

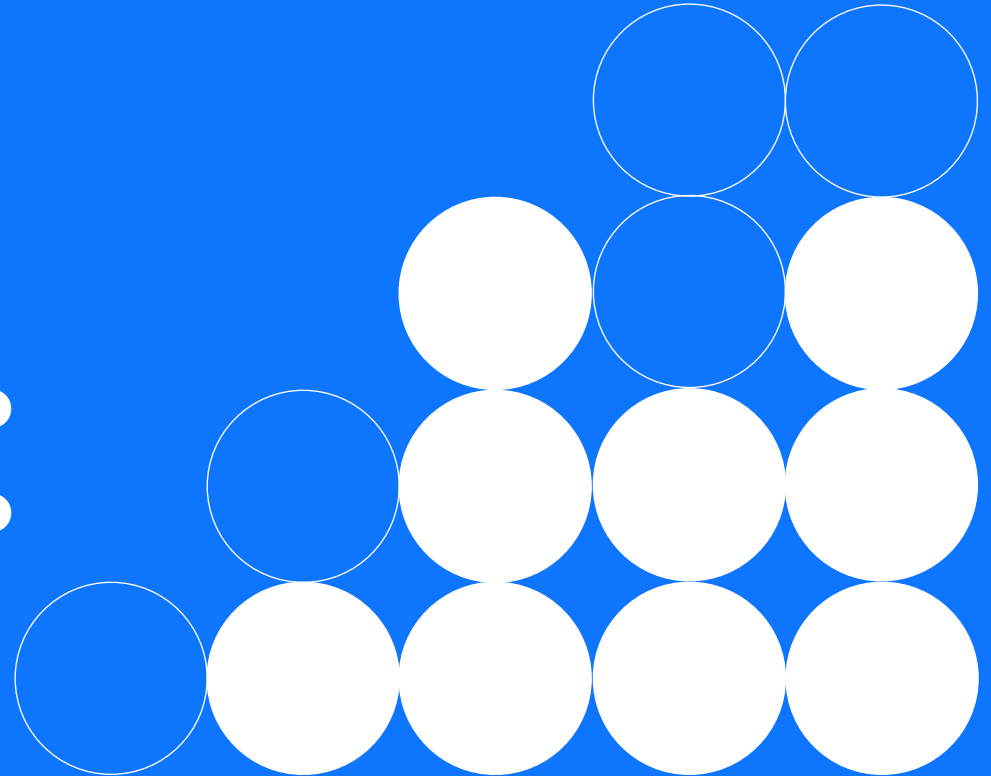


2024 B2B Thought Leadership Impact Report

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# REACHING BEYOND THE READY:

Thought Leadership's Impact on  
Engaging Out-of-Market B2B Buyers



# Executive Summary

Times are tough for B2B marketers. At any given time, a staggering 95% of business clients are not actively seeking goods or services.<sup>1</sup> Lingering economic uncertainty is extending sales cycles, with nearly 90% of global buyers indicating their purchase process became more drawn-out last year.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, B2B buyers now prefer a self-directed journey of digital discovery.

In this environment, getting buyers off the sidelines has become imperative. B2B companies need to prompt buyers to rethink their challenges as a first step to stimulating demand. Thought leadership can provide that competitive edge.

We surveyed nearly 3,500 management-level professionals in December 2023 for insights into how thought leadership can do more than just increase brand awareness. Done well, it makes buyers reexamine their assumptions and inoculates you against competitors trying to woo away your customers.

Such content is an important way to convey what your company stands for — the promise you're making to your customers<sup>3</sup> — and makes your brand powerful and attractive to buyers.

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This study is the sixth annual collaboration between Edelman and LinkedIn examining how thought leadership influences buying behaviors among B2B decision-makers and C-suite executives.

Our previous research confirmed the full-funnel, business-generating impact of strong thought leadership — especially amid economic uncertainty — and the tangible risks of publishing low-quality content.

Please view our [2017-2018](#), [2019](#), [2020](#), [2021](#) and [2022](#) reports.

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**Joe Kingsbury**  
Edelman

**David Bersoff**  
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**Annie Dunleavy**  
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<sup>1</sup> "The 95-5 rule is the new 60-40 rule." Ehrenberg-Bass Institute for Marketing Science, September 2022.

<sup>2</sup> "Forrester's 2023 Global B2B Buyers' Journey Survey Reveals That Budget Crunches, Information Overload, and Generational Differences Are Protracting Buying Cycles." October 2023.

