

A CTC Publishing Mini-Report

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How to Manage Free Content for Marketing Success

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Introduction

Today's session is titled "How to Leverage Free Content for Marketing Success" with Bob Bly.

Bob is one of the world's top copywriters. He has written more than 70 books including *The White Paper Marketing Handbook* and *The Copywriter's Handbook*.

In this session, Bob reveals the many alternatives to white papers that can be used in free content marketing. You'll discover how you can use white paper services as a bridge to offering your clients other content services.

Presentation

You guys listening might think it's weird to end with a session called "White Paper Alternatives". After all, the summit is called The White Paper Success Summit. You've spent a number of weeks and a lot of sessions learning all the strategies for researching and writing very effective white papers and also how to get clients to hire you to write white papers for very nice fees.

So why am I talking about white paper alternatives? The white paper, when you think about it, is just a very specific format, one of many in the arena of marketing for free content. Everyone listening to this call knows that today a very hot, growing topic is giving away free content online and also offline as a marketing strategy. White papers are just one example of that. But white papers aren't the only example of that.

In addition, there are a couple of problems with white papers. I'm not saying you shouldn't write them, but let me tell you what the problems are. First of all, your clients generally fall into two areas. Some are going to come to you and say, "We need a white paper." If a client comes to you and says, "We need a white paper," they're going to pay the kind of fees that Michael and the others have been telling you they get. They have no problem if they want a white paper. They understand what it is and they need a writer.

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They don't have any problem hiring you for \$4,000, \$5,000, \$5,500 or \$6,000 to write that white paper.

But you're also going to have a situation where you're asked to do some marketing for a client and you decide that one of the strategies should be to give away some free content. But they've never thought of that and they really weren't interested in that. You suggest this strategy and they say, "Okay, you're our marketing gal or guy. We'll take your advice. What do we need?" You say, "Well, you need a white paper and it costs \$5,000." Those types of clients are often going to balk. They weren't planning on spending that much money. Unlike the first category of client, they have no desire for a white paper. It's just that you suggested content as a strategy and they're going along with you.

To be able to offer those clients free content marketing campaigns, you need to come up with some alternatives to white papers. Also, white papers, as good as they are, have one problem. The perceived value of a white paper is zero. If you go to the syndication sites that Michael has recommended like Bitpipe.com, you can download any white paper for free. In a way, that's good, but if something is always free, then it has no real high perceived value.

On the other hand, let's say you had a teleseminar series. I worked for a company that had a teleseminar series in the pharmaceutical industry. Pharmaceutical executives would listen to these things on regulations and marketing and whatever in pharmaceutical manufacturing. They would charge, for a 90-minute seminar, \$149. So we started giving away, as a premium, a CD with the teleseminar and the perceived value of that is \$149. It's a much more high-value premium. That's another reason why I say that a white paper is just one format. It's just one example of a content marketing campaign.

White Papers

Here's a white paper that I did for one of my clients. They were an enterprise software

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firm, so typically these companies think about doing a white paper. But you guys have a lot of other clients that don't fall into this category.

Michael works a lot for IT companies. One of the listeners on the call works in the aerospace industry. I work in the logistics industry. These are some industries that aren't used to white papers, so what else can you offer them? What alternatives to white papers can you write for them that are still a variation of the free content offer that a white paper is?

To give you an example, there's a company that advertises on the radio in the New York Tri-State Area and they sell advice for inventors. If you're an entrepreneurial type and you're inventing something, they help you market it and they help you patent it. I don't know how good or bad these services are. In their radio commercials they have a brochure, but they don't say, "Call up for a brochure," because a brochure, like a white paper, has a perceived value of zero. You don't pay for it. They say, "Call up for a free inventor's kit." Basically, they send you the brochure and some little tips on patenting your invention to make it more of a kit, but that sounds valuable. An inventor's kit sounds like something I want to have. It sounds like something that costs money, so that works very well.

There's a radio commercial in the DC area which is four hours south of where I live in New Jersey. They were advertising, years ago when Clinton was in the White House, a subscription to the conservative magazine *The American Spectator*.

I was driving along and they said, "If you call our toll-free number and subscribe now, you will get our *American Spectator's* red-hot, off-the-press report *Inside the Bill and Hillary Clinton White House*." It sounded like something exclusive, scandalous and really hot. What is was is that they had continuously run articles critical of the Clintons and they took two or three of those articles and reprinted them in a saddle-stitched folder, an eight- to 12-page brochure, and put a title on it and were offering that as a premium. Because it was titled *The Bill and Hillary Clinton Report*, a report sounds

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valuable. A white paper you can get for free, but there are a lot of reports out there that you have to pay for.

