one gtm

VIEW POINT

From Thought Leadership to Revenue Guide

A practical guide to building thought leadership programmes that deliver results

Contents

Introduction

Thought leadership has become a vital tool in the B2B marketer's armoury, increasingly used by businesses across a wide range of sectors as a way to build market positioning and gain access to hard-to-reach decision-makers. Yet many organisations still struggle with the practicalities of how to convert their insights and opinions into pipeline and sales.

In this guide, we'll look at:

- why significant changes in buyer behaviour mean that thought leadership is now a vital element in B2B demand generation;
- the mistakes marketers often make, which prevent their thought leadership and content marketing initiatives from realising value;
- what practical steps marketers need to take to convert their thought leadership into revenue, summarised as a straightforward framework for execution;
- where thought leadership is working well today, with reference to specific examples.

We'll summarise with our top tips for building your thought leadership to revenue model.

We hope you find this booklet useful. If you do, please let us know by emailing: **phil@onegtm.com**

2 Why Does It Matter?

So why is thought leadership a vital element in successful B2B go-to-market strategies today?

On average B2B customers complete nearly 60% of a purchase decision before engaging with any supplier.

Source: HBR 2012

The simple answer is that it is because the world has changed. Buyers make decisions in different ways and are looking for different things from their suppliers.

- **B2B decision-making is complex**
  One reason why thought leadership plays a more important role within B2B than B2C is that the decision-making process is typically complex, with multiple stakeholders having an influence on the decision. Relevant thought leadership content can help gain alignment across multiple influencers in terms of the problems they are facing and the responses they should be considering.

- **Well-informed B2B buyers don't need suppliers to learn about products or technologies**
  Customers are increasingly able to identify potential solutions themselves, supported by sophisticated procurement departments, purchasing consultants and IT analysts. Plus they have easy access to a wealth of information via Google and social forums.

- **Buyers are engaging suppliers later in the decision-making cycle**
  A recent survey[1] of 1,400 B2B decision-makers found that, on average, customers completed nearly 60% of a purchase decision – researching solutions, ranking options, setting requirements, benchmarking pricing and so on – before even having a conversation with a supplier. That's a disaster for B2B companies who have built their business around the solution-selling model, and now find themselves with limited opportunity to influence customer thinking and demonstrate their value.

- **Prospects want perspective and insight, not a product pitch**
  Senior execs want to engage with providers who can bring to the table new ideas and interesting opinions – specialist providers who can challenge the customer's own thinking and highlight problems that the customer may not even have identified themselves.

- **You need distinctive, relevant content to capture buyers' attention in the places in which they hang out**
  A recent survey[2] found that more B2B buyers identified online communities as their primary source of information when beginning a solution search than any other. To be visible and relevant in these forums, you need to have relevant content and be contributing to the debate.

- **Responding to RFPs isn't the route to profitability**
  If the first time you've spoken with a customer is after an RFP has landed on your desk, then your chances of winning the business are slim – and the chances of winning it at a healthy margin are even slimmer. Perceived thought leaders have the opportunity to engage customers and shape their thinking outside of formal procurement cycles.

- **Being perceived as a thought leader gets you in the game**
  In a separate survey[3] when buyers were asked about the importance of thought leadership in creating their supplier shortlists, an impressive 88% said it was important or critical. In today's B2B environment, if you're not perceived as offering insight and leadership, you may not even get visibility of the deals you're missing out on.

88% of buyers said thought leadership is critical in creating supplier shortlists.

Source: How customers choose, ITSMA survey, 2012

4 Common Pitfalls

So the advantages of an approach based on thought leadership are clear. Which is exactly why organisations are devoting an increasing share of their marketing budgets to thought leadership and content marketing initiatives.

Some 54% of B2B marketers expect to increase their spend on content-driven marketing in 2013,[4] compared with only 2% who expect it to decrease, and 56% of B2B marketers cite thought leadership as a key objective of their strategy.[5]

However, the effectiveness of these initiatives is highly variable and many organisations are struggling with how to translate thought leadership initiatives into pipeline and sales. There are a number of common mistakes that prevent organisations realising the value of the investment they're making.

- **Lack of a distinctive point of view**
  Too much thought leadership is actually 'thought followship' – simple regurgitation of accepted wisdoms or reporting of other people's opinions. Almost by definition, you can't claim to be a thought leader unless you have some strong opinions. It's the distinctive opinions and insights that make people want to engage with you; without them, you're just another media outlet.

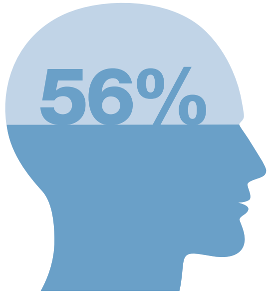
- **Lack of depth and consistency**
  A scattergun approach – firing out content on a range of subjects with no obvious connection or underlying theme – has two big drawbacks. Firstly, to associate yourself with a particular issue, you need to talk about it consistently for a period of time. Genuine thought leaders tend to do this. Conversely, talking about everything probably means you'll be associated with nothing. Secondly, to be perceived as a thought leader in a particular area, you need depth of content, which you're unlikely to achieve if you're spreading yourself thinly across multiple areas.