<sup>3</sup> "Making a Promise to the Customer: How to Give Campaigns a Competitive Edge," by Roger Martin, Jann Schwarz, and Mimi Turner, LinkedIn B2B Institute.

# Key Learnings

1

**Thought leadership that spurs business leaders to rethink their challenges is a powerful tool for stimulating demand for your business's products and services.**

It does far more than just create a favorable impression of your brand.

2

**Effective thought leadership exerts a surprisingly strong influence on sales and pricing.**

Thought leadership can be a more powerful marketing tool than traditional methods and makes people more willing to seek you out — and even pay extra for your expertise.

3

**Offense is your best defense: Protecting your existing customers is critical.**

If you're not helping your customers think about their challenges in new ways, someone else will. Thought leadership can help inoculate you against competitors trying to poach your customers.

4

**Despite the clear power of thought leadership to drive business results, most organizations say it is under-resourced, misused, and not measured appropriately.**

Firms adept at quantifying thought leadership ROI will be better positioned to secure the resources that can amplify their efforts.

5

**Effective thought leadership has three key attributes: it cites strong research and data, helps buyers understand their business challenges, and offers concrete guidance.**

Doing any of these will elevate your thought leadership above the pack. Doing them all will put you in the top tier.

# Terminology

## Thought Leadership

Thought leadership refers to content that offers expertise, guidance or a unique point of view on a topic or in a field. It includes content like thought pieces, essays, videos, webinars, live presentations, PowerPoint slides, and research reports that organizations make available to the public for free (or in return for registering or giving contact information).

In this context, “thought leadership” does not include content that is primarily focused on describing an organization’s products or services, or thought leadership that you pay to receive — such as client deliverables, subscription services, or reports that must be purchased.

## Audiences in this Report



### **B2B Decision-Makers:**

Company executives who consume thought leadership and are involved in making final decisions on their company’s choice of professional service providers or products.



### **C-Suite Executives:**

Company owners, partners and founders who consume thought leadership and who have complete or partial ownership of a company, or C-Suite-level executives with responsibility for a business function.



### **Producers of Thought Leadership:**

Managers (and higher) who both consume thought leadership and work for an organization that produces free thought leadership.

# About the Study

## Survey Respondents & Methodology

To help B2B companies understand the impact of thought leadership, Edelman and LinkedIn surveyed 3,484 global business executives across a wide range of industries and company sizes.

### Data Collection

Online, using the LinkedIn platform to survey LinkedIn members

### Markets Surveyed

United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Germany, Singapore, Australia, India (all surveyed in English)

