

Thought Leadership

COMBLU

A ComBlu POV on Thought Leadership

Thought leadership differentiates companies in terms of their intellectual capital. Thought leadership programs work best when a company wants to reach influencers, impact legislation or standards, create a new industry category, change business thought or philosophy and assume a leadership role in a specific industry or on a specific topic.

Thought leadership is not a “once in a row” activity. Even if a company or a subject matter expert has an interesting point-of-view (POV) or a breakthrough idea, thought leadership may not be the appropriate path. A company must have the right culture, processes and ideas to sustain dialogue and thought. ComBlu has designed a process to help organizations audit their thought leadership capabilities and then develop a sustainable program that will reach the right audiences.

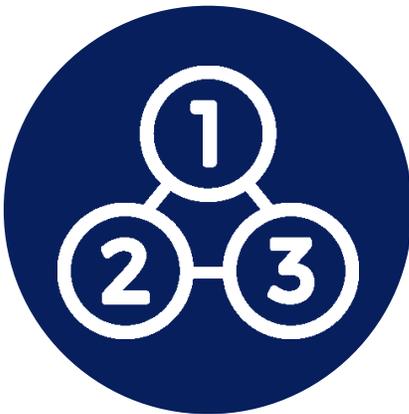
This interactive process addresses various issues and factors that can ultimately affect thought leadership positioning and credibility. Our goal is to identify a thought leadership POV that is credible, sustainable, provocative, expressive and relevant.

Process:

The process begins with a clear definition of the thought leadership objectives and ends with a framework to deliver thought leadership positioning that will stimulate discussion, differentiate the organization and generate action.

Following are the steps in this process:

- Clearly define the purpose of the thought leadership program. Thought leadership is an important force when the organization wants to:
 - Manage or influence an issue impacting the industry or other communities of interest
 - Reach influentials to forward a specific point-of-view or to coalesce them around a topic or issue
 - Create a new industry category
 - Change industry or market dynamics
 - Influence the creation or change of standards or credentialing criteria
 - Assume a role as an industry or subject matter leader
 - Impact legislation



Process



Convene a group of internal subject matter experts and facilitate a discussion around the thought leadership POV



Blogs as a tactic

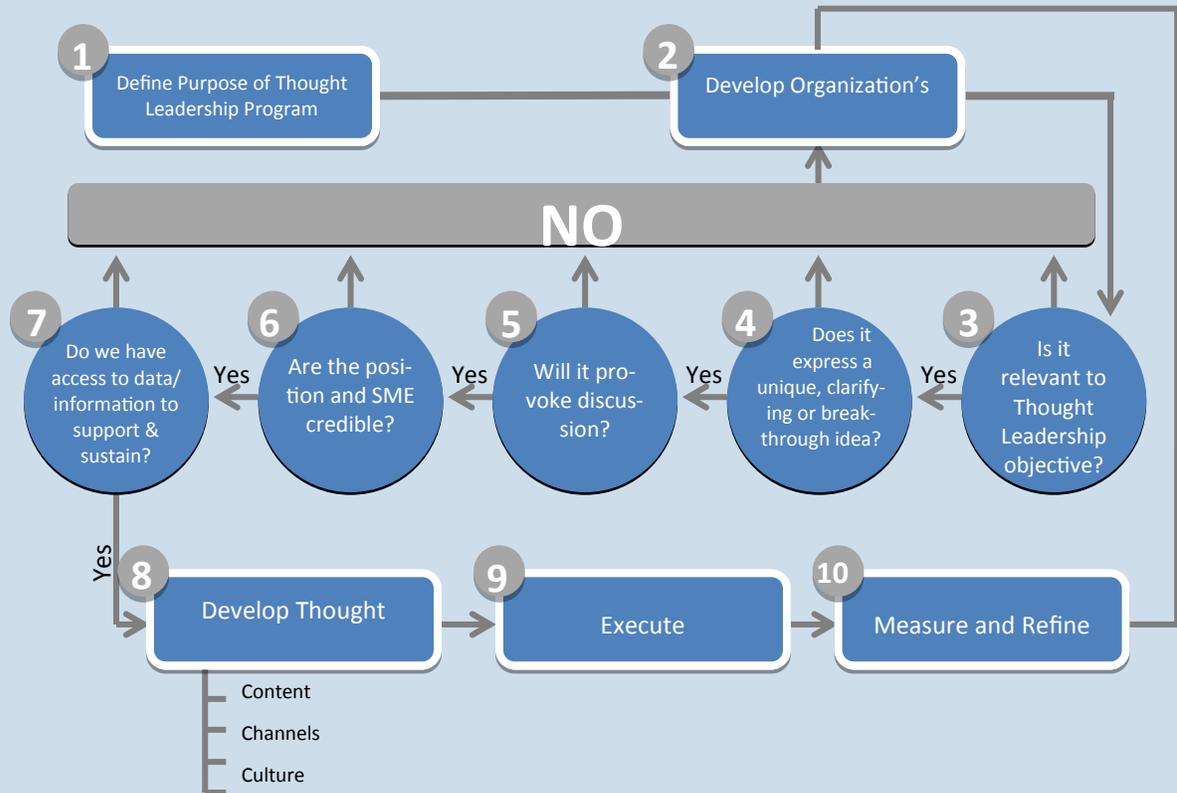
- Convene a group of internal subject matter experts and facilitate a discussion around the thought leadership POV
- Outline the initial concepts and vet them for:
 - Relevance to the objective
 - Ability to provoke discussion
 - Expression of unique, clarifying or breakthrough thoughts and ideas
 - Sustainability
 - Credibility
- If the concepts meet thought leadership criteria, begin creating a framework that:
 - Establishes a timeline for content creation
 - Identifies tactics and channels. It is important to note that many of these tactics are similar to those in other integrated marketing campaigns. The point that differentiates them as part of a thought leadership program is the quality, tone and subject matter of the content. These tactics and channels would include:
 - > Original research
 - > Surveys
 - > Speeches, roundtables, panels
 - > Authored articles, expert commentary, op-ed pieces, roundtables, etc.
 - > White papers, POVs
 - > Special events or sponsored symposia
 - > Trade shows or industry conferences
 - > Webinars
 - > Blogs, including editorial analysis of posted content
 - > Publications
 - > Road shows
 - > Board and/or committee chair of key organizations or associations
 - > Participation on standards boards or self-regulatory bodies



