



THE PREMIER ONLINE COMMUNITY
FOR GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAIN PROFESSIONALS

You Made the Widget – Now Market It Effectively

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Technology marketing is a fertile ground for applying thought leadership and best-practices, considering that change is rapid in today's world. Technology trend chasing is part of the game, and technical purchasing decision-makers are constantly being bombarded by, and attracted by, non-promotional, informative content that aids them in their work. While not new, this is being referred to these days as Content Marketing.

For companies wanting to engage in thought leadership (TL for short), a more strategic attitude is required than just talking about products or services directly driving revenue. The conversations need to go well beyond straight product publicity.

In the technology marketing realm, it's only natural to show the world your stuff through engineers' acOften TL is mistakenly attributed only to market share leaders. But this strategy is available to potentially any business that has the imagination to break out with fresh thinking. It typically requires competent writing support and knowledgeable, authoritative people. However, it can easily be cost-effectively employed by any business with the will and imagination.

TL content is focused on change -- what's new, what's next, or what's not working but may be essential to success of a particular interest group. What's wrong in your particular tech sector? Can you express it and clearly recommend changes that are needed? Can you engage in a market dialogue? Can you discuss how a new category of product helps make life easier in an industry segment? Note that the focus is on the market category and not your particular brand.

Being persuasive demands clearly stated ideas, not necessarily extensively long copy. Technical people with the necessary background and passion can initiate a program by clearly demonstrating domain expertise with credible, well supported ideas, typically by advocating for innovation or change. Making waves is part of how it's done.

Most significantly, TL is available to tech companies of nearly any size or in any sector. Sometimes, for businesses in seemingly mundane product areas, focusing business communications on what people are thinking or new ideas is far more effective than hyping your widget.

As an example, a small-town banker can become the local thought leader by providing personal finance classes or writing a pamphlet helping people imagine more effective ways of managing their money. This generates increased awareness and credibility -- not a bad thing for any business. Providing something competitors aren't offering creates differentiation that effectively separates your brand from others, which is at the core of any successful marketing campaign.

Other benefits of a thought leadership program include the following:

- Exposing your company's values to your prospects
- Demonstrating expertise where expertise is valued (as in the tech sector)
- Attracting specific kinds of customers
- Changing how people think -- usually for the better!
- Preempting competitive marketing efforts
- Attracting attention beyond simple product or company advertising claims

So, how should you execute a TL program? Here are two suggestions:

1. Strategy first, then tactics. Create a communications objective so there's team agreement on what you want to be known for. Achieving market agreement with how you want to be known is the objective. No brand "positions itself." The market does. The strategy will come from how you create the desired reputation. Hint: It may involve more than just TL. You'll have to walk the talk.

2. Start small. Creating a publishing calendar on your internal Website or offline will help drive a what-by-when plan. Research and develop a speaking opportunities calendar and book relevant engagements locally, nationally, or internationally. Also learn where contributed articles, like this one, are accepted and where they'll reach your market. Developing a team of speakers or writers is key. It allows your company to quickly become a resource in your market. Solo works, too, but takes more time. Getting professional help can help move the ball faster.

Positive management attitudes about engaging with the market and sharing vision, debating issues, and discussing trends all enable a company to project itself without resorting to purely promotional activities. Thought leadership can run parallel to product publicity, but with the more strategic objectives of creating a new or differing company reputation that helps the organization stand out against competitors.