



The Importance of Communicating Thought Leadership in Your Marketing Strategy

A Best Practices Guide

June 2022

In This Deck



This deck provides a discussion of the importance of developing and proactively communicating a thought leadership story as part of an overall marketing strategy. The importance is particularly strong for companies in technology, and can help establish greater levels of credibility and set you apart from competitors.

The Callan Consulting team has decades of experience helping companies craft and deliver thought leadership messaging, and is happy to provide this guide for our customers' use.

Technology Marketing Teams Struggle to Provide Compelling, Differentiated Messaging to the Market

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Technology marketing is hard.

Technology buyers are bombarded with messages from established vendors as well as startups, and often struggle to understand individual companies' value propositions, how they address the business' needs.

Technology vendors' marketing and communications teams frequently struggle to tell their companies' story in a way that is clear, compelling, unique, differentiated and ownable.

Throwing additional product messaging in the form of data sheets, product decks, and web content is helpful to tell the product story but doesn't always work to cut through the clutter.

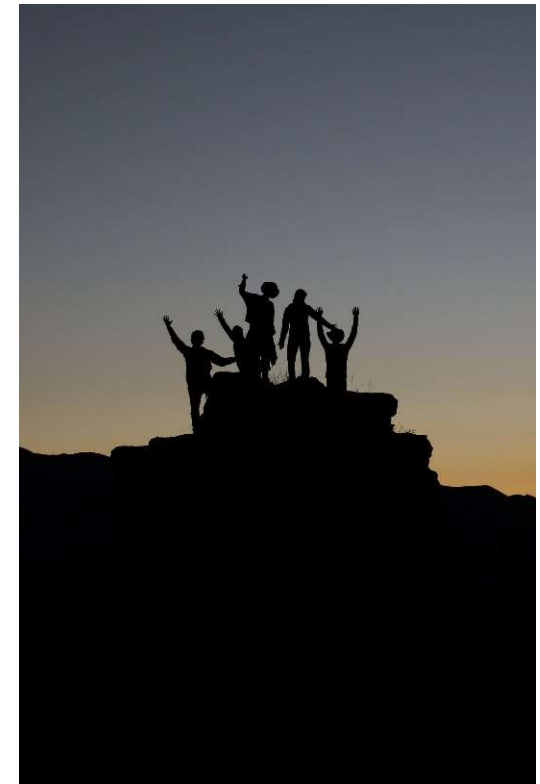


Technology Companies Are Increasingly Turning to Thought Leadership Messaging

Thought leadership consists of identifying one or more *unique, defensible, and compelling concepts intended to get customers and industry participants to think about the way they conduct their business – and by extension the way they use technology – in new and unexpected ways.*

A good thought leadership story will:

- **Push the needle.** It should be provocative and compelling, making the reader sit up and take note and potentially reconsider the way they think about their business today.
- **Resonate.** It should relate to and build off trends in the market and should feel credible.
- **Light a fire.** It should be pertinent to the reader, planting the seeds of fear, uncertainty, and doubt. It should hint at potential downside to the reader's business if it is not prepared for the scenarios you are describing.



Thought Leadership Can Help You Break Through the Messaging Clutter

Unlike product-centric or brand-centric approaches to marketing messaging, thought leadership is intended to convey a *credible, defensible point of view that rises above or is not otherwise directly tied to your company's value proposition*. As such it can cut through the clutter and resonate more deeply with your audience.

Benefits of incorporating thought leadership into your messaging strategy include:

