



The Ultimate Guide to **Content Marketing** for **Thought Leadership**

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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 just 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 the types of content that fuel a thought leadership strategy, the tools that make it work, the metrics that illustrate progress, and insider secrets that can maximize success.



“A thought leader is an industry expert who shares their 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.”

KELSEY RAYMOND
COO OF INTERO DIGITAL

Why you need content marketing to build thought leadership

Creating and publishing content positions your company's subject matter experts as thought leaders in your space, enhances your credibility, and helps you build trust with your audience.



REACH A NEW AUDIENCE

Thought leadership content published outside of your website (e.g., guest posts and press mentions) engages a wider audience. Because this content is published on websites that your audience members read and trust, it helps build credibility. Performing keyword research and optimizing on- and off-site content for search also help you reach more people by positioning your insights in search results.



BECOME A GO-TO EXPERT

As you continue publishing content that your target audience finds valuable and helpful, you can elevate the personal brands of individuals in your company and solidify your company's position as a thought leader in your industry. As a result, leaders in your company are more likely to secure speaking engagements and award nominations and strengthen your thought leadership even further.



EDUCATE AND ENGAGE

When your thought leadership content is published in online publications, you have the opportunity to guide your audience members back to your website and educate them through in-depth, engaging blog content.



Thought leadership's role in the buyer's journey

Establishing yourself as a trusted expert humanizes your brand and, in turn, can help you build an authentic connection with your target audience. Read on to learn how that connection plays a critical role in each stage of the buyer's journey.





AWARENESS

During the first stage of the buyer's journey, your prospective customers are just becoming aware of the particular problems or opportunities they're facing, and they're looking for educational information to help them better understand and meet their own needs. That's where thought leadership content comes into play.

While these members of your audience are typically the furthest away from making any purchase decisions, they represent the biggest pool of potential business you have, and you shouldn't ignore this opportunity to educate and engage them.



CONSIDERATION

Once you've become a trusted resource for your audience members, you can use thought leadership content to walk them through various solutions. This is often the lengthiest stage of the buyer's journey, and much of the thought leadership content you create will be targeted to this part of the funnel.

Information collection and analysis is an ongoing process that your prospective customers go through at their own pace. To be successful, you've got to stay top of mind and add value to these audiences, and you can do that by consistently publishing thought leadership content.



DECISION

As your audience members engage over time, they'll eventually be prepared to evaluate solutions and make a purchase decision. The thought leadership content you create can help buyers in this stage evaluate the pros and cons of their options and position your company as the best solution.

Thought leadership content can also be leveraged during the **sales cycle** to increase conversion rates among leads from all different sources.

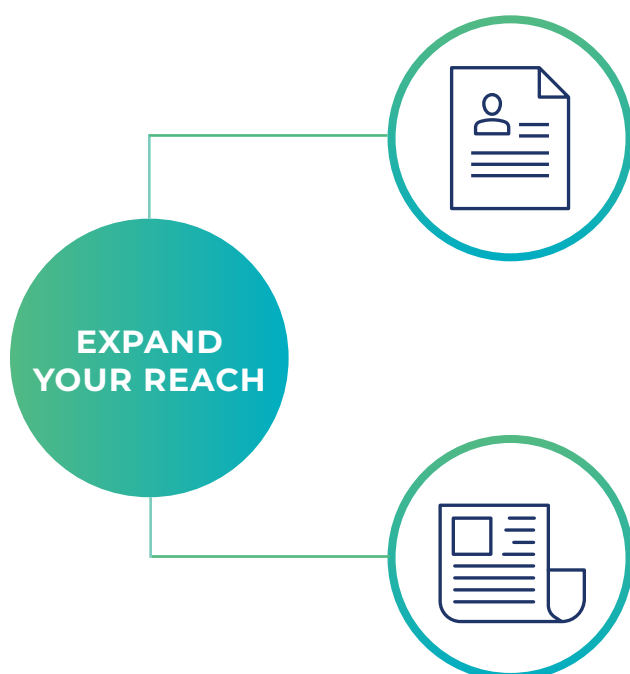




Key types of thought leadership content

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, each one acting as a puzzle piece of a bigger strategy that attracts, converts, and engages your audience — and, as a result, positions you as a leader.

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



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 FEATURES

This is when an outside source, such as a journalist, references your company in the press. It could be a quote from one of your company's thought leaders or a full interview that provides third-party validation and shows your audience they can trust you.

EDUCATE AND CONVERT



ON-SITE CONTENT

This includes blog posts, case studies, whitepapers, infographics, and other helpful content that you create to further educate your audience and position your company as a knowledgeable, trustworthy resource.

SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

Thought leadership isn't just about how much content you create. It's about how you use that content to keep your readers engaged. With social media, you can share and repurpose your thought leadership content into social posts that engage your audience and help you grow a following.



