



UNLOCKING INDUSTRY INFLUENCE

6 Secrets to Writing
Great Thought Leadership Content

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More B2B executives are looking to thought leadership content to build credibility, demonstrate expertise, and provide value to their industry. Thought leadership is a highly effective form of marketing because, when done right, it addresses challenges, educates readers, and inspires new ways of thinking.

A recent thought leadership report by LinkedIn-Edelman found that **61%** of B2B decision makers say **thought leadership content** is more persuasive and effective at demonstrating value than product marketing.

*2022 LinkedIn-Edelman B2B Thought Leadership Impact Report



Written thought leadership can come in many forms, from books and articles to blog posts and LinkedIn content. Regardless of the format, there are several best practices and tips that can help create excellent thought leadership. Thought leaders can make the most of their work by being clear and direct, finding the right story, and backing up their ideas with reliable sources.

As a ghostwriter for management consulting agencies and executives in the fintech, supply chain, and retail tech industries, I've worked on hundreds of thought leadership articles. My job isn't to merely summarize and write my client's ideas. It is to help them bring those ideas to market in the most compelling manner with the right angle and the best story to engage their target audience.

Here are my six secrets to producing top-tier thought leadership.

Secret 1: Fewer Word Counts, More Frequency

When it comes to producing content, some people have a natural inclination to think that bigger is better.

This can be particularly true with technical types who may be tempted to write about every little detail of a technology or application. Executives occasionally approach me with grand plans of lengthy thought leadership articles.

However, big word counts for the sake of more content rarely help them achieve their goals. Lengthy content assets take time, effort, and money to produce. While that's fine for reports and white papers, thought leadership content is more effective when it is delivered incrementally in shorter, more digestible pieces.

In one case, a fintech company approached me with the intent of producing a 3,000-word thought leadership article. After our initial discussion, I presented a more effective option and course of action, proposing a 2,000-word ebook and a four-part, 750-word thought leadership article series. Two months later, they published the ebook then released a thought leadership article every two weeks over the next two months. The client also spun off a few LinkedIn posts from each article, creating a content tree that all led back to the ebook.

While this entailed writing slightly more content, it gained far more traction than the initial article idea. It reached a bigger audience with five deliverables and a trail of LinkedIn breadcrumbs that generated buzz throughout the entire quarter.

Secret 2: It's All About the Angle and Story

Thought leadership more than just bringing new industry ideas to market. You must find the right angle, tell the best story, and then deliver it with the most effective presentation and packaging.

While most executives and SMEs come to the table with great ideas, they don't always connect those ideas to readers through a compelling story and narrative.

I typically start client engagements with a 30-minute discovery call to feel out their idea and discuss the concept. After that, I go back to my drawing board with notes and insight to draft a formal outline for the content.

However, there are times during that process when I discover a client's ideas can be improved. Sometimes, the client proposes a topic or concept that is too broad or has already been covered by all of the company's competitors. In other cases, they may have a strong idea, but the angle or story just isn't right.

I've helped many clients refine and strengthen their ideas to deliver more value for their readers and enhance their brand perception in the process. In most situations, improving the angle and story requires getting clearer on the audience and key points. It rarely involves a major change to the original idea, just new ways of positioning and thinking about it.

Secret 3: Sourcing Enhances Credibility

Opinions are a part of thought leadership.

However, to carry weight and credibility, those opinions must be backed up with reliable, trustworthy evidence. Surveys, reports, data, and articles from industry organizations or management consulting agencies are often a good place to start.

While the supporting evidence is usually there, I have encountered instances where there simply aren't sufficient sources to back an executive's idea. In one case, I worked with a retail tech client who wanted to build a story on what many at the time perceived to be a retail trend. However, in the course of creating the outline, I could not find any hard data or industry sources to confirm this was, in fact, a trend. It's not that he was wrong in his assessment—there was plenty of anecdotal evidence. It was that the lack of sourcing made the idea seem weak.

I brought this to the client's attention. While talking through the idea, we re-worked the story concept into something that was far more powerful **and** had compelling evidence to support it.

The client's byline eventually ran in a prominent industry trade publication and shined a new spotlight on the company. However, the real story was that looking for sources to back it up identified the holes and a critical weakness in the initial idea.

Secret 4: Nobody is Impressed with Excess Jargon

Executives and subject matter experts with technical backgrounds often like to use complex jargon. While it just comes naturally for some people, others believe complex industry speak demonstrates expertise.

It's certainly important to use proper industry terminology. However, too much jargon can confuse readers and bury the main focus in complexity. I frequently encounter this problem, especially with technical subject matter experts (SMEs) who may have industry knowledge but don't understand the nuances of content marketing.

Thought leadership content is more effective when it's written in clear and direct language. Don't get lost in the details and feel the need to explain everything. During the review process, be sure to check for readability and avoid run-on sentences. Using more active tense can also simplify the content. Using simple and direct language is usually more effective in thought leadership, even when speaking with a highly educated industry audience. Reserve your complexity and details for a white paper.

Secret 5: It Doesn't Need to Be Perfect

Good thought leadership takes time to develop. In most cases, it's usually a couple of weeks and a couple of rounds of back and forth to get it right. However, it shouldn't take three months to complete an 800-word thought leadership article.

Believe it or not, on more than a few occasions, I have seen executives let perfection be the enemy of good. While it's essential to get the story right, analysis paralysis and lengthy delays can kill momentum and put great, "nearly-finished" content on the back burner for months. By the time they get back to the content, they've lost focus and have to invest more time to regain the mindset and clarity for the topic.

To this day, I have at least a dozen thought leadership articles that clients have paid for yet never seen the light of day. It wasn't that they weren't happy with my work. It's that they took it within inches of the finish line then sat on it for months. It eventually went stagnate because someone couldn't find the time to review or SMEs couldn't find consensus on a single paragraph.

The thing about creative work is that if you judge it with the lens of perfection, it will *never* be complete. Every time you read it, you will potentially spot something else that can be improved upon. Make two or three reviews with the best insight, check for accuracy, and then get it out there.

Secret 6: Identify and Involve the Decision-Makers at the Start

High-level thought executive leadership is often a collaborative process that involves many people. Even for a short executive byline, it's not uncommon to also have the marketing director and an SME or two involved in reviewing and approving the content.

However, it is critical that all relevant stakeholders and decision-makers be involved at the start. Nothing derails a thought leadership article quicker than when an SME or executive isn't available or isn't brought in until the final review.

By involving all stakeholders at the start, you can ensure all of their input, ideas, and issues are incorporated into the outline and development process. This saves time for everyone involved by reducing go-between and ensures a final deliverable that aligns with all stakeholders' interests.

How a Thought Leadership Ghostwriter Can Help

A ghostwriter with industry expertise can bring an outside perspective to your thought leadership development. I have helped dozens of executives and subject matter experts at fintech, supply chain, and retail tech companies and management consulting agencies turn ideas into polished thought leadership content for some of the world's top publications. I work with executives and marketing directors to:

- Create a thought leadership strategy and roadmap
- Brainstorm and refine your ideas
- Develop a comprehensive outline
- Reduce burden and time commitment
- Collaborate with executives and SMEs
- Write top-tier thought leadership content
- Work through multiple versions to get consensus
- Identify thought leadership markets and opportunities

Ready to Collaborate?

I'm a high-performing ghostwriter who specializes in the financial services, supply chain, and retail technology industries. I help busy executives, marketing directors, and thought leaders share ideas, build their brands, and elevate their voice in the industry. Contact me at craigguillot@gmail.com to discuss how I can help. Read more about my work at www.craigdguillot.com