

The Six P's of Successful Thought Leadership

How to Become a Thought Leader and Grow Your Business



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Market Leaders Are Thought Leaders

How can a company build a powerful brand that resonates with its customers' needs? Become a trusted source that customers will turn to when they need solutions? Create deep, lasting customer relationships? What do companies like Apple, Nike, McKinsey, Merrill Lynch, Kaiser Permanente, IBM, and Accenture have in common? These companies excel not just because of the competitiveness of their products, distribution, and pricing. They are market leaders because they are also thought leaders.



How Thought Leadership Empowers the Customer Lifecycle

At its core, thought leadership is the creation of a unique viewpoint and in-depth, proprietary insights of high relevance to customers' lives. Therefore, establishing a thought leadership position often begins with conducting branded research and thought leadership studies. Unlike most company knowledge, thought leadership insights are shared publicly to empower all aspects of the customer lifecycle: awareness, engagement, purchase, retention, and advocacy (Figure 1).

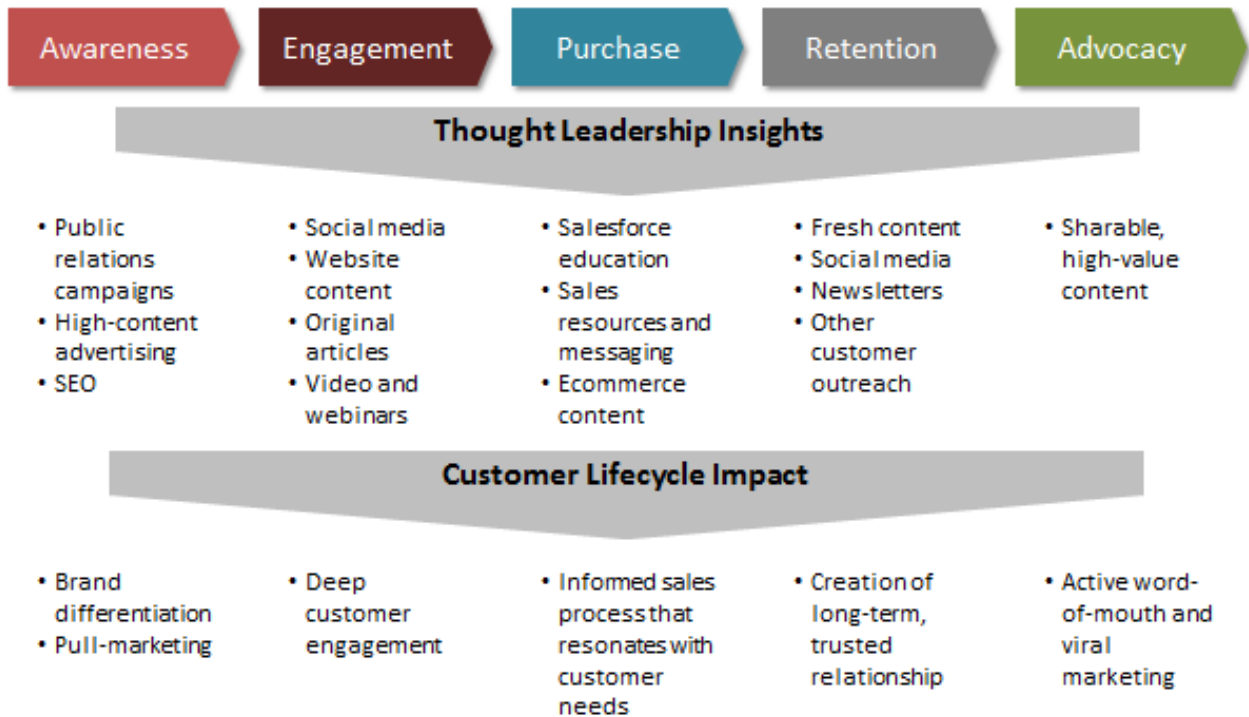
- **Awareness.** Thought leadership insights are, by definition, groundbreaking, timely, and highly newsworthy. These insights can be leveraged to create powerful public relations campaigns to spread awareness of your brand. In addition, they can be used to create high-content advertising and messaging that catches the attention of your customers.
- **Engagement.** Thought leadership creates the opportunity to develop deep relationships

with customers. Through social media, website content, original articles, and video, you can focus on who you are as a company, not just what you sell—moving the dialogue from price, product features, and short-term sales, toward long-term customer connections and trust.

