8 Ways to Find Whitepaper Topics Your Audience Wants to Read

Castleford

Table of Contents

Introduction

Looking to expand upon your base of blog posts and the occasional infographic? **Good.**

Too often, marketers start small and target only the top of the funnel. ToFu content can be easier to create and less resource-intensive relative to assets in the middle or bottom of the funnel.

But if you're already building a content stream to keep prospects engaged, you need other formats that reach them at points in their customer journeys.

A whitepaper combines visual and written content with data-backed insights so leads have something more comprehensive and in-depth to consume. It's **thought leadership, industry authority and relevant research** all in one.
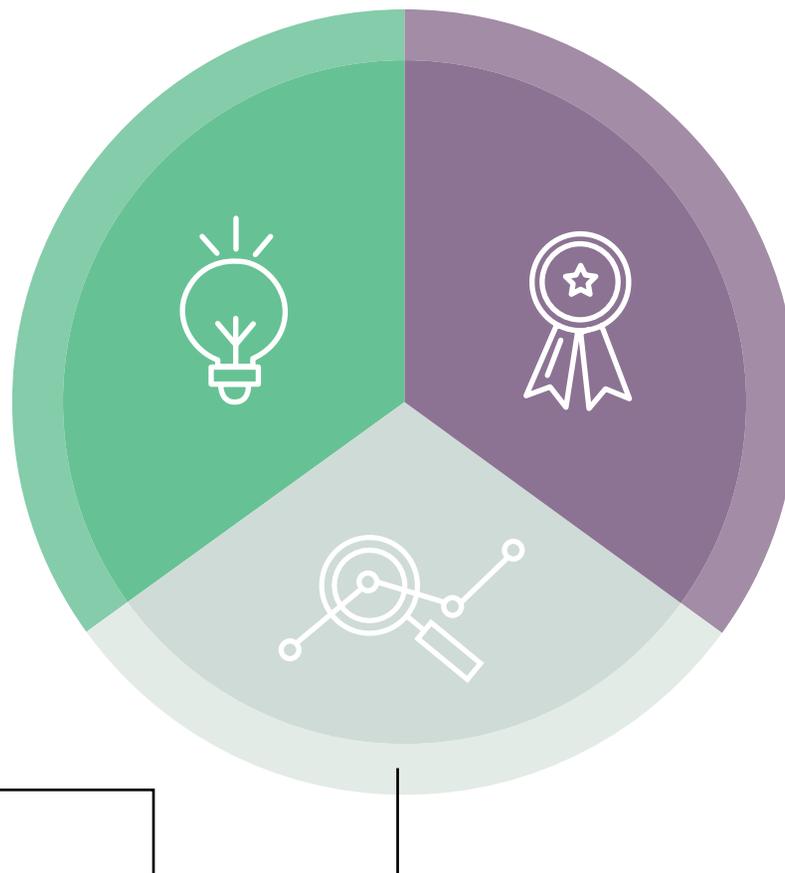
Let's look at ways to generate whitepaper topics from scratch. That way you can differentiate your content offerings from competitors' and align your subject matter expertise with audience demand.

What is a whitepaper?

Whitepapers are comprehensive, formatted assets primarily used for lead generation. They're more data-driven and branded than blog posts but less visual than eBooks. A whitepaper has no word or page count limit, although they tend to fall in the range of 1,000-10,000 words, with the goal of allowing the writer to properly explore all facets of a topic and include analysis or predictions.

Popular whitepaper topics are:

Industry trends

Brand solutions

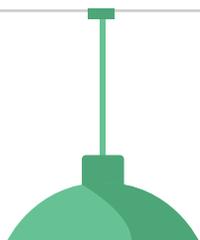Product or service guides

Data insights and observations

Niche, educational walk-throughs

Common business challenges

Whitepapers are typically gated, requiring readers to provide their contact information to download the document. Because they're gated, they're often used in email campaigns and live on distinct conversion landing pages.

How do whitepapers differ from blog posts or eBooks?

So what makes a topic suited as a white paper as opposed to a blog post or eBook? The short answer is that nearly any topic can be addressed accurately in any content format, depending on how detailed you want to be. Then there's the issue of how you distribute it to your audience.

If you want **leads,** an asset should be gated — so that removes blog posts from the equation.

