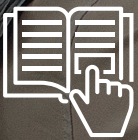




insights media



Thought leadership content 101

what, why and how

Ask for a word cloud on thought leadership content and these words should definitely be in it: engaging, credible and authentic; insights, data and research; expertise, knowledge and vision. And there's more: timely, relevant and trends, analysis; solutions, sharing and perspective; quality, innovation and impact.... There might be a few more but you get my drift.

Senior execs spend an average of four hours a week consuming thought leadership content, according to research by FT Marketing Services (<https://longitude.ft.com/resources/learning-from-leaders/>). Some people (more than 25%) spend even longer each week, clocking up five hours or more. That's a lot of people (people with very busy diaries and not enough hours in the day) committing a lot of time each week to thought leadership. They must really think it's worth it.

And it is worth it, 100%, but only when it's good quality, high impact content. There's so much thought leadership being churned out, all the time, and the quality varies hugely. Half the time it isn't real thought leadership at all - it's opinion masquerading as thought leadership.



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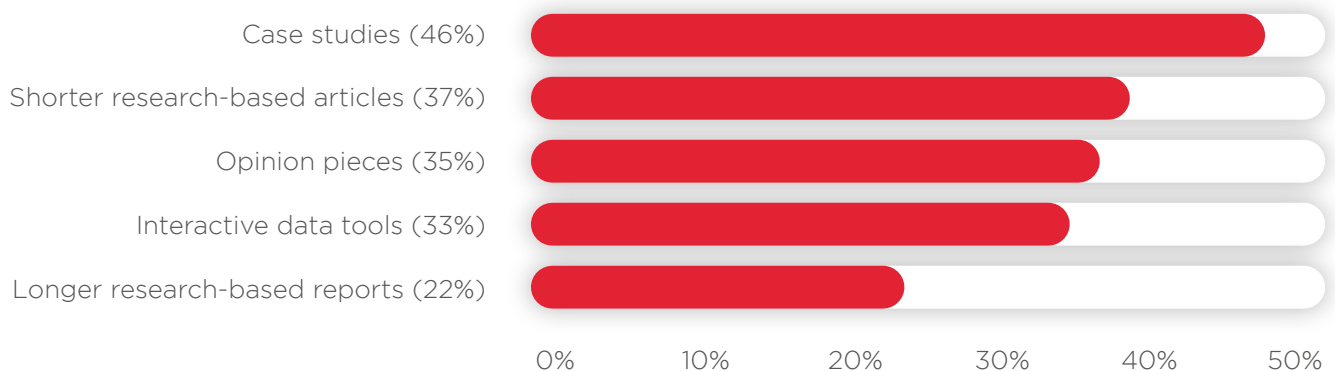
What is thought leadership?

Thought leadership is when an organisation or individual shares their expertise, knowledge and perspective on a given topic. In the B2B space, thought leaders are typically organisations or people with high visibility, a big following and a clear, recognisable voice. Think Deloitte when it comes to digital transformation and the CEO agenda, for example. Or Josh Bersin when it comes to HR tech. These are brands that people know and listen to – they may not agree with everything they say but their voice cuts right through the noise and is heard.

That is what thought leadership is about - cutting through the noise, providing authentic, credible, thought-provoking insights on issues that people care about. It's not about corporate services, product and feature descriptions or any other kind of sales-type activity – it's the wrong platform for that.

Thought leadership content can take many forms – whitepapers, case studies, podcasts, LinkedIn articles, webinars, blog posts, slide decks, videos....Some forms are definitely more popular than others, both with brands and with audiences. Case studies topped the list in the FT Marketing Services thought leadership report, favoured by 46% of the 1,000 plus senior execs polled. Next was shorter research-based articles (37%), followed by opinion pieces (35%), interactive data tools (33%) and longer research-based reports (22%).

Preferred Thought leadership content types

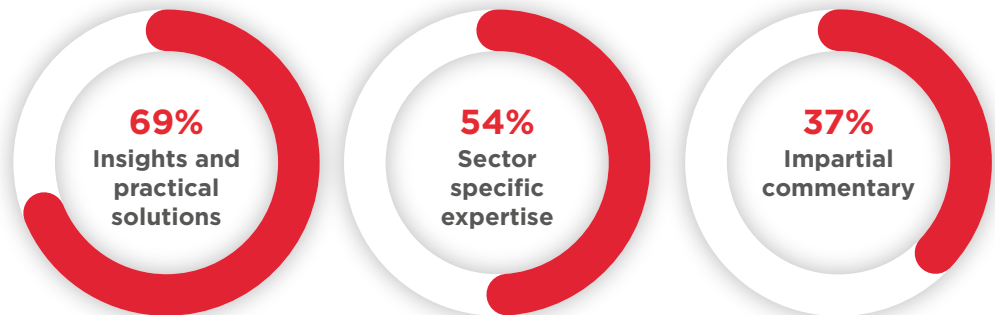


of 1,000 plus senior execs polled

What people want from thought leadership

The FT report drilled down into what execs value most highly about thought leadership content. The top criteria are: credible research (42%), clear and compelling narrative (41%), unique insights (40%), case studies that support claims (38%), new solutions to business challenges (38%) and concise content that clearly summarises the key points (35%).

