

The
SOCIAL
BOOTSTRAP
guide to

DIY
Thought
Leadership

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Imagine getting a call, out of nowhere.

You're being asked by a major newspaper to give your opinion on a breaking news story.

Or a book is being published, and they need you to write a quote for the back cover.

Or they'd like to interview you for a documentary.

Or someone wants to know if you could do some work for them— they'll pay whatever it takes, because they really want you.

Imagine having a great idea, writing it down, and suddenly a few hundred people are talking about it, writing about it, arguing about it... paying you to find out more.

Imagine mentioning a product, a website, a book, or a company, and within minutes a thousand people have bought, visited, read, and hired.

Imagine a hundred, a thousand, a million people each day seeing your name, or thinking about one of your products, or wishing they could afford to hire you, or hoping to meet you at a conference.

That's being a Thought Leader.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION TO THOUGHT LEADERSHIP	4
1 – What Is Thought Leadership?	5
2 – Essential Elements of Thought Leadership	11
3 – Unique Point of View	17
ROBUST ONLINE PRESENCE	20
4 – Content Rich Website	21
5 – Words, words, words	31
6 – Social Media Presence	37
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	45
7 – Online Participation	46
8 – Real World Networking	50
9 – Public Speaking	62
LONG FORM CONTENT	70
10 – E-books and White Papers	71
11 – Print Books and Self Publishing	80
BRINGING IT TOGETHER	86
12 – Visual Branding	87
13 – Great Ideas for Thought Leadership	94
14 – Thought Leadership Strategy	98
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	105
ABOUT	109

ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Thought Leader

You may have heard the phrase before. It's something of a buzzword, sure. But is it a buzzword that means something? Or is it just this generation's "synergy"?

Well, I certainly can't predict whether or not we'll all be tired of hearing it in a few years, or whether constant and inappropriate use by the media will drain it of all its meaning— but I do know that it means something very powerful and very important right now in business, sales, marketing, and PR.

A Thought Leader is a person who... get this... leads the thoughts of other people. With their words and their actions and their words and their ideas and their words and products and words...

Thought Leaders use words— blogs, articles, books, presentations, e-books, informational products, tweets— to spread their ideas, to expand their influence, to create relationships, to sell their services.

The words "Thought Leader" are new(ish), but we have always had people who influenced how the rest of the community thought about certain topics. Through a combination of hard work, talent, and luck, these people created a reputation for being the "go-to" guy or gal on some specific topic.

Think of Lao-Tzu (right living), the apostle Paul (Christianity), Aristotle (philosophy), or Pythagorus (math). Think of Michelangelo (art), J. S. Bach (music), or Thomas Paine (politics). Think of Einstein (physics), Stanislavski (acting), E. B. White (English grammar). Think of Dr. Phil (relationships), Dr. Ruth (sex), Dr. Spock (raising children), and Dr. Teeth (rock and roll). Don't forget Suze Orman (personal finance), Robert Kiyosaki (real estate investing), and Wayne Dyer (personal improvement).

In each of these cases, the expert isn't just revered as being the best in field (sometimes they weren't) but was the sought-after expert, the standard-bearer for telling the rest of the world what to think about the topic.

They have been called experts, mavens, gurus, and teachers. We may call them something else in the future. Today, we call them Thought Leaders.

And while the idea is old, it is not just the name that has changed in recent years.

Thought Leadership Today

In the ancient world we can point to a handful of people who shaped the way civilization developed, whose ideas were considered worth hearing. As literacy expanded, as knowledge deepened and accumulated, as subject matter became more specialized, as new fields were created, as communication technology advanced, there were more and more opportunities for Thought Leadership.

There was no Roman History expert before the Roman Empire. Nobody was the world's best piano teacher before the piano was invented. And before mass communication, it was hard to be the world-renown expert on anything.

Today, of course, we have Roman history and pianos. We have more stuff, more subjects, more specialization than at any time previous, and we just keep getting more and more. Each niche, each small subject within a subject, can have its own expert, or group of experts, whom the world looks to when they have a question about stock derivatives or luxury wedding invitations or stop-motion animation or carbon nanotubes or...

There are more "spaces to fill" on the Thought Leader roster than ever before. And because of the unprecedented ease of acquiring and distributing information and ideas, it is more possible than ever for someone (you?) to find a niche and lead it.

Not only that, but if you can't find a niche, it is easier than ever to start one. Drilling further into an established field, finding specialties within specialties, synthesizing a new field at the intersection of several areas, or creating a whole new land of ideas with a radical new technology. The possibilities today are endless. And increasing.

Thought Leadership as a Field of Study

Let's not forget that Thought Leadership itself has also become its own subject of study. While this has created some weird self-reference (marketing about marketing), it also means that the tools of Thought Leadership have been, and are being, studied, tested, written about, and made available to the world.

Expertise has never been enough to propel someone into a role as a Thought Leadership. A host of natural talents and developed skill (along with luck) have always been required. Getting your ideas in front of other people, persuading them to see your way, connecting with others in power, inspiring people to engage with your work, creating a community of fans... not everybody who would qualify as an expert has the skills needed to do all those things, or would even think to do them.

Today, though, you can leverage the work and expertise of other people. Don't know how to get your ideas into the public? You can learn how to do it yourself or hire someone else to do it for you. Don't know how to create community? All the information you could ever need to know how is available— some for free online, some of it for the high price of a discounted paperback or library late fees. And if that's too much trouble, there is probably a consulting firm somewhere that does nothing but help people in your ridiculously specific industry build communities.

What this book is all about...

While consulting firms have their place (I run one), and I would never knock the idea of purchasing products and programs that can help (I sell them), I believe very strongly in Bootstrapping and in DIY (do-it-yourself). Both time and money are valuable resources, and you may find that you have more of one than the other at any moment. That's why sometimes it makes sense to dig in and learn how write HTML and other times it makes sense pay a developer.

You can't make an educated decision about DIY vs. outsourcing if you don't have any idea what it would take to do things yourself. And even when you do decide to go with (or graduate to) an outsourced model, the more you know about how things work (or could work), the better able you are at hiring and working with people like me and firms like Social Bootstrap.

This book was written to help you educate yourself about the tools and techniques of Thought Leadership. It was written so that you could create a robust online and offline presence, spread your ideas, position yourself as an expert, and make more money— all without the need to hire us or anyone else. It was also written so that you could decide what you could and couldn't do yourself, what you wanted and didn't want to pay for.

This book is designed to give you some Bootstraps to pull yourself up with.

Excuses Not to Use this Book

But I don't have the time...

When I talk about all the cool things that people can do today, from Social Media to book-publishing, the thing I hear most often is, “But I don't have the time...”

That's fine.

If you are so busy with client work and filling sales orders that you don't have time for marketing activities, then it sounds like you probably don't need to change anything (assuming you're making the kind of money you want to be making). If, on the other hand, you're spending any time (or money) on new client acquisition, marketing, or the sales process, then that is time (or money) that you could be spending to increase the profitability of those activities and reduce the need to spend time (or money) on those activities in the future.

But I don't want to be world-famous...

That's fine, too. When Social Bootstrap works with clients, our goal isn't to make you the world renowned expert. Our Financial Services clients are not trying to be Suze Orman, our psychologist clients are not trying to be Dr. Phil.

The work of our firm, and the plan laid out in this book, is designed to help you create local Thought Leadership. It is up to your imagination and determination to decide what "local" means: your neighborhood, your town, your metropolis, your state...

I know people who think that the next town over is another world, and other people who think that local means anywhere they can WI-FI.