If you want **nuanced, detailed copy that explains a complex subject matter,** a whitepaper is likely preferable to an eBook. eBooks often have character restrictions, as each page needs room for graphical components and various types of visualisations. A whitepaper, on the other hand, is copy-centric, with graphics being a supplement.

So to pick the right topics for your whitepaper, you'll likely want to compile interesting, new data on that topic, gather quotes/opinions from internal/external experts and cover every subtopic related to that larger concept.

Here's how to get started.

# 1 Convert an existing blog post into a whitepaper

One of the easiest and most convenient ways to write a whitepaper is take what already works and **make it better.**

Look in your Google Analytics dashboard, find your top-performing blog post of the past year and make it your next whitepaper.

Your blog is already relevant and well-received based on your metrics, so there's an existing audience that can be engaged with and recaptured with an updated white paper on the same or similar topic.

For example, your blog article titled "What's keeping HR managers up at night?" could be converted into a whitepaper called "12 fears every HR manager has in 2019 and how to overcome them".

Dive deeper, add more data and offer more solutions. That's it.

WHAT'S KEEPING HR MANAGERS UP AT NIGHT?

12 FEARS EVERY HR MANAGER HAS IN 2019 AND HOW TO OVERCOME THEM
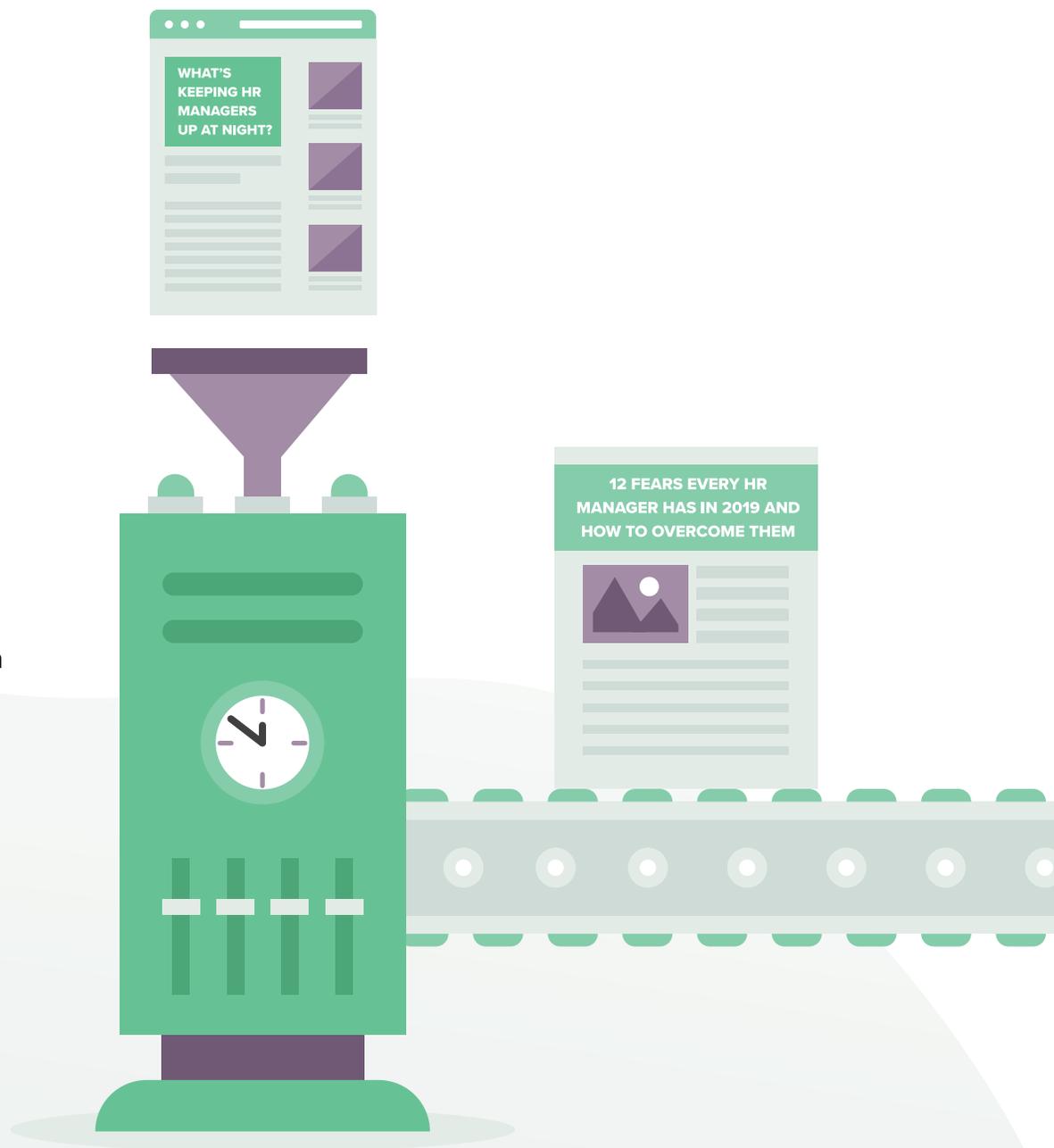
Aggregate commentary from social media into perceptive topics