### Fielding Dates

November 30 to December 14, 2023

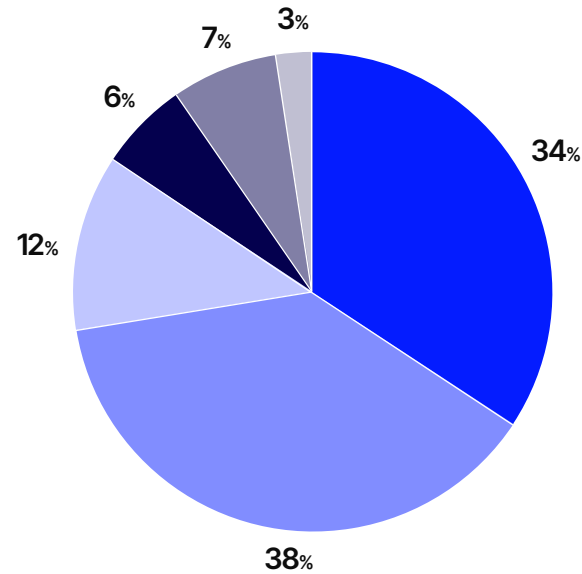
### Survey Length

10 minutes

### Margin of Error

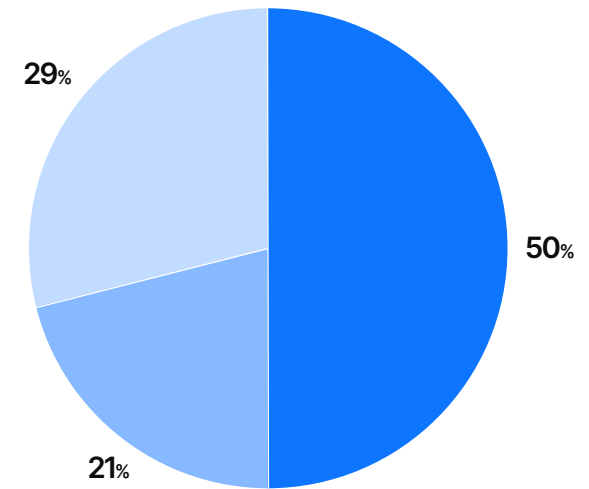
+/- 2.8%

### Seniority Level



- Manager
- Director
- VP
- CXO
- Partner
- Owner

### Company Size



- 1 - 200
- 201 - 1,000
- 1,001 +

1.

**Thought leadership that spurs business leaders to rethink their challenges is a powerful tool for stimulating demand for your business's products and services.**

It does far more than just create a favorable impression of your brand.

# B2B decision-makers and C-suite leaders consistently consume thought-leadership content.

52%

of decision-makers

- and -

54%

of C-level executives

spend **an hour or more on average per week reading thought-leadership content.**

# Executives trust thought leadership over marketing materials.



Nearly

# 3/4



of decision-makers (73%)

say that **an organization's thought-leadership content is a more trustworthy basis for assessing its capabilities and competencies than its marketing materials and product sheets.**

Source: 2024 Edelman-LinkedIn B2B Thought Leadership Impact Report. Question: How much do you agree or disagree with these statements? "An organization's thought leadership content is a more trustworthy basis for assessing its capabilities and competencies than its marketing materials and product sheets." 5-point scale, top 2 box, agree. Decision-makers and C-suite executives, 7-country average. Question: If an organization consistently produces high-quality thought leadership, how likely are you to do each of the following? Think more positively about them. 4-point scale, top 1 box, very likely. Decision-makers, 7-country average.

# 7 in 10

decision-makers

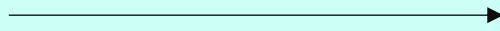
say **they are very likely to think more positively about organizations that consistently produce high-quality thought leadership.**



# Thought leadership can prompt B2B buyers to question the status quo and seek alternate solutions.

More than

**75%**



Moreover,

**54%**

of decision-makers and C-suite executives

say that a piece of thought leadership has led them to **research a product or service they were not previously considering.**

say that an organization that consistently produces high-quality thought-leadership content has **prompted them to research the organization's offers or capabilities.**

## It can even reveal previously untapped business opportunities or identify new threats.

Among decision-makers who say that a particular piece of thought leadership has led them to research a product or service they were not previously considering,

**60%**

- while -

**29%**

said **that piece of thought leadership had made them realize their organization was missing out on a significant business opportunity.**

said **they realized their organization was more vulnerable to a potential threat than previously thought.**



For DP World, a global leader in end-to-end logistics, thought leadership on digital channels allows us to get into the hands and heads of customers and prospects wherever they are. **If you know your customers' challenges, you can shape content that sharply identifies those problems and brings your unique solutions into focus.** For busy customers, this outside-in perspective needs to be fresh, practical, and important to spark commercial conversations. The formats you use are also important, so it's vital to think about how your audiences are consuming information in 2024 and plan accordingly. For DP World, high-quality thought leadership is a competitive advantage.

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**Daniel Van Otterdijk**

Group Chief Communications Officer, DP World



# 2.

Effective thought leadership exerts a surprisingly strong influence on sales and pricing.

Thought leadership can be a more powerful marketing tool than traditional methods and makes people more willing to seek you out — and even pay extra for your expertise.

# Strong thought leadership prompts out-of-market buyers to step off the sidelines.



# 9 in 10



decision-makers and C-suite executives

say they are moderately or very likely to be more receptive to sales or marketing outreach from a company that consistently produces high-quality thought leadership.

# 86%

of decision-makers

also say they would be moderately or very likely to invite them to participate in the RFP process.

Source: 2024 Edelman-LinkedIn B2B Thought Leadership Impact Report. Question: If an organization consistently produces high-quality thought leadership, how likely are you to do each of the following? Be more receptive to their sales or marketing outreach. 4-point scale, top 2 box, moderately likely or very likely. Decision-makers and C-suite executives, 7-country average. Question: If an organization consistently produces high-quality thought leadership, how likely are you to do each of the following? Invite them to participate in the RFP process when you are in the market for a product or service that they offer. 4-point scale, top 2 box, moderately likely or very likely. Decision-makers, 7-country average.

