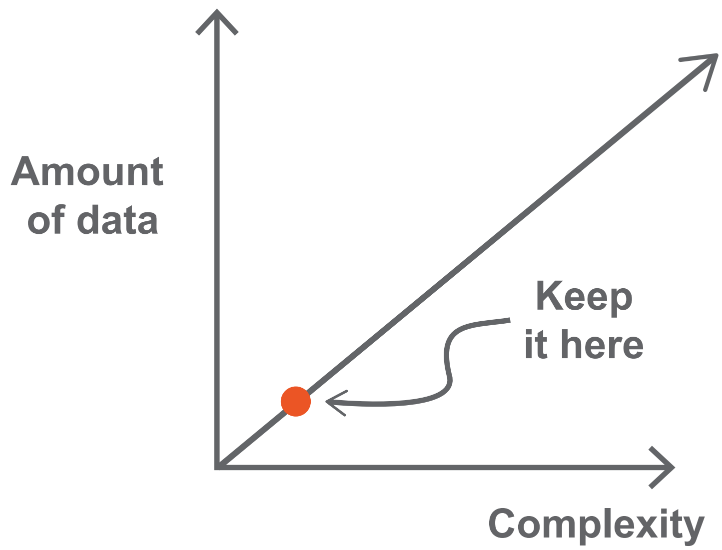
People need to be able to skim through the paper, picking out what they consider important and relevant. It may sound a little sad - since you put so much effort into it but, they should be able to get the general sense of the whole paper just by skimming. Once they have done that, they can decide whether or not it's relevant to them and whether or not they should actually read it.

Imagery:

Imagery is mostly important on long whitepapers. They break up the space and make the content appear easier to digest (more chewable bites). One word of caution though. It's better to have no imagery than to use stock, over-used or irrelevant images. When it comes to imagery, it's often best to seek the support of professionals. A bad image may result in a great paper never getting read. Whereas, a great image may help but it isn't a given.

Charts/Graphs:

Graphs have their place but if there is one piece of advice in this area is that, IF you need a graph, keep it simple. If a reader needs to think through the data, the chart will not work as desired. Four or five pieces of data is about the maximum the average reader can quickly absorb. On this point, the rules of the common comma apply; If in doubt, leave it out.



Design

Your whitepaper design needs to be simple and appealing.
Here are a few pointers:

- Colors: lots of contrast. 2 - 3 colors max. Consider using colors to help with visual representation of hierarchy of content.
- Fonts: Serif fonts are generally easier to read while sans serif fonts are more appealing to the eye. It's a bit of a judgment call there but the recommendation would be for serif-fonts on extremely technical documents and sans-serif on shorter, less formal pieces. Typically, a white paper would fall into the latter.
- Whitespace: Use plenty of it. Crushing your content to fit a fixed number of pages will result in hard-to-read documents. Spread it out.

Back Page

Use the back page or even the bottom section of the back page for your contact information - followed by your prescribed disclaimer.

CONCLUSION

A whitepaper is an important part of your content marketing strategy. It's an "easy Yes" way of initiating the start of a relationship with new prospects.

Keeping it to 1,500 - 3,000 words makes it easy for someone to read it in one sitting.

The whitepaper should solve problems for the people you are most interested in working with. The problems and solutions should be easy to understand and completely relevant.

Breaking the content up to a beginning, middle and end in the format of setting the stage, presenting solutions, reiterating the conclusion makes it easy to follow and understand.

Pick a title that is appropriate to what you have written only after you are nearly done writing it. Make the title catchy and compelling.

Finally, take the time to wrap it all up with a nice bow by getting help with the design.

Following all these steps will give you the best hope for a long lasting piece that your ideal prospects can benefit from for a long time to come.