Guides and Manuals

Let's take a look at what else you could offer that is really very similar to a white paper in purpose and even in content, but packaged differently. One is a guide or a manual. In fact, I never call my white papers 'white papers'. I call them 'guides' and 'manuals'; guides if they tell you how to do something and manuals if they have referenced data.

Here's a program I did for Bulova Watch Company which was a guide on giving business gifts as incentives and premiums. The purpose of Bulova doing this is they were marketing and selling their watches as business gifts. So they put out, to help the buyer, *A Simple Guide to Running a Profit-Building Business Gift Program*. That was offered free to generate inquiries. They would send this guide that I wrote along with a very nice—this is pre-Internet—color catalog of all the Bulova watches that were offered as executive gifts.

Again, this is useful content that helps the reader make some kind of decision. Mike always talks about how you want to give them the specs and tell them, "Here's how to buy this thing." This is something that was a little variation of that. This just told them, "Here's how to use this thing. We have business gifts. Here's how to use them to maximum effect."

Guides and manuals are really effective.

Books

Here's an example of an IT company, a hardware company that has something to do with controlling server climates and power monitoring in IT rooms where they store the servers. This is more expensive than a white paper. They packaged it as a book.

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Although, really, you can take a relatively short document and with the right cover design and trim size, you can make it look like this and call it a 'book'.

People want books because books have a perceived value of \$10, \$15, \$20, \$25 or \$30, depending on whether it's a paperback or hardcover. I worked years ago for CoreStates Bank and when EDI, electronic data interchange, was becoming the hot technology and the next big thing, they hired a consultant who wrote a little paper for them, maybe a 10,000-word paper, and they published it as a very thin, little paperback called *How to Get Ready for EDI*. We offered it in our ads and I think the ad said, "From the bankers who wrote the book on EDI." That's an old, almost clichéd headline, but it works.

People in our society believe that if you have written a book on something, you are an expert. So when they look at this ad, "Server room climate worries? Get our free book," not only do they want to respond to get the free book, but they get the book and see the ad and say, "Well, these guys are experts. They wrote a book on it."

Of course, they published the book and probably if you ordered it or requested it, I guarantee it's not the size of regular book, but it still works. You can put something together that's actually a book, a perfect bound little paperback, or that resembles a book. It could even be saddle-stitched as long as you trim size it and design it to make it look like a book.

Reportalogs

A fellow I met, Mark Satterfield the copywriter, sort of invented this format which we call 'reportalogs'.

This is a brochure for a firm that does competitive intelligence research for corporations and attorneys. It does have the company name at the upper left, but instead of featuring a logo or the company name or some advertising slogan, the headline of the brochure is *What Every Attorney Needs to Know About Obtaining Crucial Intelligence. Quickly. Easily. Affordably*. It sounds like useful information. In fact, that's how he writes the

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brochure. Yes, there's stuff about their services, but mixed in with that is some stuff you really need to know about gathering and using competitive intelligence.

The acid test here is: is there information in your white paper or your paperback book or your reportalog, your combination brochure/special report, so that if your reader or prospect read the whole thing, they would get something useful even if they don't hire you or buy your product?

In this case, the answer is yes. Even if you don't hire this firm, there are some interesting tips about competitive research which you can use whether you hire them or not. Of course, if you read it and you think those are good tips and good ideas, you're going to say, "That's a great idea. We don't know how to cut somebody's padlock and go into their parking lot and go through their trash or whatever they do, so we're going to hire this firm."

A reportalog has a lot of useful content in it, so it's more of a combination of a sales brochure and an informative special report.

Special Reports

In consumer advertising, premiums work very well. Often you can use in consumer advertising multiple premiums, multiple free content offers. I don't think this would work in IT. Nobody wants to get 10 white papers. But here health buyers like to get information and consumer information buyers we know like to get information almost by the pound.

Look at this ad. This was an HTML e-mail I got. When you look in the upper-right corner, you get 10 free reports and here's the link to it. It sounds like a lot of valuable stuff.

The little trick here when you're offering these reports is to put a cover price on each report roughly representing its value. A cool thing is that if the cover prices of the individual reports add up to more than the cost of the product—in this case, it's easy; it's

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only \$12—it's sort of self-liquidating. The prospect thinks, "Even if I don't like the product, I'm getting more than my money's worth in just the premiums." So that could help make sales.

If you have a mailing piece, this is a 'magalog' type mailing. Some of you have seen these. These are mailing pieces that look like magazine pieces. Often, with the free content offers, which if we're selling a newsletter, is usually a special report, and if there are multiple ones, we put them on a separate page in the mailing. The mailing might be 16 pages and this would be the page facing the inside back cover. Then on the inside back cover is the order form. Then there's a back cover with the mailing label.

Another good idea if you have four or five premiums is to make one a 'quick response bonus'. This will help get more people to respond because there's an incentive to act now instead of later. We know in direct marketing that a decision deferred is a decision not made.