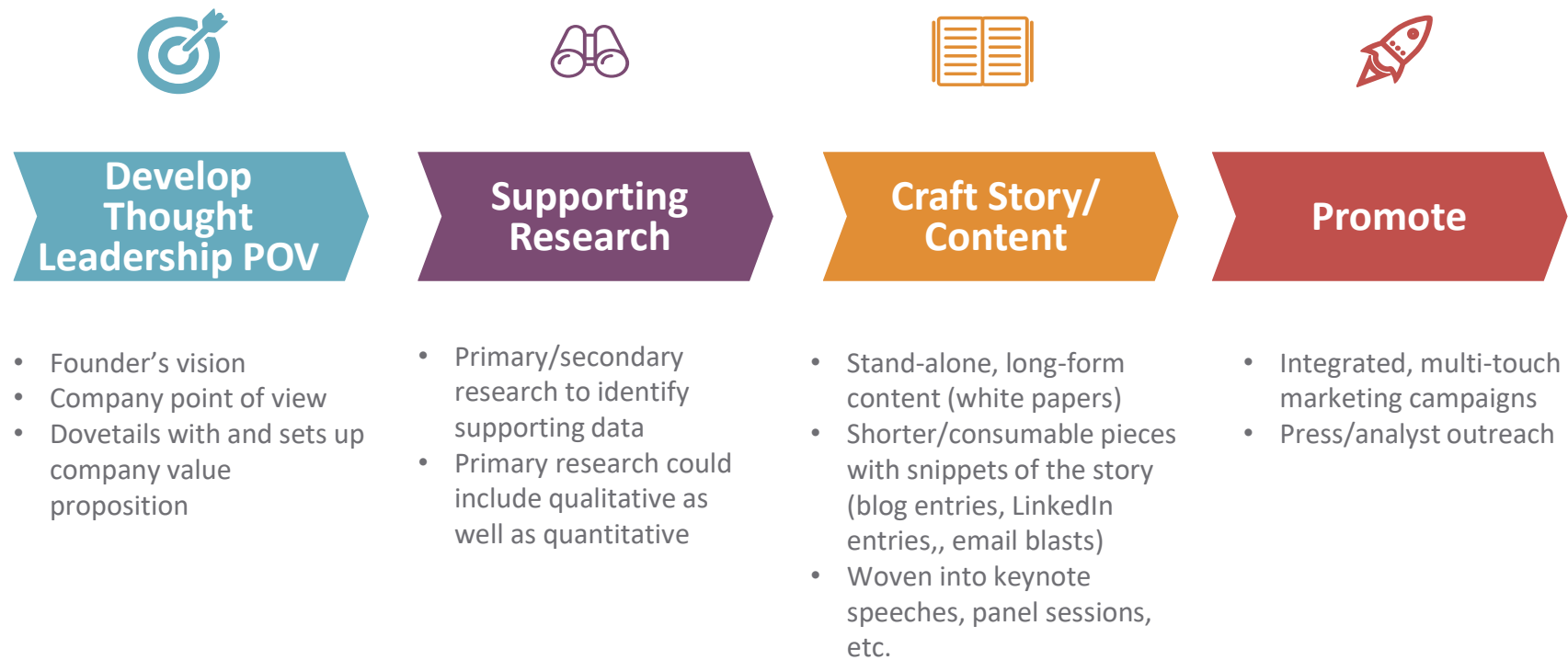
- **Paints the view of the future your solution fits into.** Technology companies are often attempting to get their customers to change the way they currently conduct their business, and to prepare for changes in their business, often by purchasing the company's products or services. A good thought leadership story will lay the groundwork and prepare your customers to hear your company's or product's value proposition story (told via traditional methods). The analogy is that thought leadership is like putting a golf ball on the tee, setting your traditional product messaging up to drive it down the fairway.
- **Establishes and builds credibility.** When your company tells its thought leadership story, you are now providing value to your audience beyond simply pitching them on your products or services. It positions your company as an expert in its domain and can help put your company on your customers' radar screen (especially if you are an earlier-stage startup).

What It's Not Is a Regurgitation of Your Company or Product Messaging

It's just as important to keep in mind what thought leadership is not, as what it is. Thought leadership is not:

- **Repackaging your sales pitch.** With thought leadership messaging you're rising above the fray, and not talking about products, features, functions, or benefits. Instead you are focusing on larger industry trends, predictions, and/or best practices designed to enlighten the reader and get them to think about the market in a new way. You don't want to be too salesy and if you are, then your purported thought leadership story will lose its effectiveness.
- **Limited only to technology or the areas your products/services touch.** Good thought leadership elevates above specific discussion of technology and how organizations use it, often focusing on larger business trends, impacts and influences across the broader organization, and impacts on organizational design, processes, and procedures.
- **A book report.** Thought leadership should add something unique to the conversation; you are not simply parroting someone else's point of view

Building a Credible Thought Leadership Story Is a Considered, Multi-Step Process



Keep in Mind Five Key Considerations to Develop Great Thought Leadership Content

Unique

Your thought leadership should be differentiated, belonging only to you. Don't parrot McKinsey, Gartner, IDC, or your top competitors. The story should be yours and yours alone.

