

How to Become a Thought Leader in Your Niche

Seth Godin. Tony Robbins. Vandana Shiva.

The first is the ultimate entrepreneur in the information age. The next is a philanthropist and life coach well-known for his infomercials and self-help books. The third is an advocate against globalization and a recognized worldwide environmental hero.

They come from different industries and have different areas of expertise, but they have one thing in common: they are all thought leaders.

Thought leadership has different meanings for different people. Its use and practice transcend industries and vary in scale. Thought leadership can apply to a single industry or have global influence. Essentially, thought leadership is a concept that opens opportunities to become credible sources for issues we are passionate about.

The article outlines what a thought leader is, why we should strive to be one, and what steps we can take to become a thought leader.

Thought leader definition: A thought leader is someone who is considered an authority in their field of expertise. Through their knowledge and experience, they have established themselves as the go-to person in their industry. They're the expert of the experts.

What is a thought leader?

The opinions of thought leaders are very influential and can sway the views of other people. They exude a powerful personal brand that is highly visible not just within an organization but among various industries. Their innovative ideas inspire people and engage them to purposeful action. They enact meaningful change and help people do the same.

A thought leader is someone we all should aspire to.

Why should you strive to be a thought leader?

No everyone can become a thought leader, but this is no reason not to strive to become one. Even if you don't attain worldwide fame, you still have much to gain from becoming an authority in your niche.

Being a thought leader can open doors to new opportunities for yourself and for your organization. It can transform your brand and position your organization as a leader in the industry.

You can freely share your ideas within your industry and outside of it. You gain access to people who can contribute in turning these ideas into reality. You are afforded status and authority to move things in a new direction. You can also leverage thought leadership as a marketing tool to grow your business.

Moreover, you have the power to persuade your audience. You can inspire meaningful change and create a significant impact in your industry. You have the clout to bring about real progress and usher widespread innovation.

As a thought leader, you can leave an enduring legacy.

How can you find your niche?

Before you set out to become a thought leader, you must first define your niche. This niche must be relevant to your experience, background, industry, and target audience.

Choose a niche in which you have significant expertise and are deeply passionate about. Passion is important. If you're writing, speaking, researching, and discussing topics within your niche, you'll want to cover a subject matter you love. If you lack passion, your message will fall flat and not resonate with your audience.

You will find your niche where your expertise, interests, and commitment align.

How to become a thought leader in 8 steps

Transforming yourself into a thought leader requires hard work, dedication, and creativity. It doesn't happen overnight. For most people, it takes decades to build a reputation and earn credibility. Identifying your niche is just a small step forward in the lifelong journey of thought leadership.

Below are eight ways to become a thought leader in your niche.

1. Start blogging

Create your own blog or become a guest blogger for reputable sites. You can do either or you can do both. What's important is that you develop a unique voice that showcases your brand and expertise.

Writing your own articles and publishing them on the web is a good starting point to establish your position as a thought leader. Your articles should not only display command over the topic you are writing about, they should approach the subject matter from a unique angle and provide information that is not offered elsewhere on the web.

Build your credibility in your niche by creating an archive of relevant posts. Regularly update your blog, syndicate content, promote your content through social media channels and build a following. Most importantly, focus on content that is useful to your target audience and avoid content that is overtly self-promotional.

2. Get published

Another way to fortify your position as a thought leader is to publish on topics related to your niche. Published content affords long-term exposure, builds trust and drives traffic to your site.

Write expert content in various forms. You can publish books, release eBooks, create guides and fact sheets, or contribute articles to well-known publications. Provide content that is of great value to your audience. Share new ideas, give practical advice, simplify complex ideas; create something that educates and inspires other people.

Publish as often as you can. The more content you publish, the more your audience will grow and the more people you can reach. Aim to publish in high-circulation publications and sites with a high domain authority.

Every time you publish an article, promote it on social media to amplify your exposure. You can also post on Quora, LinkedIn and Medium to expand your reach.

3. Reach out to influencers

Influencers already have an established connection with their audience. They often have hordes of followers that respect them and heed their advice before making decisions. These influencers present new channels to position yourself and gain exposure.

Locate influencers in your niche to learn from them and build relationships. Follow them on social media and comment on their posts and tweets. As you do so, provide new perspectives and meaningful insights, not just bland comments. This engagement allows you to build a relationship with the influencer and their followers. This is known as influencer marketing.

Another way to initiate a relationship with an influencer is to offer your assistance rather than ask for help. Offering to help them with a campaign or contribute to an article can go a long way toward establishing a connection.

4. Garner awards and accolades

A solid educational and professional background is a good foundation for building authority in your niche. Credentials, awards, accolades, and honors can help build credibility. The goal is to build a platform that will help you sell your expertise, hone your message, and open doors to opportunities.

The more impressive your platform, the easier it will be to break into leading media outlets, secure coveted speaking engagements and draw a following. Create an honors and awards page on your website to highlight your accolades, and link to it from your bio and home page.

5. Leverage content marketing

Integrate thought leadership into a content marketing strategy to expand your reach. Content marketing is an effective tool to inform, educate, and increase your organic reach. Content marketing can be accomplished in a variety of formats. You can write blog posts, contribute to publications, create infographics, author original research papers, conduct webinars, or upload inspirational or instructional videos.

To create an effective content marketing strategy, always start with a blueprint. Create a strategy to align brand positioning, target market, and your objectives. Then, formulate a detailed plan for your campaign flow and organize it in an editorial calendar. This strategy can help you keep track of your content and maintain focus on your goal.

Bear in mind that your purpose is not to market a service or product or to create content largely for SEO purposes. Ultimately, your goal is to present yourself or your brand as the leading authoritative voice in your niche. Optimize your articles with keyword phrases that your target market is searching to help drive traffic to your site.

6. Engage on social media

Anyone and everyone is on social media. Social media can help you amplify your thought leadership efforts and grow your following. Build a following through social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. These platforms connect you with more people and allow you to engage with them easily.

Share worthwhile articles and post relevant and insightful commentaries. You can also broadcast live videos to reach your audience instantaneously. To fully take advantage of social media, create continuous high-engagement posts that build followers and broaden your reach.

7. Network within your industry

Boost your industry presence and build your brand by attending networking events, conferences, industry events, seminars and other in-person events. Get to know other leaders in your field, network and learn from experts and find mentors who can help you grow your expertise.

Use HARO (Help a Reporter Out) to respond to media inquiries in your area of expertise and build relationships with journalists who cover your industry. Already use HARO? Let other users know the benefits of the platform.

8. Secure speaking engagements

One of the best ways to gain exposure is to speak at events and conferences in your industry. Being invited as a notable speaker also reinforces your position as an expert in your niche.

When you're just beginning to make a name for yourself, you can start by delivering topical speeches, inaugural addresses, or thematic briefings in schools or forums. These allow you to present your ideas in a professional setting.

Regardless of the crowd and the event, always strive to deliver value. Make sure that your presentation has substance and will enrich the audience with new insights.

Maximize the work and research you put into your speech by recycling it into other content such as a blog post, e-book or infographic.

The journey toward thought leadership

Establishing yourself as a thought leader is not a walk in the park. It involves hard work, patience, and perseverance as well as innovation and a little luck. You can't merely declare yourself an expert and expect people to follow you.

Thought leadership is an ongoing process. Once you've established yourself as an expert of the experts, stay on top by continually improving yourself and your brand.

Source: Sally Kane, Learning Hub