2

Your content marketing strategy is incomplete if you're not monitoring social media, industry forums and the comments section of other websites. The information contained in these fields comes from the type of person who is obviously engaged and wants to voice their opinion.

There's also a lot of repetition and call-and-response going on. Comments sections are like a **petri dish for future whitepaper topics:** What are people talking about, and what do they want more of?

You can likely pull out themes from the commentary you see, like if lots of users or followers have questions on a new trend or Gallup poll.

By staying abreast of industry discussions you can uncover topics that invoke further commentary and be the first brand to tackle those ideas in full.

It's almost like mind reading.

Concentrate on themes picked up from sales conversations

Your sales department is having targeted conversations with prospects and customers every day. These calls are essentially vent sessions for pain points, common questions and pervasive curiosities.

Your sales reps can only answer so many calls and chase so many prospects. **What if you could sum up all those discussions in a whitepaper?**

You could then distribute it to prospects after the call ends so they can consider it further on their own time. You can also get out in front of inbound calls by answering as many questions as possible before the phone even rings, which qualifies your leads and increases sales potential.

Set up a weekly or monthly touch base with your sales team to better understand the themes they encounter and how you can best serve their goals through content creation.

Go heavy on hyper-relevant industry data – and gate it

4

The web is awash with data, but who has time to query over and over until they connect the dots on how to find and use all that disparate data?

No one.

So do it for them.

What's a trending topic in your field right now? Artificial intelligence? GDPR?

Aggregate industry data around those topics, offer a bit of context and analysis and format it as a whitepaper. Now you have the most exhaustive and useful asset on the internet about that topic, and it's highly relevant to your audience.

You can do the same thing with quotes from subject matter experts or predictions from industry analysts. Compile the work, then gate it.

5 Identify mid-funnel or commercial-intent keywords to build upon

Because whitepapers are mid-funnel assets, it makes sense to build content around search terms that correspond to that stage of the funnel.

So instead of something like "Content marketing trends to know," you might aim a little lower in the funnel with "How to capitalise on the top 6 content marketing trends right now".

The latter has urgency, requires action and is aimed at an audience persona that's looking to fix problems, not just read general-awareness content.

In short, don't be vague. Be as specific as possible. You're not targeting every person under the sun; you're writing for a decision-maker who may be close to purchasing from you.