- **Purchase.** Thought leadership initiatives can create deep insights on how best to relate to, communicate with, and sell to your customers. Research and insights can be used to develop salesforce education, sales resources and messaging, and ecommerce content.
- **Retention.** Thought leadership can increase customer retention through ongoing dialogue on topics that matter most to your customers—through social media, newsletters, and the continued development of research and content that keep your customers engaged.
- **Advocacy.** Thought leadership can lead to powerful word-of-mouth marketing by creating valuable content your customers want to share actively with friends and family.



Figure 1: Thought Leadership and the Customer Lifecycle



The Six P's: A Gameplan for Thought Leadership

Although many companies strive to be thought leaders, few succeed. Through decades of experience working with clients to envision, design, and launch thought leadership campaigns, we have identified the following “Six P’s” of successful thought leadership (Figure 2).

Plan with both prudence and practicality. Before launching a thought leadership campaign, clearly identify your business objectives and potential metrics. Identify resources, budget, timeline, milestones, and expected ROI. Then measure your results against your success metrics. Thought leadership requires long-term vision, but staying grounded in your business objectives and results will help you build an initiative that benefits both your customers and your company’s bottom line.

Position around a topic that will forge a powerful personal connection between your company and your customers. Thought leadership must be big, important, and game-changing. What is most important in your customers’ lives? What is top of mind for them each day? What keeps them up at night? Connecting with your customers around their greatest hopes, dreams, or worries will win their minds, hearts, and loyalty. The topic must also be aligned with your company’s expertise and offerings. You should have the experience and credibility both to be a leading expert on the topic, and to create the best solutions. And finally, position around a topic that is timely. Why is this topic now more important than ever? A topic that is timely will both grab your customers’ attention and help attract widespread attention in the national media.

Pioneer a new way of thinking about a topic of high importance to your customers. Very often this requires original research and thought leadership studies that uncover new dimensions, trends, challenges, and solutions. Original research creates a formidable barrier to entry: proprietary knowledge, insights, and a viewpoint your competitors can’t replicate. To maximize impact and media exposure, ensure your research and methodology are robust, credible, and nationally representative. Your research findings must then be translated into a powerful narrative that is clear, compelling, and forever changes the way your customer think about their lives.

Promote your findings to your key stakeholders, who may include company leadership, employees, partners, the media, and your customers. Internal buy-in and education is a necessary first step before external outreach. Identify, educate, and empower your outreach team—including media spokespeople, partner liaisons, and employee educators—to be adept with the key talking points. Be creative and aggressive during your external outreach, whether through PR campaigns in consumer and trade media, webinars, website content, original articles, videos, active social media engagement, or high-content advertising. But remember that the first rule of selling thought leadership is to sell without selling. Never appear to be self-serving. In a thought leadership campaign, you are promoting groundbreaking content to improve your customers’ lives. Done right, and customer loyalty, engagement, and sales will follow.

Practice what you promote. If your thought leadership research identifies a pressing consumer need, be ready to talk to the solutions you are putting in place. If the research uncovers consumer passions, priorities, and beliefs, look for ways to reflect these attitudes in your company culture and way of doing

business. Over time, insights from your thought leadership campaigns can be ingrained into your company DNA to create even deeper understanding, connections, and communication with your customers about what matters most to them and their lives.

Persist. Creating thought leadership requires commitment and dedication. If your thought leadership effort is perceived as brief and half-hearted, you will lose credibility with your customers. Establishing an authoritative thought leadership position is often a multi-year effort and can build powerful momentum.

Figure 2: The Six P's of Successful Thought Leadership