Recruit people with intellect and vision

- > Advisory councils
- > Creation of evangelist or influential communities or social networks
- Establishes cultural and organizational ability to sustain program. Thought leadership thrives in organizations that:
 - > Allow expression of new or innovative ideas
 - > Share knowledge deep into the organization and encourages people to contribute to the ideation process
 - > Facilitate the monitoring of trends and emergent thought and shares this information across the enterprise
 - > Invest in systems and processes that allow the organization to continuously gather and analyze pertinent information and data. This includes gathering information from both internal sources (e.g., the organization’s sales force, customer knowledge group, research organization) and external resources (e.g., industry or government databases, secondary research, etc.) Intellectual capital is derived from the analysis, combination and interpretation of data from multiple sources.
 - > Encourage and rewards appropriate risk-taking
 - > Recruit people with intellect and vision
 - > Maintains conviction behind original intent of thought leadership campaign through consistent and ongoing refinement of program
- Launch the program within the framework of an integrated thought leadership campaign that includes appropriate tactics delivered across multiple channels. The tactics and channels will depend upon objectives, audiences, content and delivery preferences.

Thought Leadership Process Map



Thought Leadership Expected Outcomes

A well-crafted thought leadership program can bring many benefits to an organization who wishes to be differentiated by its intellectual capital. Some of these include:

- Building customer loyalty
- Creating evangelists and champions
- Shortening the sales cycle
- Driving customer preference
- Retaining and recruiting top performers
- Changing the dynamics of the industry
- Generating goodwill among key stakeholders
- Influencing legislation, standards and compliance



About Comblu

ComBlu is a marketing consulting firm that specializes in content strategy, influencer marketing, thought leadership and integrated social media. We help organizations distinguish themselves through customized programs that combine high-level strategic thinking and creative hands-on execution.

Our industry specialization is largely on professional services, financial services, technology and healthcare. Our clients' businesses and challenges are complex; they value our consultants' depth of experience that helps us:

- Find the parallels in seemingly unrelated programs or industries and accelerate the learning curve in new environments
- Recognize where the parallels end and innovation needs to begin
- See what's trending and figure out what's germane to our clients that can freshen our approaches
- Get the results that matter to our clients

About the Author

Kathy Baughman is president and co-founder of ComBlu, a firm specializing in content strategy, influencer marketing and thought leadership programs. Kathy's forte is content strategy, social engagement and social business strategy.

Kathy is a frequent speaker at industry conferences, with appearances at SXSW, Social Media & Community 2.0 Strategies Conference, the Department of Defense Social Media Conference, and the Word of Mouth Marketing Association (WOMMA) Summit. Kathy is also a gifted panel moderator. She conducts webinars on a variety of topics and leads workshops for organizations seeking to better grasp content strategy. Kathy is a board member of WOMMA and serves on its executive Committee. She is an adjunct professor for Georgetown University, and a past board member of the Council of Public Relations Firms.

Kathy has authored four eBooks, "Content Supply Chain", "The Alchemy of Content" and "Taming the Content Vortex" and writes ComBlu's annual research report, The State of Online Branded Communities. She has also authored two reports for Lithium on community vibrancy and the state of social report.

Links:

[The CMO's Guide to Personalization](#) / [Forbes report: Publish or Perish](#) / [Ten Steps to Building a Brand Publishing Center of Excellence](#) / [Content Supply Chain](#) / [The Alchemy of Content](#) / [Taming the Content Vortex](#)



Kathy Baughman

Contact:

Kevin Lynch
klynch@comblu.com
312 343 1849

Kathy Baughman
kbaughman@comblu.com

 312 423 4916

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