Thought Leadership:
Today's Sharpest Marketing Tool?

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Foreword

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In today's business world that is overwhelmed with information, producing great authentic content has never been more important.

"Effective thought leadership allows organisations to stand out from the crowd, elevate industry conversations with new insight, opinions and recommendations. Moreover, executed well it can open doors to your target accounts and C-level buyers."

Network Sunday is grateful to the dozens of experienced business and marketing leaders from the UK technology and professional services sector who took the time to interview and meet with us.

We hope their insights will inspire and clarify a new approach to implementing thought leadership in your organisation. The eBook provides advice on planning, delivering and measuring clear value from thought leadership, securing active participation from sales and maximising engagement with existing and prospective customers.

We believe that done well this can be your sharpest marketing tool today.

Read the Report

Executive Summary

In a crowded and noisy marketplace, thought leadership can be a powerful way of building a brand's visibility and credibility.

Thought leadership is distinct from a marketing document in that it is not usually product or feature led. Rather, thought leadership presents credible insight into an industry issue or trend, from expert commentators.

Effective thought leadership generates new sales opportunities. Research shows that 45% of executives have invited a vendor to bid for a contract, after seeing thought leadership. In addition, 54% of executives say they use thought leadership as one way to evaluate potential suppliers.

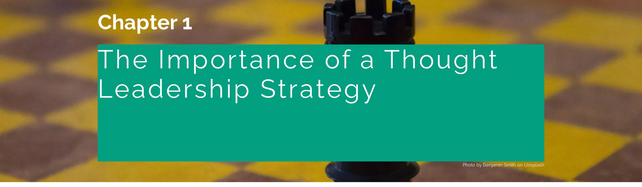
However, achieving these benefits is not always straightforward. Organisations must take a strategic approach to the planning, creation and distribution of thought leadership to avoid creating content that does not add value to the audience or is simply boring.

Creating effective thought leadership means evaluating content ideas carefully, and then selecting the best format and platform for distribution. One of the most common mistakes around thought leadership is restricting content to voices from inside an organisation.

Organisations should strive to be collaborative in the creation of thought leadership, adding voices from customers, industry thought leaders and partners. This adds credibility to the resulting content, but also makes it more valuable to professionals, who are always interested in the experiences of their peers who face similar challenges.

It is also essential that content is distributed and supported by people inside the organisation. This can be extremely challenging in sales departments, where there is often limited understanding of the potential value of thought leadership. This means that marketing teams must invest in training and education of sales teams, to ensure that they are able to communicate and utilise thought leadership in the sales pipeline.

Most organisations that report positive ROI from thought leadership see this over the long rather than short-term. The key benefits may be more requests to bid for proposals, greater engagement with existing accounts, or increased brand visibility. As with all investments, it is essential to plan for the metrics that will form the basis of ROI calculations, before content is published.



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Chapter 1

The Importance of a Thought Leadership Strategy

The broadest definition of thought leadership is content that presents insight into an industry or issue that prompts the audience to see its creator as a credible expert.

Thought leadership used to be the preserve of industry analysts and independent publications. However, in today's competitive technology marketplace, effective thought leadership content can provide B2B marketing teams with a powerful competitive edge.

"Thought leadership engenders trust in a brand," explains Paul Malyon, Head of Thought Leadership and Data Literacy at Experian. *"It's less about a sale, and more about a conversation that can result in a longer term, consultative relationship."*

"You need to go to the market and tell your story in an effective way. Doing this through traditional advertising and digital banners is simply not enough. You need to build relationships with your potential buyers by demonstrating credibility and delivering high value. Good thought leadership content helps you prove that you have the talent and expertise to get the job done," says Matthew Holland, Head of Corporate Marketing at Iress.

Good sales conversations always focus on the customer – and thought leadership is the same. *"Every time we start any kind of sales engagement, we spend 50-60% of the time talking about their challenges,"* notes Gareth Case, chief marketing officer at Redstor.

High quality thought leadership is an opportunity to demonstrate your organisation's insight, and credibility. If successful, the content will be shared across professional networks, putting your ideas and brand in front of potential partners and customers. IT purchasers are increasingly researching products and services online, presenting a huge opportunity to be discovered through thought leadership. Case says.

> ***"Good thought leadership content helps you prove that you have the talent and expertise to get the job done."***

Matthew Holland
Head of Corporate Marketing, Iress

About Iress

At Iress, we believe technology should help people perform better. Every day around the world, our technology helps millions of people make better financial decisions. More than 100,000 people use our advice software, data and trading services. We manage market data from 153 global exchanges. More than 450 third-party enterprises have integrated Iress technology into their own software. From entrepreneurial and established advice firms to challenger banks, digital disruptors and the world's most iconic finance brands, businesses of all sizes choose Iress technology to enhance their impact, performance and customer relationships. Together, we help them find better ways to manage investments, navigate financial markets, deliver high quality financial advice, simplify mortgage applications, find and compare insurance and create better customer experiences.

Connect with Matthew

Thought leadership can be a powerful tool for marketing teams to help sales develop trusted relationships with potential customers, adds Mark Terry, Vuzion's head of marketing. *"The marketing teams are engaging in those early conversations and thought leadership can be really valuable in that setting."*

Lorna Nightingale, director of marketing at Esri UK, recalls working on the global rollout of Salesforce.com software at a prior company, that was prompted by thought leadership. *"Our purchasing decision was influenced by the company's thought leadership content, which helped us take a clear business case to senior management,"* she says.

Today at Esri UK, Nightingale is working on a project called *"Lighting up the Enterprise."* This will build on established relationships and help advocates for the brand to tell their story and showcase how Geospatial technology adds value to businesses, government and society.

There's no single version of what thought leadership could be. The organisations quoted in this e-book have utilised social media posts, white papers, videos, podcasts and more. While the medium might change, however, the fundamental nature of thought leadership remains the same.

Effective thought leadership should offer value to the reader, usually in terms of insight, actionable advice and a strong vision of how challenges might be addressed. *"Good thought leadership uncovers what is going on in the market, and sets an industry standard,"* adds Holly Harding, marketing manager at Causeway Technologies.

While much thought leadership uses data to offer insight, the best content combines this with genuine storytelling. Alongside data, a customer anecdote or real-world example of a technology solution can bring content to life. The key is to use storytelling to prove and qualify that you are an expert in what you are trying to sell, or the advice you are giving. *"It's sharing opinions in a way that people are genuinely interested in,"* says Richard Turrell, head of marketing at recruitment specialists Handle.

The challenge that organisations face is that too many technology firms use *"thought leadership"* as a way to push out marketing material, with product led white papers and *"solutions"* that are thinly disguised vendor case studies. *"Companies are often pushing product rather than listening to what the customers issues are,"* says Simon Carlton Rhodes, previously Director of Thought Leadership at EY, CS, HSF. *"It really should be about current and future industry challenges, and the move to the correct solution for the specific problem/ issue."*

At IBM, the customer's issues are at the heart of thought leadership strategy. Much of the content is built around curated insight and conversations with customers and industry experts. This means that if a piece of content relates to an issue for CEOs, then the content will feature insight from CEOs.

Caroline Taylor OBE, is vice-president and chief marketing officer at IBM Global Markets, likens thought leadership to a dance – it's something you do in partnership, not on your own. The upside of this collaborative approach is that sometimes the conversations involved can lead to new business, and new relationships. IBM also benefits from what Taylor calls 'expertise by association' – resulting in content that the audience is more likely to want to share with their peers and colleagues.

Organisations that take a considered approach to thought leadership are already reaping the rewards. According to the 2019 LinkedIn/Edelman B2B Thought Leadership Impact Study, 41% of chief executives and 37% of business leaders say they would use thought leadership as a criterion for including a company in RFP, where they were not previously in the consideration set.

Edelman also found that business leaders use thought leadership as a standard by which they evaluate potential partners. A huge majority of those surveyed said they use content to gauge the calibre of a potential supplier's goods and services, especially in smaller, niche businesses.

> ***"Creating thought leadership is a like dance, it's something we do in partnership, not on our own."***

Caroline Taylor OBE
Vice-President and Chief Marketing Officer, IBM Global Markets

About IBM

IBM is a leading cloud platform and cognitive solutions company. Restlessly reinventing since 1911, we are the largest technology and consulting employer in the world, with more than 380,000 employees serving clients in 170 countries. With Watson, the AI platform for business, powered by data, we are building industry-based solutions to real-world problems. For more than seven decades, IBM Research has defined the future of information technology with more than 3,000 researchers in 12 labs located across six continents.

Connect with Caroline

Top Insights:

People make buying decisions based on emotions. Thought leadership is about having a bold opinion, a clear point of view, and communicating it with a difference.
Susi O'Neill - Head of B2B Brand Content (Global) at Kaspersky

Thought leadership puts your brand front of mind and makes it more trusted.
Paul Malyon - Head of Thought Leadership & Data Literacy at Experian

Thought leadership revolves around three connected Rs; revenue, relationships and reputation.
Simon Carlton Rhodes - Former Director of Thought Leadership at EY, CS, HSF

Customers want to know that you are keeping up with what is important in the industry. The big problem is that sales just want to get to the pitch as quickly as possible.
David Turner - CMO at SideTrade

People do not want to be sold to. The product pitch should be left behind until they know you, like you and trust you. Sharing insightful and authentic content accelerates this process
David Turner – CMO at SideTrade

B2B business purchasing is influenced by more than just trends. Businesses are looking for things that inspire them which are backed up by research, data and credible people.
Clare Delmar - Marketing & Brand Director at Nuada Medical

Thought leadership is an opportunity to stand out in a world where content is abundant, says Joseph Sursock, senior vice-president EMEA at Course5 Intelligence. A smart piece of content with pertinent findings, experience and recommendations will always stand out from the crowd, he says.

