



THE  
*Sophisticated  
Marketer's*

GUIDE TO **THOUGHT  
LEADERSHIP**

**Linked**  **in**™

# A NOTE TO THE *Sophisticated Marketer*



Thought leadership is an essential part of any successful content marketing strategy. Both B2C and B2B companies can benefit from the many advantages of thought leadership to build a more competitive reputation and ultimately drive more revenue.

It's especially important in B2B because of the complexity and length of the decision-making process and the large number of people involved. There's lots of buzz around thought leadership, but it's very often a misused and misunderstood term. That's why we created *The Sophisticated Marketer's Guide to Thought Leadership*.

What you hold in your hands, or more likely are viewing on your screen, is the latest eBook in our very popular Sophisticated Marketer series. This is your one-stop shop for everything a marketer needs to know to deliver a world-class thought leadership strategy that produces results. This comprehensive guide is chocked full of interviews and tips from marketing thought leaders combined with expert insights covering both basic and advanced thought leadership strategies.

It's been a labor of love putting this guide together and after reading it, you will have a much deeper understanding of thought leadership; what it is, why your business needs it, and how to develop your own thought leadership strategy for driving real results.

**Let's get started, shall we?**

**Jason Miller**  
*Senior Manager, Content Marketing  
LinkedIn Marketing Solutions*



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**PART ONE**

WHY DOES MY  
COMPANY NEED  
A THOUGHT  
LEADERSHIP  
STRATEGY?

# WHAT IS THOUGHT LEADERSHIP?

Ask ten people how they define thought leadership and you'll likely hear ten different answers. And these days, many people struggle when it comes to understanding the connection between thought leadership and content marketing. It all boils down to this: thought leadership is a special form of content marketing—one that can deliver measurable value to your organization.

We like how Jon Miller, VP Product Marketing for Marketo, breaks it down:

"...both thought leadership and content marketing can very effectively build your awareness and brand, but...true thought leadership is much rarer. Thought leadership consists of ideas that require attention, that offer guidance or clarity and that can lead people in unexpected, sometimes contrarian directions (think of Seth Godin). Thought leadership needs to be educational and ideally provocative; content marketing can simply be fun or entertaining"<sup>1</sup>

In our minds, thought leadership and content marketing are intertwined. In fact, in numerous surveys, establishing thought leadership is often cited as one of the key reasons that B2B marketers engage in content marketing.

## The Best Things Come in Threes

In a nutshell, thought leadership is about sharing insights and ideas—and a unique point of view—that provoke new ways of thinking, spark discussions and debates, and inspire action. A true thought leader knows a topic inside and out, has formed a clear, unique and defensible point of view about it, and freely shares that perspective.

That said, there's more than one type of thought leadership. In fact, we feel it falls into three categories (and we cover all three later in this section):



### Industry Thought Leadership

(a point of view on news, trends and the future)



### Product Thought Leadership

(how-to's, best practices, strategy)



**Organizational Thought Leadership** (company culture, talent development, etc.)

# WHY IS THOUGHT LEADERSHIP IMPORTANT TO YOUR BUSINESS?

Every B2B marketer today knows buyers can readily access information online as they explore issues and evaluate options for addressing those issues within their own organizations. Sure, we can think of this as giving rise to the self-empowered buyer.

But the fact is that buyers ultimately want assistance finding a solution that will help their organization address the issue at hand. As Jeff Ernst, principal analyst at Forrester Research puts it:

**“Business buyers don’t ‘buy’ your product or service, they ‘buy into’ your perspective and approach to solving their problems.”<sup>1</sup>**

That’s where thought leadership comes into play. By painting a picture of how buyers can address their issues, your organization can move beyond the “me-too” product discussion to engage buyers at the strategic level.

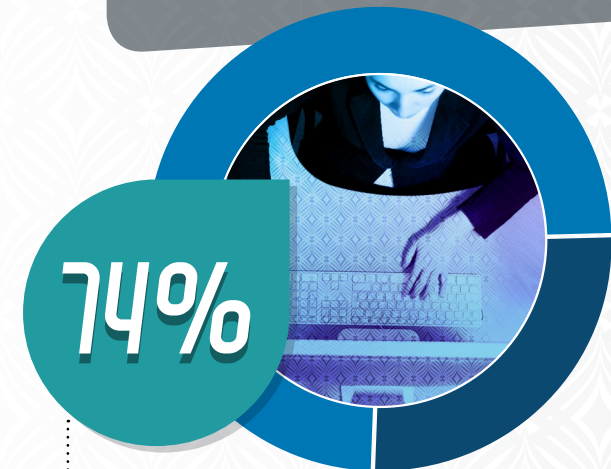
It’s no wonder that according to one study<sup>2</sup>, the characteristics most valued in B2B content include breadth and depth of information, and originality of thinking and ideas. Other research has found that editorial content offering in-depth insights is the most influential content type during the purchase process.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, thought leadership can help your organization stay top of mind as B2B buyers make their way through a lengthy purchase process.

As buyers digest and connect with your thoughts and ideas, they begin trusting you as a reliable source and brand. And that means your company is much more likely to make the short list of contenders. In fact, Corporate Visions found that 74% of buyers choose the company that was FIRST to add value as they are defining their buying vision.<sup>4</sup>

## FILL THE CONTENT VOID

With B2B buyers facing irrelevant information overload, thought leaders can truly stand apart by filling the void with timely, relevant, insightful ideas.



of buyers choose the company that was FIRST to add value as they are defining their buying vision.

—Source: SAVO, *Techniques of Social Selling: Just Do It!*, 2014

1. <http://blog.eloqua.com/thought-leadership-marketing/>
2. <http://www.marketingcharts.com/wp/online/b2b-buyers-on-what-online-content-works-and-what-doesnt-30021/>
3. <http://www.skyword.com/content-marketing/how-content-influences-the-b2b-buyers-path-to-purchase/>
4. SAVO, *Techniques of Social Selling: Just Do It!*, 2014, [http://www.slideshare.net/SAVO\\_Group/techniques-of-social-selling-just-do-it-sales-for-life](http://www.slideshare.net/SAVO_Group/techniques-of-social-selling-just-do-it-sales-for-life)

# HOW THOUGHT LEADERSHIP DRIVES BUSINESS

We all know that market leaders generate more revenue than others in their industries. For many years, companies established themselves as market leaders by building—and successfully marketing—the products and services that their target audiences wanted and needed. But as companies across industries find themselves struggling to differentiate their offerings from others, thought leadership is becoming critical to standing apart—and driving business.

## Learn from the best.

One such market leader is IBM. And it has evolved with the times when it comes to taking a leadership position. Realizing it can no longer rely on its product strength alone to drive sales, it invests in robust thought leadership programs, such as its Smarter Planet initiative.

As Gartner says, the value is that "...it [the Smarter Planet initiative] moves the conversation with customers

from product-specific discussions to broader and longer-term concepts—less directly comparable to IBM competitors' more-concrete and narrow offerings."<sup>2</sup>

Just two years after its launch in 2008, the Smarter Planet initiative generated \$3 billion in revenue and double-digit growth from more than 6,000 client engagements. IBM expects its Smarter Planet initiative to contribute at least \$7 billion in revenue growth through 2015.

According to Forrester Research, one of the responsibilities of today's CMO is to "generate<sup>1</sup> thought leadership to drive brand differentiation."

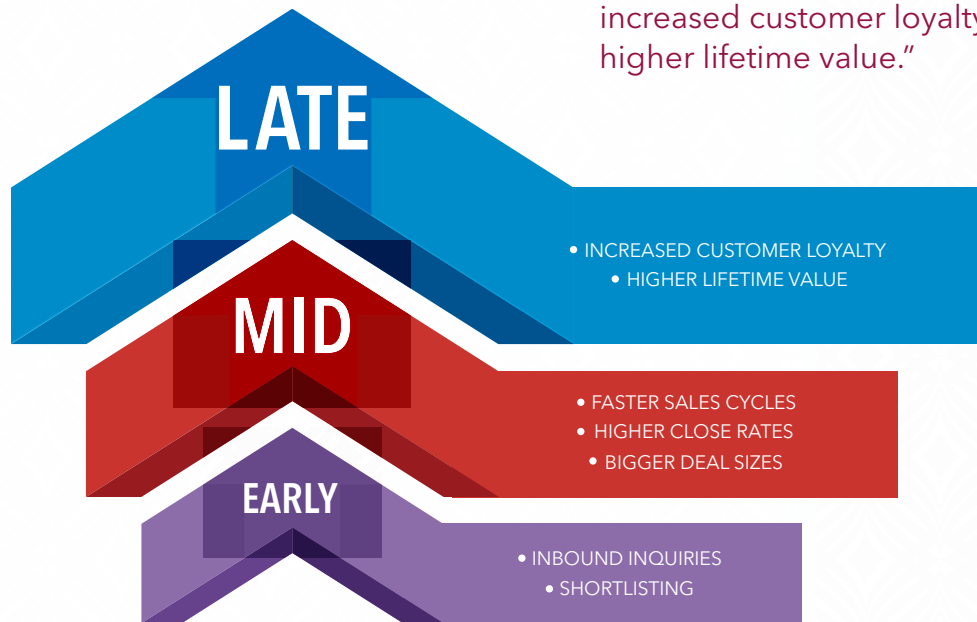
There's a reason for the saying "No one ever got fired for buying IBM". Business decision makers want to align with leaders, whether market leaders or thought leaders.

## Seize the Opportunity to Stand Out

But you don't have to be IBM to realize game-changing results from a thought leadership program. After all, with so few companies effectively "doing" thought leadership and delivering the insights that buyers crave, the door is wide open for those with the right approach, resources and dedication.

Laura Ramos of Forrester says thought leadership impacts business at each stage of the buyer journey:<sup>1</sup>

"...we have found companies benefit in the early stage...through more inbound inquiries and shortlisting; in the middle stage...through faster sales cycles, higher close rates, and bigger deal sizes; and in the later stage...through increased customer loyalty and higher lifetime value."



of technology buyers said thought leadership was important or critical in determining a shortlist of vendors.

—Source: "From Thought Leadership to Revenue Guide" put out by The Channel Partnership.<sup>2</sup>

"If you want to remain 'top-of-mind' in your industry, you must regularly provide relevant content to a niche audience. When you consistently deliver value to the right people, they will share your content, evangelize your products and services and in many cases become your best customers."

