

# Unlock the Gate!

How getting rid of the “form required” approach to downloading white papers will benefit your company

by Gary Dietz

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## What is “the gate”?

The “gate” is the barrier many companies put in front of a prospect in order to download a white paper. When content is gated, prospects must fill out a form, sometimes an onerous one, in order to download a company’s white paper or gain access to other company marketing and promotional content.

Ungated content can be accessed by anyone without requiring any contact information ahead of time.



## Who is this white paper for?

This paper is for marketing folks who want to increase the quality of leads and engagements that can be obtained by delivering white papers as part of a marketing mix.

It can also be used as a tool to illustrate to reticent management teams that when compared to gated ones, ungated white papers can be more broadly read, increase the quality of leads generated, be used as a social media tool and SEO, and can increase trust and brand equity.



## If a white paper falls in the woods, does anyone read it?

The reason your white paper exists at all is to make an authentic and useful connection with specific segments of your buyer personas. And then convince them to continue the conversation willingly.

The way in which a prospect accesses a white paper can be as important as the white paper itself. After all, if a target persona can't access the paper, it doesn't exist to them. Should a paper be accessed through a locked gate—something he or she must fill out in order to access the paper—or should it be accessible to all with no barriers?

The download process should be easy enough, and the content compelling enough, so that readers will eagerly choose to interact with your team further. Yet many white papers today are gated behind a barrier. In most cases, this is a mistake.

### How can you use this white paper?

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## Ungated white papers can speed up the sales cycle

Providing a white paper to your reader before they engage with you and provide contact and other information can make the sales cycle faster, less expensive, and increase the trust relationship with the reader for a variety of reasons.



### ***...by Reducing garbage leads***

Gated white papers often generate fake or low quality leads. You'll save money and time ungating because your sales team will not be spinning their wheels. These sales folks won't spend time emailing and calling "leads" who filled out forms before they read the white paper and then, after all that effort discover that the prospect has no interest in continuing the conversation. Instead, your sales teams can spend time reaching out to prospects that clearly indicated they wanted a discussion because *they reached out to you first*. Can you say "permission marketing?" <http://www.sethgodin.com/sg/> Go ahead, say it out loud.

Gating can also discourage qualified prospects from accessing your paper. How many times have **you** clicked away from a web page when it asked you for e-mail address before the site seemed credible?

***...by generating leads that are further into the sales cycle***

Providing valuable and useful materials to a person that self-selects themselves as interested will indeed create fewer lead records in the database. But people in your target persona that read your content and are motivated and ready to enter into a deeper conversation with your team are infinitely more valuable. In an ungated white paper offering, you know that almost every request coming to you is, if not extremely serious, at least interested and has the start of an education on at least some aspects of your solution before the conversation starts (or continues) with your staff.

***...by being “social network ready”***

When you provide an ungated white paper, your readers who are authentically interested will blog, like, or link to your white paper. Also, you don't have to worry if they host the file on their own blog or site. Rather, you should encourage them to! (To contrast, what prospect would want to link peers to your company's "form page"?)



Third-party links make the authenticity and usefulness of the paper more credible – because an entity outside of your organization took the time to repost it. Also, if you encourage promulgation of the white paper in other locations, search engine rankings could increase on the topic and your company and solutions and key people.

***...by creating more quotation opportunities***

Even if the interested reader doesn't enter the sales cycle immediately (or ever), they may quote text or tables from your white paper internally or externally to their own organizations and networks. This can only increase your search engine rankings, credibility, and number of readers who are in the target buyer persona.

***...by demonstrating a consultative sales approach***

By not gating a white paper, you can foster a good feel about your organization and its brand. You will seem less scared of the competition (and thus more confident) and show that you have a consultative sales approach. Your readers could think "if they are willing to give this away, imagine how helpful they will be if I pay them?"

“So this expert explained it to me in this excellent free white paper...”

***...by making it easier to work with you than with your competitors***

Since so many firms, probably including your competitors, gate so much material, having ungated white papers will make it easier for the buyer personas to learn about your firm, who you are, and your solutions. Lower as many barriers as possible to learn about your solutions and company.

Maybe you can even point out in the white paper itself that you won't call them incessantly like their competitors will unless they reach out to you first for the call!

## Create authentic conversations rather than fake “mmouse@xyz.com” lead records

Ungated access to marketing white papers usually is the right move. But the 'ROI-meisters' will and should ask “How can we capture contact and lead information about who reads our sage words if we just give words away, ungated?”

Here are some techniques to encourage readers to willingly engage with you and provide you contact and other lead information for your ungated white papers.

### ***Make sure you clearly indicate the persona this piece is intended for***

Ensure that the content explicitly identifies particular buyer personas early on, but also gives people a place to look for more information or another white paper if they are not this persona. And put enough useful information into the white paper that the person can actually do something with it. Most people will be more than happy to engage with you if you helped teach them or gave them something first.

### ***Make sure you embed a form or a link to a form***

Put a live form or a hypertext link to a form directly in the white paper. If you are concerned that readers won't be able to use the embedded form, place a clear, readable URL link to the form. Place this link asking for engagement with you at the start and the end of the white paper and maybe in a sidebar or header or footer. You can even point out to the reader that they have not been tracked and will not be contacted by reading this paper unless they explicitly reach out to you first.

You're more than halfway through this piece now! If you want to comment or explore working with me on a project fill out this form:

<http://tinyurl.com/6by7wp1>

### ***Share, share (and share) everywhere!!***

Share the link to your whitepaper on your corporate blogs, Facebook, LinkedIn, Partnerup, Google+, or other social networks where your professional circles will benefit from it. Encourage key employees to do the same. With goodwill like this, prospects will be more likely to pass on the white paper or your company name to others who may buy. The long-term goodwill you generate could have the reader become a customer in that job or in a future position they may hold.

### **Of course, there are the naysayers**

There are times when you must gate content. For example, if proprietary information requires some kind of agreement before it can be read. But the other reasons are really more about fear of giving stuff away as part of the sales process. Gates rarely stop competitors from getting your materials (they ***will*** find a way to get it even with gates in place). Ironically, gates slow down prospects from engaging with you, but not the competition.

You may need to give-in and gate a white paper when your management team doesn't buy into how much more valuable ungated white papers are. This can happen when that management is looking at a number-of-leads-per-campaign metric versus a much harder to measure, but more valuable number-of-qualified-leads engaged with. We should be much more interested in the number of people moved to the next stage in the sales cycle and shortening the cycle with the assistance of a white paper rather than raw lead record counting. Perhaps you can propose A/B tests in your market to determine and show your management that ungated white papers are more valuable.



# Unlock the Gate – The Conclusion!

After having read a good white paper, the reader who contacts you will be a prospect that has already started the education process. Isn't that better than your sales team having cold, half-filled out web forms from a "lead" who may or may not have even read the white paper or may not even be interested? Ungated access to white papers can improve the odds that prospects of the persona you are targeting will be further along in the sales cycle. The ungated approach can generate a higher volume of qualified, educated prospects and can increase inbound queries.

**About the author:** Gary Dietz has held a variety of Senior Product Management, Product Marketing, and consulting roles at such companies as Elluminate, Virtual Ink mimio, and White Pine Software. He is currently finishing up an independent third-party book about Blackboard Collaborate.

Specializing in bringing new elearning technologies to market over the past 15 years, Gary has also worked on projects involving marketing consulting, retail collectibles, database technology, home media servers, public relations, and publishing. Gary has a BA in Writing from SUNY Potsdam and is a graduate of the Pragmatic Marketing courses. You should hire him.

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