If organisations can match the right ideas with the right platform, the benefits can be enormous. Course5 Intelligence has found that using video to share client stories, particularly in areas where there is rapid change and uncertainty, has driven huge engagement. That video content can then be used to help create supplementary content, such as white papers and, increasingly, podcasts.

The days of expecting potential customers to read through brochures and long white papers are gone, according to Ian Moyse, EMEA Sales Director at Natterbox. If vendors want content to be consumed, we need to look at how technology – and content consumption – has changed. *"Fifteen years ago we didn't have timelines and newsfeeds but those technologies are now freely available and part of our everyday lives,"* he says.

Buyers want to know something and gain insight in a short period of time that's convenient for them. Research suggests that while senior c-level executives spend up to an hour each week reading long-form content, other executives consume content on the move. In this setting, video and podcasts can be much better content mediums.

Podcasts are useful in terms of exploring someone's thought process, Sursock adds. *"People are exhausted by PowerPoints and charts, it's much easier to listen to people telling stories in a natural way, and someone throwing questions at them in real-time."*

While content can be consumed quickly or on the move, it's essential not to neglect the quality of the underlying information, says Matt Kaye, head of marketing with the Lane4 Management Group. *"People want to see things backed up by academic rigour,"* he says. Thought leadership should incorporate solid research from organisations such as the CIPD, says Kaye.

> ***"People are exhausted by PowerPoints and charts, it's much easier to listen to people telling stories in a natural way, and someone throwing questions at them in real-time."***

Joseph Sursock
Senior Vice-President EMEA, Course5 Intelligence

About Course5 Intelligence

We enable organisations to make the most effective strategic and tactical moves relating to their customers, markets, and competition at the rapid pace that the digital business world demands. Course5 Intelligence does this by driving digital transformation through analytics, insights, and Artificial Intelligence (AI). Our clients experience higher top line and bottom line results with improved customer satisfaction and business agility. As we solve today's problems for our clients, we also enable them to reshape their businesses to meet and actualize the future.

Connect with Joseph

Chapter 2

Strategies for Executing Thought Leadership

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An organisation's approach to thought leadership will necessarily vary depending on the resources available. **However, the experts agree that the priority for executing effective thought leadership relies on**

Four Key Processes

1. **Having in place a process for gathering ideas for thought leadership**
2. **Creating boundaries and gatekeeping so that ideas can be filtered, evaluated and moved forward or reviewed/rejected as needed**
3. **Processes that allow for insights to be gathered from inside and outside the organisation**
4. **Content to be created and then distributed and driven through key channels**

What should Thought Leadership be about?

What should Thought Leadership be about? Being first is important in thought leadership – but it's not the only thing to consider. A YouGov survey reports that 66% of respondents said that being first to comment on an issue is important, but 81% said that it was important to add genuinely new thinking to a discussion, while 81% look for a new angle on an existing topic. The lesson for businesses? You can still make a big impact as a second leader. If your thought leadership is relevant, timely and has a strong point of view and expertise. When it comes to offering up ideas for thought leadership content, it's true that everyone has an opinion. An effective thought leadership programme should welcome as many opinions as possible but provide a framework so that these ideas can be filtered and managed.

> ***"Thought leadership needs to be embodied by a thought leader, someone who can incarnate that content. It also needs to be the very first pranking on it becomes just thought followership, not leadership."***
>
> **Ludovic Lefebvre|Sr. Global Analyst and Influencer Relations Director, Criteo**

Connect With Ludovic

About Criteo

Criteo is a global technology company that enables brands and retailers to connect more shoppers to the things they need and love. We've built the Criteo Commerce Marketing Ecosystem: an open, secure, transparent, and fair environment where retailers, brands, and publishers collaborate to put data into action at every point of the purchase journey. Its value to our clients lies in measurable performance in the form of sales, and profits.

It's essential to consider any potential thought leadership content carefully, notes Ludovic Lefebvrelier, Global Analyst and Influencer Relations Director at Criteo. Lefebvrelier says that he asks the same question of any potential thought leadership project. *"What's the headline? What do you want people to remember?"* If someone proposing an idea can't boil down its essence in a tweet then, says Lefebvrelier, the content is not going to inspire anyone.

Great content should start with a key question, finding or hypothesis, says Lefebvrelier Rather than running a survey about how people view a customer experience, it's better to start with a thought leadership hypothesis such as *"customer service via telephone is more likely to end a customer relationship"* then do the research. Lefebvrelier argues organisations will almost inevitably end up with a better piece of content.

One option for organisations wanting to capture and progress content ideas is to create a designated storytelling lab that takes responsibility for creating and driving thought leadership. This could be a podcast or a blog post about a news story. Having a dedicated role makes it easier to be responsive. At IBM the company has an internal department called the Institute for Business Value that creates thought leadership content.

While management is important to thought leadership execution, dont manage the value out of it. If your organisation has hired exciting young talent, don't be afraid to encourage them to write blogs, or share podcasts. After all, these are the people who will likely be working with your customers – theirs is the talent you are selling.

Some brands are creating too much 'content by committee' says Kaspersky's O'Neill. The result is content that isn't engaging and doesn't have a strong point of view. *"It kills the joy, and the brand loses their individuality and identity.The result is just corporate blandness,"* she says.

Too many companies invest in content for thought leadership without also investing in strong editing and writing, says Lefebvrelier. *"If you do not have that person and that authority to challenge the status quo, you're just creating more marketing content,"* he says. *"For me, thought leadership needs to be leading, and there has to be a thought leader, someone who can embolden and incarnate that content. It needs to be thought provoking or it's thought following, not leadership."*

What form and platform should be used for thought leadership?

The risk is that the department can be overwhelmed by ideas, or that a smaller department is overwhelmed by the number of channels that seem important. At this stage, it's important to evaluate not just the idea of a piece of thought leadership. Organisations must also evaluate the form and platform for that content.

While YouTube or LinkedIn might offer a wide reach, is the content/idea better suited to a storytelling format, or an interview that can be shared via a podcast.

When making these decisions, it's sensible to ask a sample set of customers what content they consume, and which platforms they use. Rather than feeling that you must use the same platforms as competitors, or try to be everywhere, test small to begin with, gather feedback, and focus on platforms and ideas that make sense for your brand, and your community. Its best to look at creating multiple pieces of content from each central activity.

Leforestier advises treating thought leadership as a content pyramid. At the very top there may be a Tweet and a great visual. Below this, there are actions and recommendations, perhaps in a detailed infographic. Lastly there may be a white paper with a narrative and a story. But always start with the headline or the Tweet.

Thought leadership should always be more than research, adds Turner.Anyone can pull together statistics to make an argument, but credibility comes from sharing what other people do. *"It's better useful to show how other people are facing this challenge, or problem, and research can show that, but it can also be dry, so you have to combine it with storytelling."*

What this means is that it's fine to say that 60% of CIOs have a problem with AI, but it's more compelling to also have a video of a charismatic CIO sharing their challenge and solution, or a podcast where three industry leaders discuss their vision of AI in the future.

> ***"We always want to invite and feed customers, which really resonates with someone in the buyer's shoes."***
>
> **Regina Bluman, Head of Brand & Marketing, Logicalis**

Connect with Regina

About Logicalis

Logicalis UK provides an end-to-end ICT delivery capability founded on a superior breadth of knowledge and expertise in communications & collaboration, data centre, business analytics, video, professional and managed services, data centre hosting and cloud services. Our customers cross industries and geographical regions, and our focus is to engage in the dynamics of our customers vertical markets, including financial services, TMT (telecommunications, media and technology) education, healthcare, retail, government, manufacturing and professional services, and apply the skills of our subject matter experts in modernising key disciplines: data centre and cloud services, security and network infrastructure, workspace communications and collaboration, data and information strategies, and IT operation modernisation.

Turner personally thinks long white papers have had their day and prefers to focus on short-form content such as infographics, videos and similar. She also has a lot of success with events, small dinners with *20 or 30 people, who all want to listen to the CFO at Deliveroo. You just get them in the room and people turn up because they want to hear stories from companies that are seen as the leading lights."*

Logicalis' thought leadership strategy encompasses blogs, webinars and panel discussions, explains Regina Bluman, Head of Brand & Marketing at Logicalis. *"We always want to invite and feature customers, which lends credibility to us and resonates to someone in the buyer's shoes,"* she says. *"We find that content works well when it's treated as a learning exercise - where people can share and learn from issues their peers are facing."*

Leforestier has worked on over 6 thought leadership projects covering topics such as 'platform economy' and 'customer experience' What makes this content useful, Leforestier believes, is that it is researched by thought-provoking, grounded and resilient. *"Good thought leadership is based on solid evidence and usually numerical,"* he says. *"Finally, it should be actionable for the reader"*

How Should Thought Leadership be Distributed?

Just as organisations shouldn't try to be on every platform, they shouldn't publish every possible piece of content. Quality is always more important than quantity, says Sheen. *"There was a time ten years ago when the focus was on getting a lot of content out of the door, but now it's much more about quality,"* he says.

