

WHITE PAPER

# HOW TO CREATE A THOUGHT-LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

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# INTRODUCTION

What's your big idea?

What one idea or topic area do you want to be known for?

When people think about your organization, what do you want them to say? "Maybe they're the pros on \_\_\_\_\_?".

The answers to these questions should be the essence of your thought-leadership program. Chances are your organization is full of people who bring experience, expertise and opinions to their work. Thought leadership is all about pulling those ideas out of your team's heads (and emails and phone conversations) and using them to build a brand.

**We see thought leadership as the most advanced form of content marketing.** In this guide we'll show you how to build a thought-leadership program that establishes your organization as a true expert in your market.

# THE STAGES OF CONTENT MARKETING

Content strategy often evolves over time through three stages:

- 1** **SEO-DRIVEN CONTENT.** You want potential customers to find you online. This approach involves chasing keywords so prospects can find you, read your content and decide whether you're the right fit for them. Often seen as the entry point for content marketing, this strategy relies on a high volume of basic how-to content based on long-tail keywords.
- 2** **CUSTOMER-DRIVEN CONTENT.** You have great customer relationships, and you want to build on them in your marketing. If you care more about building those relationships than being simply being "found," this strategy is often a good fit. You'll focus on case studies and profiles of customers on your blog. This can be a very effective content strategy for smaller and mid-sized B2B companies.
- 3** **IDEA-DRIVEN CONTENT.** This is the pinnacle of content marketing — true thought leadership. You gather and share deep internal expertise, often working ahead of your own industry publications. People reading this type of material may even forget that it's "marketing."

So how do you get to that idea-driven stage? This guide will walk you through the steps to creating a thought-leadership program at your organization. You'll learn how to:

**UNCOVER THE BIG IDEAS** driving excellence across different teams at your company.

**BUILD A CONTENT FACTORY** that turns those big ideas into amazing content by establishing a team and process that gets results.

**SPREAD THE LOVE** by enlisting employees to proudly share content.

## HERE'S HOW TO GET STARTED.

# UNCOVER YOUR BIG IDEAS

Your best ideas for content probably aren't going to come from a marketing team brainstorm — but that's often where organizations start. Twenty-five percent of marketers say their own teams were the primary source of content ideas. No matter how clever you are, relying on your marketing team too much will quickly make your content stale. You have to cast a wide net to find strong ideas worth sharing. **No matter the size of your organization, it's likely full of smart people who have those ideas. Look for:**



**BIG THINKERS.** These people are the “connectors” — they work across department lines and can see the connections within your organization. Who are the leaders everyone looks to for ideas and answers? Who has been at the organization for a long time and knows everyone in the industry?



**INTERESTING DATA.** You are probably collecting data about your customers and your industry. How can you use what you already have to tell a useful story? Maybe you turn a recent customer survey into a state-of-the-industry report. Or you track how your customers' needs have changed over time and share what that means for the future of your industry.



### OPPORTUNITIES FOR ORIGINAL RESEARCH.

If you're not collecting and analyzing your own data, that doesn't mean you can't start. Only 9 percent of marketers conduct their own research, which represents a huge opportunity for you. Ask and answer the questions your industry and customers want to know more about.

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## YOUR HOMEWORK:

### Identify 10 new sources of ideas at your organization

Draw from each of the three areas. What other departments can help you uncover ideas? What expertise could they share?

# BUILD YOUR CONTENT ENGINE

Turning ideas, data and research into compelling content isn't easy. Even the sharpest thinkers sometimes have trouble getting their big thoughts out of their heads and into a blog post, and scaling up that process across the organization can be a challenge. You'll need a strong team and a smooth process to make it happen. Here's how to create a content engine.



## ESTABLISH A STRATEGY

Before you start thinking about the nuts and bolts of writing and editing, step back. What are you trying to accomplish with your content? Our research found that only about half of marketers have a formal content strategy. “Strategy” can be an intimidating word — don't you need months of planning and PowerPoint presentations? But a strategy doesn't have to be complicated. In fact, the best ones are simple.

