



Using business research to stand out

Eleanor Windsor discusses how business research can help your thought leadership efforts.

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Business research is often used to support a number of marketing activities – from client relationship management programmes, to pitch development and conference preparation. However, another growing use of business research is to help support thought leadership. An increasing number of organisations are adding thought leadership to their marketing toolkit, inspired by the ability to easily publish and promote yourself and your business in today's online world.

Even when you don't have an extensive budget, a small investment in some targeted business research can be invaluable in helping to establish you as a thought leader in your chosen field.

Here are five easy examples of the activities your business researchers can undertake to help boost your thought leadership efforts.

1 Nimble current awareness

A basic rule for thought leadership is that it needs to be timely. Responding quickly to developments in your market and publishing your commentary and analysis, ideally before your competitors, is key. Your clients and prospects generally won't want to read your thoughts on a new development in their market place when the moment has passed. This means you need to have an excellent handle on your market – you need to be aware of key news and developments in good time for you to pick them up and turn them around quickly – adding your unique thoughts and views.

Along with your own discoveries, there are numerous current awareness and news aggregation tools available today, from Google Alerts or Google Trends to more sophisticated subscription services. Whatever tool you choose, you need to make sure that you identify the topics you'd like to track and establish a mechanism to flag them quickly and easily. You also need to regularly review the topics you're tracking, checking they remain relevant. How many of us are guilty of setting up an alert and then simply deleting the email each time it arrives because we're no longer interested in the topic, rather than revisiting our search and ensuring our news alerts remain constantly relevant?

As well as setting up alerts on current topics and developments, you may also want to look ahead and focus on areas you believe might be important in the future – trends you've spotted, new

developments in your field which are starting to get more attention. Experienced business researchers can help you set up valuable current awareness tracking, using critical search parameters and regularly reviewing these searches to guarantee you are one of the first people to comment on a new development in your market.

2 Re-purposing other people's research

Of course, you don't just need to focus on breaking news; as a thought leader you can also comment on published research studies and papers. Your business researchers can support this by tracking reports, surveys, white papers and analyses completed by other key individuals in your chosen markets. As a thought leader you can review these published reports from your perspective, adding your own value by combining research and experiences from others with your personal experiences and views.

You may also choose to repackage the research you identify, highlighting and summarising key points, adding your commentary and presenting it all in an infographic. This can provide a more accessible and perhaps more memorable presentation of your thought leadership.

Your research team can identify those organisations that routinely publish reports, subscribing to those considered critical, and tracking commentary and interpretation by others to ensure you deliver an alternative and valuable perspective.

3 Tracking your competition

Another important role for your business researchers is in tracking what your competitors are saying. Using competitor intelligence this way can feed into both your thought leadership strategy and also your wider marketing strategy.

In thought leadership terms, this will mean that you can consciously decide to adopt an alternative perspective to help differentiate you from your competitors. In some cases it may pay to not comment on a topic too soon, but to decide to hold back and wait for others to publish their views first, so that you can develop your unique perspective.

Watching competitor activity may also flag issues you are not actively tracking. Your attention may have been focused on other market developments and activities. Having your business researchers regularly review what your competitors are publishing can help you



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identify a key topic or development you have missed – a debate in which your clients and prospects would expect you to engage.

Of course another benefit of watching your competitor is talent spotting – identifying the people you might want to attract into your business. Thought leadership is about relationship building, and individuals who create a following based on their own unique insights and analyses are valuable. Using effective competitor intelligence will enable the identification of emerging thought leaders you may then choose to target to join your business.

4 Thinking beyond the usual

Your business research team can also help you to identify some more unusual sources of information for use as the basis of thought leadership. We automatically tend to look to people with similar roles to our own and will naturally monitor their commentary on key issues. However, it is often useful to think beyond this. Are there key groups, organisations, government agencies, or other professional bodies who provide commentary on issues relevant to you and your clients? Are reports being written, conferences held or surveys undertaken which may not be immediately obvious as a point of interest but could start a new debate? Are there paral-

els within other sectors that you can use to shed light on activity and trends within your key markets?

A discussion with your business research team can help to build a useful list of these alternative sources. Your research team can keep a watching brief to see what these groups publish, flagging any useful reports or articles for your comment. Beyond this, they can begin to proactively identify other sources you may not have considered. The aim here is to be the first to make an issue relevant to your chosen market – and then to grow and develop that commentary, helping to establish you as a thought leader in this particular field.

5 Accurate audience targeting

A final way your business research team can help support your thought leadership is by creating and constantly updating your target lists – detailing those individuals you should target with your thought leadership.

Using market data collated either manually or through subscription databases, your research team can build lists of prospects based on very specific criteria. These lists can be used for numerous marketing and business development activities, one of which is thought leadership targeting. Your researchers can join key groups and track their activities and debates or identify strategically important publications for your commentary. Targeting your thought leadership publications will help to ensure that your views are seen by those who matter the most.

These are just some of the ways business research can be used to support your thought leadership activities, helping you to stand out from the crowd. Professional business researchers are cutting through information daily in their roles; why not tap into them as a resource to help you in your thought leadership journey or efforts.

Thought leadership is not something that brings immediate results, but over time, through regular engagement with your chosen audience, relationships can be built that will ultimately lead to future opportunities.



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