A smart thought leadership strategy should concentrate on small, high quality content campaigns that are planned over an extended period, with key articles or Whitepapers serving as long-form anchor content, adds Andrei Tiu, director and Chief Marketing Officer at Marketiu. *"Putting relevant high quality content over time puts you in a position of authority and will influence the buying decision,"* he says.

> ***"Pushing relevant high quality content over time puts you in a position of authority and will influence the buying decision."***
>
> **Andrei Tiu, Director and Head of Marketing, Marketiu**

Connect With Andrei

About Marketiu

Born at the heart of London from an insanely passionate and lively team of Top-class Marketers and Strategists, we are on a mission to help Brands get famous by tapping into the power of Intelligent Digital Marketing Communications. Having worked with a wide range of businesses in Entertainment, Luxury Cosmetics & Fashion, Lifestyle and Technology worldwide, we have always put our heart and soul into combining Creativity and Intelligence, delivering outstanding results. We're constantly aligning ourselves to our individuals clients' goals and priorities, becoming essentially an effective extension of their company.

> ***"Very senior people who travel a lot may prefer videos or podcasts. You need to segment your audience and work out which channel delivers the best results for which audience."***
>
> **Joseph Sursock, Senior Vice-President EMEA, CourseS Intelligence**

Once content has been created, how will it be shared with the community, both inside and outside the organisation? In some cases, technology can bring order to this process. For example, Dynamic Signal lets content be pre-populated and shared across an organisation. This means sales and marketing teams can drive content through their channels, confident that it has been approved and is in line with wider strategy.

Stop gating all your best thought leadership, Moyse advises. While it's understandable to want to capture details, gates are hugely off-putting. Moyse advises companies to select their 5 best content pieces and make them freely available. *"Then people come in and follow and like what you've got, and they want the other stuff, so they register.You have to earn that right."*

Don't underestimate the challenge of distributing content, advises Leforestier. *"There's no point just pushing out content, it needs to be smart and targeted,"* he says. "At the top of the sales funnel you want newsworthy content and research, but in the middle and bottom you need practical advice."

To achieve this tales just as much time and effort as creating the content to begin with, Leforestier says. The key to success is in training and providing a process or platform that gives sales teams the skills and understanding to know the value of thought leadership, and which content to share, where, and when.

The most important part of thought leadership isn't the channel, but rather the story being told, and creating an overriding narrative arc. Once that's done, content can be utilised across multiple channels, says IBM's Taylor. *"You can utilise that thought in a speech, as the basis for a round table, a video, eBook or podcast,"* she says *"those are all different ways to get it into the hands of the individuals you want to influence."*

Crucially don't settle on one version of what is the "best" style of thought leadership, urges Joseph Sursock. *"Managers on the floor have a different appetite and way of looking at things to the operational directors above them. They're networking and want anecdotal information. Very senior people who travel a lot may prefer videos or podcasts. You need to segment the audience and look at which channel delivers the best results for which audience."*

At Courses Intelligence, the company is currently investing in infographic-based thought leadership. Sursock says that having a visual, mobile-friendly piece of content works well – and if it's good enough to be printed and shared in someone's office, or on their wall, that's a powerful branding message.

Thought leadership often failed in the past because organisations fell into the trap of talking about themselves and making content too long. "All the old metrics that used to work, don't work anymore," comments Moyse. *"What the buyer wants is insight, not being sold to. It's with some value attached.Often what that means is the only bit of ownership you have is your brand logo and contact details as a course of action."*

Many of us are familiar with the scenario where you see an intriguing title, register to download a document and then there are pages of introduction, a sales pitch, and the promised value isn't there. *"It isn't just that I didn't get what I wanted. It's worse because you brought me in on the basis of promising me something, then not delivering,"* Moyse says. The same can happen when presenting at events, creating a video or any other platform.

> ***"Too often blogs are the only default medium. But now it's easy to reach further through podcasts, vodcasts, webinars, video blogs and more. This enables your audience to digest content differently such as on the move which you can download and listen to them offline. How many people are going to be that with a blog, reading it on a small screen?"***
>
> **Ian Moyse, EMEA Sales Director, Natterbox**

Connect With Ian

About Natterbox

Natterbox offers a complete business phone system & contact centre 100% natively embedded in Salesforce. Administrators can create and manage their entire phone system, create personalised caller journeys and buy numbers through Salesforce. No Hardware. No Software. Available from the Salesforce AppExchange, Natterbox Advanced Voice Service provides a complete Cloud PBX with Contact Centre for Salesforce. The app is designed to either replace a customer's existing phone system with one that is 100% embedded natively in Salesforce, or can integrate with your existing phone system

This is understandable when there is pressure to deliver direct sales benefits from content. But it's ultimately counterproductive. Effective thought leadership is investing time in creating content that may not be directly about you. Let people to consume your content and gain value through insights and they are more likely to remember you and engage with you as a potential customer They will respect the value that was given, and the insight, and they will probably continue to follow you, and consume your content, because they may well learn something. Moyse cites HubSpot as a company that does particularly well in this regard.

In general, the best thought leadership mixes different platforms and content types. However, it is possible to identify a buyer persona as fitting a particular style and entity. *"If you're a gamer, there are particular sites where your community tends to be, and it needs to be video, because that's where that community and persona engages and digests,"* says Moyse.

With a single piece of content, you could mix up video content, blog, interviews, comments etc. Even social media quote cards can be used as a powerful image, perhaps on Instagram, to direct people back to a blog, says Moyse. *"So often we just provide loads of blogs. But you have podcasts, which a lot of people engage with on the move. You can download them and listen to them offline. How many people are going to do that with a blog, reading it on a small screen?"*

Ultimately, Moyse advises, think about where your user is, and what content they consume. Then decide how this best matches up with your own brand and product. Some products are simply not visual, and so probably won't work on Instagram, no matter what.

Top Insights:

Reusing content across multiple media, multiple times is an efficient, repeatable strategy to deliver business conversations in B2B.
[Tom Isherwood-Cope, Director Global CMO of IT Datametrics]

A good balance of white papers, video, round tables is required. Take a detailed study and then make smaller content pieces from there that you can spread across channels.
[Paul Mayzes - Head of Thought Leadership & Data Literacy at Experian]

Consider the audience. A CEO will be more receptive to a 2-minute video than a 60-page white paper, because they want something they can review quickly, and pass on.
[Jennifer Tasse - Chief Marketing Officer at Toddler]

Today our brains are firing in completely different ways. I don't have time to consume masses of information. I want good short content that draws me in and makes me want to engage with longer-form content.
[Greg Taylor - General Manager, bnb app & Tigermilkie

Much content out there is lacklustre and does not engage in a personal way. Smarter companies are including personalisation, language and tonal elements that speak to their target audience.
[Kelsey Duncan - Founder at your Allies.

Chapter 3

Thought Leadership in Action: Success Stories

One of the biggest challenges around thought leadership is demonstrating its value to an organisation. With long sales cycles and content that doesn't directly solicit sales, it can be hard to demonstrate provable value.

That does not mean the value does not exist, however Sharon Shahzad, Global Head of Marketing at TigerWit Group, recalls working at a prior company at the time Sony Picturehouse was hacked. Sharon Shahzad spotted an opportunity to create valuable thought leadership content. "The editorial team dropped everything to create an article, which was published and shared on LinkedIn. Within half an hour, people were interacting and commenting on the article."

The strong, timely content prompted widespread conversation about cybersecurity. The marketing team followed up with a questionnaire that aimed to uncover insights into the state of cybersecurity. *"We provided participants with an engaging plan of action, and the salespeople got an introduction to potential buyers,"* says Shahzad. That company won three new contracts off the back of the initial article.

Lorna Nightingale, director of marketing at Esri UK, describes how producing truly beautiful thought leadership content has literally transformed the understanding of their brand. *"Organisations who thought that we are just a 'mapping company' now have a greater understanding of how Geospatial software and locational intelligence is helping leading brands such as Knight Frank, Thames Water, Costain Engineering and TfL solve complex industry challenges. We are also starting to see greater awareness of how Geospatial software is advancing science, helping to track air pollution, carbon emissions, movement of disease, loss of biodiversity and the location of ocean plastic to provide solutions to climate change."*

"At Esri UK, we have spent the past 3 years developing and building our online resource centre with a wide variety of content including eBooks, podcasts, blogs and maps in the media. This has been developed as part of our continued focus to enhance the online buyers' journey by providing relevant and insightful content including a number of thought leadership blogs and eBooks on key industry topics", says Nightingale.

Nightingale describes the results of her successful Thought Leadership strategy. *"The decision to invest in creating Thought Leadership Content and making it easily available in a central resource hub as well as promoting new content on LinkedIn has transformed the awareness of the Esri brand and increased the number of LinkedIn followers this year by 30%"*

Although sales may not be immediate, thought leadership content can open up new conversations and relationships. Recruitment agency Stanton House recently interviewed external HR experts and industry thought leaders for a series of white papers around recruitment issues. *"Although they weren't affiliated with us, we collated that content, and the result was that a number of HR directors have been in touch to say the content had a great impact on their own programmes,"* says Richard Turrell.

If content is aligned with a company's values, it can also help to raise a brand's profile and credibility. Chaucer is a UK-based digital transformation consultancy, helping organisations to develop and grow beyond a technology-focus. The company recently created thought leadership content around Boris Johnson's pledge to recruit 20,000 new police officers.

