



THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO

Content Marketing for Thought Leadership



Presented By:

Influence&CO.

Companies don't have ideas. People do.

Your company is powered by people who are experts at what they do. Tapping into the stories, advice, insights, and experiences of those internal experts is the key to creating content that engages your audience and achieves your company's thought leadership goals.

Still, at a time when everyone and their CMO tosses around the terms "thought leader" and "thought leadership," it can be hard to remember what this idea actually means.

For one thing, it's more than how often you use those terms, and it's also more than the number of followers you've amassed on social media. Authentic thought leadership is a powerful tool for your brand, your entire company, and your audience — and that's why it's so important to understand.

Achieving thought leader status requires more than a single post, ad, or article, no matter how amazing each of those things might be. Thought leadership requires your company to become a true resource for others in your space by sharing knowledge and experiences with your audience members for the purpose of educating and engaging them — and content marketing is a perfect vehicle to foster this connection.

Like most of your company's marketing and brand-building goals today, achieving thought leadership relies on high-quality, original content. The thing about content, though, is that it's so versatile that brands often believe that creating any content will work for their goals. In reality, reaching a specific goal requires specific content. To achieve thought leadership, you'll need to develop a plan that leverages certain types of content that all work together to bring you closer to your goal.

Read on to discover what makes content marketing an essential tool for building thought leadership, including what types of content fuel a thought leadership strategy, the tools that make it work, the metrics that illustrate progress, and the insider secrets that can maximize success.



Influence & Co. President Kelsey Raymond says it best:

“ A thought leader is an industry expert who shares his or her expertise with a broader audience for the purpose of educating, improving, and adding value to the industry as a whole. Thought leaders are people who fully immerse themselves in everything about their industries; they not only understand the inner workings of their businesses, but they also know their audiences and competitors to a T.”

How Content Marketing Works to Build Thought Leadership

You're probably familiar with the saying "It's not what you know but who you know."

Well, in the world of brand building and thought leadership, it's not quite who you know — it's who else knows that you know what you know. You know?

To become an industry thought leader, your company has to show its audience that it knows its stuff. That's why content from your company's subject matter experts communicating that expertise is so essential.

Who?

A good thought leader is someone who:

- Possesses a wealth of industry insights and experiences
- Tells stories authentically
- Enjoys teaching and helping others learn

What?

Effective thought leadership content is:

- Educational
- Non-promotional
- Helpful and engaging to readers

Where?

Thought leadership content should be published and shared with your audience via:

- Online publications your audience reads and trusts
- Your website and blog
- Industry events and conferences

Who on my team would make a good thought leader?

- _____
- _____
- _____

What topics would make sense for us to write about?

- _____
- _____
- _____

Where would we publish and share our thought leadership content?

- _____
- _____
- _____

Content That Fuels a Thought Leadership Strategy

The members of your audience will never know what your company knows if you don't show them. Thankfully, there are plenty of content types that can help you showcase your expertise. The secret is to publish the right kinds of content for your audience; use all the pieces of your content together as a bigger strategy to attract, convert, and engage an audience; and, as a result, position yourself as a leader.

Here's a look at the different types of content you'll need to make your thought leadership goal a reality.

To reach and engage a new audience and establish your credibility, you'll need ...



Guest-contributed articles. This is content bylined by your company's subject matter experts that offers original insights, ideas, research, and opinions. It's then contributed to targeted publications in your industry that your audience reads and trusts.



Press mentions. A press mention is exactly what it sounds like — a mention of you or your company by the press. While it's content published in an outside publication, it's not content that's bylined by a thought leader within your company. Press mentions are references to your company by journalists, contributors, influencers, etc. that provide your audience members third-party validation that they should trust you.

Why it works

This off-site content helps you reach your audience members where they are — the online publication sites they already read.

By contributing your own bylined content, your brand is able to share its expertise, educate readers, and piggyback off the credibility that those sources already have with your audience, thus helping to build trust with new audience members. Press mentions complement these efforts by helping your brand earn that critical third-party validation from trustworthy sources outside your company and reinforce positive brand association.

Now, to educate and convert those audiences, you'll need ...



On-site content. As you might guess, this is content that lives on your website. It includes all the blog posts, case studies, whitepapers, guides, infographics, and other helpful resources your company creates to further educate your audience.



Bonus: Books. A published book authored by your thought leader offers a much more in-depth exploration of a topic that your audience is interested in and helps solidify your expertise.

Why it works

Aside from delivering more education around the topics your readers are most interested in, your on-site content helps reinforce your position as a knowledgeable, trustworthy resource. It also allows you to highlight certain company offers, services, or achievements that can help you convert visitors into leads and subscribers.

A book takes your status as a knowledgeable resource a step further. Writing a book on a topic allows you to explore more ideas your audience is interested in, cementing your status as an industry leader and opening the door to countless potential press, speaking, and award opportunities.

And finally, to help you nurture and keep leads engaged over time, you'll need ...