— **Michael A. Stelzner**  
Founder, Social Media Examiner  
Author, *Launch*

1. [http://blogs.forrester.com/laura\\_ramos/13-09-11-thought\\_leadership\\_hot\\_topic\\_at\\_cs\\_forum\\_helsinki\\_2013](http://blogs.forrester.com/laura_ramos/13-09-11-thought_leadership_hot_topic_at_cs_forum_helsinki_2013)  
2. "From Thought Leadership to Revenue Guide" put out by The Channel Partnership. Original stat is ITSMA but its from a 2012 survey.



# ALIGNING THOUGHT LEADERSHIP WITH MESSAGING STRATEGY

No matter how you define or slice and dice thought leadership, it is always core to a company's communications strategy. And by injecting true thought leadership into your content, you can take it to new heights. In fact, these three key principles behind thought leadership reflect the same ones that should be driving your company messaging and positioning:



Understand what prospects and customers believe



Develop and articulate a well-informed point of view



Frame a story in terms of the value delivered to help buyers see new possibilities

*So how do you go about getting into thought leadership?*

## Use Thought Leadership to Deliver on Your Vision

A 2014 Forrester Research/Business Marketing Association/Online

Marketing Institute study<sup>1</sup> found that an overwhelming 85% of B2B marketing leaders fail to connect their content to business value. One of the key reasons for this disconnect? Content "lacks forward-leaning insights that buyers can turn into action." It turns out that only 12% of those surveyed focus on publishing research and perspectives. And even those few don't engage outside experts to validate their ideas. In other words, the majority of content being published by B2B marketers is being done in a thought leadership vacuum.

Effective thought leaders map their topics to key themes that intersect with their target audience's pressing concerns and what their organization can do to help address those concerns. Put another way, they make sure there's consistency in the company's mission and vision, what the company delivers in the market, and its marketing messages. This is key to making sure there's muscle behind getting your thought leadership noticed.



85% of B2B marketing leaders fail to connect their content to business value



1. "Compare Your B2B Content Marketing Maturity," <http://www.forrester.com/B2B+Marketers+Struggle+To+Connect+Content+Marketing+With+Business+Value/-/E-PRE7144>

## THE BLOOM GROUP'S EIGHT CRITERIA FOR THOUGHT-LEADING CONTENT

"The job of making sure that the thought leadership a firm's subject matter experts are producing aligns with the firm's overall business strategy generally falls to senior leadership on editorial boards and steering committees and to the marketing group."

–The Bloom Group, Best Practitioners Offer Four Best Practices for Thought Leadership, [bloomgroup.com/content/best-practitioners-offer-four-best-practices-thought-leadership](http://bloomgroup.com/content/best-practitioners-offer-four-best-practices-thought-leadership)

### What's in it for Your Organization?

At the same time, it's important to align thought leadership efforts with your company's overall strategic goals so you can drive a meaningful outcome from the program.



Industry Leadership



Product Leadership



Organizational Leadership



SUCCESS

"If a firm's published thought leadership is not aligned with its offerings, not only is producing it a waste of time and resources, it risks alienating customers... If thought leadership is not relevant to the business, the business unit leaders will get tired of it, and the organization's interest in producing it will wane, along with the resources it devotes to it."

–Deloitte Managing Director, Innovation, Craig Muraskin

See more at: [bloomgroup.com/content/best-practitioners-offer-four-best-practices-thought-leadership](http://bloomgroup.com/content/best-practitioners-offer-four-best-practices-thought-leadership)

1. **Relevance**—Addressing a burning issue for your target audience
2. **Novelty**—Having a fundamentally new way to solve a problem
3. **Depth**—Possessing substantial knowledge about the problem and how to solve it
4. **Validity**—Proving your solution works through real examples of companies that have solved it your way with measurable benefits
5. **Practicality**—Demonstrating you have a well-thought-out approach to solving the problem and understand how to overcome the obstacles to adoption
6. **Rigor**—Having hard-to-dispute logic about the problem and the best way to solve it
7. **Clarity**—Communicating the point of view in words your target audience understands
8. **Coherence**—Having frameworks or models that simplify the problem and/or solution.<sup>1</sup>

# THREE TYPES OF THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Earlier we outlined three flavors of thought leadership: Industry, Product and Organizational. Here you'll learn more about each type, and how to select the optimal mix for your company.

## Industry Thought Leadership

Standing out in your industry is the aim of many thought leadership programs. But what exactly does this mean and how do you achieve this goal?

At a minimum, it means you need to focus on the news, trends and forces shaping the market(s) you serve. Then you need to develop and share innovative thoughts and insights about those dynamics with your audience. Just remember to keep your audience in mind, whether prospects, customers, analysts, or others. Clearly spell out how your ideas surface newfound opportunities, provide an alternative path to success, or offer a novel approach to solving

an entrenched problem. We'd go so far as to say you should develop a contrarian point of view. After all, what's the value in hearing someone agree with what's happening in a particular industry? A good rule of thumb: don't just rehash what's being said—recalibrate people's thinking with a fresh perspective.



## Product Thought Leadership

Once you've defined a new—and let's face it—best way for companies in a certain industry to go about business, you want to give them the means to get from point A to point B. Ideally your products (or services) are the vehicle for taking them down this better path. To help your audience understand how this vision can become reality, share best practices,

strategic roadmaps, practical how-to's and other information that shows your product's potential for transformation. The content and ideas you share are the "evidence" of your thought leadership, and can inspire others to partner with your company.

*"Some companies put forth what they call thought leadership, when in fact, they're simply keeping pace with the market. And that's okay. As long as you're able to satisfy your prospects' and customers' needs, you don't need to develop groundbreaking concepts. In fact, a well-executed content-marketing strategy reflects key characteristics of thought leadership by offering insights and perspectives that frame one's thinking, spark conversations and lead people down the decision-making path. At the end of the day, it comes down to delivering relevant information and ideas to the right audience and LinkedIn provides a terrific platform for companies across industries to do just that."*

– **Stephanie Tilton**

Principal/Marketing Writing Consultant Ten Ton Marketing

## PRODUCT THOUGHT LEADERSHIP



## Organizational Thought Leadership

Your thought leadership should reflect your company's vision, innovations and uniqueness. In other words, it should mirror your organization's culture. We could go a step further and say it should drive your company's culture. No matter how you look at it, your thought leadership and culture need to be in sync for your thought leadership to take flight.

Take this example: Five years ago, Netflix CEO Reed Hastings published a 126-page slide deck outlining how he hires, fires and rewards employees. The level of insight into the inner workings of a company's culture was unprecedented, and Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg has since said the SlideShare "may well be the most important document ever to come out of the (Silicon) Valley." It's a very forward-thinking approach to thought leadership that set off a movement for others to follow in Netflix's footsteps.

More than 6.5 million views later, Hastings' "Netflix Culture" has spurred a conversation among business leaders that's at the backbone of every organization: What is, or should be, a company's culture? How do you create the perfect workplace? How do you attract and retain top talent that is the lifeblood of your company?

Indeed, dozens of organizations, from Spotify and New York University to HubSpot and Fab.com, have followed suit. What was once more abstract theory has become transparent, documented constitutions to live and work by.

# ORGANIZATIONAL THOUGHT LEADERSHIP



"Thought leadership is such a powerful content marketing strategy because it strikes that delicate balance between the personal and the professional. It's authoritative, yet authentic. When you find this balance with your content, you are truly optimized for influence."

– **Stephanie Sammons**

*Digital Entrepreneur and Marketing Strategist*  
[www.stephaniesammons.com](http://www.stephaniesammons.com)

## What's the Best Mix for Us?

We recommend applying these different flavors of thought leadership based on what you can do well and where the opportunity lies. Commit to all three if you have the resources. That means you need to develop a point of view and produce a variety of content on industry, product and



organization. But if your resources are limited, choose one and do it very well. For example, is there a gaping hole in your industry that you can fill? Maybe there's an opportunity for a quick win around culture and product, but high competition around industry.

Bottom Line: Focus on the area(s) where you can make an impact and add value to the conversation instead of just adding noise.

## JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Upload your own culture deck and tag it **#CultureCode**. View all **#CultureCode** decks [here](#).

Need help getting started? Download the **#CultureCode** [template](#).

"The difference between content that doesn't perform and content that does is whether or not the author has authority (ever notice that the word 'author' is in 'authority'?). If you're just repeating what everyone else is saying, you're not building authority. To instill confidence and trust to drive someone through to a conversion, you must provide thought leadership in addition to your other content."

– **Douglas Karr**  
CEO, DK New Media and CMO, CircuPress



# BRIAN SOLIS

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Principal Analyst, Altimeter Group,  
Author of *What's the Future of Business (WTF)*

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*Brian Solis is principal at Altimeter Group, a research firm focused on disruptive technology. A digital analyst, anthropologist, and futurist, Solis has studied and influenced the effects of emerging technology on business, marketing, and society.*

*His new book, *What's the Future of Business (WTF)*, explores the landscape of connected consumerism and how business and customer relationships unfold and flourish in four distinct moments of truth.*

## **How important is thought leadership for gaining a competitive advantage?**

If you define thought leadership as thinking about people and how to provide these people with value, how to help them solve problems, and how to help them achieve aspirations and goals, it's absolutely critical. If you define thought leadership as personal branding, the opposite is true. People often confuse thought leadership with personal branding. There's a difference.

## **For those looking to create thought leadership content for the first time, what are the best opportunities to get started?**

I was once asked how to be a thought leader. The answer is: You have to be one. That takes understanding of the market and the people you are trying to reach and engage. You have to understand the state of the world, and also have ideas on how it should evolve. But it starts by being human. This is a part even successful thought leaders miss, and it's mostly driven by

ego: "I'm better than the voices that are out there, so I'm going to add mine."

True thought leadership starts with empathy. Can you tell me the top ten problems your audience has at any given time? How about the top ten aspirations? Are you thinking through where your audience *wants* to be, compared with where the market is going? That's what inspires me. Someone who is honestly trying to better understand the people they are trying to help. And if understanding and helping is the goal, I don't think any thought leaders would call themselves thought leaders.

**Can you think of a brand that is nailing thought leadership? What are they doing right? What are they gaining from it?**

For a while American Express Open Forum was one of the best examples because they didn't just try to put their own voice out there. They made it a point to bring in relevant

outside voices. Their model became the benchmark, as did Mayo Clinic's when they offered thought leadership by helping people answer common questions about health conditions. Same with H & R Block and their selfless approach to answering questions. When you are selfless as a brand, when you are providing value, the natural response is reciprocity. Reciprocity can lead to ROI.

Intel (client) has catered to the B2B audience as well as B2C which is pretty stellar for a semi-conductor company. They continue to break ground, using new and existing channels in leading ways, and demonstrating to the rest of the world what is possible.