Since Chaucer employs a high number of ex-metropolitan police officers, the company invited one partner (former police officer) to write a content piece challenging the proposals and making recommendations. The content resonated with the audience and as a result the article was republished on a policing website, reaching thousands of new potential partners and consultants. The campaign demonstrates the value of sharing content that resonates with your organisation, and people.

Research can be the basis of highly successful thought leadership. At Atos, the company invested in independent research with target accounts in the cyber-security sector. The resulting research addressed challenges in this industry, without pushing the company's products or services. Despite this, it generated over 40 new conversations at C-level with potential customers, says Catherine Dutton, vice-president, marketing at Atos.

It is possible to create highly successful thought leadership by identifying fresh perspective on a big industry challenge, says Turrell.

In his recent role as head of marketing at Stanton House, Turrell and his team realised that while there was a lot of thought leadership around diversity, the role of reverse mentoring in supporting diversity had not been explored. *"We made a decision to find the best experts in that space and interviewed them. We talked about the pros and cons, the lessons learned, and shared the results as an insight series,"* says Turrell. The result was numerous contacts from HR directors, who had read the content.

This experience shows the importance of selling solutions rather than products, says Turrell. *"Even if you have a product, thought leadership is about discussing bigger issues and creating a desire for your product, without needing to mention it. It's starting a conversation with somebody."*

Effective Thought Leadership on LinkedIn

Since LinkedIn is the biggest global platform for professionals, it is the natural home for thought leadership. Almost three quarters (74%) of respondents to Edelman's Chief Marketer's 2019 B2B Outlook Survey said that LinkedIn was their most effective channel for B2B marketing, outpacing other channels such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

IBM embraces LinkedIn as part of a mixed platform approach to thought leadership, says Taylor. *"If you're publishing great content on LinkedIn, then Tweeting about it is a really great way to get more people to engage with the content. A lot of people don't go into LinkedIn daily, sometimes you have to break through and capture their attention about the article, the posts, or video. It's not just one thing."*

LinkedIn's strength comes from providing a place where people can amplify the content you share, says Taylor. IBM has begun using LinkedIn Elevate, which curates content for IBM specialists, who can then add their own spin and share content with their own networks.

David Turner spent three years as head of EMEA marketing for Oracle Netsuite. While with Oracle, the company's sales team used LinkedIn extensively in B2B marketing, with Sales Navigator as a supporting tool. Alongside this, the company invested in training and coaching to help sales team use LinkedIn, not just to share content, but to discuss and engage with content in a way that helped position themselves as thought leaders. *"It does depend on the person being confident enough to take on that role."* Turner adds.

> ***"If you're publishing great content on LinkedIn, then Tweeting about it is a really great way to get more people to engage with the content."***
>
> **Caroline Taylor OBE**
> **Vice-President and Chief Marketing Officer, IBM Global Markets**

> ***"It comes down to relevant content. It's better to not send anything than to send something irrelevant. That could undermine the trust and credibility of your organisation."***
>
> **Matt Kaye**
> **Head of Marketing, Lane4 Management Group**

Connect with Matt

About Lane4 Management Group

Co-founded in 1995 by Olympic Gold Medallist swimmer Adrian Moorhouse, Lane4 isn't an ordinary organisation. We expect extraordinary things and we help people to deliver exceptional results. We understand how to apply the psychology of performance like nobody else. Our purpose to build winning organisations and improve people's working lives keeps us motivated every day. And, although we're relentless in our pursuit of excellence, we believe that talent is everywhere and that, with the right mindset and tools, anybody can achieve exceptional performance. Our culture embraces diverse opinion and constant curiosity. Whether it's with our clients or colleagues across the world, it's our rigorous insight, skilled team and humble confidence that help people to think, learn and develop.

Training allows sales teams to understand what content is relevant to a champion or potential customer, and when. A salesperson who understands thought leadership content will be able to provide the right content to the right person at the right time, says Kaye. *"It comes down to relevant content. It's better to not send anything than to send something irrelevant,"* he adds. "That could undermine the trust and credibility of your organisation."

Course5 Intelligence has invested heavily in LinkedIn as a thought leadership platform. Over the past two years the company has used LinkedIn tools such as Sales Navigator to identify key, named personnel within Fortune 1,000 companies. These roles can then be mapped to different products and content, allowing the sales team to reach out with relevant pitches at the right point in time.

This type of targeting is made easier by sharing data across Outlook, Salesforce and Sales Navigator, says Sursock. *"A lot of work is done in email, but if you can link all the data together, it is such a powerful way to engage,"* he adds. However, it's important to balance the admin work involved here with results, Sursock says. *"Salespeople aren't paid for admin; they're paid for results."*

Turrell finds LinkedIn a powerful tool in distributing thought leadership. *"We're in an industry where LinkedIn adores us,"* he says. *"A third of all white-collar professionals in the world are on LinkedIn, and there's no other platform that engages people on that level. People feel comfortable having high value conversations, supporting an agenda and building a personal brand."*

> ***"Just look at the number of white-collar professionals across the world that are on LinkedIn, there's no other platform that engages people on that level. People feel comfortable having high value conversations, supporting an agenda and building a personal brand."***
>
> **Richard Turrell**
> **Head of Marketing, Handle**

Connect with Richard

About Handle Recruitment

Handle Recruitment is a brand talent partner; we connect our clients with exceptional people who will power their brand, and we connect brilliant candidates with roles they'll love in exciting industries. We're deeply invested in the brands we work with; understanding each client, its market and its culture inside out, and the capabilities and qualities of the people who'll shine there. We cast our net beyond those who are actively looking, presenting people who are highly competent, passionate and brand-savvy. We're deeply invested in our candidates too, recognising the skills and competencies that drive a brand forward – we match exactly the right person with exactly the right role for them.

The success or failure of thought leadership on LinkedIn depends on context, says Moyse. *"While most tech buyers are on LinkedIn, as are sales people and recruiters, if you're an engineer in manufacturing that may not be the case. You can be active on all channels, but if it's not where your influencers and decision makers are then what's the point? If one platform accounts for 99% of your results, it's okay to just do that and to do it very well."*

Redstor recently conducted a comprehensive LinkedIn campaign lasting six months, says Case. The campaign combined sponsored and organic content with a large email campaign. The results were impressive – the company is seeing email open rates of up to 70%, compared to 11% on typical campaigns. *"We're also seeing a 50% click-through rate on the link to emails, compared to about 6 or 7% on HTML emails. It's been incredible in terms of engagement,"* says Case.

Chapter 4

Involving Your Market in the Development of Thought Leadership

To deliver true thought leadership, most organisations will reach outside of their own teams for insights. Bringing together customers and third-party experts gives thought leadership content greater reach, credibility and independence. Of course, it also provides an opportunity to build and strengthen relationships with potential customers and partners.

This approach works well for Sursock, with the company regularly reaching out for augmented insights to build into thought leadership. The company also features customers in video content, which is shared via their website. *"If you can loch in a quote, ideally with a number, those are so powerful,"* he says. Bringing together customers and thought leaders into a community allows the organisation to talk about common horizontal challenges. This is something Course5 has already adopted in the US and is now planning for Europe and Asia. *"It provides a platform for leadership sharing and for better relationship building, which is so important in today's markets."*

At Lane4 Management Group, the company creates thought leadership that combines academic rigour with customer insights. With this in mind, the company recently conducted quantitative research on 12-15 industry leaders, followed by a wider survey of senior professionals. *"This gave us market insights that are based on reality and what is actually going on in our target organisation's environment,"* says Kaye. *"Buyers want to consume thought leadership in a way that they can learn from and apply in their own business."*

> ***"It's about partnering with an organisation that has the credibility, so you are almost borrowing from that. It increases your chances of the thought leadership being read as independent and not just written from an IBM lens. Co-creating with clients is really valuable for that reason, and we do a lot of it."***

Caroline Taylor OBE
Vice-President and Chief Marketing Officer, IBM Global Markets

IBM works closely with analyst houses such as Gartner and IDC, as well as publishers such as the Economist. The company views these partnerships as hugely important. *"A credible third party will be recognised by the target audience for their credentials,"* says Taylor. *"It's about partnering with an organisation that has the credibility, so you are almost borrowing from that,"* she says. *"It increases your chances of the thought leadership being read as independent and not just written from an IBM lens. Co-creating with clients is really valuable for that reason, and we do a lot of it."*

When co-creating content, consider your customer, says Moyse. *"Customers have great insights into what they've actually done in the real world. So, if you want to talk about your product, ask your customers to talk about it, in the context of how they have solved their biggest challenges,"* he says. *"It's about being educational and informative. It is not about you."*

Moyse uses the example of a series of video interviews he was involved with as a social influencer where he interviewed customers of a third party. *"We did an interview where we're both getting value, but it's not about me, and I didn't talk about our company once. My logo and my ethics are there, and that's promoting my brand. Rather than thinking about "how can I get my company into that?"*

Much thought leadership fails because it's written from the perspective of the brand, rather than the audience, says Taylor. *"Unfortunately, what is interesting to you is highly likely not that interesting to the audience. It's bizarre because marketing is all about a customer-centric approach, yet so many organisations are just trying to showcase the wonderful things they have."*

Co-creation is powerful simply by being included, adds Moyse. *"It's about being included alongside peers I may not know. Similarly, if someone reads that insight, that gives me benefit because my name and brand are there, even if I didn't create the whole thing."*

Creation should be a collaborative process. It's not enough to simply create thought leadership content and then ask an expert to endorse it. Rather, it's about asking the influencer person for their insight, to be in the content, part of that education process. Or have someone independent interview a customer about a journey that the brand may be part of, but it's not corporate written, it's not a sales case study, it's going to come across as much more engaging.