But I just want to be a...

You don't have to be a Thought Leader. You can be a great lawyer or a great plumber or a great large-animal vet. There is certainly a huge need for low-profile, high-skill workers in every field of human endeavor. Don't believe the books and blogs and high-priced consultants (even me) if they tell you that you have to be a Thought Leader to get anything done. You can do your work and make a living just fine.

This book is for those people who want to be more—
maybe a little more, maybe a lot... but more, just the same.

This book is for people who want new clients to call them out of nowhere.

This book is for people who want to work on cool new projects and get paid well for them.

This book is for people who want to be recognized for their passion, their expertise, and their innovation.

But...

is it for you?

If you start paying attention to all the blogs, the tweets, the updates, the articles, the e-books, the workshops, the seminars, the newsletters, the videos, the podcasts, the lifestreams, and every other form of new media madness, you'll be told (and start to believe) that in order to become a Thought Leader you have to blog and tweet and update and write articles and e-books and run workshops and tele-seminars and send out newsletters and record videos and podcasts and lifestreams and generally go completely mad with new media.

Well... Maybe.

The thing is, you do have to do all that if you want to become a Thought Leader... in the field of New Media, Social Media, and Thought Leadership. If you want bloggers to see you as the world's greatest blogger, there is a never ending arms race to have the coolest new technology, the greatest new socially-integrated, semantic high-definition 3G cheese slicer.

But you just want to be a Thought Leader for estate planning or payroll processing. You just want more people to donate to your community theatre. You just want to sell more red flip-flops.

For you, most of those things are not essentials, just possibilities. Good ideas, maybe. Additional tools.

In this chapter, we're going to go over the essentials— what the things are you (almost) have to be doing. The balance of the book will be an in-depth look at how to do each of those things, with a chapter at the end about some of the more useful good ideas that you might add in once you're up and running.

Innovation

The bedrock of Thought Leadership is innovation. That doesn't have to mean crazy-new technology. It might mean that, but it also might mean a new way of doing an old thing, or a new way of thinking about things, or even just a unique point of view.

If you're not different— unique, interesting, innovative, creative— in some way, then it's remarkably unlikely that anyone will ever care about your Social Media strategy. They won't remember you after networking events. They won't bother to come to your seminars or read your books. Why would they?

Without innovation, everything else stops being “Thought Leadership Activity” and becomes “Newfangled Advertising and Time-Waste.”

Content-Rich Website

Until the world changes again (it will, but it hasn't yet), a website that is full of interesting and useful content is the cornerstone of Thought Leadership. When someone hears your name, meets you, or gets one of your newsletters, the first thing they'll do (if they care) is Google you.

As great as a LinkedIn profile is, what they really want to find is your website. And when they get to it, they will make all sorts of judgements about you. Based on the way your site looks, the way it navigates, and the depth of its resources, people will decide how good you are, how interesting, and how valuable.

They will know (or think they know) if you are a start-up or an established business.

They will know (or think they know) how much you know about your industry.

How big your firm is.

How profitable you are.

Whether you're a legitimate business or some goofy scam.
What kind of culture your company has.
What kind of clients you service.
Whether you are honest or not.
Whether you are cool or not.

If people will decide all of those things after seeing your website (or lack of one), shouldn't you have a good one?

Blog

A blog is something like an online journal and something like a personal op-ed column. They can be part of your overall firm website, or they can be separately hosted and separately branded. It's a place where you can, on a regular basis, write about your thoughts and opinions relating to your field or industry. You can comment on current events and trends, you can announce company news or promotions, and you can advance your philosophies.

Blogs are essential for at least three reasons. The first is that they provide a regular way for people to connect with you and your ideas. The second is that the constant addition of content provided by blog writing is highly valued by Google. The third is simply that it is expected.

Robust Social Media Presence

No, you don't have to live tweet while you stand in line at the grocery store. Nor do you need to post on everybody's wall or follow everyone's feeds. But you do need a presence. If someone wants to link to you, they should be able to find you. If they want to follow you, they should have the option.

You can't do everything, and it is very easy to lose yourself to the time-sink of Social Media (especially if you

can convince yourself that it is “business”). But people expect to be able to find you on at least the most popular networks. If they can’t, they’ll just move on to the next hopeful.

E-Books and White Papers

You’re reading an e-book right now, so it shouldn’t be too hard to understand how they work. These are PDF files (usually), which address particular issues within your field in a more in depth way than a blog post or online article could. Typically, white papers are shorter (5-15 pages) than e-books (25-100) and more technical as well.

White papers and e-books give visitors to your site an opportunity to see the depth of your knowledge on particular topics, while getting some information they can actually use. Even better, if your e-books or white papers are useful and valuable, your readers will forward copies to their friends and colleagues, advertising on your behalf. (Please?!)

Print Books

Nothing says “expert” more than having published a book.

It is now possible to write, edit, design, publish, distribute, and profit from the sale of books, without a publishing company or an agent. Will you be a New York Times Best-seller? Probably not (although, probably not anyway), but that isn’t the goal, really. The goal is to position yourself as an expert, as a Thought Leader, and bring additional sales to your primary business. It may turn out that you make additional money from the sale of the print book. That’s just a (welcome) bonus.

Real World Networking

So much of Thought Leadership is tied to relationships. You're trying to create a network (or a community, or a tribe) of people who think of you when they hear a reference to your industry. People who provide you with new business, but more than that— people who provide you with new ideas, information, resources, friendship, and joy. (It isn't all about money, you know.)

While it's possible to develop connections like that solely online and through media, it is so much easier if you just spend time with people. So go. Go to networking events, to conferences, to seminars, to workshops. If there are more than five people in a room, and one of them might be a potential client, you should be there.

Public Speaking

After print books, the most powerful Thought Leadership tool is Public Speaking. That could mean running your own seminars and workshops, or it could mean speaking and giving presentations at other events. When you stand in front of a group of people, and all the attention is focused on you, people assume you must know what you're talking about. If it turns out that you do know what you're talking about, and that you're able to provide valuable, useful information, your audience will remember. They will tell their friends, they will seek you out for more information, they will buy from you.

Visual Branding

A fresh, impactful logo.

A consistent color scheme and style.

Attractive fonts, perfect kerning, and a vivid margin.

To become a Thought Leader, you need people to engage with you and with your ideas. Your ideas will mostly be words, so you need people to take the time to read your words. Before anyone bothers to read, they will see the logo, or the cover design, or the splash page. They need to be compelled to read what you have to say. And once you have them reading, your branded design needs to make it easy for them to keep reading or to engage further with your material.

Sloppy branding turns people away.

Inconsistent branding confuses people,
which eventually turns them away.

Branding that doesn't quite match your culture, your personality, or your product inevitably attracts the wrong clients, who will be disappointed when they don't get what they were expecting.

If you go crazy, trying to jump from one essential element to another, you'll waste vast amounts of time and money. You'll become frustrated and eventually give up.

But if you think strategically about how to combine the nine elements into a plan that makes sense for your business and your budget of time and money, you can build a following, become an expert, and create Thought Leadership.

And make a lot of money.

Hundreds of thousands of people write books every year. Even more write blogs. And give seminars. And tweet.

They aren't all Thought Leaders.

Some people will say they don't give it enough time, they aren't doing enough, they aren't patient.

I say a lot of them just aren't unique enough for anyone to care what they have to say.

The foundation of Thought Leadership is having a unique perspective on your market, industry, or field of study. All the “stuff”— SEO, social media, book publishing, public speaking— is just marketing if you don't have a unique point of view.