"I was once asked how to be a thought leader. The answer is: You have to be one. That takes understanding of the market and the people you are trying to reach and engage."



## What LinkedIn marketing tactics can brands use to implement thought leadership campaigns?

Recently, Altimeter Group (where I am a principal analyst) and LinkedIn partnered on a research project that ultimately showed how genuine communication and engagement in social media helps businesses improve relationships with both customers and employees. The key to 'relationship economics' on social media is no different from real-world relationships: the more you invest in terms of time, openness, value, listening, and engagement, the more likely it is that relationships will flourish.

It starts at the top. We found that executives at companies that reap the rewards of social media engagement are much more active on social media than executives at companies that are not socially active. They also play a bigger role in driving a socially engaged culture. Yes, there are specific tactics companies can use on

LinkedIn, but the most effective social media strategies are derived from a culture of relationship building where the executives lead by example.

**You've mentioned before that engagement is really about A.R.T. (Actions, Reactions and Transactions). When crafting a thought leadership strategy, do you recommend starting with the story you want to tell or the A.R.T. you want to achieve?**

A.R.T. is really about what happens next. Everyone should design for what happens next. Attention is precious. Once you have earned attention, it's what you do with that attention that counts. Too many companies emphasize attention. They come up with amazing headlines, clever GIFs, and great infographics, but there is rarely a defined strategy to do something with attention once it is captured.

"The key to 'relationship economics' on social media is no different from real-world relationships: the more you invest in terms of time, openness, value, listening, and engagement, the more likely it is that relationships will flourish."

A.R.T. is less about following the trend of trying to be a storyteller, and more about just trying to be engaging. I believe the story comes naturally when you are inspired by the empathy of being human, and what humans find compelling, useful, and meaningful. Most brands think about one audience, one campaign, and one emotion, but there are so many types of emotional elements to consider. The culture of each social network is different. Each channel features different people, with different needs and motivations, in a different context. The actual story is the bigger purpose or aspiration. And it unfolds in so many different ways, like the movie Crash. More companies need to think like that.

**In your mind, what is the biggest differentiator between those who try to become thought leaders and those who ultimately succeed at it?**

Philosophically I wonder if anyone really knows if they are successful. How do you define success? The people who want to be helpful, do they have to justify ROI? It comes down to campaign vs continuum. One turns off and the other is part of life. The A.R.T. of engagement was always about assessing the value in real-time, adding to what you're doing, and measuring. You should know more as you go, so that you can effectively refine as you go.

There are too many content marketers who suffer from [mediumalism](#) and there are too few strategists who can turn attention into a human moment. It's about designing for the embrace, not the channel, and then for the journey.

"I believe the story comes naturally when you are inspired by the empathy of being human, and what humans find compelling, useful, and meaningful."



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**PART TWO**

HOW CAN  
MY COMPANY  
LEVERAGE  
THOUGHT  
LEADERSHIP ON  
LINKEDIN?

# LAY A STRONG FOUNDATION

While it's valuable to publish your thought leadership across a variety of forums, it's invaluable to establish a platform that makes it possible to effectively showcase your thought leadership. And LinkedIn offers prime real estate for doing just that.

By using a combination of your Company Page, Showcase Pages, Sponsored Updates, SlideShare and Groups as well as the option to publish on LinkedIn, you can lay a solid foundation to build and showcase thought leadership for both your company and professional brand.

In this section you will learn best practices for distributing thought leadership content on LinkedIn and how to create thought leadership content that resonates with your audience, customers, and prospects on LinkedIn.



# HOW TO DISTRIBUTE THOUGHT LEADERSHIP ON LINKEDIN

Make your Company Page the hub for thought leadership.

There are more than three million companies leveraging Company Pages to promote content and build relationships by sharing relevant information, encouraging vibrant discussions, and publishing useful insights that help our members become more productive and successful. And thought leadership should be a big part of that strategy.

Your Company Page is the ideal central repository for your thought leadership. It's often one of the first pages that LinkedIn members visit when checking out a company, making it the perfect place to feature thought leadership content, including links to your latest and greatest white papers, eBooks, and how-to content.

To complement the thought leadership content, your organization authors point people to other relevant content by curating articles from industry news, trends and content

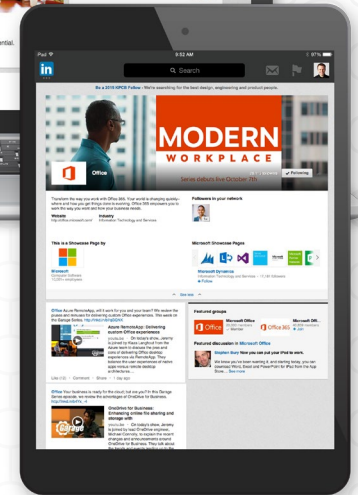
from LinkedIn Influencers. The idea is to show that your perspective isn't trapped within the four walls of your company and that your ultimate goal is to educate anyone interested in the topic. In other words, it's a way to demonstrate that you're not self-centered but instead are truly motivated to help others.

With the introduction of Showcase Pages, companies can now extend their thought leadership content by creating dedicated pages for their more prominent brands, businesses, and initiatives. Through Showcase Pages, companies can segment content to distinct audiences who are interested in different aspects of their business. It's a fantastic way to directly engage the right people in the right context with thought leadership content. It's a one-two punch of broad content on a Company Page and more specific thought leadership content segmented through a Showcase Page.

Company Page



Showcase Page



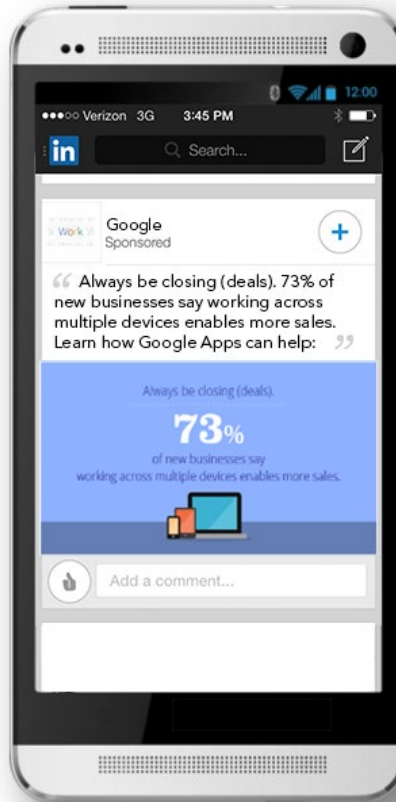
"Anyone can achieve business authority with content, if they truly want to. I've done it in several industries, starting as a complete unknown in each."

– Brian Clark  
Founder and CEO of  
Copyblogger Media

# HOW TO DISTRIBUTE THOUGHT LEADERSHIP ON LINKEDIN

Increase reach and engagement with Sponsored Updates.

By combining the power and reach of LinkedIn Company Pages and Showcase Pages with LinkedIn Sponsored Updates, you can broaden reach and engagement. Sponsored Updates are paid updates that appear in the LinkedIn feed across all devices. Sponsored Updates help you achieve your goals by sharing your thoughts and ideas with a targeted audience who are highly engaged on LinkedIn. In addition to sharing links to thought leadership content you can also add rich media using SlideShare and video. Here are a few examples of companies that have realized success with this approach:



Sponsored Update



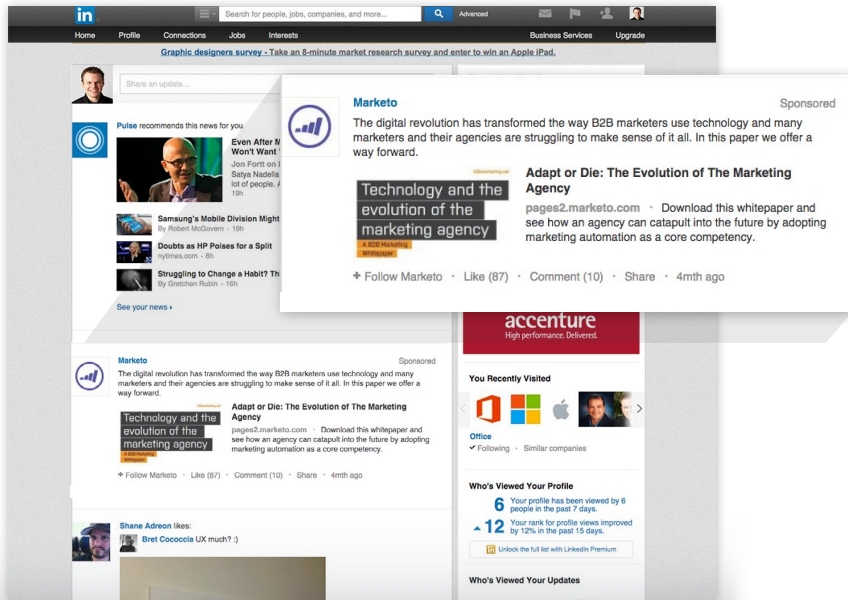
Adobe's audience of marketing decision makers was 79% more likely to agree that "Adobe can help me optimize my media spend" after exposure to Adobe's Sponsored Updates.



Salesforce sees triple-digit ROI using Sponsored Updates.



HootSuite saw 15% conversion rate from click-to-lead and 32% lower cost per form-fill compared to other paid channels.



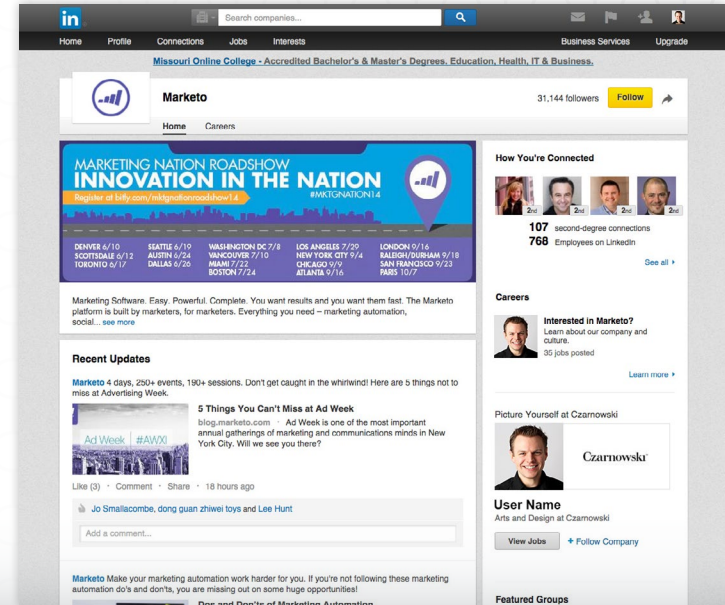
Sponsor any content directly in your target audience's feed

With the introduction of Direct Sponsored Content, companies can now make their content more relevant by sending personalized messages to specific audiences. It gives them the ability to test and retarget a variety of content in real-time. This allows you to get very specific with your thought leadership and target much more effectively by segmenting your audience for better relevance.