Partnering with customers is a key strategy for Turrell. *"We agree upon a topic and organically, we start a conversation with someone who may have shared an incredible story. Some companies try and use all their clients, but this approach often ends up with an imbalanced narrative. You need to be able to say, hand on heart, there are people who would be able to tell a better story. It has to be about the best insights, balancing existing and prospective clients with others you have not met yet."*

David Turner was recently involved in a project selling business software to chief financial officers. To help build this business, the company partnered with a journalist who had built a community of CFOs on LinkedIn. *"They run an annual survey into CFOs each year on the future of finance, and technology. This aligns really well with what we talk about, so we partner on the survey. It's not exclusive. We are involved in it, and use a lot of it, because it's really good. The author has a strong background and it gives the content a lot of thought leadership credibility."*

> ***""It's about being included alongside peers I may not know. Similarly, if someone reads that insight, that gives me benefit because my name and brand are there, even if I didn't create the whole thing."***

Ian Moyse
EMEA Sales Director, Natterbox

> ***"Often, quite poor research or research that is biased to come with a specific answer just doesn't have credibility. It's a product pitch dressed up as thought leadership and it's not good for anyone involved."***

Richard Turrell
Head of Marketing, Handle

Sadly, thought leadership content is not always this successful. "People don't want to be sold to," says Turrell. "The product pitch should be left behind until you've engaged with someone who realises that you understand the problem. Often, quite poor research or research that is biased to come with a specific answer just doesn't have credibility. It's a product pitch, dressed up as thought leadership and it's not good for anyone involved."

Top Insights:

We include external stakeholders such as our customers in our Thought Leadership material. It allows us to position our organisation as one that really understands customer challenges and speaks to that.
Paul Malyon - Head of Thought Leadership & Data Literacy at Experian

The best stories come from your clients.
Mark Terry - Head of Marketing at Vuzion

Make your prospects feel good about taking part in Thought Leadership because you want them to be involved and you value their opinion.
Holly Harding - Marketing Manager at Causeway Technologies

A third party perspective offers more context and flavour. When creating your own content, it's easy to get trapped into focusing too much on the sell and not enough on the problems you're trying to solve.
Edward Harries - Brand Partnerships Director at Visualsoft Ltd

It is very important to see who your market's influencers are. If there is an influencer you trust or a journalist that you rate, then their opinion is going to count for a lot more.
Sam Barnes - Senior Director, International PR and Marketing Communications, AXON Communications

Utilise research that is backed up by data to add credibility to your content.
Benjamin Cawthray - Global Thought Leadership Director - Kantar Worldpanel Division

If a picture tells a thousand words, then video is worth a million words!
Harsha Swamy - Chief Commercial Officer at The Smart Cube

Creating a collaborative environment such as focus groups or roundtables allows you to bring back human touch and add real value to conversations.
Dhara Kothari - Marketing Manager at Check Point Software Technologies

Chapter 5

Integrating Sales with Thought Leadership

Business leaders may talk about thought leadership as a sales tool, but the research suggests that salespeople themselves are yet to be convinced by the value of thought leadership content.

One recent survey showed that while 45% of executives say they invited a company to bid on a contract after seeing thought leadership, only 17% of sellers believed that content could lead to requests for proposals. Even though 58% of corporate decision makers say a thought leadership piece has led directly to a contract, only 26% of sales teams said that thought leadership could help them to close a deal.

"We have business development reps on the phone, who tend to be our first contact with people before sales," says Turner. *"We need to get them to understand how to approach and pitch thought leadership, and it's not by picking up the phone to someone who downloaded a white paper and asking if they want to buy some software. It can be a struggle getting the sales team to have the appropriate high-level business conversation."*

> ***"At the top of the funnel you should be producing two thirds thought leadership to sales content. Because unless your product is radically different to anything else available, people are just not going to be interested."***
>
> **Richard Turrell**
> **Head of Marketing, Handle**

Addressing this disconnect means educating and training sales teams about the value and nature of thought leadership. It will also require business and thought leadership strategy to align with sales goals and strategy. This ensures that thought leadership is being produced that is more obviously beneficial to sales and marketing teams.

When we consider the model of a sales funnel, thought leadership has most value at the top, before someone is a customer and potentially before they have ever engaged with your organisation. *"At the top of the funnel you should be producing two thirds thought leadership to sales content,"* advises Turrell. *"Because unless your product is radically different to anything else available, people are just not going to be interested."*

Thought leadership can be useful further down the funnel, in some instances. Leforestier says that thought leadership which incorporates more practical advice can be used in the middle and bottom of the funnel. However, this will only work if sales teams are trained to understand, and know how to drive out this content, he adds. *"You have to spend time training every single sales rep on that new survey, report and new content that you've done. They need to know what conversations to have with their client and why."*

At IBM, the whole organisation understands that thought leadership is a valuable opportunity to demonstrate expertise, says Taylor. *"It creates some credibility and a positive perspective around the source of the thought leadership,"* she says.

Taylor believes that thought leadership programmes that involve the buy-side are a great way to establish new relationships with experienced senior professionals who are keen to promote change and development. *"We call these people champions, and the challenge our sales team has is giving those champions the tools they need to establish wider buy-in from their organisation."*

Moreover, the team does not focus exclusively on these champions. IBM uses a technique known as *"mass mapping"* to create multiple types of content to engage with multiple people at different levels within a target account. *"With digital content, you really can systematically understand all of the points of influencer within an organisation and then seek to influence those,"* says Taylor. *"It's all about the narrative that you build, and then packaging it in different ways for different audiences."*

It's also important to think about what sort of organisation a champion exists in. Moyse points out that if your champion is in a channel organisation, then the type of content they will need will vary from an organisation that markets their own product or service directly. *"Many resellers want something product based so they can tick a box, but in reality, it's about how are they solving problems. Trust the audience that they're smart enough to click through the link to your website when you provide more indirect content."*

> ***"You have to spend time training every single sales rep on that new survey, report and new content that you've done. They need to know what conversations to have with their client and why."***
>
> **Ludovic Leforestier**
> **Global Analyst and Influencer Relations Director, Criteo**

B2B marketing often struggles in this space because it focuses on product. Instead, salespeople need to incorporate expertise about the industry and trends, says Turrell. *"They want you to keep abreast of thought leadership trends, and what's important in their industry,"* he says.

Presenting this type of potential customer with a sales or feature document is likely to be counterproductive, Sursock adds. Good thought leadership demands collaboration between product and marketing teams, to understand the buying cycle, and how to nurture new and existing customer relationships. *"When we brought together product and marketing teams to share real customer conversations, we quickly realised that our early podcasts were missing the point, some events we attended were off the mark. That's pretty hard, but it's a very good exercise,"* Sursock says.

> ***"When we brought together product and marketing teams to share real customer conversations, we quickly realised that our early podcasts were missing the point, some events we attended were off the mark. That's pretty hard, but it's a very good exercise,"***
>
> **Joseph Sursock, Senior Vice-President EMEA, Course5 Intelligence**

Thought leadership must be shared at the right point in the buying cycle, and as part of a strategy that Sursock calls *"persuasion strategy"*. Organisations should not focus on just one part of the sales funnel, advises Sursock. The top, bottom and middle are all important. In addition, analysis then maps potential solutions the company might have to address challenges. These insights can then be used as a basis for creating, sharing and tracking the impact of thought leadership content. *"It's never a single activity, but it's reaching out to people who look like people you want to be targeting,"* Sursock says.

At Course5 Intelligence the key metric for measuring thought leadership is consumption, followed by feedback. If you share some thought leadership then Sursock advises making a space for people to provide feedback. With digital content, the company will also look at open and download rates, comments, likes and shares. *"It's about understanding if we are touching something that's important to other people,"* he says.

The most important thing for Turrell is to ensure the sales team is fully behind thought leadership as a concept. *"Every idea that we have will come from a focus group or a cohort where we discuss the challenges of customers and communities. We make sure sales are fully involved throughout the process, educating them rather than parachuting in and assuming they're going to talk about some thought leadership content."*

> ***"We make sure sales are fully involved throughout the process, educating them rather than parachuting in and assuming they're going to talk about some thought leadership content."***
>
> **Richard Turrell**
> **Head of Marketing, Handle**

Top Insights:

Many Lawyers and consultants are not natural salespeople. Thought Leadership allows them to pick the phone up and have better client conversations.
Simon Carlton Rhodes - Director of Thought Leadership at EY, CS, HSF

I have never met a CIO that wants to be sold to. They do not want telemarketers to call them. They do not want aggressive sales email sent to them. All they want is to be able to learn. To position yourself as a trusted advisor, I think is absolutely key.
Gareth Case - Chief Marketing Officer at Redstor

Sales should have a human touch and an ability to see sales as a consultative approach. The mantra is to think bigger and inspire clients.
Edward Harries - Brand Partnerships Director at Visualsoft Ltd

We provide client champions with material that is educational and not product/service focused. They can then use this material to evangelise for you at their organisation.
Paul Malyon - Head of Thought Leadership & Data Literacy at Experian

Chapter 6

How Do We Measure ROI of Thought Leadership?