# High-quality insights boost sales efforts and pricing power.

Among decision-makers who say thought leadership had led them to research a product or service they hadn't been considering,

# 23%



say **they began buying from or working with that organization.**

# 60%



say that **good thought leadership makes them willing to pay a premium to work with that organization.**

Source: 2024 Edelman-LinkedIn B2B Thought Leadership Impact Report. Question: What happened as a result of you encountering this piece of thought leadership? Data: % of respondents who said, "We began buying from or working with the organization that produced it." Decision-makers and C-suite executives, 7-country average. Question: How much do you agree or disagree with these statements? "I am more willing to pay a premium to work with an organization or individual that produces thought leadership versus one that does not." 5-point scale, top 2 box, agree. Decision-makers and C-suite executives, 7-country average.



Every business decision ultimately boils down to ROI and trust. In this context, thought leadership plays a crucial role. **Consistently and repeatedly delivering credible yet actionable insights to customers, during and outside sales cycles, offers a unique opportunity to strengthen trust.** It involves giving customers a clear sense of the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead, along with a strong sense of how to capitalize on them. Thought leadership is more than ever about informing better decision-making, by being a trusted voice. Immersive and interactive formats have proved to be particularly impactful in that rather saturated space.

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**Ophelie Janus**

Global Head of Thought Leadership, Siemens

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**SIEMENS**

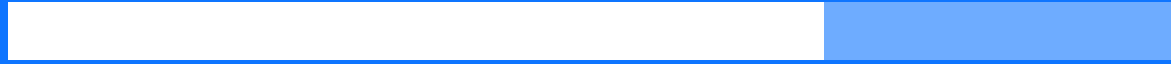
# 3.

## Offense is your best defense: Protecting your existing customers is critical.

Thought leadership is not only about going on offense to win new customers; it's also about protecting the ones you have. If you're not helping your customers think about their challenges in new ways, someone else will. Thought leadership can help inoculate you against competitors trying to poach your customers.



# Competitors are using insights to steer your customers away.



**70%** of C-suite leaders

say that a piece of thought leadership had at least occasionally led them to question whether they should continue working with an existing supplier.

**54%**



say the piece of thought leadership got them to realize there were other suppliers they could work with that had a better understanding of the challenges their organization was facing.

**51%**



say the piece of thought leadership got them to realize that other suppliers were smarter or more visionary.

Source: 2024 Edelman-LinkedIn B2B Thought Leadership Impact Report. Question: Has a piece of thought leadership ever led you to question whether a current provider/supplier was one that you should continue working with? 5-point scale, top 2 box, occasionally or often. C-suite executives, 7-country average. Question: What did that piece of thought leadership get you to realize about your current provider/supplier? Data: % of respondents who said, "There were other suppliers that I could work with that had a better understanding of the challenges my organization was facing" or "There were other suppliers that I could work with that were smarter or more visionary." C-suite executives, 7-country average.

## Your competitors' thought leadership can hurt your business.

Ultimately, among decision-makers who said a piece of thought leadership had gotten them to question whether they should continue working with an existing supplier,

# 25%



said **it had led them to end or significantly reduce their relationship with a current supplier/provider.**

Your customers might rethink their relationship with you if they see your competitors offering thought-provoking content.

Providing strong thought leadership is a **vital defensive measure to reassure your customers** that working with you means staying ahead with the best insights and solutions.



These are times of uncertainty for businesses, which makes their already difficult task of finding the right path to decarbonization even harder. **In a market like this, thought leadership is essential in providing new value to customers, preserving our existing customer base and forging new relationships.** Shell Low Carbon Solutions serves as a trusted guide in this capacity, offering rich perspectives on how decarbonization value chains must be developed, policies must be adopted and change must be catalyzed. It's about sharing Shell's expertise, but just as much about convening other leaders for shared advocacy and impact. That drives progress for our customers and creates real growth opportunity for our business.

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**Seowhui Tan**

Global Head of Thought Leadership Marketing & Commercial Strategy - Low Carbon Solutions, Shell

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# 4.

**Despite the clear power of thought leadership to drive business results, most organizations say it is under-resourced, misused, and not measured appropriately.**

Firms adept at quantifying thought leadership ROI will be better positioned to secure the resources that can amplify their efforts.

