

## HOW TO IMPLEMENT A THOUGHT LEADERSHIP PR PROGRAM

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Thought leadership is one element of a successful brand leadership strategy. Thought leadership is a coveted state that many desire, but few achieve. Like brand leadership, thought leadership is much more than just making a claim that you are the best in your industry. It takes commitment and dedication and a ton of hard work. By utilizing thought leadership in your public relations efforts, you will not only earn respect from reporters but also build trust, credibility and your brand with your customers.

Reporters are always in need of credible third-party experts that can address current issues and trends with interesting insight and vision. So public relations (PR) should be easy, right? You have untapped experts hidden within your company that have deep knowledge of your market and its challenges. All you need to do is sit back and wait for the reporters to call. Chances are you're still waiting.

Unfortunately every company wants to be the "go-to" guy for the press. Reporters are bombarded daily with emails, press releases and pitches that are filled with pages of industry jargon and company fluff, but have no real news value. And it's especially difficult for small-to-mid sized companies to get media visibility, when the market is crowded with larger competitors, with deeper pockets, all vying for the same ink. So, how does a company become better known with limited resources? By becoming an industry thought leader.

### ***What is a thought leader?***

Simply put, a thought leader is a recognized leader in one's field. These individuals are recognized by the outside world as someone that understands their business, the needs of their customers, and the broader marketplace in which their company operates.

Thought leadership PR is personal and centers on a focused group of company spokespeople. Thought leadership PR is a means of differentiating your company from others in your field by building a pool of credible experts and positioning them with the press as informative, innovative, insightful sources that the media can call to comment on current industry issues and challenges.

If you want to successfully position yourself or another leader in your company as an expert resource, you have to cut through the clutter. By following a few keys to thought leadership, you will be well on your way to building strong, meaningful relationships with key reporters and editors in your market.

### ***Be Available***

You must understand that journalists are on a different clock and calendar than the rest of the world. They are operating under strict and stressful deadlines. To be a reliable source for a journalist, you have to make it easy to get in touch with you, and you must respond with catlike reflexes to any voicemail or e-mail left by a member of the media.

### ***Be Prepared***

Reporters will expect you to have wisdom and information in your particular field. They will also expect you to be familiar with the specific subject they are writing about, as well as what types of issues they have written about previously. As a part of being prepared, you should always develop talking points for each interview to help you deliver key messages, as well as research and statistics that would be useful for you and the journalist. Most importantly, practice your delivery. If you have been media trained, review the materials from that session to sharpen your understanding of the basics to conducting a successful interview.

### ***Be Opinionated***

As a true expert, you will bring something new to the party in the way of perspective. In most cases, reporters are not looking for fence sitters; they are looking for someone with a clear point of view, otherwise known as an opinion. This means that you will have to be dramatic in your speech, compelling with your insight and bold with your predictions.

### ***Be Persistent***

To wage an effective thought leadership campaign, you have to make your own opportunities. If you are waiting for a journalist to discover you as an expert resource, it may be a while. Thought leaders must create their own fortune. You have to get on the media's radar screen by getting the word out that you have valuable expertise to share and by consistently putting in the time and effort necessary to generate opportunities.

Stick to these guidelines, and your company will be well on its way to becoming an industry thought leader.

### ***Thought Leadership Tools***

Below are some key tools and tactics used in Thought Leadership PR. You are probably already producing most of these materials, now it's time to use them build your credibility with the press.

White Papers	An educational or technical document showcasing your company's vision and product strategy.
Case Studies	Show how your company helped another solve a problem or gain a competitive edge.
By-lined Articles	Opinion pieces that contain a unique view of a current problem or issue.
Speaking Opportunities	Chance to communicate directly with your customers and prospects at key industry events and conferences.
Interviews	Those times when media want to talk to you to obtain an opinion of quote for articles being written.

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