Direct Sponsored Content also lifts limitations on who can, and cannot, post

in the feed. Because content doesn't have to start on the Company Page, different business units can try content specific for their audience with the Company Page administrator's approval.

Thought leadership is a powerful way to inspire people both outside and within your company.



Control which posts are visible on the Company Page or Showcase Page

"Hey, let's follow the brand that only copies other people's content", said no one ever. Brands that develop trust and authority through thought leadership content earn the kind of success that's near impossible to copy."

– Lee Odden  
 CEO @TopRank Online Marketing,  
 Author: Optimize, Public Speaker: Integrated Search, Social, & Content Marketing

# HOW TO DISTRIBUTE THOUGHT LEADERSHIP ON LINKEDIN

## LinkedIn Groups for thought leadership.

Spend time cultivating a LinkedIn Group and you can quickly establish your company as a thought leader.

Consider the example of Kapost, a leading provider of content marketing software and services. It grew its LinkedIn group from 0 to 7,000 members in just 6 months, establishing itself as one of the most active and fastest-growing LinkedIn Groups around the hot topic of content marketing. Kapost launched The Content Marketing Academy group in July 2013 with the goal of developing it into the largest, most active, and useful group on LinkedIn for content marketers. As of January 2014, it had achieved that goal, with an average of 267 new members and about 10 to 20 quality discussions per week. When a LinkedIn Group is run well and provides food for thought, it can quickly develop a loyal following.

The natural by-product is that group members see your company as the leader in whatever niche you've chosen to focus on.

Or look at our own Marketing Innovation with LinkedIn group. We launched this group in April 2009 as a forum for marketers to exchange experiences, ideas, insights and information about using social media and LinkedIn to transform their business. Five years later we count over 4,500 members and host lively discussions every day on a range of topics.

Jennifer Lonoff Schiff, business and technology writer and a contributor to CIO.com, suggests these<sup>1</sup> ways to maximize your thought leadership efforts with LinkedIn Groups:



### LinkedIn Groups



Join

*Join groups where your customers and prospects are. Don't stay siloed in the LinkedIn Group you create. Be the life of the party and make the rounds.*



Contribute

*Contribute to group discussions. Our research finds that participants who comment on group discussions get four times the number of profile views.*



Poll

*Poll group members to conduct market research and then publish the results.*



# HOW TO DISTRIBUTE THOUGHT LEADERSHIP ON LINKEDIN

Take advantage of publishing on LinkedIn.

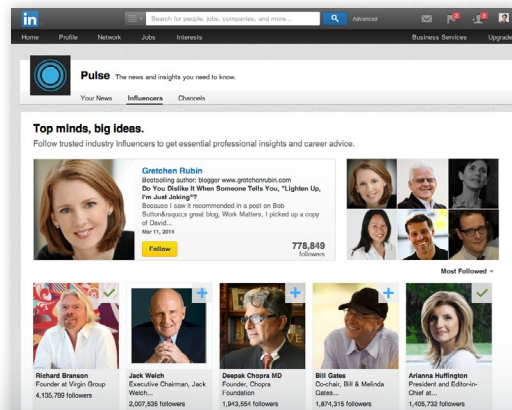
Publishing on LinkedIn gives every professional the ability to share their expertise with the world. Once reserved for the sole use of an exclusive group of Influencers, now all members are invited to publish long-form content on LinkedIn.

Using an intuitive blogging tool that seamlessly integrates with your profile on LinkedIn, you can publish new and previously published content on LinkedIn to quickly grow your audience and network. Articles posted with the tool are searchable by keyword in LinkedIn's post search box and if your post is viewed enough times, it can get picked up by [Pulse](#), the news app and content brand for LinkedIn. That means you can grow views, comments and shares by leaps and bounds.

The real power of publishing on LinkedIn can be unleashed when you combine subject matter expertise,

Company and Showcase Pages, employee amplification, and finally Sponsored Updates for an always-on thought leadership engine.

For example, your CMO/ CEO publishes a thought leadership piece on LinkedIn. You then publish it on your Company Page or Showcase Page, or both, and ask your employees to share with their networks, and finally extend the reach of the post using targeted Sponsored Updates and Direct Sponsored Content.



LinkedIn Pulse

## THREE REASONS TO PUBLISH LONG-FORM CONTENT ON LINKEDIN

1. *The content you publish is attached to and becomes a part of your LinkedIn profile and positions you as an expert and thought leader.*
2. *You can create an always-on strategy with your C-level team, subject matter experts and employees by delivering your message with credibility and authenticity.*
3. *Your posts have the potential to be featured on LinkedIn Pulse and recommended to a much broader group of members.*

“The internet is awash with anonymous bland content. A genuine thought-leadership approach to content marketing empowers companies to differentiate their expertise, to leverage their bench-strength and demonstrate both knowledge and—ever-importantly—authenticity. For smart marketers, thought leadership drives the creation and distribution of content.”

– **Todd Wheatland**

*Author, Speaker, and Head of Strategy at King Content*

# HOW TO CREATE THOUGHT LEADERSHIP THAT WORKS ON LINKEDIN

## Best practices for long-form posts on LinkedIn.

Here are some recommended best practices for publishing long-form posts on LinkedIn.

### What should I write about?

Your long-form posts should share your professional expertise. Write about challenges you've faced, opportunities you've seized, or important trends in your industry. This could include your most memorable work experiences, lessons you've learned along the way, or topics you're most passionate about.

### Here are some suggestions to get you started:

- What concrete advice would you give to someone hoping to enter your field?
- What your industry will (or should) look like in 5, 10, or 15 years and how it will get there.

- What is the biggest problem your industry needs to solve?
- What skill is essential in your job or at your company, and why?
- How has your job, profession or industry changed since you started?
- What else would you do if you started all over again and why?
- How did you get your start in a certain profession?
- Advice for career advancement in your function.
- Challenges for the future of your function.

Here are some long-form posts that might inspire you:

[How To Stay Calm And Perform Under Pressure](#)

[Why Honesty is Your Best Marketing Tool](#)

[Your Content Kicks Butt, But Is It Taking Names?](#)



Long Form Post

# HOW TO CREATE THOUGHT LEADERSHIP THAT WORKS ON LINKEDIN

Best practices for long-form posts on LinkedIn (cont'd).

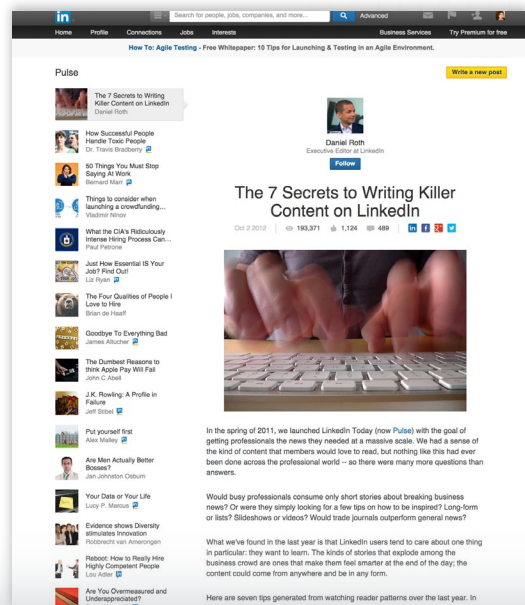
## What should I avoid writing about?

LinkedIn is an ideal platform to develop and strengthen your professional identity by sharing your knowledge and expertise in your job. It will be tied to your professional profile. The focus on your professional life is what differentiates it from other social media networks. Please keep this in mind when writing your long-form posts.

## How often should I publish?

Publish whenever you have something valuable to share with LinkedIn members. In general, the more long-form posts you publish, the more credibility you will build, and the stronger your professional profile will become.

There are no limits on word count, but the long-form posts that are best received are more than three paragraphs in length. Upload pictures, videos, presentations, and documents to add to your content. It helps bring your insights to life and is a good way to showcase concrete examples of your experience.



Long Form Post

"Buyers today are looking for trusted partners as much as the features and functions of your product. (If not more). Content is the ultimate vehicle to build your organization into the trusted advisor buyers crave. And LinkedIn is the ultimate platform to deliver this thought leadership content to your audience."

– **Craig Rosenberg**  
Chief Analyst, TOPO and  
Editor of *The Funnelholic*

Check out our editor's long-form post on [The 7 Secrets to Writing Killer Content on LinkedIn](#).

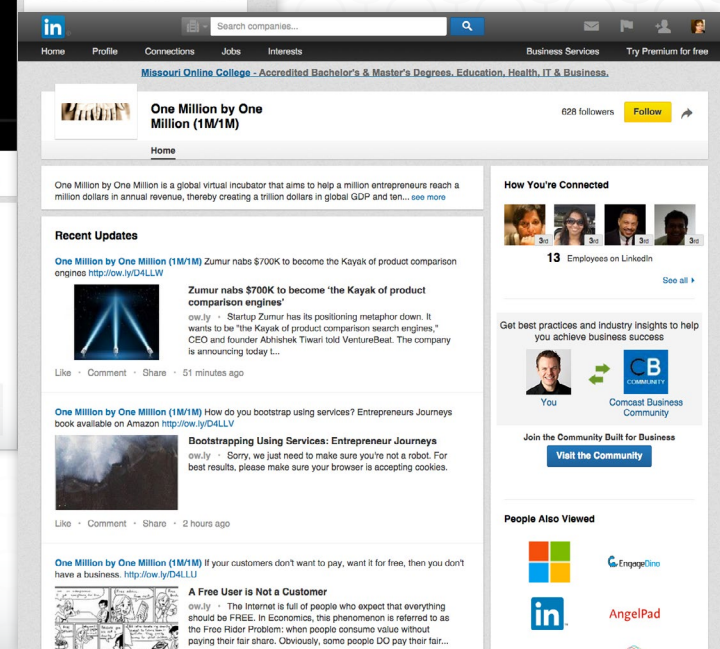
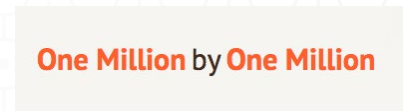
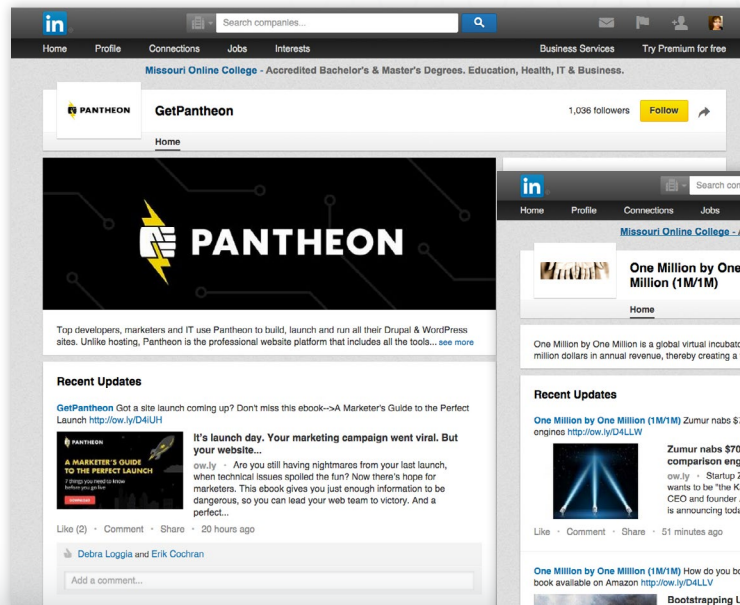
# HOW TO CREATE THOUGHT LEADERSHIP THAT WORKS ON LINKEDIN