NURTURE AND ENGAGE



EMAIL NEWSLETTERS

A newsletter is a simple and effective way to get your messaging to your audience and keep your brand top of mind. It allows you to package up your best thought leadership insights and deliver them directly to your audience members' inboxes.



BOOKS

Writing a book takes your status as a knowledgeable resource a step further. It allows you to offer a much more in-depth exploration of a topic that your audience is interested in, and it can open the door to more press, speaking, and award opportunities.

Tools and tech for thought leadership

1. A WEBSITE WITH A BLOG

Companies without an online home are hard to interact with, let alone trust. **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, you need a high-quality website.

2. ANALYTICS

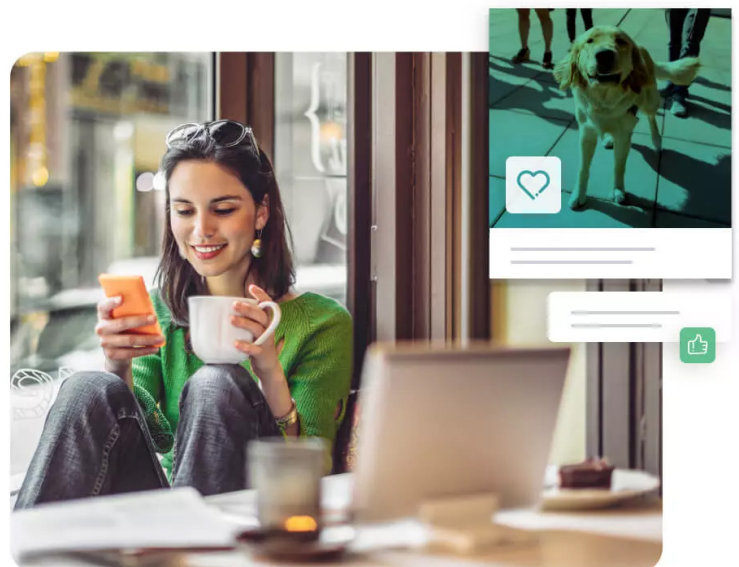
To track whether your content is successful, you'll need an analytics tool. **Analytics allow you to see how each piece of content is performing and monitor specific metrics.** Before you begin publishing content, make sure you've got a way to keep an eye on its performance.

3. EMAIL MARKETING OR MARKETING AUTOMATION SYSTEM

Email is one of your best tools for staying top of mind, so you need a platform **that helps you manage it.** You could use a tool that's made specifically for email distribution, like MailChimp, or a marketing automation tool that offers a more robust suite of features, like HubSpot.

4. SOCIAL MEDIA

Email is a valuable touchpoint for people already in your system, but **social media opens the door for touchpoints with even more audience members.** And while it's important for thought leaders to share content with their networks on their personal accounts, your company plays an important role in amplifying those messages, too.



Success metrics that showcase ROI

Thought leadership measurement is not an exact science. 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 in favor of the more subjective, intangible benefits you'll notice over time.

Here are some key metrics you can track to gauge how effective your thought leadership content strategy is:



SOCIAL SHARES AND ENGAGEMENT

Social shares on their own don't always show you the extent to which audiences truly engage with your content — but they do signal when your ideas have traction. If your audience is sharing and leaving feedback on your content, you know you're heading in the right direction. To track social shares and ROI, you can use a tool like BuzzSumo.



CONTENT SYNDICATION

It's a good sign your efforts are paying off when publications pick up your thought leadership content and syndicate it. To keep tabs on syndication, set up Google Alerts for your company name and the names of its thought leaders. This way, you'll get notified when your content has been republished online. Create a spreadsheet or dashboard to keep track of it over time.



ON-SITE ANALYTICS

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



AWARDS

Awards aren't often presented to just anyone. Earning awards from others shows that you've demonstrated thought leadership and high performance in your industry. Keep a spreadsheet outlining the awards you apply for and receive nominations for, and keep it updated with the status of each award.



PRESS OPPORTUNITIES

Invites to contribute as a source in an article, appear as a guest on a podcast, co-host a webinar, or any other form of press opportunities indicate that people value your insights. Log these opportunities in a spreadsheet to keep track of how many you gain, and note how they came about to better understand which content drives the most visibility.



SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

Being asked to speak at events is an indication that you share valuable insights with the right audiences and are, therefore, considered an expert in your space. Keep a running list of your speaking engagements, and note where these opportunities came from so you can identify the content that drives the most speaking engagements.



How to maximize 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
through social media
and email marketing



Paid amplification
via social ads and
Google Ads

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 new 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 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 to your strategy can help you reach and connect with even more people in your audience.

4 FOCUS ON SEO.

A successful content marketing strategy requires SEO. You can't simply create content and hope it'll stick; you have to integrate SEO strategies to see a bigger return on your thought leadership content strategy. Let's review a few tactics that can help you build thought leadership:

Keyword research: Keyword research allows you to learn what questions your audience members are asking. This way, you can answer those questions and position yourself as an authority in your industry. This is important because if your audience doesn't find you when they navigate to Google and search for insights related to your expertise, they probably won't consider you an industry expert.