# B2B companies that publish thought leadership seek to drive business-generating outcomes.

Most producers of thought leadership want it to drive positive sentiment toward their organization or get potential clients to look at them more closely.

## What producers of thought leadership expect it to do:

55%



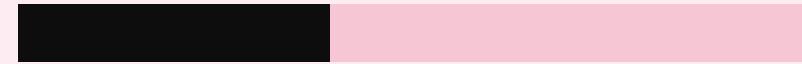
get potential clients to think positively about their organization.

48%



get potential clients to reach out to them to get more information.

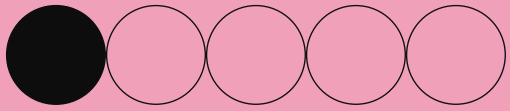
40%



get potential clients to consider their products or services.

Source: 2024 Edelman-LinkedIn B2B Thought Leadership Impact Report. Question: Which of the following do you expect your organization's thought leadership to do? Data: % of respondents who said, "Get potential clients to think more positively about our organization," "Get potential clients to reach out to our organization for more information about our products or capabilities," or "Get potential clients who did not previously think they needed the type of products or services our organization offers to realize that they do." Producers of thought leadership, 7-country average.

# Many B2B companies use basic metrics that don't uncover the true business effects of thought leadership.



Nearly

**1** in **5**  (19%)

said **they do not have any process in place for measuring effectiveness.**

**42%**

of producers of thought leadership still **seek to measure effectiveness by looking for increased traffic to their website and social pages.**

Source: 2024 Edelman-LinkedIn B2B Thought Leadership Impact Report. Question: How does your organization measure or determine the effectiveness of its thought leadership? Data: % of respondents who said, "We do not have any processes in place for measuring the effectiveness of our thought leadership" or "Look for increases in traffic to our website and social media pages after we release thought leadership." Producers of thought leadership, 7-country average.

# Few B2B companies can link sales leads back to their thought-leadership efforts.

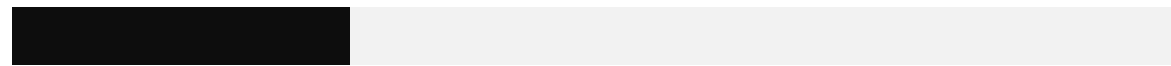
**30%** of producers of thought leadership



say **their organization does not really know how to use thought leadership as a sales or marketing tool.**

Without clear measurement of sales impact, companies may hesitate to invest in thought-leadership initiatives — a cycle of negative reinforcement that leaves organizations vulnerable.

**29%**



can **link sales leads back to specific pieces of thought-leadership content.**

Source: 2024 Edelman-LinkedIn B2B Thought Leadership Impact Report. Question: Which of the following are main barriers preventing your organization from producing more effective thought leadership than it currently does? Data: % of respondents who said, "Our organization does not really know how to use thought leadership as a sales or marketing tool." Producers of thought leadership, 7-country average. Question: How does your organization measure or determine the effectiveness of its thought leadership? Data: % of respondents who said, "Link sales leads back to specific pieces of thought leadership." Producers of thought leadership, 7-country average.

# A lack of resources and internal engagement with senior leaders are barriers to effective thought leadership.

The main barrier cited to producing more effective thought leadership is that **it is under-resourced**, with

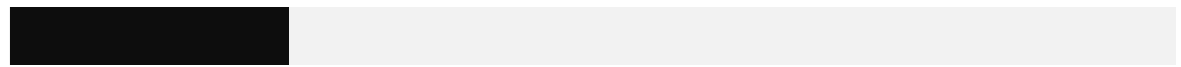
**50%** of producers of thought leadership



citing that reason.

**27%**

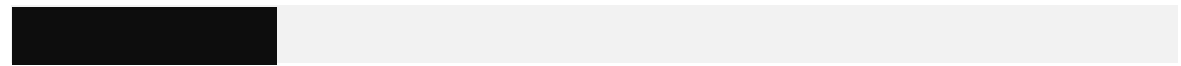
say they're not engaging the **most senior and talented people**.



- and -

**26%**

say their organization lacks the skills to **produce high-quality content**.