Clear

You are not writing this for an academic audiences. It should be written in clear, compelling, understandable business prose and easily digestible by your your customers, partners, influencers, and other important audiences in your ecosystem.

Compelling

Your story needs to win your audience's hearts and minds. It needs to resonate, address concerns that are top of mind, and be backed up by compelling arguments, trends, and data.

Relevant

It needs to be applicable to and set your customer up for your company's value proposition. See above regarding setting the golf ball on the tee so your sales reps can drive it down the fairway.

Ownable

The best thought leadership stories are those that leverage internal data, expertise, research, or methodologies so that they cannot be (easily at least) replicated by competitors. You and you alone should own this content, so you get people coming back to read next year's report

Thought Leadership Messaging Should Be Provocative and Attention-Grabbing

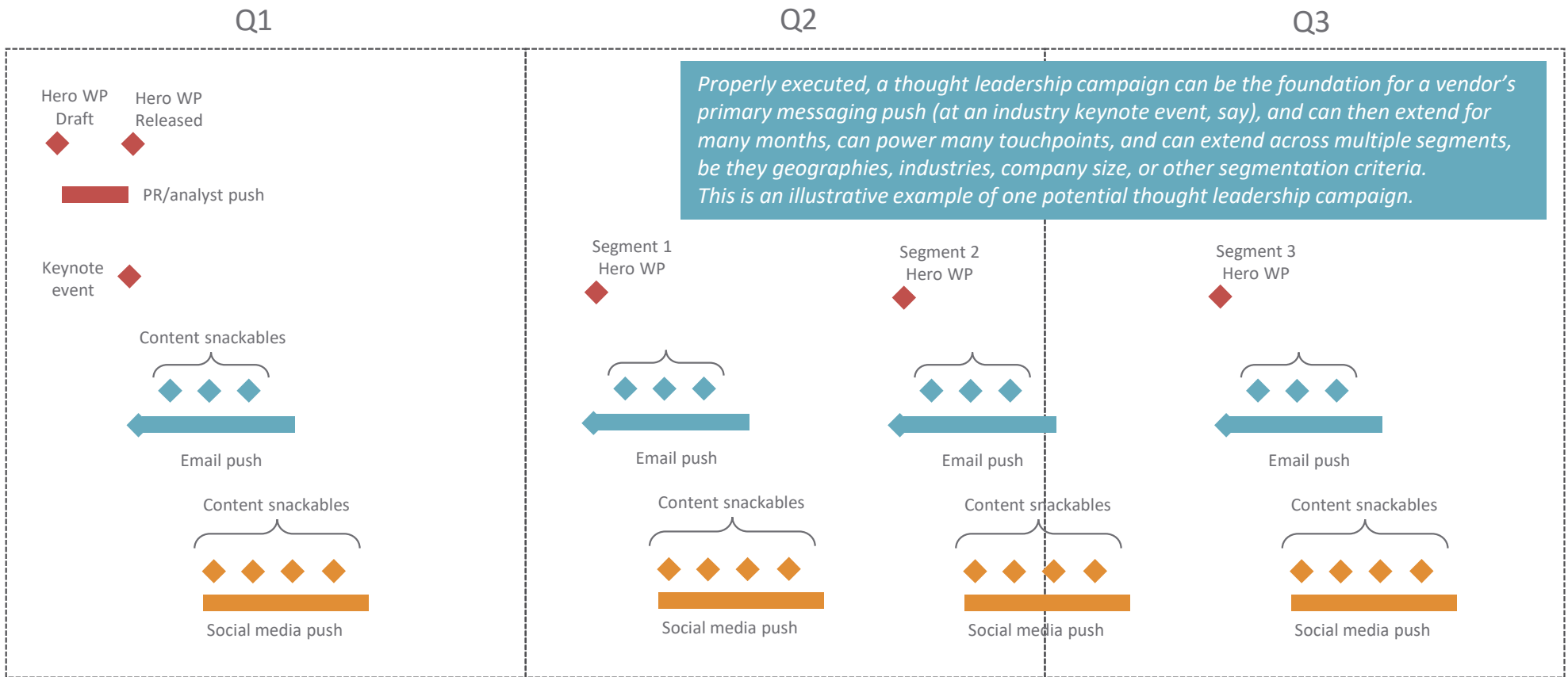
Archiving Thought Leadership Project Messaging Framework Example