Topic clusters: A topic cluster is a group of pieces of content that cover various aspects of a subject area, preferably a keyword that you've identified as important in your keyword research. The topic cluster approach allows you to create overview content and in-depth content, which positions you as an expert on the subject matter that your audience cares about. Plus, search engine algorithms favor topic-based content, so using the topic cluster approach can help you rank better in search results.

Content optimization: When you optimize your content for search engines, such as updating in-text links and adding keywords, it's more likely to show up in search results when your target audience looks for content related to your industry and services.

Link building: This is the process of earning hyperlinks that point back to your website from another site. These hyperlinks are called backlinks. If your website gets backlinks from relevant, high-quality sources, Google will see your website as an authority, and your audience will view you as an expert in your industry.

A thought leadership strategy in action

COMPANY

MEADE, a management consulting firm, offers guidance to help digital, creative, and experiential marketing agencies scale their performance and achieve growth.

STRATEGY

On a quest to cement himself as a thought leader in the space, MEADE founder and CEO Jeff Meade started working with Intero Digital. Together, we developed and executed a thought leadership content strategy that included SEO guest-contributed content.

RESULTS

Jeff worked with Intero Digital for two years, and during that time, we published **14 guest posts in 10 top publications in his industry — including Harvard Business Review, Ad Age, and Entrepreneur**. His articles have amassed tens of thousands of shares across Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest, and his content has a **social reach of more than 6 million**.

- Jeff's Harvard Business Review Ascend article has generated more than 32,000 social shares.
- A guest post published in Entrepreneur has garnered more than 6,600 shares, and leads often mention this article when communicating with MEADE.

Overall, the content we've created together accounts for:

- 5 of the top 10 referral traffic sources to the MEADE website.
- 31% of all referral traffic to the MEADE website.



Click here
to see
more case
studies

Thought leadership **strategy outline**

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 templates on the following pages to begin mapping out your company's current and future plans to build thought leadership through content marketing.



A GOOD THOUGHT LEADER IS SOMEONE WHO:

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

WHO ON MY TEAM WOULD BE A GOOD THOUGHT LEADER?

EFFECTIVE THOUGHT LEADERSHIP CONTENT IS:

- Educational.
- Non-promotional.
- Helpful and engaging.

WHAT TOPICS MAKE SENSE FOR US TO WRITE ABOUT?



[Click here](#) to learn how to choose publications that reach your target audience.

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP CONTENT SHOULD BE PUBLISHED VIA:

- Your website and blog.
- Online publications your audience reads and trusts.
- Social media.

WHERE SHOULD WE PUBLISH OUR CONTENT?



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

	TACTIC	WHAT IT IS	WHY IT WORKS
TOP OF THE FUNNEL EXPAND YOUR REACH	Guest-Contributed Articles	Articles that offer unique insights from your subject matter expert(s) in publications your audience reads	• Educate your audience • Build trust • Establish your expertise • Earn third-party validation
	Press Features	References to your company in articles published on reputable sites that reach your target audience	• Earn third-party validation • Establish your expertise • Create positive associations
MIDDLE OF THE FUNNEL EDUCATE AND CONVERT	On-Site Content	Blog posts, case studies, infographics, whitepapers, etc., that live on your company's website and address topics your audience is interested in	• Educates your audience • Builds trust • Improves your website's SEO • Highlights your offerings
	Book	A more in-depth exploration of a topic that offers your target audience examples, experiences, takeaways, and context	• 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	• Educates your audience • Keeps your company top of mind • Offers company updates • Highlights your offerings



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	TACTIC	CURRENT CADENCE	FUTURE PLANS
TOP OF THE FUNNEL EXPAND YOUR REACH	Guest-Contributed Articles		
	Press Features		
MIDDLE OF THE FUNNEL EDUCATE AND CONVERT	On-Site Content		
	Book		
BOTTOM OF THE FUNNEL NURTURE AND ENGAGE	Email Newsletter		



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CONTENT **AMPLIFICATION**

	TACTIC	CURRENT CADENCE	FUTURE PLANS
TOP OF THE FUNNEL EXPAND YOUR REACH	Search Engine Optimization		
MIDDLE OF THE FUNNEL EDUCATE AND CONVERT	Paid Amplification		
BOTTOM OF THE FUNNEL NURTURE AND ENGAGE	Social Media Collateral		

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

Website CMS and Blog



Marketing and Email Automation



Social Media Access



Website Analytics





Intero Digital is a full-service digital marketing agency that helps businesses reach their most ambitious goals by leveraging integrated digital marketing solutions executed by top industry talent and enabled by cutting-edge technology.

Contact Intero Digital today to learn more about how we can help you crush your digital marketing goals.