- **Lack of connection with what you actually do**
  The ultimate aim of any thought leadership programme has to be to drive sales. But this will only happen if you can join the dots from the issues you're talking about in your thought leadership activity to the solutions you deliver to your customers. Thought leadership needs to be a starting point for a conversation that ultimately gives you the opportunity to make a sale.

- **Failure to integrate with demand generation activity**
  Sometimes companies manage their thought leadership programmes as if they were completely separate from their demand generation efforts. This is a wasted opportunity and can result in conflicting or confusing messages to the market. Your thought leadership should be a key part of your demand generation, not simply a high-level positioning exercise.

- **Failure to enable the sales channels**
  There is little point in generating interest in your company with some stimulating and thought-provoking content if the salesperson that sits in front of the customer doesn't understand your insights, can't articulate your point of view and immediately wants to start talking product features and benefits. Sales enablement needs to be a key part of any thought leadership programme.

- **Content that fails to engage**
  Having a good idea achieves nothing unless you can turn that idea into an engaging, credible and thought-provoking piece of content. A 2011 survey[6] found that 83% of technology marketers believed that the quality of their content needed to improve.



56% of B2B marketers cite thought leadership as a key objective of their strategy.

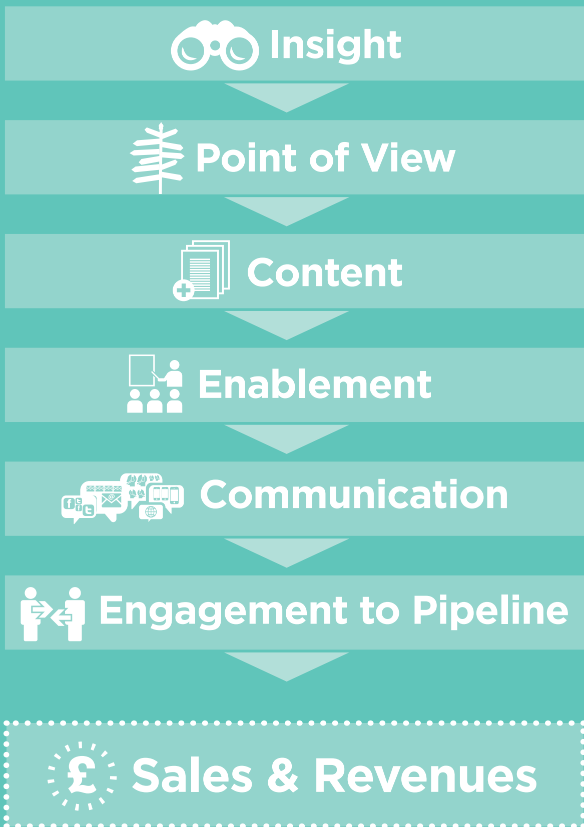
Source: Curata B2B Marketing Trends Report 2012

6 From Thought Leadership to Revenue – A Framework

Based on our experiences of working with clients on the creation and delivery of successful thought leadership programmes, we've developed our six-stage 'thought leadership to revenue' framework.

The framework is intended to help our clients develop relevant and insightful content based on thought leadership, and then use this content to drive pipeline and revenues.

Over the following pages, we'll look at each stage of the framework and the key points that need to be considered when implementing a 'thought leadership to revenue' programme.



Insight

The foundation of any successful thought leadership programme is high quality insight.

We can't hope to have credible, relevant opinions unless we really understand:

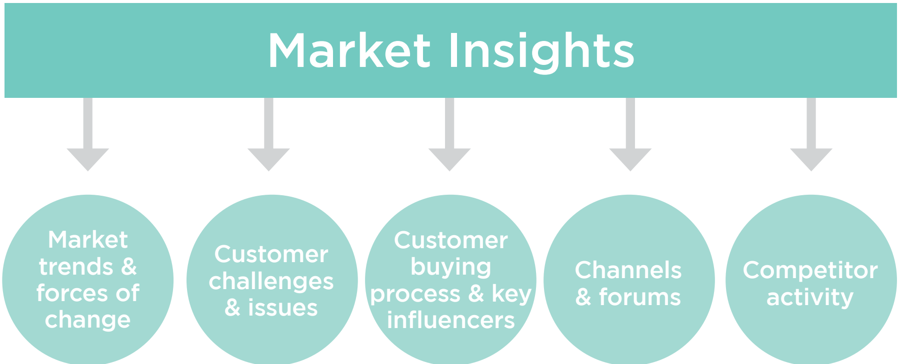
- the major trends in the markets that we, and our customers, are operating in;
- the forces that are driving change in those markets and will shape them in the coming years;
- the pressing challenges that our customers are facing today and the hot issues that are keeping their senior executives awake at night.

If we're to ensure that our content is distinctive and 'thought-leading', and that it engages the right people at the right time in the right places, we also need to understand:

- our target customers' buying processes and who the key influencers are during that process;
- where those influencers go to find information or to exchange ideas;
- what our competitors and other commentators are talking about.