If you sound just like everyone else, then someone who sees your book or accidentally attends one of your workshops will have no reason to care enough to seek you out again. Why would they? They can get similar information or opinions anywhere.

But if you have a unique point of view— a special perspective on digital music editing, or a new method for teaching jazz saxophone— then you aren't a commodity anymore. You are someone worth seeking out. Someone worth paying for.

How to Cultivate a Unique Point of View

If you're thinking,

“I don't have a unique point of view. I just want to get more clients and do a good job,” don't worry.

Most people in the world, especially in the business world, are not very unique. If you care about your profession (you should), then it isn't that difficult to cultivate an increasingly original perspective on your field.

The best part is that the most useful thing you can do is... write.

As we'll discuss more in-depth in other chapters, writing— especially blogs, articles, and books— is an important Thought Leadership marketing activity. It turns out that it is also an incredibly powerful way to cultivate your unique point of view.

When you write, you have to organize your thoughts. You have to work through what you know, what you believe, and what you think. You have to take your vague ideas and mold them into concrete, shareable concepts. Writing forces you to think clearly.

Writing a single article about an incredibly specific topic will help you gain a unique perspective on that topic. As you write many articles over time, a unique perspective on your entire field will start to develop.

You don't need to be able, today, to sum up your unique point of view in a few words. This isn't about having an original opinion on some aspect of your industry (although that's great if you do).

This is about developing, over time, an original voice.

In all the noise of new media marketing madness— amid all the spam and sales pitches and really pointless crap— what people really want is something:

- new
- fresh
- genuine
- thoughtful
- meaningful

If you write down your ideas (or record them), and if you do so because you care about your clients, you will start to find your own voice emerging.

You'll have to chisel away at the fillers, the cliches, and the garbage to get to it (that's called good editing). You'll have to sand down the rough edges of bad spelling and grammar (good proofreading). But you'll find your unique perspective under there somewhere. You just have to do the work.

Two

ROBUST ONLINE PRESENCE

Websites are a funny thing to talk about anymore. There are still a lot of people who consider the internet to be all newfangled and confusing. Then there are the Social Web people who think that websites are such old news that even talking about web design is uncool. And then there's this really weird group of enthusiastic late-comers who still think that as soon as they get their site up and running, the world will beat a path to their virtual door.

Websites are neither cool and new, nor old and boring. They are simply necessary. It's possible to run a business without one, but not smart.

People will eventually try to find you online. Some will go home after meeting you at a networking event and Google you right away. Others will check you out online before they sign that commission-paying order form. Whenever people decide to look for you, they need to be able to find a solid, professional looking website that has plenty of information about you, your industry, your products, and your services.

Without a website, or with a really lame one, you look like a hack.
Or a fogey. Or a scam. Or just a small-time operator.

Clearly, none of those are good.

In some ways, a decent website is just the cost of entry. For a Thought Leader, it can be so much more. It can become the hub of a robust online presence, a resource for useful and valuable information, a way to keep your potential buyers engaged with you and your brand, a source of automated income and lead generation.

There is an endless (and growing) array of ways people may find you online, and another endless number of things people could do when they get to your website. Let's look at a few of the more common ones, to give you an idea of the importance and value of a well-created online presence.

Search Engines

Google and its cousins have altered the way average people find things. Unless you're really unusual (nothing wrong with that), you probably already know what I'm talking about. Need a plumber? Throw pillows? A haircut? Curious about how long to cook a chicken or how often to water your azaleas? Need to know if your kid has the chicken pox?

The vast majority of people simply type a question into Google (sometimes with the name of their city, if they're looking for a person or store) and just click on the first thing that pops up. If that doesn't work, they try the second thing, and then the third. Since Google has gotten so good at figuring out what people are looking for, the average searcher usually finds something on the first few hits.

So, let's say you run a dry cleaner that specializes in formal wear and military uniforms. That's just the sort of thing someone might search for. Maybe two or three times a day, someone types in "how do I store my wedding dress?" or "dress blues cleaning stoughton." How great would it be if the first or second thing that popped up was your website?

Sounds like you just created a customer.

Direct Browsing

Let's say you're an accountant. You meet someone at a networking event or a party or wherever. Of course, you exchange business cards and all that. A day or two later, at her desk, your new friend runs past your business card. Of course, she now has your web address, so she decides to check you out and see what you're all about.

Your new friend goes to your site and, through clever home page design, finds another page with interesting articles about tax law. A half-hour later your new friend realizes two things: she has missed lunch, and you clearly

know more about tax law than anyone else in the world.

Sounds like you just created a referral source.

Linking

Let's say you are a chiropractor, and I'm someone with chronic lower back pain. I've tried other chiropractors before, without success—but you have a unique and innovative approach that would probably help me a lot.

Since I'm in too much pain to develop any interesting hobbies, I spend a lot of time online reading blogs and message boards about chronic back pain.

I get a lot of spammy emails about Chinese massage and expensive juice.

Then my favorite back-pain blog reviews your services, and includes a link to your site. The reviewer has a problem similar to mine, and has had similar chiropractic experiences, but said you were unique, innovative, and incredibly helpful. I click to your site.

When I get there I read about your unique practice. Since I read a lot about back therapies, I can tell right away that you are doing something different. An article about your patented diagnosis process. A blog post about a woman with my exact symptoms who felt better after just three sessions. A white paper detailing why different people respond differently to different types of chiropractic therapy.

And, by the way, I find out your office is only two hours away from my house.

Sounds like two hours isn't too far away.

Just a few examples. I assure you, this sort of thing happens millions of times every day, and if you don't have a good website, you're missing out on the joy of having people just show up at your door looking to pay you.

So how do you drive all this amazing, targeted traffic?

Content Rich

Did you notice that in every one of those stories, the website had some interesting and useful content? This is so incredibly important. The days of a website being nothing more than a billboard or brochure are long over. The one single requirement to drive all of those different types of traffic is **CONTENT**.

That's because Google can't infer from your brochure that you could help answer the question, "How do I store my wedding dress?" Your brochure might say, "Wedding dress storage," but so do a thousand other brochures. Google is looking for as much good information as possible. Without at least a good article and in-depth information about wedding dress storage, you'll never make it to the top.

And it's because your networking friend can't just look at your online billboard and tell whether you're a good accountant or not. Nobody has an ad that says, "We're alright, but you could do better if you paid more." Only depth of information can give her a sense of what you do and how well you do it.

And it's because my previous experience with chiropractic doesn't prepare me well for your services. Only by providing enough valuable information that addresses my issues and concerns do I have the opportunity to discover that your innovative approach may be exactly what I need.

Content— unique, interesting, helpful content— is the driving force in all of this. That is why you don't just need a website, you need a content-rich website.

Building a Content Rich Website

For the geeky (or “cool,” as we like to say now) AV kids, setting up a basic website is the easiest thing in the world. Then there are people, maybe you, who find the whole process a little mystifying. And of course, there are all sorts of companies, from web hosting services to crappy page designers that make a lot of money by adding to the confusion and offering bogus solutions for \$19.95 a month.

How a Content Rich Website Works

If you have a couple thousand dollars, it might be a really good idea to spend some money on professional site design. If you're a serious Bootstrapper (seriously short on cash) it is possible for you to learn how to build a working site on your own, in such a way that a more professional design can be layered over it later.

Either way, there are some things you should understand about websites that will help you DIY, or help you ferret out the good designers from the hacks. And to be a Thought Leader you need to become comfortable enough with the technology that you can keep your website running and continuously add new content to it.