Photo by bruce mars on Unsplash

Given the challenges around assigning a dollar value to a download, or share, or like, can we measure Return on Investment from Thought Leadership?

Certainly, we cannot calculate ROI when viewing thought leadership through a quarterly sales lens. To achieve and capture ROI from thought leadership, organisations must step away from quarterly sales figures. View this as a long-term investment, though, and organisations can achieve extremely impressive results.

The most obvious metrics to measure in this area are engagements and downloads. Benchmarking should be a part of this process. For example, if you know that your industry has an average rate of content engagement of 1% then you will more easily understand which of your own content is under- or over-performing. Be aware that more risky or provocative content tends to be more engaging.

It is also possible to measure how front-line sales staff engage with thought leadership content. Some organisations put systems in place to capture feedback on whether the content is opening doors for sales teams, whether it's something they want to share, and drive out to their customers and prospects.

The best data in the world is no substitute for simply asking for feedback from customers themselves. Taylor suggests making sure that there is feedback at every stage of thought leadership content, asking whether content is useful, and whether the audience wants more of the same, or something different.

When a new customer comes on board (or leaves), consider asking them for feedback on the part that thought leadership plays in their purchasing decisions. Was thought leadership an important part of their decision-making process in a positive or negative way?

At Redstor, the company uses a platform called TurtlLco to publish and track thought leadership content. It offers powerful feedback capabilities, says Case. *"TurtlLco provides a better experience for readers but it also tracks analytics and soft metrics that we can measure,"* he says.

TurtlLco analytics reveals how long readers spend on each page, and whether content has been shared. If video is added to a page, the Redstor team can see how many people watched the video and for how long. With some content, there will be forms embedded inviting readers to complete them to find out more.

All of the interactivity provides valuable insight into the value of content, says Case. *"It's fine creating great thought leadership, but if you don't know who is reading it, for how long, and if they're engaging, then it is lost the minute you send it out,"* he says.

At IBM the company doesn't measure thought leadership ROI as a standalone issue, but rather as part of a wider content strategy. All content created by the company is carefully tracked and measurements such as downloads and view time are considered. *"All of those things are captured and tagged into that overall journey through the funnel so we can identify not only which items are getting traction, but which ones actually do end up being tagged to business,"* says Taylor.

> ***"It's fine creating great thought leadership, but if you don't know who is reading it, for how long, and if they're engaging, then it is lost the minute you send it out."***

Gareth Case
Chief Marketing Officer, Redstor

Connect with Gareth

About Redstor

Business downtime is over! So too, is high storage costs, siloed data, and difficult access. At Redstor, we're disrupting the norm and changing everything you know about data storage, backup, and recovery. Our pioneering technology is the first of its kind and provides you with on-demand access to your data from a single control centre (on any device). Simply stream your data in real-time and eradicate business downtime... forever.

At Course5 Intelligence the key metric for measuring thought leadership is consumption, followed by feedback. If you share some thought leadership then Sursock advises making a space for people to provide feedback. With digital content, the company will also look at open and download rates, comments, likes and shares. *"It's about understanding if we are touching something that's important to other people,"* he says.

Some thought leadership ROI will always be intangible, says Moyse. However, he does believe it still has value. If a document carries the Natterbox logo and contact details and is widely shared, Moyse is confident this adds value to his organisation. *"A lot of the content we've produced has been picked up by third party platforms and shared with our name on it. We often ask for links back to our site, which gives us further value. And it shows our name, great!"*

Turner's previous company was very focused on lead generation, so reverse measurement of sales and leads is standard. However, with thought leadership content, that's not always easy. The company allocated a proportion of campaign costs towards content creation, and a discussion will happen around the aims of wider campaigns, and how they can be supported with content, what needs to be commissioned and the multiple ways it might be used. *"Thought leadership won't be tied to one programme, it tends to be used across 10 or 15 programmes,"* says Turner.

Measuring ROI is tough, but Turrell treats thought leadership as similar to other business projects. *"We start with business objectives. If the objectives will be to generate X hundred new contacts, could we use thought leadership to approach those people? Or could we create thought leadership for those people to make inbound inquiries and engage with us?"*

> ***"A lot of the content we've produced has been picked up by third party platforms and shared with our name on it. We often ask for links back to our site, which gives us further value. And it shows our name, great!"***

Ian Moyse
EMEA Sales Director, Natterbox

> ***"Thought leadership won't be tied to one programme, it tends to be used across 10 or 15 programmes."***

David Turner
CMO at SideTrade

Connect with David

About Sidetrade

Sidetrade (Euronext Growth: ALBFR.PA) uses Artificial Intelligence to empower marketing, sales and finance teams to grow sales and accelerate cash. Sidetrade identifies untapped business opportunities on the customer journey with Aimie, its Artificial Intelligence platform. Aimie understands B2B challenges, recommends the best business process, and executes your chosen actions.

A key challenge when assessing ROI of thought leadership is a lack of visibility. Too few organisations routinely ask new prospects, "How did you hear about us?" If you're not asking the question, you can't begin to know the answer, says Turrell.

More than half (54%) of those executives surveyed by Edelman and LinkedIn said that thought leadership played an important part in supplier evaluation. If this is true, then it is imperative for sales teams to know how thought leadership is impacting on new business, positively or negatively.

CRM applications are crucial to monitoring performance in this regard, Turrell says. *"Even a basic metric of people read this content, so are they more likely to engage with us on a regular basis? You have to be confident in knowing that if someone has read or engaged with thought leadership, that they will take the positive business actions that result in ROI."*

Leforestier argues that all approaches to measure ROI of thought leadership are fundamentally flawed. *"If you can avoid measuring it, that's better because it's the wrong question to ask,"* he says. *"You can always try and measure conversion rates for documents, but if you're developing the top of the sales funnel, then it's not a relevant measure."*

Instead Leforestier says he has sophisticated tools to analyse influencers sentiment across all audiences. Criteo also conducts annual customer satisfaction surveys which ask about thought leadership. *"Those measures are equally imperfect but better than measuring ROI,"* says Leforestier

Top Insights:

You need to have quite an advanced tracking team within your organisation and understand who is using the thought leadership material and in which context.
Simon Carlton Rhodes - Former Director of Thought Leadership at EY, CS, HSF

ROI on thought-leadership must always relate back to your original marketing objective. Whether that's to drive new business, increase brand awareness, grow existing clients, change perceptions of your business, or some other key goal.
Linsay Duncan - Founder at Your Allies

> ***"You can always try and measure conversion rates for documents, but if you're developing the top of the sales funnel, then it's not a relevant measure."***

Ludovic Leforestier, Global Analyst and Influencer Relations Director, Criteo

Poll Questions

1 Do you think your organisation produces enough TL material?

54%

Think they should be producing more

2 On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being the highest), how regularly does your organisation experience quality sales meetings as a direct result of one piece of content?

6.37

Mean average

3 On a scale of 1 to 10, how well is your organisation leveraging the LinkedIn platform?

6.42

Mean average

4 Do you think your organisation should be spending less, the same or more on Thought Leadership related content creation in the next budget cycle?

67%

Think they should be spending more

5 On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 = not very well and 10 = extremely well), how well do you feel your organisation is helping its salespeople engage a wider group of buyer stakeholders once an opportunity has been qualified at the 1st sales meeting?

6.96

Mean average

Thought leadership is one of the sharpest tools that organisations can adopt in the current sales environment, allowing them to reach new potential customers, build relationships and increase their reputation as a trusted, credible advisor.

Golden ticket for actionable insights

Organisations should use the list below to check that current thought leadership strategy is positioned to maximise the benefits of content:

1. **When creating thought leadership, look for something that you can create collaboratively, that will add value to the audience.**

2. **Never rely exclusively on voices from inside your organisation. Working with customers, partners and thought leaders brings data to life, and makes content more valuable and engaging.**

3. **Do not confuse thought leadership with product marketing. At the top of the sales funnel content should be weighted towards thought leadership and not product features or service offers.**

4. **Consider recruiting professional editors, designers and writers to create thought leadership. It is essential that content is well written, smartly packaged and designed for distribution across multiple platforms.**

5. **Have a defined framework for the process of collecting, filtering and evaluating ideas for thought leadership. Focus on making it easy for your brightest and most talented people to become thought leaders.**

6. **Don't focus on one platform or content format. Experiment with different forms of content created from the same original research. Podcasts, videos, infographics and Tweets can also complement white papers, and increase reach and engagement.**

7. **LinkedIn is the most effective platform for sharing thought leadership. Consider integrating third-party tools to guide and track LinkedIn conversations to maximise value.**

8. **It is essential to treat sales as a partner in thought leadership strategy, and to offer coaching and training where needed. This will allow sales teams to filter, share and engage with content as part of a wider conversation with a potential customer. This understanding is essential if brands are to develop credibility and trust from their community.**

9. **Don't rely on sharing thought leadership with just one contact at a target organisation. By using different forms of content and platforms, it's possible to map target organisations and deliver valuable content to decision makers at multiple levels.**

10. **Measuring the value of thought leadership should include three key elements. First, consider content-specific metrics such as open and dwell times. Second, consider long-term metrics such as new contacts. Finally, remember to incorporate person-to-person feedback, by inviting customers to share their experience of your thought leadership content.**

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About The Sponsor

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Thought Leadership theme development, interview design, market engagement plan

Thought-provoking and stimulating C-level interviews and follow on discussions

eBooks, articles, videos, podcasts with market opinions and valuable insights

Talk through industry challenges, share ideas, establish new relationships

Meetings, Referrals, Proposals = £ Revenue

Connect with Scott

Network Sunday partners with technology and professional services businesses to plan and deliver annual thought leadership programmes. The process involves engaging conversations with hundreds of senior business and technology leaders from your market on current topics of interest. Many of these lead to exploratory sales conversations and referrals.

