

**Thought Leadership:  
Use this Competitive Weapon to Create Differentiation, Build Market  
Visibility and Drive New Business**

Whether you are a start-up company with hyper-growth in mind, or a small to medium sized business with more modest growth plans, getting visibility in a crowded, competitive market is a must – and a big challenge. You have to stand out among your competitors so that potential buyers understand “why you” versus an alternative.

You may not have the “hottest news”, a recognized name, or strategic relationships with power players to draw attention to your business. But, you do have a “secret weapon” to create news, buzz and visibility: thought leadership. If your organization is struggling to gain market visibility, swimming in sea of competition and living with disappointing sales, read on.

If you envy the “big guys” who enjoy the benefit of a steady stream of corporate press releases, public announcements, new product launches, big case studies and client success stories (...*those news hogs!*), we understand how you feel. But, get over it.

We know for certain that the absolute forte of the successful entrepreneur and SMB executive is sheer creativity and tenacity in the face of significant obstacles and resource constraints. Those characteristics can help to level the playing field. They can propel your business to get noticed in a specific way that differentiates your business enables you to more effectively compete against the “deep-pockets” competition and gain new buyers.

Let's look at a few ways that the *smart-and-nimble* can get into the thought leadership game because it is a vital competitive weapon in the “David versus Goliath” business scenario. Use it as a “secret door” to reach the trade media and business press, and to find high-quality speaking opportunities which can catapult your business into the limelight – and the lap of just the buyers you want to reach.

Don't assume that playing the thought leadership game means you need to have strong academic credentials or be an already recognized authority in your field. To boost your business using thought leadership, simply have a *distinct point of view*, a passion for your business, solid experience to share with others – and a plan to leverage these great assets. Using thought leadership as a vehicle to publicize and harness what you know and do best anyway (*after all it is your business*) can result in a big payoff. But, you have to know how to leverage your “know-how” to its best advantage. Done well, thought leadership creates distinct differentiation, drives market visibility, builds your brand and, ultimately, fills the sales pipeline with the solid prospects that deliver new business and profitable growth.

Thought leadership is basically a form of public relations but It requires substantially less investment than other PR programs. Traditional PR requires a larger investment, for a longer period of time, than many SMB companies can tolerate; it's just not in the budget. But, a solid thought leadership program is doable and the time required to make it happen is quite manageable. As an example, with a little help from an advisor who can help you understand how to play the game most effectively, you can become a sought after source for reporters – a “go to person” - who can provide insights and quotes for their articles and stories.

Your thought leadership program can be packaged in many ways including:

- Frequent and consistent touch-point communications (perhaps monthly email updates) with your buyers and prospects – ones that provide some special insight about your industry, market, etc.
- “Grass roots” research (drawn from your own formal and informal surveys, for instance) that allows you to produce white papers, briefings, and other content that is your own special intellectual capital; be sure to protect it.
- Success stories and case studies that document and feature ways that your products and services - *and significant expertise, of course* – made a difference to those you serve – just don't make it a pure sales commercial.
- Write “trend” press releases – ones that tell the world what you are seeing as the market dynamics in your industry and the consequences you observe.
- Become an active participant in the business and trade associations you've joined. Chair a committee, participate in co-authoring papers, give speeches – ones that are entertaining as well as educational. Document what you're discussing and learning inside your member groups and share it accordingly.
- Select a few publications that are important to your industry, market or business and find out about their editorial calendars. Publications often plan by topic for a year in advance, so figure out the best time to make contact. Think about how to offer what you know and make it useful. ( Did you just do complete a survey with your customers on a relevant topic?)

Use your thought leadership effectively. Be sure to post it on your website. Make it easy to find and download. Make it even more effective and valuable by branding it. Give your thought leadership a name - *ABC Co. Executive Insights*, as an example. Make thought leadership work as hard for your business as you do.

### About Marketplace Partners

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