Domain Name

When you go to a website, the address up in the top is the URL (Uniform Resource Locator). The main part of it (before the dot-com or dot-org) is the Domain Name. The .com or .org is called the TLD (top level domain).

In general, you should only choose a .com TLD. If you're social-good oriented, you might want to think about .org too. But resist the temptation to go with an “off-label” TLD like .net or .biz. You will lose traffic (because people will go to the .com of your name out of habit), and you will lose trust (because a lot of people see off-label TLDs as being a bit sketchy).

There's a whole art and science behind domain name selection, but a few good rules of thumb are:

- make it easy to remember
- make it easy to spell
- letters only: no punctuation, numerals, hyphens, underscores, or special characters
- no acronyms

A company that helps you purchase a domain name is called a registrar. There are thousands of them.

Hosting

When you look at a page on a website, that page exists somewhere, just like your document files can exist on your hard drive or your memory stick. That "somewhere" is called a server. A company that provides server space for websites is called a hosting company. Hosting companies provide all sorts of options and tools and come in at all different price points. And there are thousands of them. Your choice will be based on what you need to accomplish (read on for that).

Pages and HTML

If you look at a page on a website, it seems pretty complicated. Pictures, text, buttons, videos. The weird thing is, all of that is being controlled by a text document.

Internet Browsers (that program you open to let you look at the internet) only understand text, so websites send long text documents to your browser. The browser's job is to interpret that text and make it readable.

There was a time when web designers hand-coded websites. That is, they wrote each page in HTML (the language that text file is in). Then they uploaded those HTML files onto the server using an FTP client.

The problem here is that if you're an average lawyer or chef, you don't have much interest in learning how to use the FTP client to retrieve the documents, learning how to write in HTML to edit the documents, or learning how to deal with servers using phrases like "Apache mod" or "Linux kernel."

That means you have to pay your webmaster \$50 an hour every time you want to change a few words in your online bio. Even if you have the money, that's not a good use of it.

CMS

People eventually got tired of hand-coding pages, especially since the bulk of a web design is the same from page to page on a site. So Content Management Systems were invented.

A CMS is container that holds all the stuff of your site. It is a basically a computer program (or group of programs) that keeps track of all your content (text, videos, pictures, files) and then uses a designed theme to generate all those individual text files your browser needs.

The great thing about CMS is that the function of your site, the look of your site, and the content of your site are all separated from each other. Which means you, the tech-wary entrepreneur, can edit or add content without ruining the function or design of the site. It also means that you can change the design from time to time, without overhauling functionality or losing content.

Some CMSes are easy for the end user, some are not so much. If you're looking to hire someone, make sure they talk to you about how blogging and other content creation works, and if training is included in the price.

Some designers don't like to use CMS, preferring to hand code sites the old-fashioned way. In most cases, you probably should be wary of hiring these people. For one thing, this often is an indication that they are not keeping up with web design best practices, which suggests they are a bit out of touch. On top of that, you will never be able

to edit the files yourself, which means billable hours for every update. Finally, if you decide to do a redesign in the future, your new designer will have to overhaul a lot of the function and content, which will cost you more.

There are two arguments for hand coding: “this site is so simple” and “this site is so complex.” Usually, neither one holds up well.

A “simple” site— usually a three or four page brochure site for a little brick-and-mortar business— is a great candidate for an easy to use CMS because that business isn’t going to want to pay hourly for updates in the future. Besides, do you really want to trap yourself in HTML land forever? You may realize next month or next year you want a little more function, or even just one more page. You don’t really want to be paying your web designer for that.

As for the “it’s too complicated,” that’s possible. But it isn’t very likely. If your company is developing some kind of unique online interface, that probably needs to be hand coded, but then, if that’s the case, you probably don’t need to be reading web design tips from a free e-book.

Content Management will make your life easier and save you money. There’s a place in the world for hand coders, but it isn’t in the world of small-business content-rich web sites.

Blog

A blog has become an essential element of Thought Leadership marketing. You really want to make sure that your blog is part of your website, as opposed to having a blog on some other site like wordpress.com or blogspot.com. There are two big reasons for this. One is branding— it’s hard to maintain a consistent brand identity when you are asking people to go off to some other company’s site. The other reason is SEO— all that content you are creating on your blog should be helping the search engine rankings for your site, not blogspot.

DIY Web Design

An in depth tutorial on web development is a bit beyond the scope of this e-book. Lucky for you, it is not beyond the scope of my website.

If you think you want to go that route, see our (always under development) DIY Web Design section at: <http://SocialBootstrap.com/diy-web>

In the meantime, here's a very brief run-down of what services and programs we suggest:

Domain Name and Hosting

We use Blue Host for both. They have an excellent service at an excellent price.

You may also want to look at Host Gator. We hear great things about them from our friends.

You're looking for a hosting package that has some power behind it— lots of bandwidth, lots of memory, support for PHP and SQL databases (essential for CMS), support for Simple Scripts or Fantastico (essential for CMS if you don't want to have to learn a lot). You don't need to pay for things like “Easy Web Page Creation” or “Search Engine Submission.”

That might come free, but you won't use it— so don't let the pointless freebies influence your decision.

You also especially want your hosting service to have a good Control Panel. A Control Panel is basically a front end that allows you to do all the things you need to do without learning secret computer codes. It's a bit like using Windows instead of DOS (if that means anything to you).

Avoid the flashy low-cost providers. They usually aren't that much cheaper, and they tend to suck really, really badly. We suggest specifically avoiding both GoDaddy and Network Solutions. Also avoid any free providers. If you're getting hosting for free, they're going to put ads on your site. Do you really want ads on your site?

CMS

For a DIYer, WordPress is absolutely the way to go. It was originally created as a blogging software, so that's covered. It's easy to use, easy to customize, and completely free. There is a huge global community of developers and designers who create additional functionality, which means that you can do almost anything you can think of without too much difficulty. There's also a ton of online tutorials and support forums for every aspect of the system. And using WordPress makes you part of the in-crowd.

WordPress is even an excellent option for folks who are hiring a professional site designer, because of how easy it will be for you (or them) to maintain. A good professional designer will be able to layer your new, custom design and functionality on top of WordPress, saving you a lot of time and money and giving you an easy-to-use back-end for updating and maintaining your site.

When you start to look into how it works, make sure you go to wordpress.org, not wordpress.com. The dot-org is the site for the self-hosted CMS program. The dot-com site is for people who just want to run a blog there, not build their own site.

Also, one last WP tip: Use the Control Panel at your hosting service to install it automatically (using Simple Scripts or Fantastico). If you download the files from wordpress.org and try to upload them yourself, you'll wish you hadn't.

Content Rich, Remember

Whether you build it yourself or hire a designer, at this point you really only have a shell of a website. What really matters is that your site is full of content.

Written content is the most important part of your web presence.

People love videos and pictures.

Graphs and charts convey lots of information.

Flashy animation and beautiful design get and hold attention.

But text is what really counts.

Search Engines use text to understand what a site is about, and whether it would be useful for the person who just typed “caterers in north attleboro” into the little box.

Search engines rely on text. Your prospects rely on search engines. You rely on prospects. Therefore, you rely on text.

There are six kinds of text content in a Thought Leader website:

- articles
- blog posts
- sales copy
- info
- SEO filler
- hidden text

These six categories often blend into each other a little bit, but it’s a good way of getting your mind around what kind of content you should be generating.

Articles

Articles are straight forward informational pieces about your industry. A lawyer might have articles about types of trusts; a chiropractor, articles about pain management; a plumber, articles on water safety.

