



White Paper...Wall Paper

by Jerry E. Durant, Managing Director

How much value do you place on white papers? On a regular basis we get emails announcing newly released pearls of wisdom. The value range goes from informative and enlightening, to a well encapsulated form of advertising hype. As individuals we recoil when the latter is uncovered and our natural reaction is to refrain from future exposure to such mediums.

I thought it would be beneficial to take a look at some of the white papers and and try to change our natural tendencies. The following things can be done in the first 15½ seconds to determine if the white paper is friend or foe. Your personal biases will influence your what things you will tolerate and what gets reacted to. It isn't as much a question of being wrong or quick to act, rather it's a case of opportunity lost or time saved.

- **Topic** – Titles are intended to attract interest. You should be able to discover whether the title appropriate addresses the topic or whether a different message is hiding behind the words. I recently received a white paper/web seminar announcement that talked about Integration and Continual testing... the actual document and web seminar had nothing to do with either topic.
- **Sincerity** – There is no organization, including Certellus LLC, that doesn't develops White Papers to promote their services. There is however a world of difference when talking about a business's corporate philosophy on a particular subject and blatant bandstanding. The gap world of difference between evolution and revolution, and in the context of Information Technology (IT) we have slight revolution and allot of spin on old tried and true disciplines. Some would be quick to argue and defend current ideas without being objective. While I am tempted (Lord save me please!) to expound on one or two of my personal views... I will refrain. If I have sparked your interest and feel that it might be of value and interest... send me an email. I love a stimulating dialog that may result in a better situation for you.
- **Flight** – Was the white paper on the website or did it fly in your window on the back of a mass distribution email? I'm not sure that there is any rule of thumb that one can apply to either form. One can not characterize that the particular method of dissemination is honorable or not. We have seen both respectable and dishonorable forms presented by site and email distributed forms.
- **Source** – I discussed this topic with a long time friend, Charlie LeGrand and we concluded that white papers have traditionally come from three sources. Software companies, service companies and solution companies, a term sometimes used to transform a company to a different characterization. There are of course white papers that are produced by academia. All sources have a motive in mind, whether it's to advance a theory (academia) or promote an offering white papers require motive. Otherwise, why would anyone share knowledge for the pure joy of writing? Even professional writers put works out there to attract new writing opportunities. So as the cranky old manager put it... "Get over it and deal with it!" As a rule the following white paper framing occurs as a result of the source.
 - Academia – Theory or empirical study results.
Utilization – New thinking or result comparison.
 - Software Company – Framing of Solution.

- Utilization – Process comparison and/or solution consideration.
- Service Company – Service Description.
Utilization – Process learning and comparison.
- Solution Company – Solution Description.
Utilization – Approach/opportunity comparison.

Does this leave us suspicious or curious about the virtues of White Papers? Are white papers taking on the form of blogs? Is this trend just another ploy or a sincere attempt to show a more personal side to business? Jim Rohn, acclaimed motivational speaker was quoted as saying, “If someone is going down the wrong road, he doesn’t need motivation to speed him up. What he needs is education to turn him around”. Many of us are heading down the road by ignoring the virtues of White Papers, whether based on bias or bad experiences. We need to find ways to convert data into information. With time we will become versed in filtering, the removal of extraneous data, and adapting data to a contextual information level that melds with the needs that we have.

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