CONTENT MARKETING TRENDS TO KNOW

HOW TO CAPITALIZE ON THE TOP 6 CONTENT MARKETING TRENDS RIGHT NOW
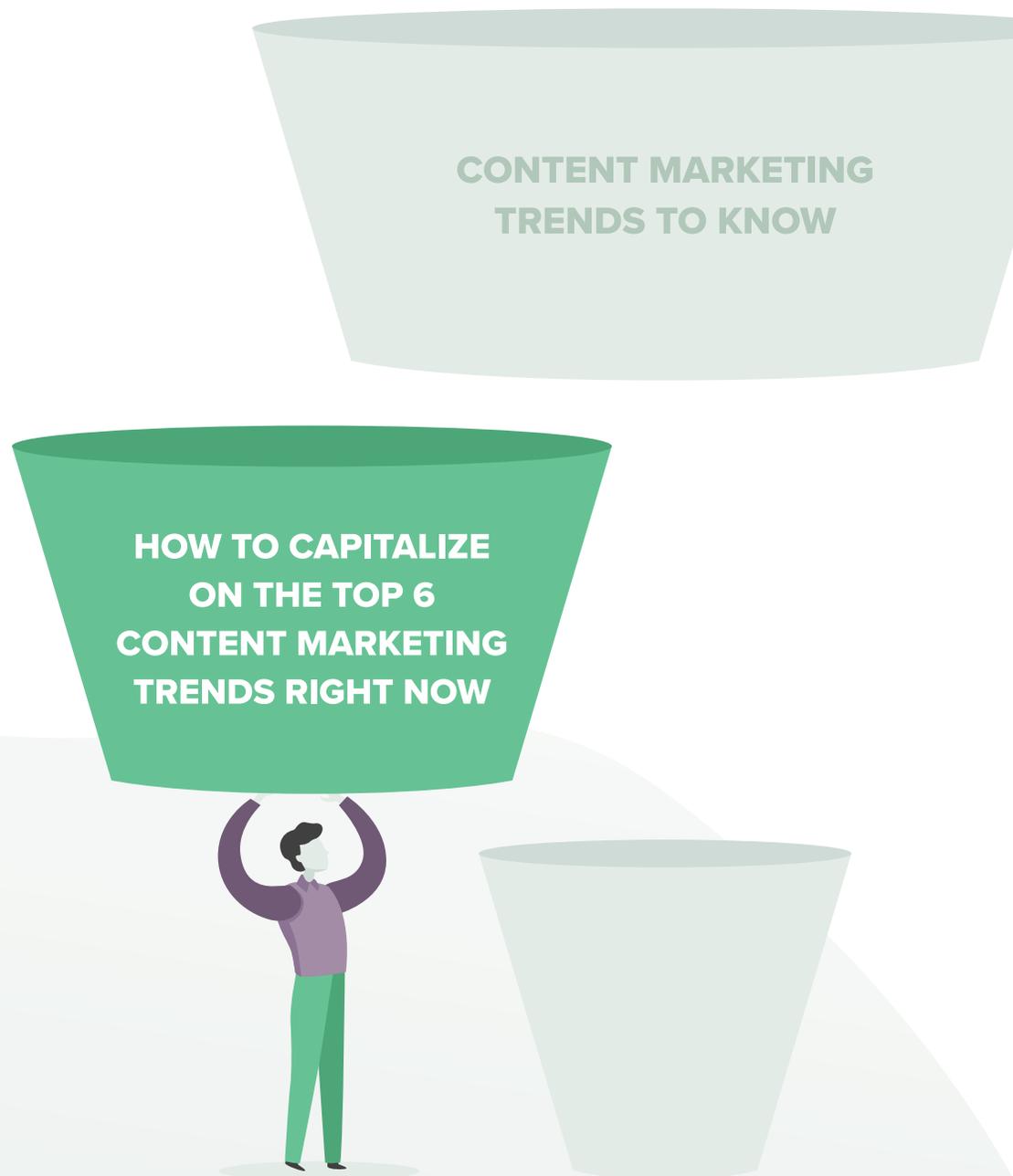
Conduct proprietary research, format it and release it

Proprietary research is recognised as the **top link building tactic available to marketers.** The reason is simple.

You have research that no one else has. You are the sole source of information on a given topic. If someone wants that intelligence, they have to download it.

Luckily, gathering this research is easier than many think. You can do this by running a quick poll on social media and measuring the results.

Or you can ask for the opinions of your own staff — that's data too. The more data points, the better.

We've taken this approach a number of times. We asked our social followers their job titles and their opinions on the future of content marketing. We got hundreds of responses, so we anthologised this data, designed it and launched it.

It was ours, and it was a simple adjunct to our marketing efforts.

# 7 Find where leads drop off and address that pain point

The purpose of any asset is to answer questions and address pain points.

And one of the most costly business hurdles is having **potential customers go silent.** They either stop responding to your inquiries because they no longer have need of your services or they've already made up their mind to go with a different supplier. In either case, the outcome is bad for you.

Isolating that precise moment when a prospect drops off is critical to plugging the gap in your customer lifecycle marketing. Once you know what the issue is, you can then create content around it.

In some cases, that could be a whitepaper.