Why choose brand thought leadership?



Those execs were also asked when they would choose brand thought leadership content over going to traditional media sources for information. They choose brand over media when looking for actionable insights and practical solutions (69%), relevant topic or sector specific expertise (54%) and impartial commentary and analysis (37%).

Brands are very aware of the power of thought leadership, which is why there has been such an explosion of content. When thought leadership content is high quality and high impact, it raises brand awareness and credibility, which can lead to increased sales, lead generation etc. It enables brands to connect with existing and new audiences, building trust and rapport.

Senior execs say they are much more likely to actively engage with brands on the back of good thought leadership content. “Brands that produce good thought leadership have an advantage when it comes to engaging and winning business from senior decision-makers. Thought leadership has become a vital tool for raising awareness of your value proposition, and ultimately for ensuring that your company is at the top of the pile when it comes to awarding business contracts,” says Gareth Lofthouse, CRO at Longitude, part of the FT Group behind the thought leadership report.

Thought leadership during an economic downturn

This need for thought leadership that increases brand awareness and credibility is never greater than during an economic downturn (such as now), according to research by the communications company Edelman and LinkedIn. Their *2022 B2B Thought Leadership Impact Report: Breaking Through to Buyers in Economic Uncertainty* says high quality thought leadership is more important than ever, having polled almost 3,500 management level professionals.

Those decision makers say:

- an organisation's thought leadership can be moderately or a lot more effective at demonstrating the potential value of its products/services compared to traditional product-oriented marketing (61%)
- high quality thought leadership has more impact on their purchase decision-making during economic downturns than when times are good (50%)
- during an economic downturn, it is more important than ever for suppliers who do not offer products/services that are essential to operations to produce high quality thought leadership if they want to win their business (55%)

The report highlighted specific things that execs want from their thought leadership content to help them weather the current economic headwinds:

- identify new opportunities or industry trends stemming from the economic downturn (48%)
- explain how the organisation can help our business do well despite the economic downturn (44%)
- give me information and insights that will make me more effective/successful in my job (44%)
- demonstrate an understanding of our organisation's main pain points (43%)

However, it's not all good news on the thought leadership front because there is so much of it and not everybody does it well. Edelman/LinkedIn have been producing this annual research into thought leadership for five years and in 2021, 38% of decision makers said there was more thought leadership content than they could manage. And over half (55%) said that content has to pique their interest within the first minute or they move on. That's not long to hook your audience in.



What makes good quality thought leadership?

There are plenty of people producing opinion pieces under the guise of thought leadership, without the data and insights to anchor their claims. Good thought leadership draws on research and insights, using them to underpin the message. “Without data, you’re just another person with an opinion.” That’s a great line from W. Edwards Deming, an American business theorist, statistician, composer and management consultant, and it’s true.

For thought leadership to work, the content has to encompass all those words that would feature in that word cloud. And it needs to have a clear message that people will understand and connect with. Speak to the issues facing your audience. Have a voice and don’t be afraid to go against the flow of established thinking, but if you’re going to stick your neck

out, it’s even more important you have the data to back it up. You don’t want to be just another person with an opinion, because there are plenty of those already and their message rarely lands.







And you don’t want to make any of the four most common mistakes (according to the FT report) that people routinely make when producing thought leadership:

- a lack of credible evidence (39%)
- bland content (39%)
- no practical advice (34%)
- predictable results (33%)

The importance of insights

Given that our organisation is called Insights Media, it should come as no surprise that we are big on insights. When creating thought leadership for organisations and individuals, we dig deep, using four sources of insights to inform the content we produce:

-  your insights: data, feedback and testimonials
-  customer insights: impact, value and customer experience
-  audience insights: challenges, context and relevance
-  market insights: trends, impact and changes

It's really worth putting the time and effort into getting those insights. Not just because it makes you look good, but because it will deepen and maybe even challenge your thinking. Customers may tell you something you didn't know. Employees are a mine of important information. Markets can be unpredictable...Uncover these insights and thought leadership will follow.



Final thought

There are some very compelling reasons to invest in thought leadership content.

These include:

- ➔ Clear market differentiation
- ➔ Ongoing product development and innovation
- ➔ Building and sustaining brand awareness
- ➔ Continuous business improvement
- ➔ Customer advocacy
- ➔ Building a trusted brand

These become even more compelling when you are operating in crowded, competitive markets that are noisy and, to the buyer, seem very homogenous.



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