Email newsletters. These newsletters package up your best thought leadership content and deliver it directly to your audience members' inboxes. A newsletter is a simple and effective way to get your messages to your audience and keep your brand top of mind.



Social media. If your audience is on social media, then your company needs to be, too. Social media platforms like Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, and even Instagram are excellent tools for consistently sharing content that engages your audience members where they are online.

Why it works

Building thought leadership is about more than how much content you produce. It's about how you use that content to keep your readers engaged long after that first article goes live. With email newsletters and social media, you can get your messages to the right people at the right time, and that helps you earn that valuable top-of-mind status as a leader in your space.

Let's Get Technical: The Tools and Tech of Thought Leadership

Content is nonnegotiable when it comes to building thought leadership — but it doesn't work all on its own. If you want to build your brand, there are a few tools you can't live without.

Before you start publishing and expect results, make sure you've got the following tools in place:



1. A website with a blog

This might sound basic, but it can't be overstated how important this tool is. For one thing, companies without an online home are harder to interact with, let alone trust. And for another, a brand that's building thought leadership through content needs a place for that content to exist. No matter what content type is your strategy's biggest player, your company needs a website.



3. An email marketing or marketing automation system

Because email is one of your best tools for staying top of mind, you're going to need a platform that enables it. That could be a platform that only works to help you manage email, like MailChimp, or it could be a marketing automation tool that offers a more robust suite of features, including email, like HubSpot. The tool itself is up to you — you'll just need a way to easily store and manage your audience contact info for email distribution.



2. Access to that website's analytics

To understand the quantitative ROI of your efforts, you'll need access to data about how your content is performing — and the best way to gain that insight is through access to your analytics. Before you begin publishing content, make sure you've got a way to keep an eye on its performance.



4. A following on social media

Email is valuable for touchpoints with people already in your system, but social media opens the door for touchpoints with even more audience members. And while it's valuable for thought leaders themselves to share content with their networks on their personal accounts, your company plays an important role in amplifying those messages, too. Make sure you've got a plan to distribute your content via social media, as well as to grow and engage your followers.

The Metrics That Can Help You Monitor Progress

Thought leadership measurement is not an exact science. No one gets thought leadership points, and there are no prizes for the winners. Your journey is uniquely yours, and what success looks like for you and your brand is yours to define.

So, define it — and make sure that definition accounts for the full spectrum of benefits thought leadership can deliver. Looking only at the numbers in your analytics system won't show you the full picture, and neither will ignoring them for the more subjective, intangible benefits you'll notice over time.

Before you ever start publishing content, lay out the metrics you'll use to measure your performance.

Think through your goals for thought leadership and what signs will show you whether you're on the right track, like:

Content syndication.

Publications, media outlets, and industry blogs are always on the lookout for content their readers will enjoy, and sometimes they gain access to that content via syndication. It's a good sign you're sharing valuable, high-quality insights when your thought leadership content is picked up and published by more outlets than the one you targeted.

Social shares and engagement.

Social share counts on their own don't always show you the extent to which audiences truly engage with your content — but they do help signal that your ideas have traction. If your audience is sharing, leaving comments about, and giving feedback on your content, then you know you're heading in the right direction.

Award opportunities.

Like speaking engagements, awards aren't often presented to just anyone. Earning an award from other leaders in your industry shows that you've demonstrated your expertise and high performance in your space.

On-site analytics and engagement.

When you publish thought leadership content to your company website, you can use your own analytics to monitor its performance — and even make tweaks over time to improve. Look to metrics like time on site, finish rate, and bounce rate to see what pieces of content keep readers engaged on-site, and use conversion rate metrics to see which ones led visitors to take certain actions on your site.

Speaking engagements.

Organizers of industry events and conferences don't typically make a habit of booking obscure, unknown professionals to speak. If you've been invited to speak at a reputable event in your industry, then you can tell that others in your space find you knowledgeable and trustworthy — key traits of a true thought leader.

Press opportunities.

Thought leaders interact with others in their industry and contribute to the conversations happening within it. Invites to contribute as a source to an article, appear as a guest on a podcast, co-host a webinar or other live event, or any other form of press opportunity indicate that others value your insights and trust your brand.

3 Ways to Maximize Your Success

Building thought leadership takes time. Neither quantitative nor qualitative results will appear overnight, but with the right content, tools, and benchmarks for success, the foundation is there. The tactics below can help you make the most of your strategy, maximize success, and grow your efforts over time:

1. Amplify your content through strategic distribution.

Your work isn't finished once your content is published. Content distribution is a crucial step in establishing your thought leadership and consistently engaging your audience. It allows you to reach your audience members through a variety of channels and platforms and build meaningful connections with them. Get started amplifying your content by considering:



Organic distribution.

Sharing your own content on social media is one of the simplest ways to start the distribution process. Fuel your social media efforts and engage your social followers with consistent content on the platforms they're most engaged with. A consistent flow of content will also help you gain more followers.