Through our content brand TechPros.io we produce eBooks, articles, videos and podcasts which feature and accredit participants, just like we have done here.

We also moderate C-level roundtable events where participants meet in person to talk through industry challenges and share ideas.

If you would like to learn more, please do get in touch and we'll meet for a coffee.

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Featured Participants

Image by Tara Winstead on Unsplash

Ian Moyse
EMEA Sales Director
Natterbox

Ian has been a leader in the Cloud Computing industry for over 13 years and sat on the Boards of a number of industry bodies, FAST, Cloud Industry Forum and Eurocloud. Ian has been a judge on the UK Cloud Awards, Women in Sales Awards INFSAG (BESWA) and Top Sales Influencers and Top Sales Blogs. Ian is a regular blogger, writing for Forbes, Cloud Pro and his own blog IanMoyse.com. Ian was also featured in the EMEA Top 50 Influencers in Enterprise Technology, Cloud & Data 2017 winning best Certified Comms Blog in 2017 from CLOUDtv. Ian was awarded a UK Sales Director of the year by BESWA and in 2019 was recognised as one of the top 50 Sales Keynote Speakers by Top Sales World. Ian is also a Non-Executive Director of the Social Enterprise, Cloud Sales Academy and Social Selling Ian has successfully influenced Kingpost for Oracle, SAP, Sage, IBM, HP, Equinix, Dimension Data and more. He can be engaged at www.ianmoyse.com and www.ianmoyse.cloud

Caroline Taylor OBE
Vice President & Chief Marketing Officer
IBM Global Markets

Caroline Taylor is Vice President and CMO for IBM Global Markets, leading IBM's international marketing teams around the world. As an experienced marketing leader and change agent, Caroline has more than 30 years' experience in transforming marketing organizations and developing teams across the globe. She is a passionate advocate for diversity and inclusion. She spearheaded and led her elective residency in Vienna, and in the January 2017 Davos Next Year Honours she was appointed as an OBE for services to Marketing, Diversity and Prevention of Human Trafficking.

Simon Carlton Rhodes
Former Director of Thought Leadership
EY / Credit Suisse / Herbert Smith Freehills

Simon is former Director of Knowledge and Learning, Thought Leadership, Innovation and Strategic Research at Herbert Smith Freehills. He has previously worked as an investment banker, Strategy & change consultant, and Head of Thought Leadership at various professional services organisations. He is a Fellow of the Chartered Management Institute and Read a Book Day Ambassador. He is currently undertaking Thought Leadership Executive Coaching and Knowledge Management to help drive revenue, enable firms to build better client relationships and provide insights that enhance a firms reputation in the wider marketplace. His driving ambition is to ensure firms utilise their best intellectual insights to maximise their client impact.

Lorna Nightingale
Director of Marketing
Esri UK

Lorna Nightingale is Director of Marketing at Esri UK, the global market leader in location intelligence software. A visionary leader, with 30 years' experience in marketing, Lorna is proud to be at the forefront of modernising marketing practices and has a history of transforming teams to be more data driven, digital and customer centric. Lorna's passion is to help her team and the wider business to work more collaboratively together, to deliver amazing marketing campaigns. Lorna also works with customers, helping them to develop their personal success stories and then share them at conferences and events. Lorna is a volunteer for the Hearing Dogs for Deaf People and has dogs for placement with a deaf person.

Joseph Sunnock
Senior Vice President EMEA
Course5 Intelligence

Joseph is a passionate senior executive who specialises in customer-centric change management. Brings 25 years of international management. He enjoys challenging, fast-paced environments and has led 5 postacquisition integrations. He is currently the SVP for EMEA, leading Course5's expansion into the region. Course5 Intelligence is a leading provider of Predictive Analytics and Cognitive Insights solutions. He is also responsible for overseeing all sales activities and business development globally. Course5 is named to market, learning and efficiency across the other firm. Before joining Course5, Joseph was regional head of other services and software technology organisations. Where he built from the ground up several industry-leading Training businesses and, in Tenure & Leisure, Retail, CPG and BFSI. As a research executive in the Analytics and digital world, he speaks at key events and also sits on the advisory board of a couple of start-ups. An advocate of Insightled approaches that build deep connections with customers and partners. He has been stationed in several countries, currently based in London with his wife and 4 children.

Lindsay Duncan
Founder
Your Allies

Lindsay Duncan is a business leader, marketing mentor and founder of 9-year old award-winning marketing consultancy, Your Allies. Her 20+ years in B2B marketing have seen her work with companies from start-up to global corporate, helping them to launch and grow multiple award and coming businesses through her own marketing firm. Throughout all these stages in her career, her relationship with sales has underpinned her success. A champion of sales and marketing alignment, Lindsay helps businesses build high-performing marketing functions and stand-out marketing brand.

Andrei Tsvik
Director & Head of Marketing
Marketo

Andrei is an Amazon #1 Bestselling Author, Entrepreneur and Chief Marketing Officer of Marketo - an innovative, boutique Digital Marketing Agency with offices in London (UK) and Bucharest (RO). Working with both Start-ups and Corporate businesses on a daily basis, him and his team are helping brands push the boundaries of effective marketing communications in the modern age, as well as monetise their marketing investments. Andrei is passionate about digital & integrated marketing campaigns. While keeping a finger on the pulse when approaching to advertising, he believes there is still an element of "Art" that is needed for creating extraordinary marketing campaigns - and is committed to delivering a good point to start from.

Sharon Shatzkyal
Chief Content Marketing
TigerHR Group

Sharon Shatzkyal is a marketing professional with over 14 years of experience in devising and implementing innovative marketing strategies across consumer services such as IT software solutions, PR, recruitment, education, NHS, technology and financial risk management sectors. Through acquiring and maintaining business relationships with CEOs, stakeholders and handling clients from multi-billion dollar industries and SMEs, she has successfully delivered numerous campaigns and successfully integrated new technologies into marketing strategies. Sharon has a demonstrable track record of scaling up businesses globally. She has the expertise of building successful marketing functions from the ground level up. She has been awarded numerous awards for marketing publications for the expertise and insights she brought leadership and is currently the Global Head of Marketing at TigerHR group, where she is developing digital acquisition strategies across their key global markets. Sharon is heavily involved with Liverpool Football Clubs partnership and their official charity, The LFC Foundation.

Sam Barnes
Senior Director International PR & Marketing Communications
AXON Communications

Sam is a Senior Director at AXON, responsible for seamlessly integrating the AVON® GLOBAL network to provide healthcare clients with communications support on a global basis. Sam works with a number of pharma, biotech and medtech clients on programmes across the communications spectrum. He has over 20 years' experience in developing and successfully integrating new communications channels, including Weber Shandwick's dna communications, Burson-Marsteller, Novartis and GSK. In 2007, he founded dna communications – a global communications agency. Sam has a BSc in Physics, a postgraduate diploma in marketing, and is a regular contributor to social media and industry press.

Matt Kapp
Director of Marketing
Lane 4 Management Group

Matt Kapp is the Head of Marketing at Lane4, a management consultancy focusing on leadership and management development. He has worked with some of the world's most prestigious global brands, from start-ups to corporate and government agencies. A member of the CIM family, undertaken both the Certificate and Diploma in marketing. He successfully led the project to re-design and re-brand the Lane4 website in 2015 and remains a driving advocate for the value of relevant and valued-adding content as a means for lead generation.

Ludovic Lefrancois
Global Analyst & Influencer Relations Director
Criteo

Ludovic Lefrancois' / Criteo (London/UK), @ludovic_l, LinkedIn has over 15 years of analyst relations experience ,has co-founded the SAR with several others and is currently serving as its President. Criteo has been named to the Forbes Cloud 100 list and Ludovic's relationship with Criteo is the industry with over 100 members. Ludovic has coauthored several SAR best practices papers, blogs regularly on AR issues on the SAR website and has developed the "AR-All-Professional and Team of the Year" and "SAR Analyst of the Year" awards. His day job is Global Director Influencer Relations at Criteo, the advertising platform for the open internet, after holding EMEA and Global AR/PR, marketing and Thought Leadership roles at BearingPoint, Oracle, IBM, HSS and Orbit.

Chris Steven
Chief Operating Officer
Sidekicks

Chris Steven is Chief Operating Officer at Sidekicks 6, a company that believes great ideas can come from anywhere. A self-confessed marketing nerd, Chris is passionate about putting creative thinking at the heart of every business decision and interaction. His previous experience ranges from working in-house at Sainsbury's Argos, Carphone Warehouse and SaleCycle. Away from work Chris is a keen footballer (albeit, now in the vets leagues) and spends most of his time with his wife Gabi chasing around after their daughter Millie.

Suzi O'Neill
Head of Global Brand Content
Kaspersky

Suzi O'Neill is the Global Head of B2B Brand Content for Kaspersky, one of the world's leading cybersecurity firms. She's a seasoned creative and content strategist which has been recognised with numerous awards for her work. She's also an experienced speaker on the topic of digital and social content. Off the clock, she's musician and performer who gives international performances playing theremin; the world's first electronic instrument from supre Russia.