Engage the right people at the right time in the right places.

Insight



To build that insight, you'll typically need to utilise a variety of sources. These include:

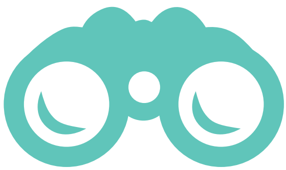
- **Internal resources** – You've probably already got a lot of relevant knowledge within your organisation. However, it may be buried in business plans or carried around in the heads of your employees. Taking the time to capture this information, in a structured and usable format, is a good first step to building a solid foundation of insight.
- **Analysts and media commentators** – Reviewing what the analysts and journalists that cover your targeted sector are talking about will help you understand what the topical issues and major trends are. That doesn't mean you need to slavishly follow what they say, but it'll give a pretty good indication of the current zeitgeist and a good starting point for identifying the topics to focus on.

- **Customer feedback** – If you want to understand what your customers are most concerned about, then there's no substitute for going straight to the horse's mouth. Take some time to speak to your sales teams, and to the customers directly, to find out what their big issues are. A caveat on this though: customers will tend to talk to you about the stuff that they think you can help with. If they perceive you quite narrowly today, that might be a very limited sub-set of their real concerns.
- **Social forums/online communities** – Spend time monitoring the debates on social forums to understand the issues that your target audience are concerned about. To do this you need to have a clear idea of who that target audience is – not just by company, but by job role or persona – and then you need to identify the places they are most likely to spend time online – learning, debating and sharing.

Once you've gathered your information it's important that there is an output. There is a danger during this stage of accumulating lots of information but not learning anything useful from it. We would suggest producing an insight report which distils all of the information gathered into the most significant points under each of the headings above and draws some conclusions from them. Information without analysis is not insight.

The other good reason for producing an insight report is that it helps to build consensus internally around the key issues that you should be considering when developing your thought leadership strategy. Unless you arrive at a shared view about the world you're operating in it will be very difficult to get agreement on your point of view and stick to it.

A lot of relevant knowledge will be buried in business plans or carried around in the heads of your employees. Take the time to capture this information, in a structured and usable format.



10 Point of View

Defining your point of view is a critical step in building a compelling and coherent thought leadership programme.

You can't hope to be perceived as a thought leader without some strong and clear opinions about the environment your customers operate in, the challenges they face, and the actions they should take in relation to those challenges.

Being able to articulate a clear point of view serves a number of purposes in the context of the overall thought leadership to revenue approach:

- It provides the starting point for your conversations with your target customers – rather than just talk about what you do, it enables you to initiate a discussion about what's going on in their world with credibility and authority.
- It links your insight with your proposition, providing the rationale for why what you do is important and relevant to the customer, given the broader market trends.
- It provides a touchstone, which connects the various strands of your content and communications activities, ensuring they are grounded in a consistent world view – rather than hopping around from idea to idea, based on whatever's in the author's head on that particular day.

- ✓ Relevant
- ✓ Insightful
- ✓ Distinctive
- ✓ Credible
- ✓ Connected
- ✓ Actionable

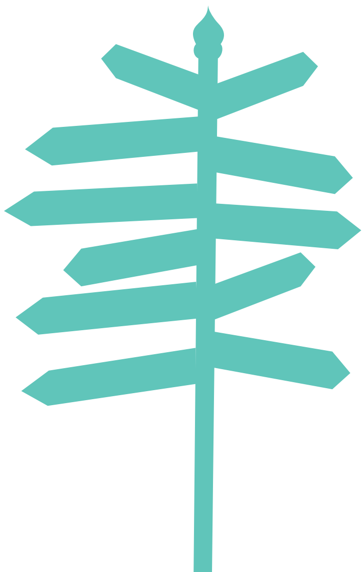
To be useful, a point of view needs to meet a number of tests:

- It should be **relevant** and therefore interesting to your target audience, given the particular issues and challenges that are of most concern to them.
- It should be **insightful**, telling the reader something they may not already know or have thought about, rather than being a statement of the obvious.
- It needs to be **distinctive** if you want people to sit up and take notice of what you're saying, not just a re-hash of what everybody else in the industry is talking about.
- It has to be **credible**, both in terms of:

  a) you being able to present a coherent argument to support it; and

  b) you being credible to hold an opinion on the subject. As part of building your point of view, you need to develop proof points to support it.
- It must be **connected** to what you do as an organisation, although not so blatantly self-serving that it will turn people off. There's no point generating lots of interest and debate around a topic, if that doesn't ultimately create a sales opportunity.
- Finally, your point of view needs to be **actionable**, with recommendations for what your audience should do in relation to the challenge or opportunity you're focusing on.

You can't be a thought leader without strong and clear opinions about the world you operate in, the challenges your customers face and the actions they should take.



Point of View

A point of view that everybody will agree with is not worth having.

A final word on the point of view:
Sometimes, people are reluctant to articulate a point of view that they fear others will disagree with and, as a result, end up with viewpoints that are anodyne and bland.

The purpose of a point of view is to stimulate debate and position you as someone worth listening to because you offer interesting and thought-provoking perspectives. A point of view that everybody will agree with is not worth having.

