

Thought Leadership: Key to Building a Magnetic Professional Brand

A lot of people think THOUGHT LEADERSHIP has to be about big ideas that change the world.

It doesn't!

Realistically, not many of us are going to be a Ken Blanchard, Tom Peters or Seth Godin. And the good news is, we don't have to be. What we do need is...

1. **Great content: Information that prospects & clients will find useful;**
2. **A givers gain attitude: A willingness to give good stuff away; and**
3. **A way of delivering it and letting people know what we know.**

Here's a definition of a THOUGHT LEADER that I really like:

Someone who profits significantly from being recognized as an expert in their chosen field.

By the way, the word 'recognized' is really important here. It's one thing to have the knowledge. It's quite another to be recognized for it.

That's what a THOUGHT LEADERSHIP strategy is designed to do – get you recognized for what you know and thought of as the person to go to for help and advice. In other words, a person with a MAGNETIC PROFESSIONAL BRAND.

There are three major parts in a THOUGHT LEADERSHIP strategy.

Part 1: Demonstrating you get it

When you get it, you understand what matters to your clients and prospects. You understand their most pressing problems. You're clear on the value you bring to your clients. And you have an answer to a prospect's basic question, "Why should I do what you're asking me to do... what's in it for me?"

Your Value Proposition

Being clear on your value means having a VALUE PROPOSITION that resonates with members of your target audience.

A very simple and effective format for developing a useful VALUE PROPOSITION revolves around 4 basic questions...

1. **Who are you addressing? Be specific.**
2. **What problem are you able to solve?**
3. **How will you solve it?**
4. **If you weren't around, what would your clients have hardest time replacing?**

There's a fifth question – it's the icing on the cake – and we'll deal with that shortly.

Once you've come up with good answers to these questions you can plug them into this template...

We promise target audience (1) who are after problem you can solve (2) that they will receive what you will do to solve the identified problem (3) and benefit they'd have the hardest time replacing (4).

I like this 'promise' format because it brings home how very personal the whole thing is. When I make a promise I do everything I can to keep it. I'm sure you're the same way.

Here's what a VALUE PROPOSITION looked like for a small consultancy that helps lawyers develop new business:

We promise lawyers, either sole practitioners or those working in a small or mid-sized law firm, who are after a systematic way of creating and filling their new business pipeline, that they will receive a proven, well-priced method for identifying qualified prospects and requiring no more than an hour of their time each week.

Part 2: Proving you can do it

The value you're claiming has to grab your prospects' attention. And the best way to do that is to answer a fifth question...

5. What evidence is there that what you do works?

Here's the proof offered by this small consultancy...

Recently, one of our clients was able to double the number of qualified monthly referrals, and open files worth more than \$350,000 in the first year of using our system.

The Linkage

When you've got a VALUE PROPOSITION that demonstrates your understanding of a client's problem (creating a continuous flow of new business opportunities), deals with a major concern (the time required to do it), and offers proof that what you're offering actually works (twice the referrals and \$350,000), you've got the basis for a first rate THOUGHT LEADERSHIP strategy which feeds directly into ideas for content:

- ▶ problems lawyers face in building a pipeline,
- ▶ barriers like time, cost, complexity and so forth that prevent a lot of lawyers from having a system that works, and
- ▶ examples of how different clients have benefited from implementing the system.

Part 3: Packaging up your thoughts and spreading the word

Every professional who successfully sells time and expertise knows a lot about their chosen field.

The content part of your strategy is all about packaging that up and getting it out to clients and prospects.

You've got a number of options. For example...

- ▶ Speaking
- ▶ Blogging
- ▶ Publishing a regular newsletter

- ▶ Contributing to relevant publications
- ▶ Writing a regular column
- ▶ Holding informative webinars, seminars or workshops
- ▶ Publishing a book

The key is to have a plan and work it... and most importantly, to do whatever you do consistently.

One caution... before embarking on a THOUGHT LEADERSHIP program it pays to have a list of 15 or 20 topics that will support your VALUE PROPOSITION and get prospects thinking about why they should want to talk to you. And at least 6 blog posts or articles 'in the can.' The THOUGHT LEADERSHIP graveyard is filled with professionals who start a blog with the best of intentions only to stop publishing when they get too busy with paying clients.

The 7 Essentials of an Effective Thought Leadership Strategy

1. Know what's important to your audience
2. Have a giver's gain attitude
3. Understand your real value (i.e your Value Proposition)
4. Have proof that what you do works (the icing on your cake)
5. Never lose sight of "Why should I do what you want me to do... what's in it for me?"
6. Plan to get your message out through speaking, articles, blogging, and so forth
7. Whatever you do, do it consistently!

So to summarize, THOUGHT LEADERSHIP is much more than a simple mind dump. The real value lies in focusing on things that are of true importance to your target audience. And giving away information that has real value.

Best of luck on your journey to THOUGHT LEADERSHIP!