Core Hypothesis/Survey Area	Question Topics/Areas to Explore
There's Untapped Value in Your Organization's Archives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are data archives managed? • What are companies budgeting for data archives? • Is there significant untapped value in an organization's data archives? • Does an ability to access, analyze and monetize data archives distinguish successful growth companies? • Can poor data archiving literally put a company out of business? • Are companies storing everything rather than deciding what is <u>really worth saving</u>?
IT Is the Enemy of Legal/Compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is IT the enemy of GRC when it comes to data archiving? • Do IT and Compliance speak different languages? • Is IT wasting so much time chasing down information it's hurting productivity and business results? • Do IT managers even know what info is stored in the data archive? Do Compliance managers know?
Businesses Can't Access Data from the Archive as Quickly as they Need To	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are businesses unable to access archived data as quickly as they need to? • What is the process for retrieving archived information? • Are business data archives a "data lake" or more like a "data swamp"? • Is new data archiving technology making it easier for businesses to find what they're looking for? (e.g. searchable unstructured content)

It's a good idea to aim for 3-5 core messaging pillars that are compelling, provocative, and attention-grabbing

It's also good to have additional detail in terms of questions and topics to explore

Thought Leadership Can Be the Foundation for Robust, Multi-Touch Campaigns



Example: Best Practices in the Sales Revenue Engine

- ZoomInfo employs a number of best practices across its SDR, AE, and account management teams. It employed Callan Consulting to articulate those practices in a series of white papers released throughout CY 2021.
- By showing sales and marketing teams what can be achieved with the use, in part, of industry-leading data solutions, ZoomInfo sought to inspire organizations to seek to improve their own practices.
- None of these white papers described the ZoomInfo solution or value proposition per se. But by showing the reader the art of the possible it predisposed them to the value proposition told in other formats.

AE Motion

The AE motion covers the period from demo to closed sale. Best role specialization, AE "best fit" opportunity matching, AE "Yield" a centralized sales enablement team, process execution automation, opportunity Go-Back harvesting, and a Staffing Escalator to ramp.

Role specialization

At ZoomInfo, account executives focus on the closing motion only. All other tasks—including administrative, upstream or downstream activities—are removed from their plates. This allows them to focus on delivering compelling demos, organizing buying groups, and understanding and navigating prospects' purchase process.

Automation and subject-matter expert reduce the number of decisions the AEs has to make, enabling them to close more business quickly (with a median sales cycle of less than 30 days).

Results and Metrics

The use of these best practices has enabled ZoomInfo to achieve results in its sales motion that exceed industry benchmarks (Table 1).