No Software!

When Salesforce.com first introduced its groundbreaking, web-based CRM product in 1999, it was going up against a raft of larger, well-established competitors such as Siebel and Oracle – not to mention potential objections from prospective buyers about the wisdom of storing all of their valuable customer data on someone else's servers.

Salesforce tackled the problem by changing the terms of the debate. Rather than focusing on the functionality of its product, its communications were focused on challenging people's preconceptions of how software should be delivered and consumed. The campaign ran under the provocative tagline 'No Software'. Salesforce.com founder Marc Benioff had a clear vision for the future of the IT industry and his point of view permeated all of the company's marketing efforts.

A decade later, Salesforce.com was the world's largest CRM company, with revenues of $2.5bn, and SaaS – or cloud-based software – was well on its way to becoming the dominant model for software delivery.

CASE STUDY

Content

Once you've formulated your point of view, you then need to develop content which effectively communicates your viewpoints and your insights to your target audience and prompts them to engage with you to learn more.

When developing your content, there are a number of areas to consider:

Content theme

Based on your point of view, you should develop an umbrella theme for your thought leadership programme. This should provide a platform which:

- clearly associates you with a particular issue or idea relevant to your target audience;
- links together your multiple content and communication activities into a single, coherent programme; and
- provides a vehicle to communicate your distinctive point of view.

Depending on your focus, this theme may be very broad (the future of UK banking, for example) or very specific (the impact of the Retail Distribution Review on the financial intermediary channel perhaps).

Unique intellectual property

Unless you are already known as a thought leader in your field, or you have some celebrity status, you're going to struggle to get coverage purely on the basis of your opinions. Therefore, if you want to grab people's attention, you'll probably need to invest in developing your own unique intellectual property (IP) to substantiate your point of view.

This IP may exist already within your organisation, if you have access to unique knowledge or research data – for example. But for many organisations, your unique IP will need to be created – by commissioning primary research from a third party research organisation, for example. This should be based on a clear set of hypotheses which flow from your point of view.

Format and style

Content can be presented in many different forms – research reports, white papers, videos, articles, case studies, blogs, slideshows, infographics, podcasts, press releases, etc. To determine the right format to make it relevant for your audience, you need to think about the profile of your target audience and the point in their decision-making cycle at which you're trying to engage them. This should dictate the format, length and depth of your content, as well as how it can be accessed, how practical/theoretical it is, etc.

In most B2B scenarios, you'll be targeting multiple influencer groups within a business, at different stages in the decision-making cycle, so you'll need multiple content formats to effectively engage your audience.

To determine the right content format, you need to think about the personas of your target audience and the point in their decision-making cycle at which you're trying to engage them.

Monthly Mobile Metrics Report

Mobile advertising network AdMob took advantage of the data it was collecting through its normal business activities to develop the Mobile Metrics Report, a monthly snapshot into trends in the mobile ecosystem. The report became a key source of data into mobile trends and enabled AdMob to achieve significant market exposure, despite not having the resources to invest huge sums in advertising or promotion. The strategy was so successful that AdMob was eventually acquired by Google for $750m.

CASE STUDY

When producing your content plan, think about the '3 Rs' to maximise the return you get from the effort you put in:

3Rs

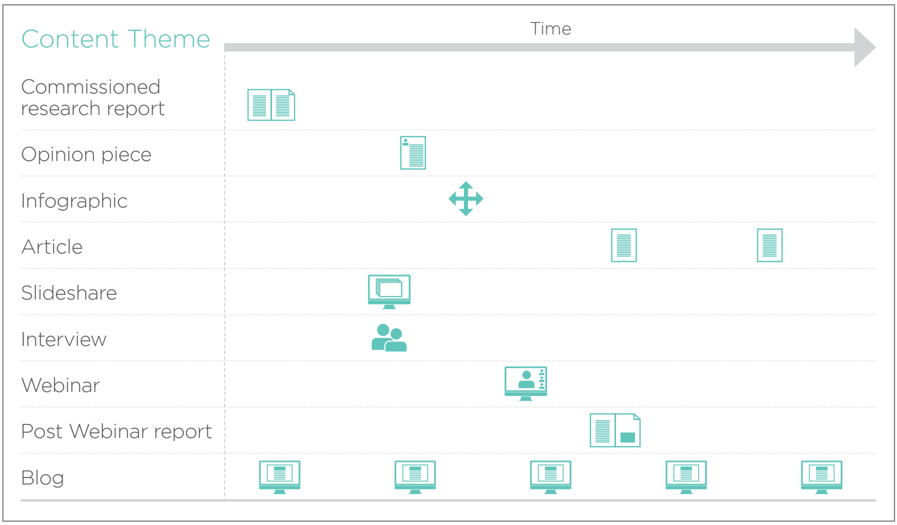
Recycle – Repurpose – Reframe

- **Recycle** – Increase the lifespan of a piece of original content by recycling it several times (a single piece of research, for example, could provide the basis for a research report, a white paper and several PR articles).
- **Repurpose** – Adapt a piece of content into different formats to suit different stages in the buying cycle (so a single piece of core content might be presented, for example, as a viewpoint paper or a PR article to capture the interest of influencers in the early stages of a buying cycle, but then developed into a more practical 'how to' guide for someone in the consideration phase).
- **Reframe** – The reach and relevance of a single piece of content can be increased by adapting it to address the specific concerns of individual job roles or different sectors (for example, a generic paper on the challenges of cloud security could be 'topped and tailed' for individual vertical sectors to increase relevance to the different audiences).