Be suitable for both companies and individuals.

Don't think that thought leadership is reserved for companies. Individuals can establish their expertise and know-how too as thought leaders. In fact, publishing on LinkedIn is a great opportunity for individual thought leadership that supports the overall business objectives.

Zachary Rosen, the CEO of Pantheon (getpantheon.com), [does this really well](#). He has established himself as a thought leader, garnered an impressive 2,600+ followers in just 5 months of publishing his thoughts on industry-related issues.

Nearly 40,000 LinkedIn members follow Sramana Mitra, founder of One Million by One Million, for her [insights and advice](#). And James Altucher, an entrepreneur, has developed a following of 61,000+ followers as of September 2014 based on the [popularity of his posts](#).



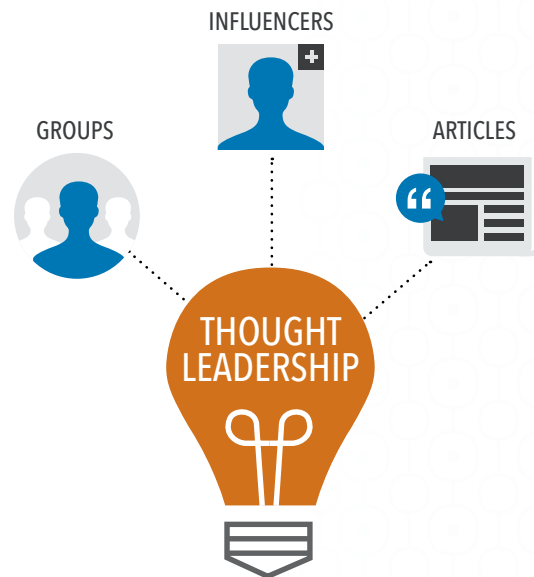
# HOW TO CREATE THOUGHT LEADERSHIP THAT WORKS ON LINKEDIN

## Tap into multiple resources.

Remember—thought leadership content doesn't mean just the content that you produce. You can curate content from LinkedIn Influencers and other relevant third parties (and add your two-cents), comment on other LinkedIn articles, participate in Groups and more.

When these activities are consistently tied to the novel ideas and insights you are promoting in your thought leadership, you establish yourself as a credible authority with in-depth knowledge about the topic. At the same time, employees throughout your company can also publish and share articles on LinkedIn. This not only spreads the workload—and your content reach—it lends a more human

element to your content strategy. Be sure to incorporate LinkedIn publishing plans into your content editorial calendar so you don't let this huge opportunity fall by the wayside.



"Any posts you publish on LinkedIn are tied to your professional profile and show up near the top of your profile. This means your thought leadership insights are showcased when someone views your LinkedIn profile."

– **Stephanie Sammons**,  
*How to Benefit from the LinkedIn Publishing Platform*, <http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/how-to-linkedin-publishing-platform/>

You have to "Give to Get" so think carefully before putting registration hurdles in front of your thought leadership content.

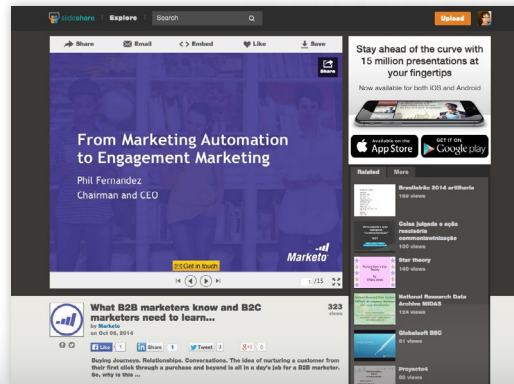
# HOW TO CREATE THOUGHT LEADERSHIP THAT WORKS ON LINKEDIN

Get visual with SlideShare.

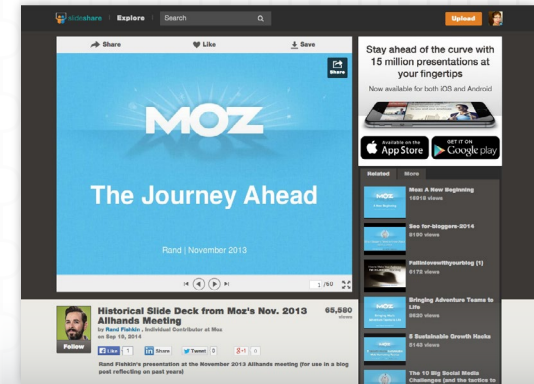
Research shows that people seek out visual content and find it engaging. And there's no reason you can't publish your thought leadership content in visual formats. It just so happens that SlideShare is not only a terrific repository for content in general, but also a platform for your thought leadership in a visual format.

Here is a sampling of the numerous companies—and company leaders—that have realized the power of sharing their visual thought leadership on SlideShare:

- [Marketo](#), a leading Marketing Automation Software vendor
- [Rand Fishkin](#), co-founder of Moz, on SEO and more
- [Content Marketing Institute](#), which has established itself as the go-to resource for all things Content Marketing
- [Altimeter Group](#), an independent research and advisory firm, which posts regular industry reports



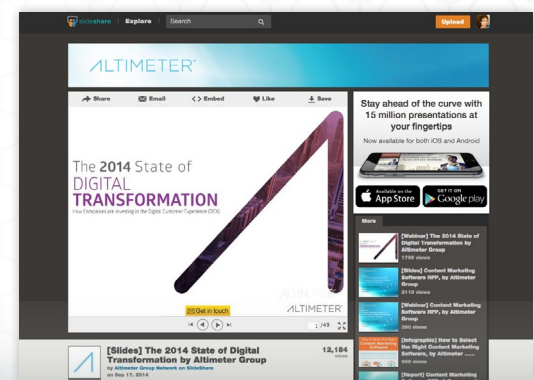
Marketo



Moz



Content Marketing Institute

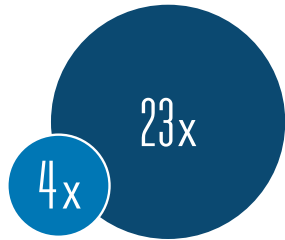


Altimeter Group

# HOW TO CREATE THOUGHT LEADERSHIP THAT WORKS ON LINKEDIN

## Get Visual With Slideshare (cont'd).

To fully harness the impact of visual content, many companies share data and ideas through infographics. SlideShare recently analyzed more than 1,000 infographics uploaded to SlideShare since launch, and the results are pretty compelling:



Infographics are liked **4x more** than presentations, and **23x more** than documents on SlideShare.



Infographics are shared **2x more** than presentations, and **3x more** than documents on other social networks, such as LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook.

Here are a few examples of companies that are successfully leveraging infographics for thought leadership and sharing them on LinkedIn.

- Marketo's guidance on [how marketing agencies can prepare for the future](#)
- Verizon on [ensuring a secure cloud strategy](#)
- [LinkedIn Marketing Solutions infographic](#) teaming up with Marketing Profs and the Content Marketing Institute

SlideShare embeds seamlessly across blogs, landing pages, resource pages and more. And it renders beautifully in the LinkedIn feed and Twitter feed. That means it's easy for people to consume your content in its native environment. It also means you can use SlideShare as an effective channel for your Native Advertising strategy, delivering your visual thought leadership without disrupting the user experience.

**178,809,843**

Publisher Total  
Unique Visitors

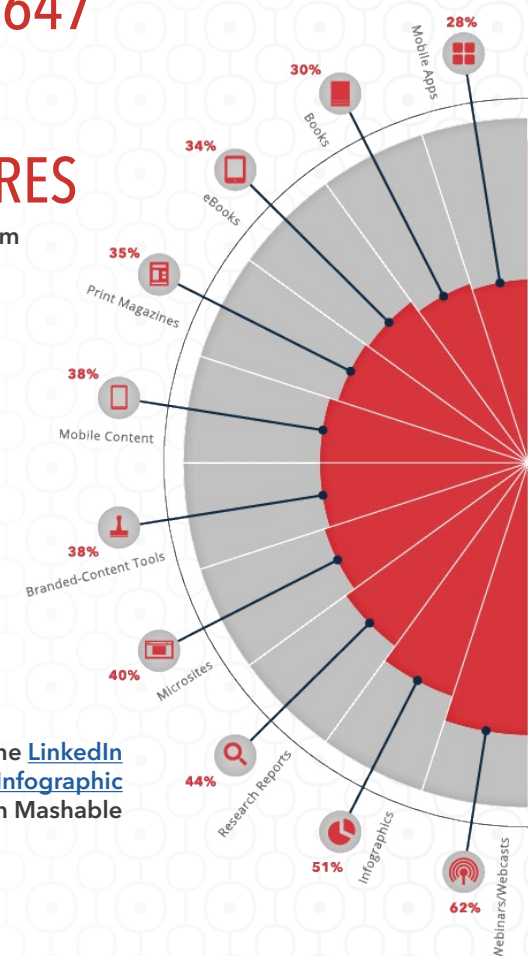
**3,024,141,647**

Total Potential  
Viewership

**8109 SHARES**

33 Linkbacks from  
Top Tier Pubs

Results from the [LinkedIn Marketing Solutions Infographic](#) as featured on Mashable



# HOW TO CREATE THOUGHT LEADERSHIP THAT WORKS ON LINKEDIN

Activating your employees for sharing thought leadership.