The Special Report Value Technique

Here's a great technique. I have an information publishing business like Michael. I offer reports and they're each about 50 pages. You can see the content.

We say on the upper-right cover that they're \$29 each. To prove that, we have a page on my main Website, www.Bly.com. If you go to Bly.com and click on 'Reports', all of these reports are listed in the format you see here in a shopping cart. We don't proactively market them, but just from organic search traffic, we get orders for them every week. Therefore, I can legitimately say and feel ethical about it, and it's also true, "I'm giving you this report. It's worth \$29." I'll say that sometimes in the copy. And it's not a made-up, BS price. It's actually what people have paid us for them, which is absolutely true.

I think it's a good idea. You can't do this on a white paper because white papers are known to be free. But if you're offering a special report or that book we looked at in the other ad, you can put a price in the upper-right corner of the front cover. Further, I

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would put all my premiums/giveaways on some page in my Website where people could order them for money. Therefore, that establishes the legitimacy of the price.

E-books

Some of you publish e-books. I'm not sure if Michael does. He might. I publish a lot of e-books and sometimes I use them as premiums to get new clients. So you can give away an e-book. Unlike white papers, you usually don't get e-books for free. They have a retail price so they can be ordered online. Probably the average 50-page e-book is \$19, \$29 or \$39. Some of them are more. I have bigger ones that sell for \$59 or even \$79. But if you offer an e-book instead of a white paper, it's really almost the same thing, but it has a higher perceived value.

Booklets

In the pre-Internet days, the favorite format for a bait piece if we weren't going to do a report or a white paper would be a little, thin booklet. It would be a 4 x 9-inch booklet, the kind you could fit in an envelope. They're the same size as a rack brochure, a little brochure that goes in a rack at a bank branch or in a travel agency. Instead of being sales copy, they would be tips.

Here, this is a company that offers leasing services to resellers and borrowers. Their marketing method is to help their resellers better using the leasing that they offer—their financing. Here was a booklet we did: *10 Sales-Boosting Strategies for Security Dealers and Integrators*. We were helping them sell more using our leasing program. Again, it was more like a rack-size brochure. It was stapled and saddle-stitched. It was maybe 12 or 16 pages.

You can still use this today. Even if you do your fulfillment online as a PDF, I've seen people print their PDF documents in this neat little booklet size. People like booklets. Booklets have a perceived value of \$5, \$10 or \$12 per booklet.

Rack Brochures

Here's a rack brochure. This is actually a sales brochure. It's not free content. But notice the technique they use. Even in the headline, it doesn't say *Wachovia Identity Theft Services*. It says *A Guide to Preventing Fraud and Identity Theft*. They're still using the free content philosophy by making you think that you're going to learn something reading the brochure. I got this brochure and it was mostly sales copy, but they sprinkled in some advice, so it worked legitimately in that way.

Catalogs

You can even offer a product catalog in your ad. Here's a company that makes patio awnings and they're offering a free catalog. You can add perceived value to the catalog. If it's a technical business-to-business catalog, you can call it a 'buyers' guide' or a 'reference guide' or a 'product reference guide'. If it's a consumer thing, here they call it the *"Shade Ideas" Catalog*. I saw one for a window-treatment company and they called it the *Window Treatment Idea Book*.

Software

Software is a very good premium. Here was a company selling a course on how to manage Novel Networks and the premium was five powerful programs. On a CD, they gave five pieces of shareware software. They got them for free, but software has a very high perceived value because of what you pay to get it.

In their letter, they actually led with the premium and not the product. By doing so, they doubled the response.

Brochures

A brochure can even serve. If you don't have a free content piece, at least show a picture

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of the brochure they're going to get. If it looks like it's technical or informative, people will respond just to get that.

Surveys

Surveys are good. That's a great way to create content. Use SurveyMonkey. Do a survey and then offer it as a bait piece, as free content to your prospect. This is a really old mailing, but it was for selling a newsletter for hospital admitting managers. By offering a salary survey, they increased their sales 50%. People love surveys.

Article Reprints

You can use just an article reprint. This is a two-page article I wrote for a newsletter. I reprinted it on a piece of my letterhead front and back and called it a special report. I did a very successful campaign to newsletter publishers to get them interested in my copywriting services.

Electronic Formats

You also have the option of putting together your premium, not as paper, but you can use an audio CD or a DVD. They have a high perceived value and yet the duplication cost is surprisingly low and people often ignore that. I use DVDs and audios. Before CDs, I used audio tapes for years.

What's good about these alternatives, by the way, is that it will give clients a price range. If the client says, "I don't want to do a white paper," well, this is only two sides of an 8 1/2 x 11 sheet of paper. You could do that for \$500, \$1,000 or \$1,200.