Content plan

If you want to build a thought leadership position, it requires sustained effort over a period of time. Putting out one white paper and hoping for the best won't cut it. Before you start creating anything, you should produce a content plan, which sets out your schedule for the next 6 – 12 month period. Your content plan should tie in with your engagement strategy (see later section).

An illustrative content plan



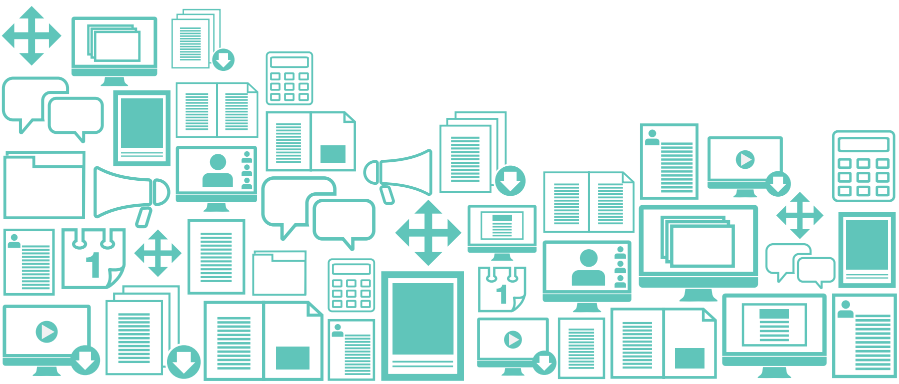
Content

By utilising third party experts to contribute content, it has gained credibility and added substance to its position, while also reducing its own content creation burden.

Content sourcing

Production of a regular flow of interesting and compelling content can be a challenge for any organisation, even those with extensive internal resources. However, there are a variety of routes you can utilise to help create your content, including:

- primary research, whether via an established research organisation or a do-it-yourself tool, such as Survey Monkey;
- in-house production of articles, blogs, white papers, etc, utilising in-house subject matter experts;
- outsourcing some or all of the development of assets to an external provider – although be careful that it's still your point of view and insight that's being communicated;
- utilising third-party 'guest' contributors, such as partners, academics, consultants or customers – you associate yourself with the topic by acting as the host and facilitator of the debate.



Race Against Time

Motor manufacturer Honda showed how you can associate yourself with a particular idea by acting as the facilitator of a debate, rather than necessarily having to generate all of the content yourself.

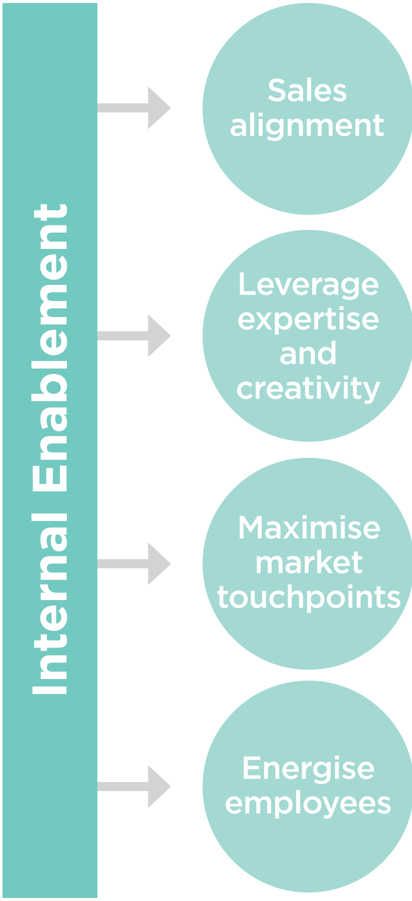
Honda, which has a focus on clean technology, has had a long-running thought leadership series entitled 'Race Against Time' on the topic of our diminishing oil supply. Much of the content generated has been from third parties, including partners, suppliers, academics and independent bloggers. Honda has cleverly communicated a point of view simply through the choice of topic and the way it has framed the debate. By utilising third party experts to contribute content, it has gained credibility and added substance to its position, while also reducing its own content creation burden.

CASE STUDY

Enablement

A critical element in an effective thought leadership programme is internal awareness and education. Your company cannot be said to be a thought leader if none of your employees understand your insights or your point of view.

There are four major reasons why internal enablement is important:



Sales alignment

It's particularly important for anyone in a customer-facing role to understand and be able to articulate your insights and points of view. There's no point in generating opportunities to engage with prospective clients on the back of some insightful thought leadership if the salesperson that then sits in front of the client is not equipped to develop that conversation and quickly defaults to talking about products and solutions.