One of the most powerful ways to share thought leadership content from your business is to empower your employees to share with their professional networks on LinkedIn. There are several ways to do this, from the very basic to the more advanced automated methods.



## Email

Creating an email group and inviting employees who are interested in sharing the content. A simple once a week email listing the content to share can be very effective.



## Closed Community

A LinkedIn Group can be a great place to post thought leadership content for others to comment on and share with their networks. This can also be a great place to host an internal conversation around thought leadership and spawn new ideas from the comments of others.



## Automating Tools

There are several tools that help to organize and automate employee sharing. GaggleAmp, for example, is one solution that allows you to cue up your top posts, amplify and even gamify the sharing of content.





# HOW TO CREATE THOUGHT LEADERSHIP THAT WORKS ON LINKEDIN

## CASE STUDY:

Tying it all together: How HubSpot leads the way.

HubSpot, based in Cambridge, Mass., creates marketing software that helps businesses grow web traffic, generate inbound leads, and convert leads into paying customers. To attract prospective buyers in a crowded marketing software market, HubSpot calls upon inbound marketing strategies, including lead-generation offerings such as free webinars and e-books.

*“However, we realize we’re not the only ones doing this—and to potential customers, companies like ours often sound similar,” explains Dan Slagen, Global Marketing Relations for HubSpot.*

To stand out from the competition while engaging a B2B audience, HubSpot targets members of the major social networks. When it came to building relationships with LinkedIn members, HubSpot’s first step was to create a Company Page.

It uses Company Page updates to keep followers on top of trends in the inbound marketing world, and to encourage them to comment on and share news.

*“We try to curate the updates we post throughout the day—we want to create a place where our followers can learn and trade ideas,” Slagen says.*

The most-shared and commented-on updates revolve around data on inbound marketing, so the HubSpot team keeps an eye out for interesting stats. Using Sponsored Updates allowed their thought leadership content to go beyond their initial followers and appear in members’ LinkedIn feeds—delivering highly visible messages to specific targeted audiences across desktop, mobile, and tablet devices.



*“Much of what passes for so-called Thought Leadership isn’t Thought Leadership—it’s Thought Followership. The key to being a Thought Leader is to... well, lead. What does that mean for you? Have an undiluted point of view—don’t just tell me what’s going on, tell me how you feel about it, and why I should care.*

*Thought Leaders sift through content mess to give context and perspective; because we don’t need more content, but we do need more true insight.”*

**– Ann Handley**

*Author of Everybody Writes and Chief Content Officer at Marketing Profs*

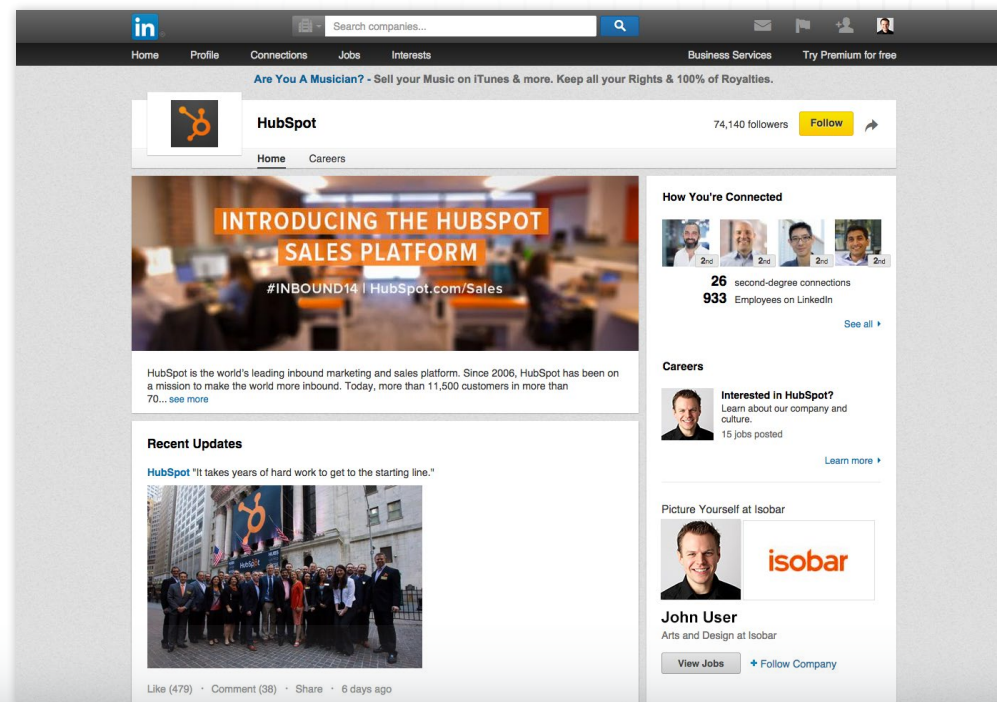
Slagen and his colleagues are also using LinkedIn Groups—especially Inbound Marketers, the group they founded—to lend their expertise on marketing issues, and extend their thought leadership efforts beyond the HubSpot Company Page.

“Our team monitors our group as well as other groups that relate to inbound marketing. We answer questions, propose new ones and engage in discussions that further advance our industry,” concludes Slagen.

Through LinkedIn, your original content becomes part of your company’s profile, is shared with your trusted network and has the ability to reach the largest group of professionals ever assembled. You can further share your thought leadership by posting photos, images, videos and your original presentations on SlideShare.

That said, LinkedIn is more than a place to publish your content. It’s a place to ignite and inspire your target audience to engage in conversation about your thought leadership content.

HubSpot Company Page





# JOE CHERNOV

VP of Content at HubSpot, Advisor to Little Bird & TrackMaven

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*Joe Chernov is VP of content for HubSpot. Previously he served as VP of Marketing for Kinvey, a backend as a service company. Before that, Joe was VP of content marketing for Eloqua. In 2012 he was named Content Marketer of the Year by the Content Marketing Institute. In 2013 Bostinno named him a "50 on Fire" finalist.*

*Joe serves on the advisory board for competitive analytics platform TrackMaven and influencer identification engine Little Bird. He has contributed regularly to Mashable.*

## **How important is thought leadership for gaining a competitive advantage?**

I think it's a pre-requisite. I don't think you can gain a competitive advantage without thought leadership. The reason why thought leadership is a pre-requisite is because trust is a pre-requisite, and thought leadership is a way to build trust.

## **For those looking to create thought leadership content for the first time, what are the best opportunities to get started?**

The very best way to get started is to not think of it as thought leadership

content. You earn a reputation for being a thought leader by delivering content that people find interesting, useful, and fresh. Thought leadership should be considered an output, not an input.

It's also important to note that thought leadership requires patience. Very few people have said one thing or written one post that thrust them to the front of the line. Anyone looking to fold thought leadership into their program should give it at least a year before deeming it a success or a failure.

**Can you think of a brand that is nailing thought leadership? What are they doing right? What are they gaining from it?**

First Round Capital, an early stage venture capital firm, has a blog, First Round Review, which is the best blog on the internet (aside from HubSpot and LinkedIn, of course). Here's why: They know their reader as well as any blog knows its reader. They write about what is interesting to the human as the entrepreneur, not just the business person. Their posts are fundamentally interesting because they appeal to the curiosity that drives an entrepreneur. If there is one thing an entrepreneur is, it's curious, and their posts speak to business people who are elementally curious. They don't write about "10 Ways to Be a Better Entrepreneur." That subject has been and is covered. They know how to find, and write about the subjects that fascinate their readers.

**What LinkedIn marketing tactics can brands use to implement thought leadership campaigns?**

I think of thought leadership on LinkedIn as lots of little. I wouldn't think of marketing on LinkedIn and promoting one's thought leadership as 'let's reach as big an audience as possible.' You are able to segment the profiles and skills you want to reach, so you should focus on reaching exact subsets of your audience. It's more about multiple small campaigns than one large campaign.

**You recently wrote about how to become a great public speaker. Do you think public speaking is necessary for someone to become a thought leader, either personally or on behalf of their brand?**

It's helpful, but not required. Becoming a thought leader is a cocktail with multiple ingredients. You don't need every single ingredient

to make a great cocktail. Speaking helps, but if someone is a poor public speaker or is uncomfortable with it, there are plenty of ways to establish yourself without a big physical presence.

**What is one thing you've learned about thought leadership that you wish you knew five years ago?**

It's ephemeral. It can go away. You have to continue to earn it and you can't rest on your laurels very long. At the same time, thought leadership is like a road race where you don't want to expend all your energy in the first mile because you will suffer the rest of the race. I wish I had known this. You can over-extend your brand. You are better off parsing your exposure to sustain interest in yourself and your brand over a long period of time.



# EKATERINA WALTER

Marketing Innovator; Bestselling Author; Sprinklr Evangelist

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*Ekaterina Walter led strategic and marketing innovation for Fortune 500 brands such as Intel and Accenture. She is an international speaker and author of the Wall Street Journal bestseller *Think Like Zuck: The Five Business Secrets of Facebook's Improbably Brilliant CEO Mark Zuckerberg* and co-author of *The Power of Visual Storytelling: How to Use Visuals, Videos, and Social Media to Market Your Brand*.*

## How important is thought leadership for gaining a competitive advantage?

It's essential. To gain true competitive advantage, it's not enough to sell a great product, you need to gain people's trust and touch their hearts. You need to get them to believe in your purpose and create a movement around your mission. Thought leadership allows you that access by sharing your vision and knowledge, sparking conversation around shared passions, and eventually building your tribe of advocates who will carry your torch.

## For those looking to create thought leadership content for the first time, what are the best opportunities to get started?

Tell it as it is. Be open and honest about your failures and successes. Consistently provide utility so that others can learn from you. Don't try to be someone you are not and don't try to force the message. And, most of all, don't sell. You can build trust by offering your expertise and help. If you build trust, the sale will come naturally.

**Can you think of a brand that is nailing thought leadership? What are they doing right? What are they gaining from it?**

HubSpot produces a lot of interesting and useful content for marketers, even if it may not be directly tied to the product they are selling. They have a number of thought leaders who are constantly providing value through posts, ebooks, data analysis, presentations, and trend commentary. In return, the company benefits by getting leads and business.