Paid amplification and distribution.

Paid distribution is a powerful way to boost the reach and impact of your content among targeted, qualified members of your audience beyond your organic network. Targeted amplification via social media, Google AdWords, influencers, and beyond can increase your ROI and ensure that your message is seen by the right audience at the right time.



Email marketing.

Earlier, we discussed how email newsletters can help you effectively deliver your messages to your subscribers and keep your brand top of mind. Simple roundups of your best content each month are a great place to start, but consider taking it up a notch by utilizing drip campaigns, too.

2. Commit to consistency.

The thing about thought leadership is that it never really ends. It's not a sprint or a marathon. It's a lifestyle, and it's all about how consistently you create, publish, and distribute meaningful content.

Consistency in thought leadership helps you build an audience and boost your credibility. Think about it: When you visit a company blog and find that no content has been published in three months, you start to wonder what's going on. Big gaps in content indicate to your audience that you're not on top of your game, and that's never the message you want to send.

3. Expand your strategy.

The best thought leaders are those people who have a wealth of knowledge about their industry and lots of unique insights to share. They're good storytellers, they love to help others, and they understand how valuable content is to their company's goals.

It's entirely possible that more than one person in your company fits that bill.

If you're seeing success with your efforts, consider expanding your strategy to include another person on your team as a thought leader. Each person's insights, expertise, and experiences are unique, and adding another voice (or voices) to your strategy can help you reach and connect with even more people in your audience.



Content Marketing for Thought Leadership

Now that you know what kinds of content fuel a thought leadership strategy and how all the pieces work together, it's time to assess your own efforts. Use the interactive template on the next three pages to begin mapping out your company's current and future plans to build thought leadership through content marketing.



[Click here to set up a call](#) with one of our content marketing experts, who can walk you through your assessment and answer any questions you might have.

Content Marketing Assessment

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	Tactic	What It Is	Why It Works		
Top of the Funnel Reach a New Audience	Guest-Contributed Articles	Articles that offer unique insights from your subject matter expert(s) in publications your audience reads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educate your audience Build trust Establish your expertise Earn third-party validation 	Technical Requirements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ A website with CMS and blog ✓ Access to your website's analytics ✓ Email marketing/marketing automation system ✓ Access to your social media accounts 	
	Press Mentions	References to your company in articles published on reputable sites that reach your target audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Earn third-party validation Establish your expertise Create positive associations 		
Middle of the Funnel Educate and Convert	On-Site Content	Blog posts, whitepapers, case studies, infographics, etc. that live on your company's website and address topics your audience is interested in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educates your audience Builds trust Improves your website's SEO Highlights your offerings 		Amplification Tools <p>Paid Amplification: Amplify content to your target audience through programmatic advertising on social media.</p> <p>Organic Distribution: Engage your social media followers with consistent content.</p> <p>Email Marketing: Stay top of mind with your audience through email newsletters and drip campaigns.</p>
	Book	A more in-depth exploration of a topic that offers your target audience examples, experiences, takeaways, and context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educates your audience Establishes your expertise Creates potential press, speaking, and award opportunities 		
Bottom of the Funnel Nurture and Engage	Email Newsletter	Packaged content, delivered regularly to your audience's inbox, that incorporates both educational and engaging elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educates your audience Keeps your company top of mind Offers company updates Highlights your offerings 		

Content Marketing Assessment

Need help filling this out? [Click here to set up a call](#) with one of our content marketing experts, who can walk you through your assessment and answer any questions you might have

	Tactic	Company Status	Current Cadence	Future Plans
Top of the Funnel Reach a New Audience	Guest-Contributed Articles			
	Press Mentions			
Middle of the Funnel Educate and Convert	On-Site Content			
	Book			
Bottom of the Funnel Nurture and Engage	Email Newsletter			

Content Amplification

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	Company Status	Current Cadence	Future Plans
Search Engine Optimization			
Paid Amplification			
Organic Social Media			
Success Metrics			
Goal:	Goal:	Goal:	Goal:
Technical Requirements			
Website CMS + Blog ✓	Marketing/Email Automation ✓	Social Media Access ✓	Website Analytics ✓

About Influence & Co.



Influence & Co. is a content marketing agency that combines a team of content marketing experts with custom technology and relationships with top online publications to provide our clients a turnkey solution to content marketing.

We love to help companies with a lot of knowledge in a specific area turn that expertise into thought leadership content. We do this by assisting you in identifying key subject matter experts within your company and using our proven content creation process to extract their insights.

We use those insights to create content that builds thought leadership, and then we help you get that content in front of the right people online — whether that means publishing content on your blog or working through our publication relationships to get it published in an industry publication.



[Click here to set up a call](#) with one of our content marketing experts, who can walk you through your assessment and answer any questions you might have.

And for a simple guide to start creating thought leadership content, grab your copy of "[8 Steps to Thought Leadership Through Content Marketing.](#)"

