

Driving thought leadership through impactful content

By [Mimi Kalinda](#)

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The term "thought-leader" has become quite a buzzword in recent years, particularly in relation to the rapid rise of "influencers" on social and digital media. However, being a thought-leader is not reserved for celebrities and the like alone - on the contrary, industry thought-leaders have been a fundamental part of business, brand building and driving public sentiment throughout history.



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From a business perspective, a thought-leader is one who is seen as a trusted advisor and credible source of insight on issues relating to certain industry or subject matters. This could be both within industry sectors or interest circles, and the broader public domain. Both individuals and businesses can be considered "thought-leaders".

For example, a tech company can be seen as a leader in the field of innovation, as well as its CEO seen as a pioneer within the tech industry. Successful thought-leader positioning helps drive brand or personal goals, such as attracting clients or shaping perceptions, and hence, provides very tangible business outcomes.

Results of a 2019 Edelman-LinkedIn B2B Thought Leadership Impact [Study](#) include the following compelling statistics:

- 50% of decision-makers spend at least one hour a week consuming thought-leadership content
- 55% of decision-makers say they use thought-leadership to vet businesses
- 58% of decision-makers stated that they choose a business based on its thought-leadership

Clearly, whether you are a brand spokesperson, company CEO, or even a sales executive aiming to secure pitch meetings with discerning prospective clients, having a positive presence as a thought leader gives you a much more enhanced starting point. This is because you are already seen as a credible subject-matter expert, and your reputation as a trusted

advisor precedes you. Building thought-leadership profiles should therefore be considered a key component of strategic positioning of a business itself, as well as the executives that represent it.

Building your personal and brand profile

The good news is that it's not just high-profile speaking engagements and media interviews that help establish you as a leader in your field. Written content is a highly effective and practical way to build your personal or brand profile.

Opinion Editorial (op-ed) articles in particular are a great way to create awareness and interest, and showcase your expertise on a particular topic or industry. However, as the content will most likely live in the public domain for a long time, it is crucial that a great deal of thought and planning goes into every piece of content produced.



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In order to achieve desired sentiments, a thought-leader needs to embody certain characteristics that are then carried forward through their content. These include: being a credible source of information and insight, have a deep understanding of the subject matter and landscape, having an established reputation within the industry; and being consistent when it comes to the key messages or ideas imparted. It also requires appreciating that, as a thought leader, you have a sense of responsibility when it comes to upholding the trust placed in you by your audience and supporters.

Content should be value-centric

The content shared should offer some sort of value to the end user/reader. For example: how-to guides, tips, insights, relevant news or statistics, or upcoming trends are generally well-received. Saying something new and galvanizing the reader into action as well makes for an effective content piece.

Audience research conducted by SurveyMonkey found that 97% of respondents feel that publishing statistics to validate a position is important (see what I did there?). Basically, a well-written and engaging thought-leadership piece needs to tactfully balance value, opinion/insight, and factual or research-based information.

Content should also be written with your target audiences, objectives and distribution platforms in mind as these factors impact the overall success of a content piece. For instance, if your target market is the general public, a highly complex or technical piece will not work well. Also, if your distribution platforms are digital, a traditional content development approach will not suit online consumption behaviour, and will lack functionality such as being optimised for search engines (SEO-related concerns).

Now, all of this may seem quite daunting, especially if you are not experienced or comfortable with developing content for public consumption. My advice would be to consult content specialists with expertise in positioning, reputation management and brand building. Partnering with the right content developers will allow you to highlight your expertise and connect with your target audiences in an effective and impactful manner. And for those who require top-tier amplification of presence, such consultants will also be able to secure the aforementioned speaking engagements and media interviews as well.

The bottom line is that in the current challenging economic climate, brands need to go the extra mile to stand out from the rest. As the statistics show, thought-leader positioning through insightful, high-quality and user-centric content is an extremely valuable way to drive your brand goals and gain a competitive edge.

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