Articles should be evergreen, which means they are not current-events specific but rather useful all the time. It's often a good idea for the writing style to be just a little formal, in an authoritative voice.

Articles are about facts, not opinions.

This is the content people find when they are searching for things like “how to change a gasket” or “gas mileage 1998 toyota tercel.”

The more articles you have, the better. Every aspect of your industry can be broken down and explained. Every additional article is one more chance that someone searching might find you instead of someone else. One more opportunity to demonstrate your expertise.

Very few of your visitors will read many of your articles.
That's okay. You're just trying to attract and retain searchers.

Blog Posts

Your blog is the place for your voice and your opinions. It's the place for current events commentary and news from your industry. It's the place for press releases and special announcements.

While your bank of articles is like an encyclopedia, your blog is like a newspaper or magazine. People will subscribe to it, some people will read every post, and some people will even leave comments and feedback.

The blog is your opportunity to develop a community of fans, followers, and hangers-on who will become both clients and referral sources.

You should update your blog with a new post on a regular basis. At least once a week, more if you can. More important than frequency is regularity. Post on the same day and at the same time every week. This is helpful both for your readers and the search engines.

Sales Copy

Sales copy is exactly that— text designed to spur the reader to do something; it’s a sales pitch.

There probably shouldn’t be a lot of sales copy on your site. It really should only come up at points where you really want or need the visitor to do something (sign up for a newsletter, buy a product, give a you a call, etc.).

Sales copy should be used sparingly, and should blend into other content so well that the reader doesn’t notice exactly where the transition happened.

Info

Info is basic content about you or your business: where you are located, store hours, what you do.

While not difficult to type your address or store hours into your CMS, it’s important to realize the potential here. If you are a piano player in Sharon, MA, it’s better to have those phrases (“piano player” “Sharon, MA”) near each other. You could even say, “I am a piano player in Sharon, MA.” This is much more useful for SEO, since “piano player in sharon, ma” is a popular way to structure a search.

SEO Filler

No human visitor needs ten different articles that explain the benefits of Reiki therapy ten different ways. Visitors to your catering site probably aren't trying to "fry eggs over easy in somerville." But Google eats up this kind of content. It can be very useful to have a storehouse of dozens or even hundreds of articles that are written with keywords in mind. Be careful, though:

SEO articles should still be decent, human legible content. Google, and the other search engines are getting better and better at sniffing out bogus content.

They should not auto-redirect the visitor back to a "good" page. Google hates that and considers it a trick.

Since you shouldn't be redirecting, all the SEO filler pages still need to be decent landing pages with calls to action and links back into the main body of your site.

Resist the temptation to cheat with content here. Copying content from other sites will at best do nothing, and at worst get you banned from the index. Same thing with computer-generated content, random word pages, keyword stuffing, and any thing else that could not possibly help live people searching for real things.

Hidden Text

By "hidden text" we mean all the legitimate little places for words all over your website that most people don't notice and don't consider content. Meta-data, file names, page titles, link descriptions, hover text, even your URLs.

Some of this stuff isn't really hidden at all, like the domain name itself (a big SEO deal); some of it people frequently forget about completely, like file names for background images. The SEO value of all this varies from negligible to incredibly important, and it's impossible to say with 100% certainty what helps and what does not.

That's why it's worth taking the tiny bit of extra time to make sure it's been done.

SEO Tips

Keyword Research

While creating all this content, it's good to have an idea of what search engines are looking for, or more specifically, what human searchers are looking for.

Google has a fantastic (free) tool called the Keyword Sandbox. You can find it at <https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal>

You can use this tool to see what phrases people search for, and how many people search for them each month.

Content Guidelines

Remember that no matter how keyword optimized your content is, it should still be written for people to read. This is important for three reasons:

- Google does not like content that is created solely for its benefit. You might be able to trick them today, but they are getting better and better at figuring out what is good writing and what is crappy SEO filler.
- If a human gets to your page from Google after searching for some keyword, and ends up on a poorly written SEO article, they will leave pretty quickly, and you've accomplished nothing.
- The best SEO power comes from links to your site. No one is going to link to a keyword-stuffed junk page.

Your goal should be high-quality, useful content, written understanding how searchers look for information.

Interlinking

Your site should be like a bowl of spaghetti, with everything touching and looping back on itself. Content should contain intentional, helpful links to other content on your site.

Patience and Discipline

If you have a lot of money to throw at the problem, you can get a lot of content up right away (by paying writers or a writing service). But if you don't, if you simply add content yourself, drawing from your own expertise over time, the results will take longer, but they will be incredibly more robust and useful. The key is to take the time to do these things regularly. If you do, you'll find your website becomes a real storehouse of knowledge within a few months.

You'll start to show up in search engine ranks, you'll notice the number of visitors to your site increasing, you'll make a few dollars from book sales or other affiliate links, and one day someone will walk into your office or call you on the phone... a customer— no, a client— who found you online and is ready to buy. No sales cycle, no objections, no demonstrations or hassle.

Ready to buy.

Social Media is a tough thing to pin down and talk about. It's a little tough to get into and learn about if you aren't the "early adopter" type.

One of the biggest problems for a latecomer trying to figure it all out is that the conversation is completely out of control and unconnected from reality. The experts, the Thought Leaders, in the Social Media world are required to keep up on the latest trends, fads, and technology— even if that fad will never impact you or your business. They are in an arms race to be the one who knows more about the latest Social Network or Semantic-Geo-Locating-4.7-iPoop. It's what they do, all day long.

So if you start trying to figure out what kind of Social Media presence you should have, you end up reading their search-optimized content, discover that you need to be spending ten hours a day "participating in the conversation," and promptly give up.

It doesn't have to be this way.

This stuff is a lot easier to understand.

If you are in love with Social Media, or want to be on the cutting edge of everything— the world leader of... whatever, then yes, you need to spend a lot time on a lot of Social Networking sites. If you want to be a Thought Leader on technology or the future or the web, then you need to be at the head of the ridiculous arms race. But if you're looking to have a meaningful presence in your community— if you want to become a local Thought Leader of cooking or car repair— then your Social Media strategy can be a lot simpler:

Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, your blog/website.

Yes, you can do more. Yes, there are ridiculous success stories from all the other sites. Yes, their technology looks really cool. Yes, lots of experts say you need to do a lot more.

But those four things are all you must do. They are enough to support a robust Thought Leadership campaign, provided your ideal consumers are not technocrats.

Twitter

Lots of people talk about Twitter, and everyone who talks about it acts as if their opinion is gospel fact. The real truth— no one knows how this is going to pan out. It could turn out that it revolutionizes everything, or that it collapses under its own business plan.

While I'd be hesitant to believe people who say this changes “everything,” (remember, they live in a world where everybody uses this stuff)— it is certainly a helpful addition to your Thought Leadership arsenal. And, because of the amount of press coverage and buzz surrounding it, you'll look a little behind the times if you don't tweet every now and then.

So, skip this section if you're using Twitter already and have at least 50 followers. There's nothing more I can tell you.

For the uninitiated— Twitter is a micro-blog, which allows you to broadcast short messages quickly and easily. It also allows you to pay attention to other people, but not as quickly or easily. The trick is that (like all other marketing) you have almost no control over whether anyone actually receives your message.

Your short messages, or Tweets (which can only be 140 characters or less), will only be received by the people who “follow” you (think of them as subscribers to your broadcasts). In the same way, you will receive the messages being broadcast by people you follow.

Finally, you can search all the broadcasts being made, as they are being made. You can do this to find particular words or phrases (things that interest you) or to look for trends and patterns (things that interest other people).

That's it.