Gareth Case
Chief Marketing Officer
Redstor

I am a pro-active marketing strategist with strong business acumen and sound commercial awareness. I have more that 20 years B2B marketing experience, gained in the UK, Europe and North America. Telecoms and Securities industries. I have experience of marketing to the public, public sector across multiple vertical markets on a National and International basis. My broad marketing experience covers all aspects of the marketing mix with extensive success delivering innovative online and off-line campaigns. I am a strategic thinker who enjoys to drive business revenues by over my online profile.
e- please visit garethcase.com

Diyora Kozhair
Head of Campaign (UK & Ireland)
Check Point Software Technologies

Diyora Kozhair is an all-round marketeer with a head for strategy and keen eye for detail. Having studied Marketing at Kingston University and earning her place in the top 5 graduates, Diyora started her career in software and quickly rose through the ranks, being up the role as Marketing Manager at just 24 years old. Next on Diyora's radar was to tackle hardware in a large corporate enterprise where she headed up B2B, B2C and commercial channels within Check Point Software Technologies. Diyora has since returned to her roots as Checkpoint's UK and Ireland lead Marketing Manager. Diyora regularly contributes to industry focused initiatives and featured in POS Top 100 Women in Tech. Going forward, Diyora continues to expand her knowledge and skills as she takes on more territory across Europe.

David Turner
Chief Marketing Officer
Sidetrade

After an over a career in science and technology journalism, David moved into technology marketing and never looked back! He has led marketing for start-ups, scale-ups and enterprise software and SaaS companies, building and managing teams across the globe. As CMO of Sidetrade, a leading AI software company that helps companies to increase the value from their customers using AI, he is building an international marketing team to help the company scale rapidly. Before Sidetrade he headed marketing for 4 years at Netsuite as part of the management team that grew the SaaS ERP vendor's presence from the UK to a pan-EMEA operation.

Paul Harper
Head of Thought Leadership and Data Literacy
Experian

Passionate about helping others get the best from good data, Paul is responsible for Thought Leadership and Data Literacy at Experian. He is a recognised advocate for transparency, privacy and data informed decision making and leading the charge on the majority of his time helping colleagues and businesses get the best from the growing deluge of data. Paul is a leading advocate of Open Data and Transparency and was an independent nominated advisor to the UK Government as part of the Open Data User Group between 2012-2015. He is also an Advisory Board member for the Data Literacy Project. Outside of his time with Experian, Paul has experienced the cut-and-thrust of Tech start-ups and had a stint at the worlds 3rd largest retailer. With a constant focus on using data for good, Paul has lived and breathed the ethical considerations of big data and shapes and sizes for over a decade.

Holly Harding
Marketing Manager
Causeway Technologies

An accomplished marketing professional in the IT sector with proven track record spanning eleven years. Confident communicator with strong written, interpersonal and negotiation skills. Driven by innovation and creativity, a forward thinking approach has brought in measurable results in a fast-moving environment.

Richard Tarrest
Head of Marketing
Handle Recruitment

After spending half a decade at a BoB marketing agency Richard moved into the recruitment industry in 2012, becoming Group Head of Digital at a FTE-backed Global Recruitment Group. After the eye-opening experience of working from Russia to Brazil (and many countries in-between) he decided to set up his own business with senior recruiting colleagues at an industry-leading Recruitment and customer-focused Recruitment agency. Having recently taken on the role of Head of Marketing at Handle, his current focus is on delivering exceptional, marketing that helps creative brands hire exceptional talent.

Benjamin Cawthray
Global Thought Leadership Director
Kantar Worldpanel Division

Benjamin Cawthray has over ten years' experience at Kantar and within the market research industry. Before taking on responsibility for Kantar's Worldpanel division's thought leadership activities, he was Head of Kantar's UK Retail & Consumer Practice, where he managed FMCG clients. His expertise is in collaborative, quantitative research, particularly shopper behaviour, with a keen focus on the retail environment. Since taking on the role Benjamin has published over ten global thought leadership pieces for Kantar, showcasing expertise across a variety of different subject areas and with ultimate responsibility for Worldpanel's flagship publication, Brand Footprint.

Helena McAteer
Senior Marketing Manager
chaucer

Helena has been working in marketing for over 10 years and has experience across both agency & publisher industries. The mix of skills she's learnt here is something she brings to the table at Chaucer helping grow the Chaucer brand.

Matthew Holland
Head of Corporate Marketing
Iress

Matt is the Head of Corporate Marketing for Iress, a technology company designing software for the financial services industry. More than 9,000 businesses and 500,000 people use Iress software globally, and it's Matt's job to help Iress grow stronger through a strong brand, clear position, and outstanding communication and design. Part of this means translating insight, big ideas and complex issues into fast working design and content, and working with the right people, leaders and creative teams to shape and execute on marketing and business strategy.

Regina Blueman
Head of Brand & Marketing
Logicalis

Regina Blueman is the Head of Brand & Marketing at Logicalis UK. She is an experimented panelist, guest author, podcast guest, and was recently shortlisted as a Finalist in the Chief Executive Channel Awards. She is incredibly passionate about the potential for technology to modernise and drive innovation within today's businesses, but her real love lies within cybersecurity and ethical hacking. When not at work, Regina can often be found at the gym, watching her son's every move during various taking sets or coding challenges. When not geeking out, she likes to catch as many Welsh rugby and Liverpool football games as she can, and always aims to get in a few days away each winter!

Greg Taylor
General Manager
brill.app & Tigerpaw

Greg is the co-founder of Brillapp and General Manager at Tigerpaw's Startup Studio. He's spent 15 years at the forefront of digital innovation and is considered a thought leader in the space. His studio's latest product Brillapp is a productivity app that's making waves. Combining bleeding-edge computer vision, machine learning, and a great user experience, Brill has saved people thousands of hours from typing — so they can spend that time on the work that really matters.

Mark Terry
Head of Marketing
Vuzion

A performance marketer for over 16 years. Mark has worked in both B2B and B2C markets across a wide range of industries including Media Data Mkt, The Guardian, Time Inc, Vodafone, Telefonica Cedetel, Cobrabid.co.uk, Guardianjobs.com, Business Services Director, Edenred and Reviewsbyme Glamfetish, Sabah Jerry Handmade Girl. Now working in the Technology and Cloud Industry for Colwell and Vuzion, Mark is transforming the approach to commercial marketing, from creating engaging brand experiences, to developing lead generation activities and optimising customer communications.

Claire Devine
Director of Brand Director
Nuada Medical

Claire Devine is a B2B marketing specialist with experience building partnerships in the healthcare, arts and charitable sectors. Her current focus is on Medtech and digital healthcare which began in the establishment of a medical imaging centre over ten years ago. This emerged into a centre of excellence for imaging the prostate, and she has been part of the development of several business from this, including 2 digital ones: an online clinic specialising in prostate disorders, and an early-stage AI/machine-learning project using our collective data to create a prostate-imaging reporting tool for radiologists.

Harsha Swamy
Chief Commercial Officer
Smart Cube

Harsha is responsible for leading sales and new business development, to drive The Smart Cube's ambitious growth plans. He has 17+ years of sales and sales management experience, most recently spear heading growth at a fast-growing analytics start-up, and previously managing sales development for companies including Cognizant and Satyam. Harsha holds an MBA from the Indian Institute of Management, and a degree in Mechanical Engineering from Bangalore University.

Edward Harries
Brand Partnerships Director
Visualsoft Ltd

Ed has spent nearly 5 years working with Visualsoft's commerce solutions and hundreds of retailers in fashion, beauty, sports and footwear to support their growth aspirations online. As Visualsoft's Brand Partnerships Director, he now oversees a new programme and approach to working with Systems Integrators, Agencies and Partners who use Visualsoft's ecosystem and Partner Hub to help them do more to grow their own clients online. His future-set approach enables digital agencies to build online strategies that will continue to deliver even in the most changeless and turbulent online environment merchants find themselves a part of. Ed works hard in hand with Verified Visualsoft Partners to help them do more for merchants here in the UK and abroad.

Catherine Dutton
Head of Marketing
Atos

Catherine originally started her career in account management and has over 15 years of experience in direct B2B senior client-facing roles across a wide range of sectors and public sector and SIAO platform available in the world to' or our FTSE100 clients tell us! We're specialists in driving traffic, commercial value and increasing brand awareness through the use of our platforms for corporations around the world.

Sam Silverwood-Cope
Founder and CEO
PI Datametrics

20 years experience in big brand global marketing. Director, Digital strategist and co-founder of venture capital backed - PI Datametrics - the best bespoke intelligence software and SIEM platform available in the world to' or our FTSE100 clients tell us! We're specialists in driving traffic, commercial value and increasing brand awareness through the use of our platforms for corporations around the world.

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- Robin Gray - Senior Digital Marketing Manager at Wandera
- Hamish Hume - Managing Director at Acuma & Mercial
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- Tom Hynes - Marketing at Rattlehaus Hub Tech
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- Jeff Hall - Director Marketing, Europe & Asia Pacific at Columbia Threadneedle
- Judy Gray - Director Marketing, Europe at Lucent
- Tereza Evangelou - Marketing Manager at Neath Document Systems
- Vishal Kurani - AVP Marketing at QA Ltd

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