Leverage expertise and creativity

Points of view and thought leadership ideas are often developed by small groups of people huddled together in workshops. By involving the wider organisation in your thought leadership programme, you significantly widen the pool of potential contributors and increase the chances that you'll identify some genuinely groundbreaking ideas and points of view.

Maximise market touchpoints

To build a strong thought leadership position in a market, you need to maximise every opportunity to communicate your insights and ideas to the market. Your employees, even those not in customer-facing roles, are all potential 'thought leadership ambassadors' for your company.

Energise your employees

In many sectors, the battle for talent is as important a factor for long-term success as the ability to win new clients. And talented people typically want to work for innovative companies that are leading the way in their particular field. A strong thought leadership programme can be a powerful tool for attracting talent to your company and energising your employees.

> There's no point in generating opportunities to engage with prospective clients on the back of some insightful thought leadership if the salesperson, that then sits in front of the client, is not equipped to develop that conversation.

Enablement

Enabling your teams – key points to consider:

There are a number of key points to consider in terms of how you enable and engage the teams within your organisation.

Audience – Who are the different internal audiences you need to reach? What level of understanding and involvement will they each need? Segmenting your internal audience will make it easier to determine the appropriate activities and messages to use.

Relevance – How do you make the programme relevant to each audience? What does it mean for them in their particular role or function? What do you need or want them to do?

Tools – What are the right tools to use across your different audiences? It's probably going to need more than just a single briefing email.

Some ideas include:

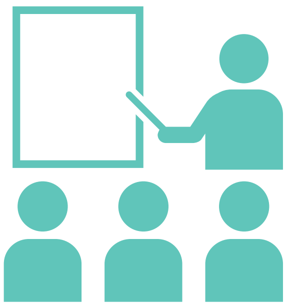
- Promotion through existing internal communications routes (such as newsletters and intranet sites);
- Inclusion in senior management briefings;
- Webinars/seminars to launch key publications and initiatives;
- Briefing papers highlighting key research findings and providing suggested talking points or follow-up questions to use with customers and prospects;
- Providing sales toolkits/playbooks;
- Creating presentation materials for use in customer meetings.

Sales culture and skills – What else will it take to equip your sales teams to be able to follow up on your content-led demand generation effectively? You shouldn't underestimate the size of the task. Being prepared to share insights and offer opinions will require a change of mindset and approach for most salespeople, one that will take them out of their comfort zone. They may need not just new knowledge but also new skills, so you need to think about how to train them effectively. We've found that running workshops which don't just provide information but also involve role-playing customer meeting scenarios can be valuable in getting salespeople to understand and feel comfortable with this approach.

Employee involvement – How are you going to enable employees to get involved? How can they provide feedback, contribute ideas and join the debate? If you can harness the expertise and creativity of your wider workforce, then your programme will be stronger for it. But you need to put in place the mechanisms that allow that to happen.

Internal champions – Who are the individuals that can champion the programme internally and articulate the message to their colleagues in a compelling way? Particularly within the sales community, identifying the people who will really buy in to the approach and act as role models and advocates among the rest of their colleagues can greatly aid adoption.

If you can harness the expertise and creativity of your wider workforce, then your programme will be stronger for it.



Communication

Once you've created your content, you need to disseminate it to your target audience – using the range of communications tools available to you.

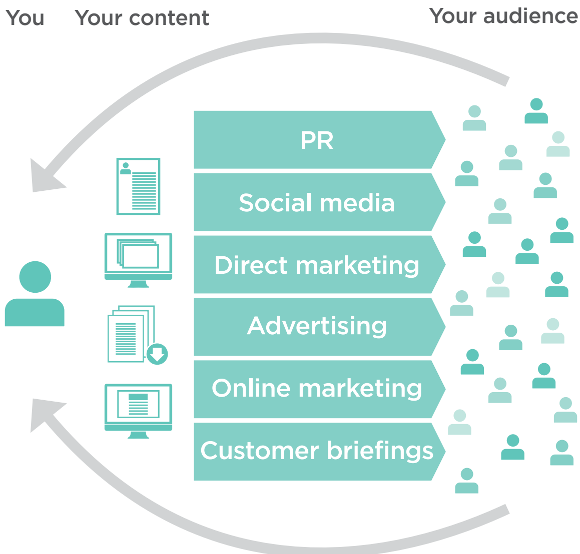
However, as with any communications activity, the dissemination needs to be well targeted and selective, with proper consideration given to context, choice of media and timing, etc. The audience you're trying to reach will inevitably be suffering from information overload, so adding to the problem with poorly targeted thought leadership communications isn't going to do you any favours. To the contrary, it will make that audience more resistant to listening to anything you have to say in the future.

Key points to consider

There are a number of issues to contemplate when it comes to building your communications plan. Key points to consider include:

Audience behaviours – Where do your target audience go to carry out research, be informed or debate with their peers? The better you understand how your target audience behaves (which goes back to the importance of good insight), the better you'll be able to reach them at the right time with the right content.

Integrated approach – As with any communication programme, there's probably not one single approach that will achieve your objectives. So you'll need to employ a mix of techniques, which could include PR, social media, direct communications, advertising, online marketing, and customer briefings. What's important is that these different elements are synchronised as part of one integrated plan so that broadly you're always talking about the same themes across your various comms activities.