As you can imagine, there are all sorts of useful things people can do with this. You can blast out messages about yourself and your company. You can have conversations with other people who are online at the same time as you (this is like a cross between a chat room and shouting across a bar). You can find out what people are interested in and talking about. You can re-broadcast useful, informative, or entertaining things other people have published. You can provide interesting micro-content and links to “normal” content. You can brag about how many followers you have.

Twitter is much easier to understand if you've actually seen it. So go ahead and sign up for an account at twitter.com, and read their “Twitter 101” guide for additional information.

It'll change everything.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is even more pervasive than Twitter— really, everybody's doing it. If not having a Twitter account makes you seem a little “yesterday,” not having a LinkedIn profile makes you look like you don't even know what the heck's going on in the world.

Like Twitter, and like almost all Social Media, this is way easier to understand if you can go look and see it. So carry this book over to your computer, and set up your profile already. And if you are already using LinkedIn, you may want to skip this section. There's really nothing new to say— just people who haven't heard it yet.

In case you don't know, LinkedIn is a site that allows you to create a profile (like an in-depth, dynamic resume), and then connect with other people you know from the real world. It's basically a way to keep track of all the relationships you've created over the years— co-workers, colleagues, vendors, clients, friends, business partners,

whatever. It helps corral all those connections and people in an easy to use way.

You can then browse the connections of the people you know. If I find that my former client has done business with somebody I want to meet, I can ask for an introduction. I could have done that in “real life” too, but I probably wouldn’t have thought to ask, “Could you tell me the names and businesses of everyone you know, so that I can decide if any of them are worth meeting?”

That is the basic functionality of LinkedIn— keep track of connections, see who your connections are connected to. If that was all it did (and early on, it was), it would still be a worthwhile thing to do. But there are several additional uses and benefits, some easy to get to, and some requiring a little work, patience, and ambition.

Findability

You’ve probably realized by now that one of the first things people do if they want to know more about you is search for your name on Google. What would you like them to find? LinkedIn profiles receive a good deal of weight in people searches on Google. Having a well-crafted profile and an active presence puts a best foot forward to anyone who happens to be looking for you for whatever reason.

Searchability

At the same time, you want people who aren’t looking for you to find you as well— that’s how you extend your influence and build Thought Leadership. Your profile has a lot of room for material: jobs, schools, interests, hobbies, summaries. The more you have in there, the more chances you’ll turn up in someone’s search results.

Approachability

It’s much easier to have a conversation with someone if you have something in common. The depth of LinkedIn profiles helps you find things in common with people that you wouldn’t have thought to ask. You both write music,

went to the same college, worked at the same company ten years ago, are connected to the same five people from another town. Use LinkedIn to discover those common things about people you're looking to meet or work with. And have an in-depth profile so that other people find it easier to connect with you.

Expertise Showoffiness

LinkedIn has a fantastic area of their site call "LinkedIn Answers." It is a place for people to ask business related questions and the LinkedIn community can offer answers. The asker and the other community members get to see everyone's responses, rate them, and vote on which one is the best answer. This gives you the ability to show off your expertise by answering questions in your knowledge area. It gives the world another example of your work, another link to your profile and home page, another opportunity for people to seek you out and buy from you. And it's something you can do everyday in just a few minutes.

Groupiness

LinkedIn allows you to join groups and then participate in discussion within the groups. Groups are usually industry-specific, professional associations. This gives you another opportunity to "get your name out there," learn more about what else is going on in your industry or marketplace, and connect with new people.

Invoke Curiosity, Wonder, or Interest

You can update your status as often as you like. Why not mention every morning what cool thing you're working on that day. For example, as I'm writing this, my LinkedIn status says, "Writing the Social Media section of my upcoming book, DIY Thought Leadership." Now, maybe no one will read that today. But if someone does wander onto my profile, isn't that way cooler than a month-old status update of, "Still lookin' for a job?"

LinkedIn gives you lots of opportunities for that sort of thing. You can have your latest blog posts show up automatically, you can mention what books you're reading (with links to Amazon), you can have slide shows.

Each thing you add is additional content, an additional path to your front door, and an additional opportunity for Thought Leadership.

Facebook

Everyone has an opinion about this sort of thing, but I believe Facebook is not a good business tool for most small businesses. It's a friendship tool. There may be overlap, and you may find business makes its way to you through Facebook, but that's not its primary function.

So why do I mention it? Why say that it's one of the four essential components of social media? Because if you're not on it yet, you'll love it when you finally get going.

If you take the time to fill out your profile, Facebook is really good at helping you find people from your past—old friends, classmates, neighbors. And it is also really good at allowing you to maintain a casual “in each other's life” presence. That girl you knew in college— you probably don't have enough to talk about to go out to dinner or (worse) have an extended phone call. But you can use Facebook to see where she ended up, how she's doing, and whether or not she did all those things you remember her talking about. You can post quick notes on her “wall,” comment on her random musings, or look at pictures she's posted.

So what's the point?

Life, I believe, is about love and relationships. Facebook, more than any other Social Media tool, helps you maintain friendships with people you have otherwise lost track of.

And you never know what kind of opportunities can arise, just because you happen to know somebody...

Your Blog / Website

We'll talk more about this in the chapters about your blog and website, but it's important to understand a few of the ways that your site can help you socialize your business.

Personalization of Your Blog

Your blog is not a news article. It's more like a cross between an op-ed column and a diary. Facts are not what give a blog value—personality is. You should be the same person on your blog as you are on LinkedIn and Twitter (you can be a little different on Facebook, but not too much).

Comments

The comment section of your blog is a wonderful place for conversation. Go ahead and comment back. Engage those readers who have taken the time to respond and interact with your work. It helps you build a community on your site, and encourages additional participation.

Social Media Hub

Make it easy for people to get to your Twitter and LinkedIn profiles from your site. Perhaps even have a feed from those sites update some piece of dynamic content on yours. This helps people engage with you outside of your website, which makes it much easier to keep them within reach of your messages and influence.

Yes, I said before, yes— you can do a lot more. You'll find some additional ideas in the chapter on “Great Ideas for Thought Leadership.” There is always something else you could do, but you really need to be doing at least the things mentioned here. They aren't hard, and you might even find you enjoy them a great deal. I, personally, get a lot of satisfaction from my social media presence.

It's easy to go overboard with social media. Some people think it's changing everything and that you need to be there every minute of every day and orient your entire business to it. I think that really depends on your market, your business, your personality.

There's no reason I can think of, for example, that all the clients of a psychologist should have their own private social networking site.

On the other hand, there may be all the reason in the world for a local gym to want to create one.

If you are really interested in an expanded social media presence, outside of the things I mentioned here, subscribe to a few of the leading blogs on social media. You will quickly see how many opportunities you have to connect with people in various ways and in various places. Try them out if you like, but keep your head on straight.

THREE

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

This chapter is here in the “Community Engagement” section, instead of the “Online Presence” section, because it’s really about interacting with people, rather than publishing content.

There are over a billion people online. And people love to talk. So, there are millions and millions of conversations going on out there on the internet. Most of them don’t have anything to do with you. But some of them do.

If you sell high-end dog collars it might be good to be a part of any conversation surrounding luxury pet products. If you sell training to financial advisors, you might have a lot to say in all the conversations about 1039 exchanges.

Participating in conversations online:

- introduces new people to you and your business
- creates or encourages inbound links (good for SEO)
- builds goodwill within your community
- positions you as an expert in your field.

Before you begin

The line between participation and self-serving promotion is thin. And the line between legitimate self-serving promotion and spam is thinner still.