**What LinkedIn marketing tactics can brands use to implement thought leadership campaigns?**

I love LinkedIn because for a connector like me, it's a perfect network for building and maintaining relationships. LinkedIn Groups are fantastic for building communities and establishing thought leadership. Answering questions, sharing content, and discussing trends can all help

you become known for a specific expertise.

Also, SlideShare has become a popular channel for finding highly visual business information on any topic, which is why many professionals now search SlideShare before searching Google. The built-in features make it a great lead generation tool.

Finally, with the introduction of content creation and sharing tools, LinkedIn has moved beyond a social network to become a media property. Now that LinkedIn has expanded the Influencer program to allow individuals to reach a broader audience via the publishing platform, LinkedIn has become a great tool for establishing thought leadership with your tribe and beyond.

"I love LinkedIn because for a connector like me, it's a perfect network for building and maintaining relationships. LinkedIn Groups are fantastic for building communities and establishing thought leadership."

**Your book, *The Power of Visual Storytelling*, teaches marketers how to use visuals, videos, and social media to market their brand. In your eyes, what role should visual storytelling play in thought leadership campaigns?**

It should play an enormous role. Did you know the human brain processes visuals 60,000 times faster than text?

In the age of infobesity, visual storytelling has emerged as a strategy for nurturing vibrant and engaged communities. With increased digital noise and a shrinking adult attention span (now 3-8 seconds), using formats like images, videos, infographics, presentations, GIFs, and cartoons is a great way to stand out as a thought leader. Visual formats are highly consumable and sharable.

**What advice do you have for brand marketers looking to increase followers or subscribers on social channels?**

Instead of increasing followers, the question should be: 'How do I build my tribe by connecting with each and every member, and by sparking brand love?' You see, numbers don't matter. What matters is how your community impacts other people's behaviors. You shouldn't care about how many people are shouting your name from the rooftops because eyeballs don't necessarily convert into a purchase. You should care about those who influence others to buy from you, and, eventually become advocates of your brand as well. THAT is the number, and the long-term goal, you should set for yourself. THAT is what brings in new customers and impacts the bottom line. Marketers should always choose community, advocacy, and influence over eyeballs.

"In the age of infobesity, visual storytelling has emerged as a strategy for nurturing vibrant and engaged communities."

"You should care about those who influence others to buy from you, and, eventually become advocates of your brand as well."



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**PART THREE**

MEASURING  
THE RETURN ON  
YOUR THOUGHT  
LEADERSHIP



# WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO MEASURE THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

All marketers worth their salt know they're expected to prove the value they're delivering. The same holds true when it comes to thought leadership—you need to define your goals and then measure and report on them. To start, outline what you expect from your thought leadership program.

ITSMA (Information Technology Services Marketing Association) breaks thought leadership influence into three categories:



## Reputation

- Arguably a key goal of establishing thought leadership is cultivating a reputation as a trusted authority. Ideally this reputation will prompt others to solicit your input and thoughts on strategic issues and take this into account as they form their own opinions and make strategic decisions.



## Relationships

- Thought Leadership can be your inroad to developing important connections with other recognized authorities, industry leaders, potential customers, partners and more.



## Revenue

- Revenue. Ultimately, you'd like to see that your thought leadership initiative helps you generate more sales.

While it may be challenging to connect the dots from idea dissemination to new revenue, that's your goal. According to research by ITSMA<sup>1</sup>, the 25% of marketers that can demonstrate marketing's impact on the business do so by defining a clear goal and the path for achieving it, and then using data to connect those

Thought leadership can distinguish you whether you're in the spotlight or contributing to the conversation.

"In the end...it's more important to increase your status with a few key influencers than it is to max out the number of retweets on Twitter."<sup>2</sup>

– **Julie Schwartz**  
*ITSMA, Four Ways to Measure Your Thought Leadership Reputation with Buyers*

"Thought leadership should be an entry point to a relationship. Thought leadership should intrigue, challenge, and inspire even people already familiar with a company. It should help start a relationship where none exists, and it should enhance existing relationships."

– **Daniel Rasmus**  
*Founder and Principal Analyst at Serious Insights*

dots. Using dashboards, they make it possible for others to visually grasp the impact of their strategy and tactics.

1. <http://www.slideshare.net/itsma/itsmavem-2014-mpmsurveyabbreviatedsummary>

2. <http://www.itsma.com/ezine/measure-your-thought-leadership-reputation-with-buyers/>

# SETTING GOALS AND BENCHMARKING RESULTS

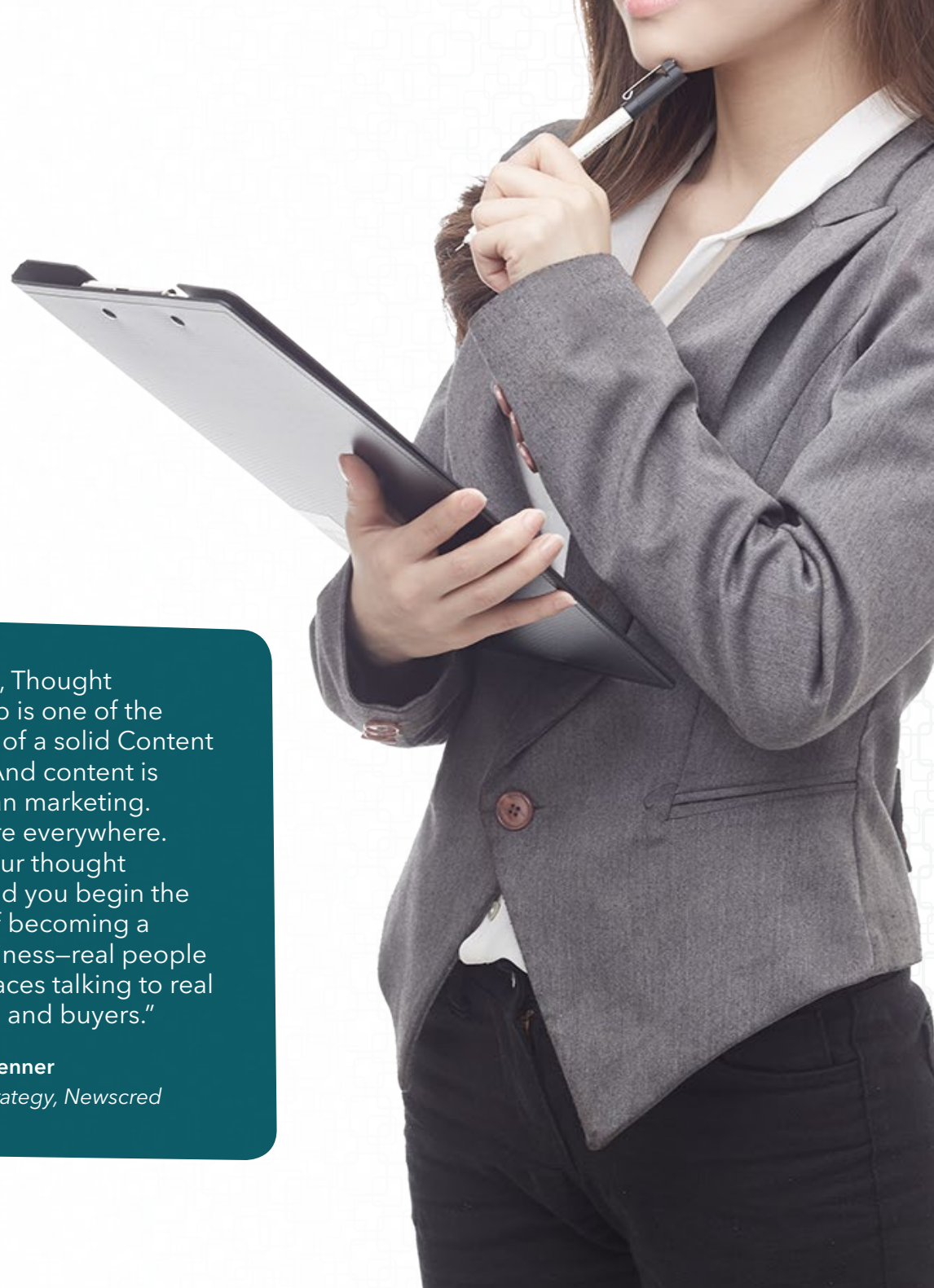
You clearly need to set short and long-term goals. But what should those be?

Katie Delahaye Paine, author of [Measure What Matters](#), suggests the following when measuring the payback of your thought leadership activities:

1. **Determine** who or what are you benchmarking against
2. **Define** Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) such as percent increase in Grunig Relationship Survey scores and percent increase in share of or coverage containing desirable quotes
3. **Track and analyze** the KPIs you settle on
4. **Conduct** regular surveys of key influencers to figure out the impact of your thought leadership

“Ultimately, Thought Leadership is one of the outcomes of a solid Content Strategy. And content is bigger than marketing. Leaders are everywhere. Expose your thought leaders and you begin the process of becoming a social business—real people with real faces talking to real customers and buyers.”