Rather than just blasting it out to your database, you need to make sure that your content can be easily found by people who are looking for it.

Easy to find – Assuming you've done a good job in identifying relevant topics, then there will be people out there looking for useful and interesting content just like the stuff you've created. So rather than just blasting it out to your database, you need to make sure that your content can be easily found by people who are looking for it. That means getting your search engine marketing working well, with a focus on the keywords that your audience are likely to be searching for – and these won't necessarily be the terms you yourself use to describe what you do.

Communication

Just because thought leadership is often serious and substantial, that doesn't mean it has to be dull.

Social media – Social media and online forums have a number of benefits as a communications method in this context:

- You can reach specific communities of interest that your content should be relevant to. For example, LinkedIn has over 1.4m groups today, ranging from the broad to the very specialist.
- It allows for easy sharing of content – so while it would be impossible for you to identify every person out there that your content is relevant to, if it's interesting enough there's a good chance that it will eventually find its way to those people through the billions of relationships that make up our social networks.
- It's an interactive media and therefore gives you the opportunity to start to build a dialogue with people that have some interest in what you have to say.

Bringing your message to life – Just because thought leadership is often serious and substantial, that doesn't mean it has to be dull. Think about how you can bring your core messages to life with the right creative approach – visually, through headlines, positioning lines, etc.

Identify your figurehead – Many successful thought leadership programmes have a strong figurehead, who will evangelise the message with journalists, analysts, customers and employees. Sometimes this is the CEO – think John Chambers at Cisco or Larry Ellison at Oracle – but it doesn't have to be. It may be a charismatic subject matter expert or a business unit head. Having a person who is an identifiable spokesperson for the company, who can articulate your point of view.

Smarter Planet

IBM's 'Smarter Planet' programme has been a central element in the company's go-to-market approach since 2008. The Smarter Planet programme is based on the view that the world is changing in fundamental ways – to use IBM's description, it is becoming more instrumented, interconnected and intelligent, or 'smaller, flatter and smarter' – and as a result organisations are faced with a raft of new challenges.

The Smarter Planet vision sets out six imperatives, which IBM says are vital if organisations are to succeed. These imperatives are then supported through an ongoing programme of research, publications, videos, etc. Ultimately, each theme links back to an explanation of how IBM technology can help organisations address their critical challenges. However, the starting point for the conversation with the customer is not technology but a point of view about how the world is changing. It encourages organisations to see changes as opportunities and not merely react to problems.

The Smarter Planet programme has become a powerful brand in its own right and helped IBM position itself as a strategic advisor to businesses and governments, not just a provider of technology.

CASE STUDY

Engagement to Pipeline

This is the key stage in the process, and one that companies often struggle with.

You've developed distinctive insights, you've built interesting content, you've communicated to your target audience... and hopefully some of those people found your content valuable and thought-provoking. So how do you now convert that interest into pipeline?

To begin with, it's important that you actually have a plan for how you're going to make it happen. You can't assume that simply sending your opinions out into cyberspace will convince a potential customer to pick up the phone. Someone might have been interested in your research into the security implications of mobility, but that doesn't mean they're going to immediately decide to call to place an order for your security software.

There are four principles to bear in mind when building your plan to convert interest to pipeline:

Map the journey

You need to form an end-to-end view of the journey that you want your prospective customer to take with you. This is likely to be a series of steps, rather than a single leap from A to Z. Those steps should lead from initial passive interest, to a two-way dialogue, to a substantive engagement that ultimately gives you the opportunity to explain how you can actually help the customer address the challenges you've been talking about.

When mapping this journey, you need put yourself in the mind of your target customer. What are likely to be the key questions in their mind at each stage? What concerns or reservations will they have about taking action? What will motivate them to take the next step? Taking the time to write this stuff down is a good discipline and will help you develop a more robust plan.

Clear calls to action

As you map the journey, you need to ensure that there are clear calls to action at each stage. Those calls to action will vary depending on what stage of the journey you're at and need to be proportionate to the customer's likely level of engagement at that point. For someone reading a blog post, you might invite them to download a research report; then, having downloaded the research report, you might invite them to a webinar to learn more; and at the end of the webinar, you might offer a one-on-one follow-up call to discuss the implications for their business in more detail, and so on.

The key point is that you need to make it easy at each stage for the prospect to engage further with you, without scaring them off by asking for too much commitment too quickly.

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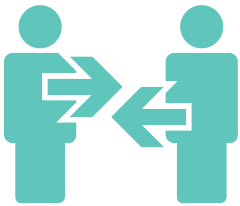

An objective of your thought leadership is to create an imperative for action on the part of the customer. Until the customer is bought into the need for action, you should avoid pitching your solution.

Build the credibility and trust

As you proceed through the journey, a key objective should be to build credibility and trust. This ensures that, once the customer reaches the point of deciding to take action, you're clearly positioned in their mind as the logical organisation to turn to for help. To do this, you need to be willing and able to share additional insights as the conversation develops to demonstrate that you really do have relevant expertise. This is why it's important to focus on a topic that you genuinely have insight into – and to build the depth of content, rather than having one great research report and then nothing to follow up with.

