

IDEAS AT WORK

How Thought Leadership Can Drive Sales, Not Just Likes

Takeaways

- Your brand strategy is the anchor for any thought leadership program
- Coordinate your brand and thought leadership strategies to reinforce each other
- Develop multiple thought leaders for your customers and readers to engage with

I believe that life is really all about relationships. And that includes business. People like to do business with people they know, like, and trust.

Smart companies have figured out how to promote individual leaders within their company alongside the company's brand itself. The two work together to build trust and credibility and then create growth. I think about the great Steve Jobs, and how his personal brand became such a central part of the Apple story. You couldn't really think about one without thinking about the other!

This article has some great thinking about how to successfully develop and promote thought leaders in your company, and how to connect those with your overall strategy. It's a great way to reinforce your company's strengths and grow!



How Thought Leadership Can Drive Sales, Not Just Likes

Thought leadership is experiencing an exponential boom. Everywhere you turn, you find another online “expert.” Meanwhile, prospects have been trained to search for free expertise and advice before they commit to buy. But does thought leadership really lead to business growth? It can – if you follow a few simple guidelines.

People have always bought from people, and thought leadership can be a great way to engage with people who've never heard of your brand, but are seeking a solution to a problem your company can solve. These days, buyers care about authenticity: they want to know who you are, what you stand for, and how you do things differently. Whether you are an emerging company or an established brand, thought leadership, done right, builds trust with your audience and bolsters your brand's credibility.



In a previous newsletter, we made the case for why you need to become a thought leader on LinkedIn and suggested strategies to set you up for success. Now let's look at how thought leadership can actually drive sales, not just followers on social media.

Have your brand strategy in place first.

This is the most important thing to remember in effectively leveraging thought leadership for brand recognition and business growth. Brand strategy anchors your thought leadership and gives it direction. Here are a few questions to consider before making your next post on LinkedIn or writing your next blog:

What does your company stand for? How does it innovate or do things differently in your industry? Get clear on what your company does and why you're doing it.

Powerful thought leadership speaks to and reinforces your company's mission, vision, and values.

Take Elon Musk and Tesla, for example: love him or hate him, what is the first company you think of when you're in the market to buy an electric car? Musk uses his controversial brand of thought leadership to pioneer future-forward ventures and take part in future-focused conversations. Electric cars are the future, and when people think of the future, they think Elon. They think Tesla.



Patagonia's CEOs are not household names like Elon Musk is, but we all know that a) the company staunchly stands for environmental sustainability, and b) its long-lasting, high-quality products reflect that. It has maintained its strong brand recognition and loyal customer base over several decades through global corporate activism. Its current CEO, Ryan Gellert, has 85,500 followers on LinkedIn and posts almost daily on topics like ethical consumption and corporate environmental responsibility. To date, Patagonia is valued at about \$3 billion.

Does your brand – not you as an individual thought leader – have an established online infrastructure in place?

Before you go all-out creating thought leadership content, make sure your company has a professional website and built out LinkedIn page that you can always link your audience back to. It lessens trust when there is no clear, reputable entity behind you in the form of online presence, marketing, or brand strategy. It also defeats the purpose of driving sales if your company website is not as robust as your thought leadership presence.

Coordinate your brand and thought leadership strategies. Don't just wing it!

It's easy to go viral once, but thought leadership that consistently translates into engagement and sales requires timing, scheduling, and intentionality. If you want your thought leadership to leverage your other marketing efforts, it takes meticulous team planning.

Be in sync with other arms of your business to make sure thought leadership is focusing on the same overall messaging.

When you talk about a current trend in your thought leadership content, for example, think about how these trends align with current initiatives in your business. When your company blog talks about a new product or service, think of a personal example you can share in your thought leadership post. Create a content strategy and schedule, so your company and your individual thought leaders are talking about the same general themes at the same time, for maximum impact.



Always, always, always connect your thought leadership back to your company brand!

This can be as explicit as stating that you are part of a company in your LinkedIn content. You can also have your company profile engage with your personal thought leadership content by liking it, commenting on it, or engaging with your audience in the comments. It's also important to have thought leadership content link back to and feature prominently on your company page. This builds credibility as potential customers peruse your services.

Measure the results!

Talk to your people on a regular basis to keep your finger on the pulse of how your thought leadership is tangibly impacting your business.

Don't try a solo act.

Tap behind the scenes writing support.

Being a thought leader doesn't come naturally to many people. But with the right guidance and support, anyone can be developed into a compelling thought leader who is comfortable sharing their thoughts and opinions with intention and authority on a public stage. Collaborate with the people in your company or outside consultants to get your thought leadership strategy started off on the right foot.

Have your team track and engage.

Your marketing or social media team should be tracking who is consistently engaging with you. Are you reaching the people you want to reach? Are any of these people part of a potentially untapped market for your business? Are you using your chosen platform's built-in tools to leverage your engagement and reach? Most importantly, use your in-house team to amplify your reach by engaging, tagging, reposting, etc. so that you can spend your thought-leadership time on creating content.

Tarkenton specializes in crafting integrated brand and thought leadership strategies that resonate with your audience, increase your influence, and drive growth. [Schedule a consultation](#) with us today and let's shape the future of your brand, together.



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Hannah Wohlfahrt manages marketing projects for Tarkenton's partners, in addition to overseeing our own marketing efforts. She works with partners to identify marketing needs and propose solutions, and organizes internal teams to plan out and execute these projects. Hannah joined the Tarkenton team in 2023, bringing years of marketing, communications, and media experience. With strong communication skills, she specializes in making marketing visions come to life.