A good content strategy answers these questions:

- Who are we trying to reach?
- What do we want to offer them?
- How are we going to make a connection?
- How will we know if we've succeeded?



## DOCUMENT YOUR PLANS

Once you've established your strategy you can start to plan content. Create an editorial calendar that maps out topics, channels and the team members needed to produce each piece.



## ESTABLISH ACCOUNTABILITY

How will you turn the entries on your editorial calendar into published pieces? Break every piece of content into steps, and assign an owner for each step. Project management software such as Basecamp, Asana and Trello will help break projects into easy-to-follow action steps with firm deadlines assigned to the people responsible for them. Keeping track of deadlines and assignments will help identify where the bottlenecks are, making it easier to improve the process over time.



## BUILD TEMPLATES

Don't reinvent the wheel every time you make a piece of content. A template lets you focus your energy on the ideas, rather than how you're going to get the work done.



## GET CREATIVE WITH FORMATS

Expecting nonwriters to just pick up and start writing is a common mistake in floundering thought-leadership programs. Don't force it. Instead, play to your experts' strengths. Interview them on camera, or let them share their thoughts via audio, then transcribe the results. What matters is capturing their ideas and then adapting the material to appropriate formats for your audience.



## ASSIGN PEOPLE THE RIGHT ROLES

As you ramp up your content engine, observe where things slow down. If people are having trouble staying on task and hitting deadlines, your content team needs a managing editor. If social media isn't aligning with the message correctly, they need to be included in the process more intentionally. If blog posts are assigned but don't get written, you may need to hire a professional writer to make it happen.



## YOUR HOMEWORK:

**Diagram what your content factory might look like.**

Who keeps things moving? Where does the process bog down? Where can you draw in new sources and what can be offloaded to others?

# SPREAD THE LOVE

Great content is meant to be shared, but we've found people don't necessarily know how to do it on their own. Employees may be reluctant to share content from their organization without some encouragement. Don't assume your employees will share your branded content. Having an internal promotion strategy is just as important as a production strategy. Guide employees on how to get the word out with these steps:



**1 EDUCATE THEM.** Take your external marketing and turn it inward. You send emails to prospects and customers to keep them informed about your business; employees should get the same level of intentional communication. Send an internal version of your marketing newsletter to employees, full of links to content they helped produce, and encourage them to share it outside the company.



**2 HELP THEM WITH WHAT TO SAY.** Encourage your colleagues to share by providing sample language or ideas about what to say on social media. As with any social sharing, making it easy is key; a simple cut-and-paste of suggested text ensures employees will get the language right.



**TRACK AND REWARD.** When sharing content is part of their jobs, employees are more likely to do it. Set expectations about how and when they should share content, and establish a reward system to reinforce its importance.

“Having an internal promotion strategy is just as important as a production strategy.”

## YOUR HOMEWORK:

**Think about your organization.**

What’s the best way to share new content with your entire team? Does your crew love email? Slack? Is there a monthly internal newsletter you could contribute to? Make a plan to regularly update everyone about new content.

You know your people have great ideas and valuable experience. Thought leadership is the way to get those big ideas out into the world. **No matter what resources your marketing team has, you can produce interesting content that gets results.** The keys are interesting ideas and a strong process.

## WE'RE ROOTING FOR YOU!

# READY TO BUILD YOUR ENGINE?

If you're ready to build or upgrade your thought-leadership program, we'd love to help.

Rep Cap is a marketing consulting firm that specializes in creating and executing digital content strategies to drive growth for B2B companies. Our team of writers, editors, designers and marketers can help you create a content marketing strategy that will connect with your audience.

To find out how Rep Cap can power your thought leadership, email [hello@repcapitalmedia.com](mailto:hello@repcapitalmedia.com).

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