

## 4 Essential Pillars of Successful Professional Services Content Marketing

In professional services firms, being able to demonstrate your firm's knowledge and value to the market is key.

Thought leadership sits at the heart of all successful professional services marketing. Nearly every growth initiative, business development target, or marketing activity centres around how well a firm can demonstrate its capability to clients and prospects.

Most firms have little to no formal structure around how they create, manage, distribute, and feedback on thought leadership. In the last few years, firms have developed more sophisticated digital teams, client relationship platforms, and business services functions, yet thought leadership programs have not evolved to keep pace.

As a result, most thought leadership programs fail to show the true value their firm can deliver. In most firms, there is a gap between how much value the firm can bring to clients and the way the market perceives that firm.

This ["eminence gap"](#) leads to key clients, prospects, and talent choosing competitors over firms who may be better suited – but don't communicate it.

### **The four pillars of successful thought leadership**

The actual core factors of successful thought leadership are quite simple. With the right focus and structure, thought leadership can be easy, enjoyable, and a huge advantage for the firm.

Successful thought leadership programs depend on four pillars:

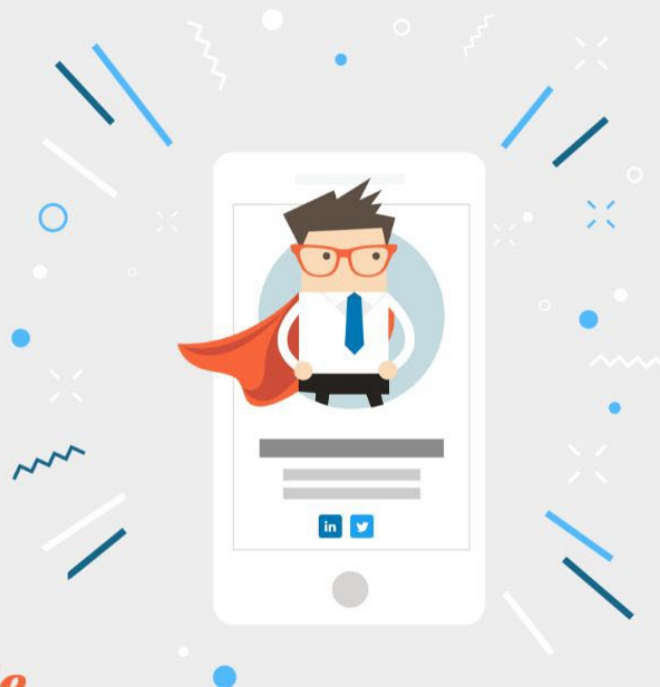
- Author-Centric Publication
- Clear Governance
- Create Once, Publish Everywhere Distribution
- Relevant Feedback

This post looks at these pillars, showing why they are so important to get right and the risks associated with getting them wrong.

## 1. Author-Centric Publication

Don't approach thought leadership as a website build.

Focus on making the creation of content easy and meaningful for busy thought leaders.



### 1. It must have Author-Centric Publication

A content marketing program needs to empower and motivate professionals while providing an efficient, straightforward way to demonstrate value and knowledge to the market.

Firms that struggle with thought leadership programs treat them like website builds, assembling agencies and in-house teams to build designs and web pages.

These firms demand content to put on these web pages but don't spend enough time and energy giving thought leaders an easy way to create that content. They treat all authors the same, rarely offering access to create different content types like videos or podcasts.

Taking a tech-first approach and failing to adopt an author-centric approach to thought leadership creation leads to brilliant websites and industry pages without the content to power them.

Failing to empower authors and give them ownership of their content leads to marketers spending their time chasing and cajoling content, causing friction with authors, and taking up marketing time that could be better spent strategically helping the firm to succeed.

Thought leadership programs are firstly about making it easy for busy thought leaders to publish content.

Don't approach thought leadership as a website build. Focus on making content publishing easy and meaningful for busy thought leaders.

### **Author Centric Programs:**

- Empower
- Give ownership
- Create efficiencies
- Remove obstructions

## 2. Clear Governance

Content must get from submission to publication in hours, not days.