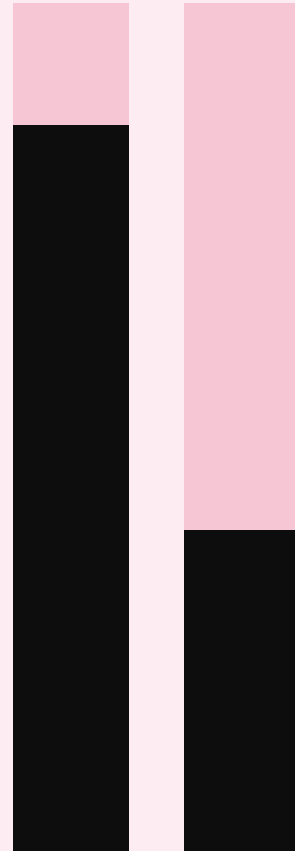
Source: 2024 Edelman-LinkedIn B2B Thought Leadership Impact Report. Question: Which of the following are main barriers preventing your organization from producing more effective thought leadership than it currently does? Data: % of respondents who said, "Our thought leadership or marketing function is under-resourced," "We do not engage our most senior and talented people in the creation of our thought leadership" or "Our organization lacks the necessary skills to produce higher quality thought leadership." Producers of thought leadership, 7-country average.



# Producers of thought leadership underestimate its importance in driving RFP invitations.

**86%** of decision-makers

say that **they are moderately or very likely to invite organizations that consistently produce high-quality thought leadership to participate in the RFP process.**



Yet, just

**38%** of thought leadership producers

expect **their organization's thought-leadership content to get them invited to participate in an RFP process.**

Source: 2024 Edelman-LinkedIn B2B Thought Leadership Impact Report. Question: If an organization consistently produces high-quality thought leadership, how likely are you to do each of the following? Invite them to participate in the RFP process when you are in the market for a product or service that they offer. 4-point scale, top 2 box, moderately likely or very likely. Decision makers, 7-country average. Question: Which of the following do you expect your organization's thought leadership to do? Data: % of respondents who said, "Get our organization invited to participate in the RFP process" and "All of the above." Producers of thought leadership, 7-country average.

# 5.

**Effective thought leadership has three key attributes: it cites strong research and data, helps buyers understand their business challenges, and offers concrete guidance.**

Doing any of these will elevate your thought leadership above the pack. Doing them all will put you in the top tier.

# Good is no longer good enough.



**48%** of decision-makers

say the **overall quality of thought leadership they read is good.**

Only

**15%**

say the **quality is very good or excellent.**

## Well-known authors and interesting formats are already considered essential.


(% of decision-makers who answered that these were characteristics of average or above average thought leadership)

62%



it is produced or written by a **prominent, well-respected expert.**

66%



it has a **unique format or style.** It looks different from the other thought leadership you see.

# These three things will take your thought leadership from good to great:

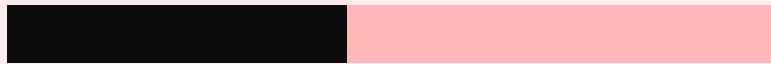
(% of decision-makers who answered that these were characteristics of the highest quality thought leadership)

55%



it references **strong research and data.**

44%



it helps me **better understand challenges and opportunities facing my business.**

43%



it offers **concrete guidance and case studies.**

# Elements of an effective thought-leadership program



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Offers insights into practical business challenges.

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Uses robust data, research, and customer stories.

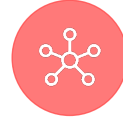
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Has executive buy-in and ownership.

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Is built into an ongoing, cross-organizational comms plan.

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Combines relevance, topical timeliness, and actionability by the target audience.

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In today's fast-paced economy, many organizations struggle to identify and address potential threats to their business, and the consequences of moving slowly against those factors are more significant than ever before. **Thought leadership has emerged as an effective tool that brings clarity and perspective to the process,** helping leaders not only precisely define their challenges and opportunities, but also quantify the opportunity cost of inaction and drive urgency in making key strategic business decisions.

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**Brian Jochum**

SVP & Global Chief Marketing Officer, Virtusa

**virtusa**

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**In today's fast-moving and uncertain economy, it is essential to get buyers to take action. B2B companies need to find ways to make buyers reconsider their challenges as a way to generate demand. Thought leadership can give them an advantage.**



Thought leadership  
is not only about raising  
brand awareness.

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**When done right, it makes buyers look at their business and the challenges it is facing in new ways and protects you from competitors producing their own thought leadership. Companies should prioritize thought leadership as an effective way to gain a competitive edge.**

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# Thank you!

## 2024 B2B Thought Leadership Impact Report

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