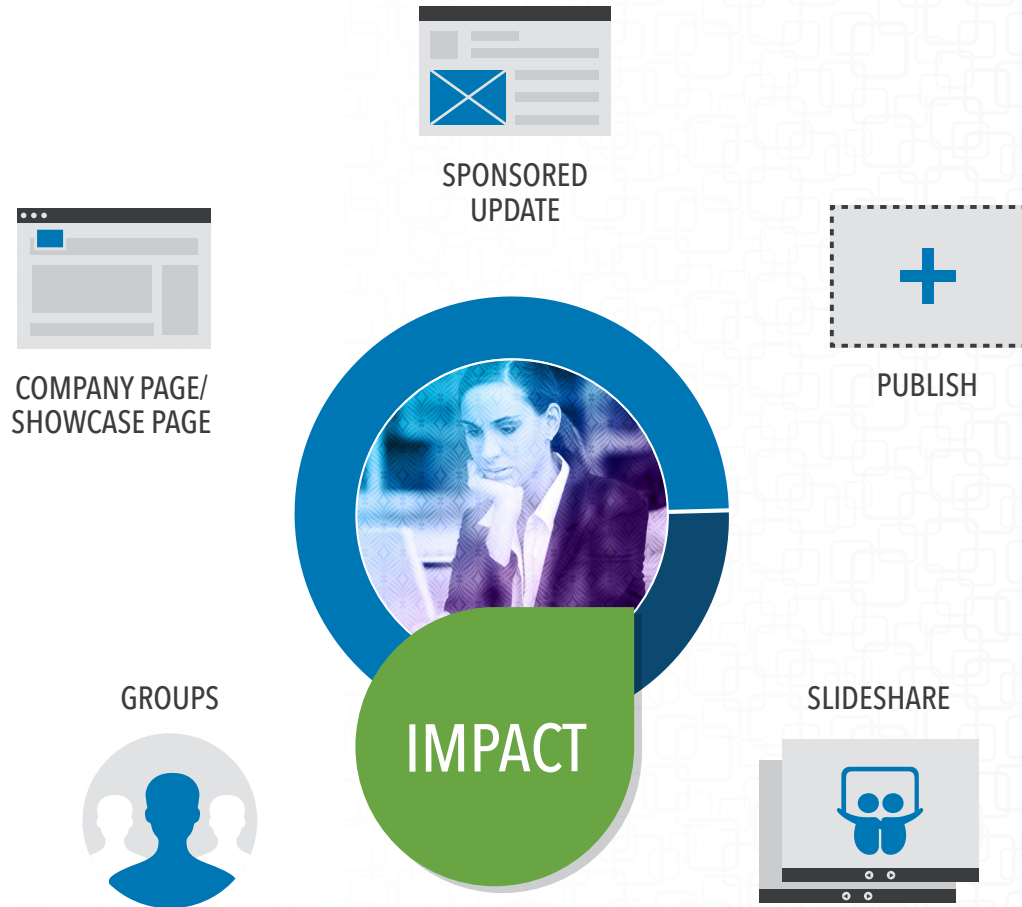
– **Michael Brenner**  
*Head of Strategy, Newscred*



# MEASURING THOUGHT LEADERSHIP IMPACT WITH LINKEDIN

The way you measure the impact of your thought leadership on LinkedIn is likely going to be similar to how you measure the impact of it across your other channels. That means you can use the same measurements to determine the reach, engagement, and new followers gained, but tailored to the LinkedIn platform:

- **Publishing on LinkedIn**—Views, comments, and shares
- **Company Page/Showcase Pages**—Followers, specifically new prospects and other thought leaders
- **Sponsored Updates**—Reach, engagement, and new followers gained
- **Groups**—Engagement (new members, number of comments per conversation, etc.)
- **SlideShare**—Embeds, shares, and views

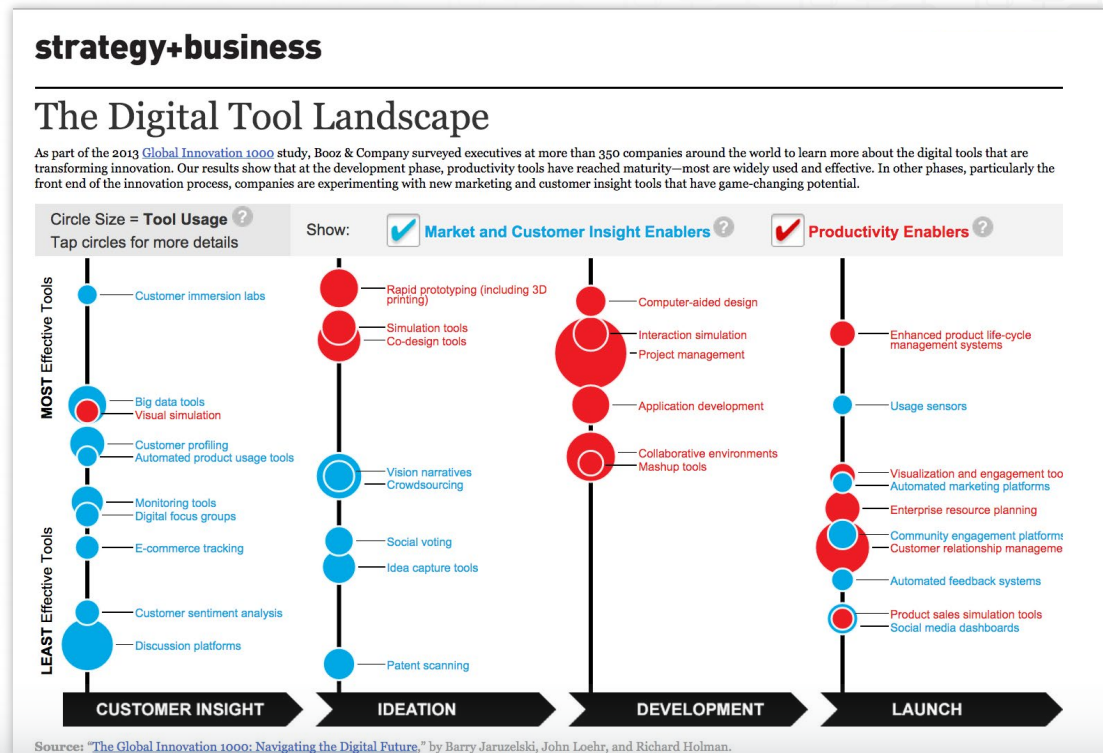


If possible, take this a step further to tie your thought leadership activities to more strategic and meaningful outcomes, such as number of:

- Quality leads generated
- Executive-level meetings scheduled
- Analyst meetings secured
- Invitations to participate on advisory boards

Craig Badings, author of *Brand Stand: Seven Steps to Thought Leadership*, shares [how](#) Booz & Company defined and measured a thought leadership campaign. For its [Innovation 1000 Global Campaign](#), the company's goals were to:

- Place Booz & Company in top-tier business media worldwide as a leader in innovative thinking and research
- Provide an effective vehicle to interest and engage clients and prospective clients
- Secure speaking engagements



Booz & Company measured how well it hit upon these objectives by:

- Tracking media coverage, social media mentions, traffic to booz.com and strategy-business.com.
- Tracking the interest, leads and sales generated directly and indirectly as a result of the campaign.

- Comparing the number of resulting speaking engagements to those in prior years.

All that said, the benefits of your thought leadership program may be more intangible than tangible. It can be difficult—and sometimes impossible—to assess the impact on brand perception, for example. But that doesn't mean it's not a worthy objective.



# SHANNON STUBO

**Global Corporate Communications Executive**

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**For those looking to create thought leadership content for the first time, what are the best opportunities to get started?**

Before launching your first bit of thought leadership content, clearly define what you're trying to say and why. If you want to be a thought leader, it's important to make sure you have ideas to share on a consistent basis that are valuable to your target audiences. Ask yourself: What's your special sauce as a leader? What unique experiences or areas of expertise do you have to share? What

are the important influences in your life and career that have shaped your leadership style and worldview? Which of your learnings could benefit others?

Once you define what you want to say, create a rough line-up of themes and ideas that you can work off of over time. This is the start of your personal "editorial calendar."

For each theme, think about which format and channel would be best to connect with your audience. For formats, you can choose from videos, presentations, webinars, podcasts, articles, posts, social media and many

more. For channels, there are a wide range of outlets to share your ideas. Think about the format and channels that will allow you to reach your business goals by engaging the right group of people.

**As someone who has executive communications experience for multiple global brands, what is your advice for marketers who aim to create bold, memorable thought leadership campaigns but worry about maintaining the best interests of the brand?**

Always start with your brand's core values. Once you have placed careful thought into creating and communicating a set of values your brand should be known for, then messaging, regardless of the topic, falls into place more easily. While the topic or conversation may change, your values always remain the same.

The same applies to your leaders' brand values. What do they stand

for, and how would they like to be portrayed? For instance, if the answer is "humble" and "accessible," then avoid communications that are aloof or professorial.

Statements viewed as controversial or provocative by those who do not share your brand's values may be viewed as a "given" by the people your brand cares about. It's easier to speak with a clear, bold voice when you know what you stand for.

**For aspiring thought leaders who are just now entering the workforce, do you recommend publishing right away? Or do you recommend practicing now and publishing later?**

Ten years ago, you'd be hard-pressed to find anyone entering the workforce who was concerned with "thought leadership" or "influence." But with today's accessible communications tools, people have been empowered to shape and grow their professional brands as a portable asset they can

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carry with them throughout their careers. It's a terrific opportunity to become known early and quickly for a point of view or an area of expertise. However, there's no need to dive in before you're ready, and in fact, the risk of launching a thought leadership campaign too soon is that you could dilute your professional brand by sharing ideas that are not fully baked or ready for prime time.

As a starting point, I recommend picking social media "mentors"—people who you look up to in your field or industry. Follow them closely. Take time to understand their messages and watch them evolve. Observe what works well, and how they handle things when they falter.

It's definitely okay to take the safe route at first. Be helpful to your followers by curating outstanding content and sharing it with your thoughtful insights. You can start with social messages and move to blog posts as you develop your online voice to see what feels natural.

**Can you think of a brand that is nailing thought leadership? What are they doing right? What are they gaining from it?**

I like what HSBC is doing to connect with the international business community with relevant, useful and well-placed content that help their target audience perform their jobs better. They've also used native advertising such as LinkedIn Sponsored Updates to grow their community. In return, they get an audience that is well-steeped in their core values and thinking on a variety of important business issues.

Shell has also been a trailblazer in this area, and it shows. Their thought leadership pieces are clean, clear, beautifully designed and well-tied back to the brand values.

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## CONCLUSION

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# CONCLUSION: THERE ARE NO SHORTCUTS ON THE ROAD TO THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

While any person or company can establish itself as a thought leader, it doesn't happen overnight. It takes commitment and a long-term strategy. Just like a well-defined and executed content marketing strategy doesn't deliver results overnight—your thought leadership program needs time to marinate. Once the right people get a taste for the ideas you're offering up, the impact will bubble up.

Remember—you don't spearhead a thought leadership initiative for a quick win; you do it to establish yourself and your organization as a respected authority now and in the future.

In fact, the ultimate value of being a thought leader is that you're seen as a reliable and credible source of strategic thinking. Once you achieve that, your thought leadership program converts from a cost to an investment that delivers measurable value. However, you need to build a plan to reach that goal.

But don't think you have to go it alone. Here's a handy checklist for thought leadership success:

- ❑ **Define** what thought leadership means to you/your organization
- ❑ **Secure** top-level buy-in and support
- ❑ **Align** thought leadership with product/service and organizational leadership goals
- ❑ **Establish** a process for brainstorming, vetting and developing a manageable number of ideas
- ❑ **Develop** a unique and groundbreaking viewpoint
- ❑ **Use** content marketing concepts and best practices to disseminate your thought leadership
- ❑ **Deliver** thought leadership at every stage of the buying cycle
- ❑ **Define** success criteria and measure and report on it

# 30 MARKETING THOUGHT LEADERS TO FOLLOW

- 1. Ann Handley**  
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