Speak with your sales team about where they're struggling with leads and what would help them bridge the divide between *potential* customer and *actual* customer.
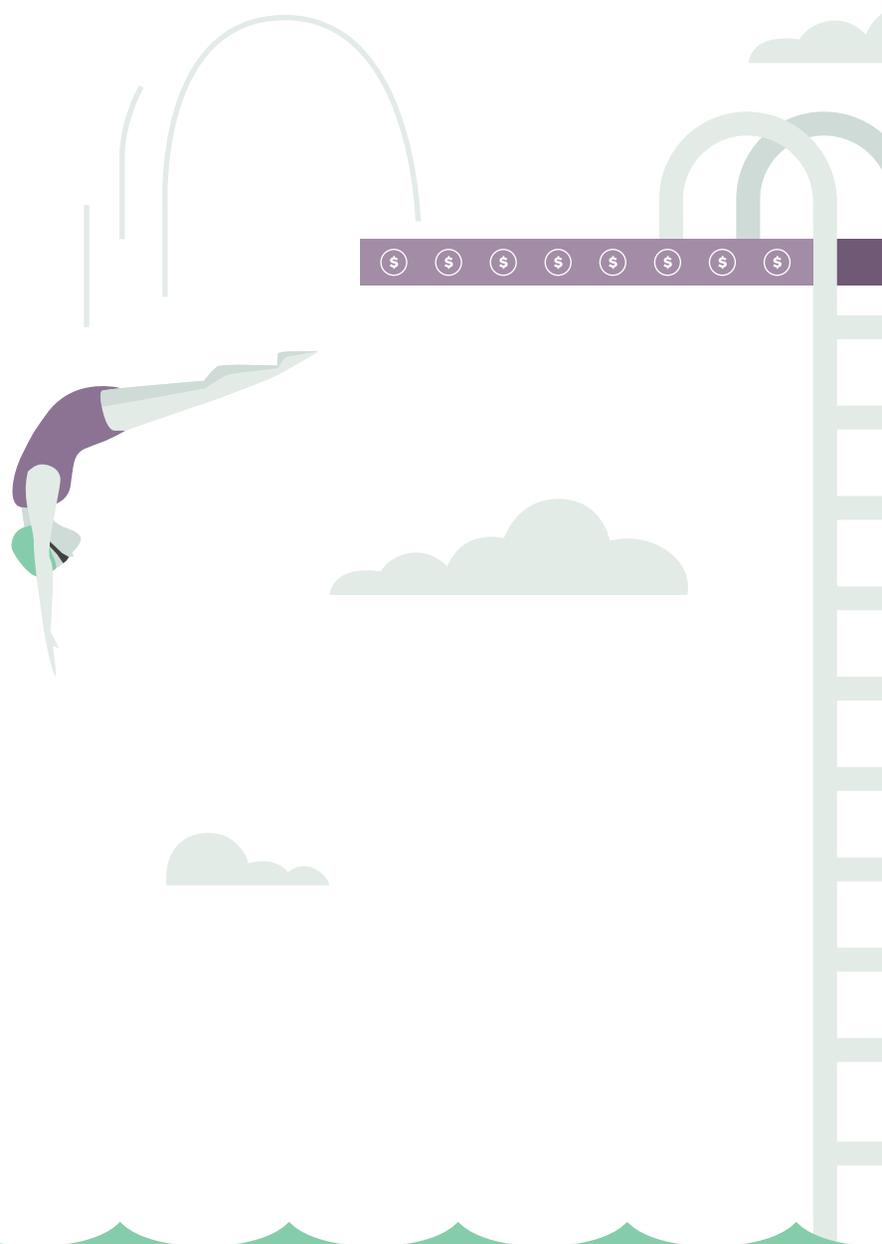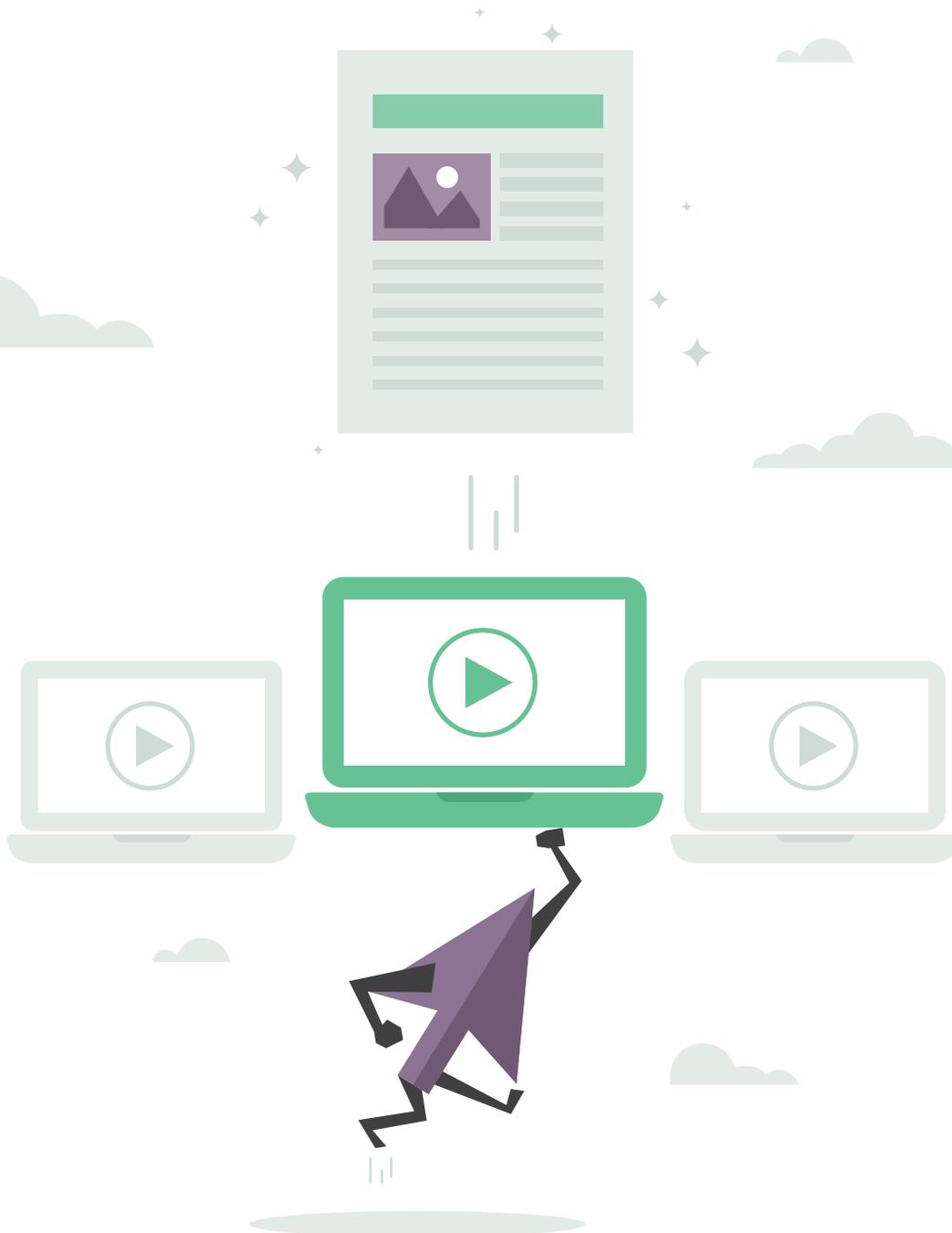
Complement other assets like web demos, webinars and tutorials