If a client says, "I don't want to do a white paper," I say, "Let's go on a conference call," like the line we're on now, "and I'll interview one of your experts for 40 minutes or an hour and we'll offer it as an audio CD." I can do that by charging the client an hour or

two of my time. It's much cheaper than having a white paper. So if the client says, "I won't pay for a white paper," these are some alternatives.

Questions and Answers

Participant: I know on your Website you have all the different self-help for writers and you have order fulfillment and things like that. Is there a method you use to really educate yourself on new things? I know that podcasting certainly isn't new, but for the new marketing approaches that you keep up to speed with?

Bob: Do you mean the new media like podcasting and Twitter and things like that?

Participant: Right.

Bob: The answer is yes and no. Yes, happily, things are changing at a breakneck speed, so we're going to be educating ourselves for the rest of our days. I think the Internet has blown marketing wide open and there's more to know than any single human can. The answer is that I study constantly. On the other hand, I don't offer all services to all clients. None of us can be a guru in everything.

I know a lot about search engine optimization, for example. I took the Direct Marketing Association certificate course on that, but just so I would know it and be conversant in it. There's no way that I can be as good in it as a guy who is out there doing it 50 hours a week every day of the year.

I tend to stick with formats and things that I know. Once in a while, a new one will come up enough that it interests me and I'll say, "Oh, I ought to learn that."

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Participant: I see, yes. That's a good point. You stick to your core of writing and then just every now and then build on that.

Bob: Yes, but I don't want my clients to be disappointed if I say I don't do something. If you go to my site Bly.com and click on 'Vendors', I have a huge list organized by category of vendors that do everything that any of my clients might want and I don't offer. I can say to them, "I don't do that, but I'll send you a link. Or go online and on the Vendors page, click on 'viral marketing'. Here are three firms that can do a viral marketing campaign for you" or, "Click on 'infomercials'." That's how I do it.

Participant: Hello Bob, it's an honor to talk with you. Thank you for your input. I'm a fan of yours and have read a lot of your material.

Isn't it wonderful that there's so much to learn these days? You can't stay on top of it for sure, but it sure is interesting to know that we can learn for the rest of our days.

Bob: You'll never be bored.

Participant: You're quite the consummate marketer too. You've shown us how we can turn content into several different forms. In particular, on Page 7 you had a thing about special reports and having a premium page. Either I wasn't paying attention or that was a little fast. I understand that you can have a quick reply bonus, but how would you suggest some different ways to market the special reports?

Bob: Do you mean to market their special reports to promote your business?

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Participant: No, for a client.

Bob: I'll give you a perfect example. I have a client that is a logistics company. They have a new service where they will handle medical products including blood, organs and so on. That's an area where there are a lot of specialized requirements.

The way we're selling it is that we're putting together a special report that's basically going to be *The 7 Things You Must Know Before Shipping Vital Biological Supplies*. It explains all the regulations and the special packing requirements.

When someone gets that, they're going to read it and say, "This is very useful. I'm glad I got this. As a logistics manager for a medical company, I need to know this, but I'm not going to be able to do all this. I'm going to call this company because they wrote the book on it." That's how we might use it.

How do we offer it to them? You can go to a mailing list broker and get a list of medical firms that do these kinds of shipments and rent their e-mail addresses and send them an HTML e-mail where there's a link that has a picture of the report and says, "Get our free report." It has a quick button where they can go to a Web page and download it. But to download it, they have to fill in a form and give you their name, their company, their phone number and their e-mail address.

Participant: It sounds good. One of the things you were emphasizing was perceived value.

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Bob: Yes. Giving away a white paper is fine, but the perceived value of a white paper is generally zero. However, if I just call it a special report, a lot of people buy reports. Some companies buy these market research reports on industries for \$3,000 a pop. So reports have high perceived value.

Why not give away something in a format where people again think it has high perceived value? One of the easiest ways to do that is with DVDs and audios. I've used both, but I especially love audios. An audio CD has a perceived value of somewhere between \$20 and \$49. Not only that, but when they get it, it stands out from all the other paper. It makes the envelope a little lumpy and it really gets noticed. Before CDs, I used audio cassettes, which are passé, since 1982.

Participant: Yes, so those special reports could be done in an audio version as well.

Bob: Yes, you can take anything and go back and forth. You could read in a studio your special report and make it an audio, or if you did it in a teleconference, you could give it to a transcription service. There are plenty of them on the Internet that are dirt cheap and they can create a PDF out of it.

Participant: That's fabulous. Thank you so much, Bob.

About Bob Bly

Bob Bly is the author of more than 70 books including *Secrets of a Freelance Writer* (Henry Holt). Visit his Web site at www.bly.com, or e-mail rbly@bly.com