As you find conversations to be a part of, as you start to engage with them, be helpful, unbiased, and non-spammy. Point people to competitors. Give free advice that can be used without buying something. Be friendly.

Before you hit “submit,” always ask yourself:

- Is this genuinely helpful?
- Would I be happy receiving this from someone else?

And when you cross a line (you will, we all do), apologize. And then don't do it again.

Conversations To Participate In (in order of usefulness)

Blogs

Use Google Reader (or another RSS reader) to subscribe to a number of large and small blogs in your industry and closely related fields. When appropriate, comment on posts.

Commenting on blogs is easy, fun, and incredibly useful. Most bloggers love to get comments, and they don't get as many as they would like, so they will often respond personally. Many bloggers will even start reading your blog, which is fantastic.

You can also retweet or repost blog posts that you like or find particularly awesome. This is a way to tell anyone who happens to be listening, “This is really cool— read this.” Obviously, the original poster loves this, which can only be good for you.

If you're still wondering how to find interesting blogs in your field, then you haven't figured out how to Google.

Expert Answer Forums

Answer forums provide a place for people to ask questions to the whole world, and then anyone who wants to can

post answers. This is great if you have expertise in some area (which you do).

Generally, answer forums let you search by topic, so that you can poke around looking for questions you know the answer to. Also, there is usually a way for the asker and the community to vote on which answer is the best.

Answer forums are pure Thought Leadership.

LinkedIn and Yahoo both have excellent Answer forums, and a number of niche sites have industry specific forums. You can find them by (guess...) Googling.

Message Boards and Forums

Message boards have been around forever, and can be a great tool for building relationships. If you've never used one, they are essentially a place where a large group of people can have ongoing conversations about a loosely defined set of topics.

Good message boards are about sharing ideas, asking for and giving advice, and learning new things. If you can find message boards like that in your industry, then you should join and contribute.

Bad message boards are about complaining, whining, insulting, and drama. Steer clear of these boards, no matter how helpful you think you could be to whatever problem people are having.

And steer clear of all drama. Even the best message boards have drama. Do not participate. Do not engage. Do not try to help. Do not try to peacemake. Ignore it. Really.

Finding New Conversations

Besides regular Google search...

Google Alerts allow you to set up a search for news, blogs, and plain-old web pages that contain useful keywords. You then get emails on regular basis (daily, weekly, whatever you want) with links to everyone who is talking about “supply chain management” (or whatever).

Twitter Search lets you know, in real time, if anyone is Tweeting about whatever topic you are interested in. If you’ve been wondering about how to engage more effectively on Twitter, that’s one of the best ways.

Patience and Discipline

As with all these things, the benefit comes after prolonged engagement. One post on a message board or one good answer is not going to boost your sales and position you as a Thought Leader.

Find one or two places that you think will be valuable, and engage there once or twice a week. In-depth participation with a few conversations over a period of time is way more helpful than fleeting participation in hundreds. You need to give people the chance to get to know you and like you. That takes time.

“Real world” networking (as opposed to online “Social Networking”) is what gives a Local Thought Leadership campaign its legs. You can make money online without ever leaving your house, but then you’re an internet marketer, not a Local Thought Leader.

Thought Leadership, and all contemporary marketing, is primarily about building relationships. The best way to build relationships is in the real world with real people you have really met. This is where networking comes in.

Networking has been around forever, from the secret societies of Ancient Greece to the Good Ol’ Boys of White America. There has been, and will always be, a strong market and social advantage for people who are able to integrate themselves into a large community and form relationships across allied industries and professions.

As a named business tool and trend, networking in its current form was more or less invented in the 1970s, and peaked in 80s. Men (mostly) in bad suits glad-handing each other and swapping business cards. “Let’s do lunch,” and all that. Rotary clubs, toast masters, chambers of commerce. The problem was that a lot of people ended up slightly inebriated, confused, and holding a stack of business cards they didn’t know what to do with.

We are currently experiencing a resurgence of networking. It never went away, of course, but it’s definitely booming again in a way that it hasn’t in a while. Partly this is because of the economy (lots of people looking for an edge), but there are a number of other trends at work here as well: the relationship marketing movement, the four hour work week / multiple streams of income trends, the increase in entrepreneurship and small businesses.

Unfortunately, a lot of people are still suffering from 1980s style networking deficiency. The clothing is better, there are more women, and the cocktails are less likely to be scotch on the rocks... but the end result is often the same: Handfuls of business cards, very little business.

But, oh! When it works, it works.

Networking can drive Thought Leadership forward because it gives you an opportunity to show complete strangers that you are an expert in your field. It gets a piece of marketing into people's hands (your business card), gives you a small piece of a whole bunch of people's attention, and provides you with dozens of personal invitations to share your story and learn about other people.

So, how do you make sure that your networking is efficient and legitimate Thought Leadership activity, instead of glorified bar-hopping?

Before You Start

You need to answer a few key questions at the outset:

- What do you do?
- Who are you looking for?
- What are you trying to accomplish?
- What makes you “sticky?”

What Do You Do?

There's a very fine balance you have to strike here between succinctness and self-promotion. If you call yourself a Chiropractor, does that communicate, differentiate, and position appropriately? Maybe it'd be better to lightly embellish. But does “Alternative Healthcare Provider” work much better? What about “Holistic Wellness Coordinator”?

More important than a title (you should probably stick with the shortest possible option) is your one sentence description of what you do. Much has been made of the 60-second commercial, the elevator pitch. That's fine—

but most people are either interested or not in the first few seconds of meeting you. What's your one-sentence answer to "What do you do?"

"I heal pain."

"I relieve stress."

"I fix pipes."

"I sue people."

Notice that none of those involve the over-used formula, "I help people..."

Sometimes "I help people" is the best way to start, but much less often than you'd think if you've ever sat through an hour of 45 second networking introductions. I suggest, even if you think it's the best way to explain what you do, that you eliminate it. You don't want to start the same way as everybody else, because you shouldn't want to be like everybody else.

Who are you looking for?

Sounds obvious, but if you don't know who you want to meet, you probably won't know where to go to meet them. See how specific you can be about your networking targets (which may or may not be the same as your target market), and use that profile to determine what events you go to and who you talk to when you're there.

In the context of Thought Leadership, you need to answer this question by answering another question: Whose thoughts do you want to lead?

What are you trying to accomplish?

Ultimately, make more sales and make more money, I imagine.

Strategically, you're trying to position yourself as a Local Thought Leader.

But at any specific event— are you trying to find prospects? Mentors? Referral sources? Business partners? Maybe you're just trying to make a bit of a splash in the community for the first time. Maybe you're trying to learn more about something.

The more defined you can be about your goals, the more likely you are to achieve them.

What makes you “sticky?”

If no one remembers you ten minutes or ten hours after they've met you, it's as effective as if you didn't meet them at all (sometimes less).

What is going to make people remember you later?

This is where all the other Thought Leadership stuff makes a big difference.

If you have a really cool business card, I'll notice it later.

If you have a great site that's well-optimized, I'll find you when I look you up.

If you have a blog, I might read an article or even subscribe.

If you're on social networking sites, I might link to you, follow you, or friend you.

If you're giving a free workshop in two weeks, I might come.

If you run your own networking group, I might join.

If you have a book, I might buy it.

Old school sales and marketing people used to talk about “touches.”

You'd have to “touch” someone eight times, with a note, a newsletter, a phone call, a visit, a coffee, whatever, before they would buy from you or engage with you. That takes a lot of energy.