Whitepaper design supports other types of assets at other parts of the funnel.

A viewer may watch a web demo on your site and then wonder *OK what now?*

Or you may run a well-attended webinar but have nothing tangible to leave your listeners with after the event is over.

Writing whitepapers to accompany adjacent marketing assets leads to a **more versatile user experience.** Your audience can now digest content in ways they prefer, they're aware of next steps to be taken and they can learn about your brand on their own time

What's not to like?

How to distribute and promote your whitepaper for max ROI

Whitepaper distribution should be a multifaceted effort. While you should have a dedicated conversion landing page where readers can download your whitepaper, you also have to get those readers to that page in the first place.

To do so, consider:

Creating a clickable whitepaper CTA and embedding it in blog posts and email newsletters

Making it the focal point of a podcast or speaking opportunity

Converting it into a viewable slideshare

Sending via email to qualified leads

Printing it out and bringing it to industry events

Ungating it and releasing a teaser portion of it as a blog post or short video

Sending via email after a relevant webinar or prospect call

Advertising it on industry forums or via display networks

Linking to it in press releases

Promoting on social media – particularly LinkedIn for B2B audiences

Using it in retargeting campaigns

Using it as cornerstone content and writing complementary blogs around it to send more traffic its way

Conclusion

Whitepapers empower your brand to flex its industry credentials. You're not just another logo in your niche; you're a **thought leader and a content leader.**

Though whitepapers are conventionally thought of as B2B marketing assets, there's room for B2C versions as well. These are typically in the form of product guides and expanded FAQ documents.

Because the demand for high-quality information on new ideas is ever-present, the whitepaper format remains a **foundational content type that all marketers should explore.**

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