Don't pitch a solution too early

As discussed earlier in this guide, one of the reasons for adopting an approach based on thought leadership is so that you can engage with buyers at an earlier point in their decision cycle – before they've clearly understood what the requirement is or what the likely solution looks like.

An objective of your thought leadership is to create an imperative for action on the part of the customer. However, until the customer has bought into that need for action, you should avoid pitching your solution. If you do, you're likely to turn your prospective customer off completely, because they're not yet in buying mode. Ultimately, you want to get the customer to the point where they turn around to you and say: "Right, I need to do something about this. How can you help?" Until they own the problem, there's no point pitching a solution.

Content marketing from the experts

Given that HubSpot's business is to provide software for inbound marketing, it perhaps shouldn't be a surprise that they're pretty good at using content-based marketing to grow their own business. HubSpot provide a wide range of thought leadership and value-adding content, available via their website, including how-to guides, white papers, videos, infographics, ebooks, webinars and their own HubSpot TV channel. They even offer an inbound marketing activity.

Each time you access a new piece of content, HubSpot take the opportunity to capture a couple of pieces of information about you, (e.g. what type of company are you? What are your main marketing challenges?). They use this information to deliver targeted follow-up communications, each offering something of value (e.g. a free guide, a free consultation) and each with a very clear call to action that builds a closer engagement with HubSpot.

The approach has helped Hubspot grow from nothing to $50m+ revenues in five years.

CASE STUDY

32 Summary – Top Tips

1 **Do your research**
Before you jump straight in and start commissioning research or writing papers, take the time to understand the market you're trying to reach and what's going to be relevant, interesting and distinctive – where's the white space?

2 **Plan properly**
Think through your approach – what's the underlying theme that will unify all of your activities, how are you going to attract interest, what mechanisms will enable you to convert interest to engagement?

3 **Don't ignore what's close to home**
Ensure you fully leverage your in-house expertise and IP and that you focus on an area that you can actually back up.

4 **Educate your team about your insights and your opinions**
If the only people who can effectively articulate your thought leadership position are your agency, then you're not really a thought leader.

5 **Think smart about content sources**
Unique intellectual property is important, but not everything has to be an expensive research project or a white paper that you spend months trying to write. Look for opportunities to tap into the expertise of your partners, your suppliers, and enthusiasts within your own organisation to generate content.

6

Repurpose your content to maximise ROI and exposure

If you invest the time and money in developing a substantive piece of thought leadership material, then make sure you get the most out of it. Think about how you can spin it out into articles, viewpoints, white papers, infographics, videos, slideshares, etc.

7

Map the customer journey

Have a clear view of the journey you want the customer to take once you've captured their initial interest. How are you going to build the path to closer engagement and ultimately a sale?

8

Remember the call to action

Ensure that every piece of communications has a call to action which is relevant and proportional but also helps move the prospect towards your ultimate objective – a sale.

So that's our guide for how to build a programme to take you from thought leadership to revenue. We hope you've found it useful and that it has prompted some new ideas and new plans.

About OneGTM

OneGTM was formed in 2010 by co-directors, Phil Brown and Tim Hallac, to address clients' needs for fully joined-up and better aligned go-to-market programmes.

Based in London, OneGTM has a core team of ten people with a powerful combination of strategic planning, creative marketing, sales management and project delivery expertise.

OneGTM offers a comprehensive set of go-to-market services to help progressive B2B technology companies deliver integrated go-to-market programmes that drive profitable growth. These services include:

- **strategic planning**
- **creative platforms**
- **thought leadership**
- **influencer profiling**
- **go-to-market toolkit**
- **channel enablement**
- **demand generation**
- **programme management**

Our end-to-end capabilities help our clients to succeed by ensuring that all go-to-market activities are fully aligned and highly effective.

The Directors

Phil Brown

Phil Brown has more than 20 years' B2B sales, marketing and general management experience, primarily in the information, communications and technology (ICT) sectors. His career includes running high-performing enterprise sales and marketing teams, launching a new online business for a major telco, building a SaaS business from the ground up, and founding OneGTM, a successful B2B go-to-market company.

At OneGTM, Phil works with clients to ensure they have the right go-to-market strategies in place to achieve their goals and effective plans to execute them. Helping clients build and execute results-oriented thought leadership programmes is a particular area of focus.

Tim Hallac

Tim co-founded the company because he recognised a need to have a seamless approach to strategy, marketing and sales implementation. As a previous client he was frustrated that he had to get so many agencies involved to get a job done; this never worked as the agencies quite often did not like working with one another, ideas and strategies became lost in translation, and you always ended up paying more.

As MD of award-winning marketing agency Mabox, Tim has experience in almost every marketing discipline from branding through to sales incentives. Known as OneGTM's marketing genius, he is responsible for marketing planning and coming up with new ideas on how to approach every client's problems.

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If you'd like to discuss how OneGTM can help you build your thought leadership to revenue programme, contact us at:

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