Keep a steady flow of content first to market by providing a safe, reliable and quick way to turn content around.



### 2. It must have Clear Governance

Keeping a steady flow of content and being first to market requires a safe, reliable, transparent way of turning content around quickly.

Done well, a good governance system empowers the author by supplying both a safety net and reassurance that their content is valuable. It should also have an audit trail so that lessons can be learned to prevent making the same mistake twice. Finally, it should be fast, so the content is timely and relevant to its audience.

If you do not have clear, well-understood processes for approving content and rely on ad hoc ways of confirming content for publication your content will not be first to market and has a reduced impact. The content is often lost, there can be versioning issues and in the worst case, harmful content can get published without proper approval.

Content must be able to go from submission to publication, in hours, not days, and the steps taken, along with all changes should be transparent.

**Good Governance is:**

- Safe
- Secure
- Insured with workflows
- Reliable
- Well understood
- Uncomplicated

## 3. Create Once - Publish Everywhere Distribution

Make sure that your content reaches the people that matter.

Build automated integrations, putting content directly into the channels that your audience use the most.



### 3. It must have Create Once, Publish Everywhere Distribution

It is the role of the thought leadership program to ensure that the content published is distributed to, and reaches, the right audience of clients and prospects.

Done well, a firm's content will reach its target audience at a time and in a place that is convenient to the reader, listener, or viewer. This requires the content to be available on every channel and on every device that is relevant. The reward for achieving this is that every

possible dollar of return is gained from your content investment. The costs of creating content can be considerable so maximizing reach is essential.

This can come in the form of providing an automatic and granular email system, putting high-quality and relevant content directly into the inboxes of key clients and prospects.

The most successful programs integrate their content directly with industry publications, so as soon as content is approved and live it is fed into platforms such as Lexology, JD Supra and Mondaq.

Given the investment of time and effort to create a content piece, a thought leadership program needs to make sure that content reaches as many relevant clients and prospects as possible.

If you rely solely on website content being “bumped into” by clients and prospects or the ad hoc sharing by employees to their network, it is extremely unlikely that all the people you wish to influence are aware of your content.

Simply put, content without reach wastes both time and money.

***Good Distribution is:***

- Guaranteed
- Automated
- Multi-channel
- Systematic
- Reader-focused
- Integrated

## 4. Relevant Feedback

It is unrealistic to expect busy authors to publish every few weeks if they only see some generic feedback once a year.

Thought leadership programs must demonstrate their relevant impact to all the stakeholders within the program and the wider firm.



### 4. It must have Relevant Feedback

Effective thought leadership programs demonstrate the impact of thought leadership in a relevant way to all the stakeholders within the program and the wider firm.

Feedback should not only demonstrate how well a campaign is going to the marketing team, but it should also motivate and inspire all of the stakeholders, in particular the authors.



For authors, the feedback is very personal, which individuals or companies read, liked or commented on their content really matters and is the reason an author will continue to write or create other content. Without individualized feedback, creating content is a thankless task that few will want to participate in.

The main way firms fail in their feedback is that it is not specific or frequent enough. In order to keep writing, authors need to regularly see the firms engaging with their content.

Feedback gives authors and the wider firm a reason to care about a thought leadership program. Without a way of showing the impact of thought leadership, authors and the wider firm will not know why they should bother.

However, done well, timely, detailed individualized feedback inspires content creation, driving the behavior change that is needed to create a consistent flow of relevant content over time.

### **Good Feedback is:**

- Meaningful
- Regular
- Concise
- Specific
- Layered

## **Thought Leadership is an opportunity for ambitious firms**

Success in thought leadership is simpler than many in professional services realise. Each of these four pillars is not ground-breaking or difficult.

In a matter of days, empowered authors see how easy it is to create, approve and distribute their insights and those very same authors can start to see feedback on who is reading their content.

Because firms haven't prioritised thought leadership or given their programs a proper structure, the bar for thought leadership is set low, providing an opportunity for those firms looking to become known in a particular industry.