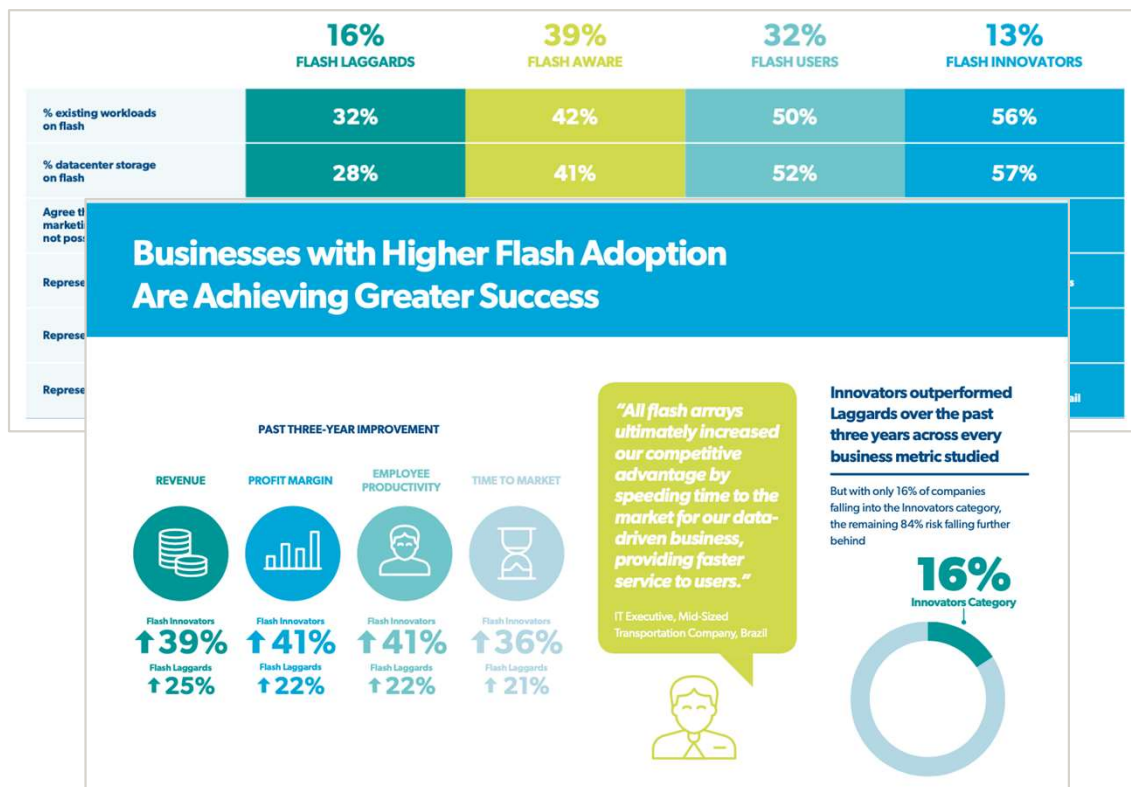
	Metric	ZoomInfo	Benchmark
SDR	Lead to demo create ratio	+40%	14-20%
	Demo set to opportunity create ratio	+50%	22-30%
	Response time SLA	90 seconds	+50 minutes
	Demo Go-Back ratio (% of no-shows who came back for demo)	+25%	N/A
	Demos per AE per business day	3	0.6-2
	AE ramp time	4-6 months	12-18 months
AM/CSM	% AEs internally sourced (% of AEs who came up through the internal SDR escalator path)	+30%	N/A
	Gross retention	+90%	85-90%
Other/Overall	% of churned ACV won back in the next 12 months	+30%	N/A
	LTV to CAC	+15:1	3:1
	New Sales Efficiency (New Sales ACV/New Sales Expense)	+1.5x	1.1x

Table 1. ZoomInfo achieves superior go-to-market results compared to industry benchmarks.

Figure 6. AEs are scored based on four trailing 3-month performance metrics which intelligently determines the demo routing and opportunity matching.

Example: Profiling Industry Leaders and Laggards Using a Maturity Index Developed via Primary Research

- Callan Consulting has performed dozens of projects based on primary research in which we identified leaders and laggards in a given area of business/technology and profiled them.
- This form of thought leadership is very compelling to industry practitioners (your clients) because they can benchmark how they are doing relative to peers, and you can give them a roadmap to improve their operations.
- Using self-developed research is a good way to ensure your thought leadership is unique, targeted, differentiated, and defensible.



Consider and Develop Content for Your Target Audience(s)

Primary

- Customers, business decision makers, and influencers within the markets you target

Secondary

- Industry thought leaders, analysts, reporters/bloggers, and investors

Thought Leadership Can Be Used by for Earlier Stage as Well as More Established Companies

Early Stage

- Early stage companies can make effective use of thought leadership to help establish themselves in the market

Established

- Later-stage companies can thrive on thought leadership to bolster their market leadership and demonstrate their degree of innovation (relative to upstart competitors)

How Do You Get Started?

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Regardless of your market segments served or marketing mix, most technology companies will benefit from demonstrating thought leadership in their field.

The Callan Consulting team is uniquely qualified, with decades of experience helping companies develop their messaging, including thought leadership messaging. We work with CEOs, CMOs, product marketing, product management, and communications teams, and can help uplevel and articulate your thought leadership story.

So give us a call. We are here to help.



About Callan Consulting

Callan Consulting Has Deep Experience in Developing and Articulating Messaging and Thought Leadership for our Clients

Callan Consulting has been providing strategic product marketing services to technology companies since 2000

- Team of former technology marketing executives, led by Ed Callan

We have conducted dozens of strategic high-profile projects to help our customers develop and bring to market messaging and positioning, including thought leadership content

+ **Callan** Consulting

Partial List of Current and Former Clients





Thank You



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