When you have a well-planned Thought Leadership campaign in place, people can opt-in to an ongoing series of touches in a way that is both satisfying and scalable.

Where to go?

The short answer is:
Anywhere there are people.

And that's pretty much true.
Even better than "anywhere," are places where your target networking contacts congregate.

Obvious, right? Go where the people you want to meet are. To a lot of people, this isn't so obvious, because they never bothered to identify their networking targets. Once you have, it's a bit easier to track down events and meetings to attend. You just have to know where to look.

Finding networking events should be a regular part of your weekly workflow. It can often take a few hours to identify what's going on in your area and what is worth going to.

How do you find events?

Meetup.com

Meetup is sort-of a social networking site, but instead of trying to get people to spend more time chatting online, its goal is to get you offline and meeting people in the real world. And it does a fantastic job.

Organizers pay a small fee to host meetup groups, centered around specific topics (anything you can imagine), and then other users are able to join as many groups as they like. Meetup provides organizers with handy meeting planning tools, and disseminates info to members. Groups meet in the real world whenever they want, and everyone is happy.

There are Meetup groups about almost everything (really), so it shouldn't be too difficult to find one full of your target market. And if none exist, you can use Meetup to start one.

EventBrite.com

Mostly used for ticketed events of all kinds, EventBrite carries information on thousands of business and social networking events, educational workshops, conferences, and seminars. They have a decent search function allowing you to find events specific to your area.

Associations and Trade Organizations

Your industry, and the industries of your target market, almost certainly have associations or organizations. If you can afford to join them, you should. Even if you can't, you should make a habit of checking their websites regularly for events. Some will be members only, and some will cost more than you want to spend, but there will certainly be some that you can attend.

In a similar vein, the Small Business Administration in most regions hosts classes, workshops, and events. Find the website for your local SBA and check their calendar often.

Local Venues

There are tons of non-profits, businesses, colleges, and other organizations that have taken it upon themselves to be a hub of networking, business development, and continuing education. They have names like "enterprise center," "incubator," "[insert industry here] development group," "economic growth council," "entrepreneur's resource," or "small business roundtable."

Find these places. Bookmark their calendar page. Develop relationships with the people in charge of programming. Network. Host events. Teach classes. Have fun. Make money.

Business Networking Groups

If you can afford the up-front fee, there's probably no reason not to join something like BNI, or another "exclusive" networking and referral group. These operate on the "one seat per industry" principle, and if you make it a point to contribute, be involved, and develop relationships with the other members, it's very likely you'll get business from it within a year of joining (sooner, if you're good or sell something a lot of people need).

Besides referral business, groups like BNI give you an excellent, if limited, Thought Leadership platform. If the group is exclusive (one seat per industry), you have a captive audience of twenty to forty people who see you as the single expert on your field. If you're doing other things, like blogging or publishing books, it's easy to leverage a referral group into an additional Thought Leadership channel.

How do I decide what to go to?

You spend a couple hours every other Saturday morning searching for events, conferences, workshops, seminars, and classes. You could easily spend your entire week at events. If you're just starting out, and don't have a lot of clients to keep you busy, that might be a good idea. Otherwise, you need to prioritize your options.

There's no easy hierarchy of events (conferences are better than trade shows, for example). The best you can do is make some assumptions about how likely it is that people you want to meet will be at this particular event. (Another reason to know who it is you want to meet.)

After that, go for the event that is less likely to be filled with people selling stuff. Most events labeled "Business Networking" attract a lot of salespeople, job seekers, and other people trying to market their wares.

You'll get more mileage (and less competition) at educational events or other places where "networking" isn't the stated primary purpose.

What do I do when I get there?

Meet people.

It's really amazing how well received a simple, "Hi, I'm so-and-so," usually is. People think they need to have an excuse, or they need to wait to be talked to, or they need an introduction from an acquaintance. It's not all that complicated. Just say hello. And smile.

Once you're talking to people, make it a point to listen more than you talk, and ask a lot of questions. People love to talk about themselves, so if you give people the opportunity to do that, they'll love you for it. You are much better off letting people think you see them as an expert than you are trying to prove your Thought Leadership by impressing them with your knowledge.

If you end up developing a personal interest or connection with somebody, go ahead and spend time talking to them and strengthening your new relationship. But if you only feel a professional connection (you think the two of you should do business), setup a follow-up and move on.

Setting up a follow-up is easier than most people think.

"I think you and I have some things to talk about. Do you mind if I call you to set up a meeting?"

That's it.

If you're asked, you can say a few words about why that might be the case. Usually the answer is, "yeah, that'd be great," followed by some practicalities like business card swapping and an explanation of why your new friend is too busy to meet you until after next week.

Once you reach the point where you want or need to move on, just be easy and honest with your new friend:

"It's been great talking to you.

"I think I need to meet a few more people while I still have the chance. I'll call you."

How do I follow up?

Never wait more than 48 hours if you can help it at all.

I find email is almost as effective as a phone call, and great deal easier, so from an efficiency standpoint, that's the way to go. You should definitely call anyone you said you would, though. And you should also call anyone who doesn't reply to your email within two days of you sending it.

The goal of your follow-up contact is almost always going to be to set up an in-person meeting. If you don't have the opportunity to meet in person, there's very little chance you'll develop any kind of relationship.

When you do meet, it's important to have some idea in mind of whether you're hoping to make this person a client or just a part of your professional network. Either is fine— it's just important to know.

Ideally, you'll meet for coffee or lunch or whatever, learn as much as possible about each other, and you'll both leave with something tangible you can do to help each other. That specific action should be what you are looking for. What can you do to help this person? Specifically. "I'll think and see if anyone I know needs your services," is not specific or very helpful. Can you introduce them to someone? Send them a book? Do a quick favor? Refer a client? Refer a vendor? Email them a useful link? Sell them something? Hire them?

The other thing you want to happen is that the conversation is long enough and interesting enough that you have a chance to speak with passion about your area of expertise. If you come on too strong with this, or don't have a good segue into it, you'll sound like a salesman. But if it comes up because it's natural to the conversation, and you're sincere in your interest, you'll be viewed as a knowledgeable and passionate expert in your field.

What happens after the follow up?

First of all, make a point to do whatever tangible thing you said you were going to do.

Additionally, send a Thank You note. A real, paper one in the mail.

People love it.

Make sure that your new friend has the ability to hook into your network if they want to. They should know you have a blog and a LinkedIn account and whatever else. That way they have the opportunity to continue a relationship with you, but they don't have to work hard to do so.

If you see value in it, and they have channels to follow, subscribe to their stuff— their blog, their twitter updates, their whatever. If you think they are annoying and don't want that stuff, don't subscribe. Only act like you like someone if you really like someone.

And if you do find the relationship to be of real value to you, make a point to drop a personal line from time to time. This helps strengthen and deepen the relationship, which is good for your business and good for your soul.

Tips and Tricks

Avoid Networking Cliches

Never say you're looking to "meet like-minded people."

Never say you're trying to "network with other professionals."

Never say you "like to be a resource for bringing different people together."

There're a ton of these annoying little tropes that make perfectly legitimate people sound like pyramid schemers.

Oh, and that reminds me...

Avoid Bottom Feeders

The lines between “entrepreneur,” “salesperson,” “network marketer,” “MLMer” and “pyramid schemer” are pretty blurry. If someone wants to “interest you in a business opportunity,” or “help you earn additional income in your spare time,” try not to spend too much time with them.

Some events are more likely to be full of these people than others. If it looks like the event is a setup for a pitch, avoid it. Don't be afraid to leave an event, either.

And if you're one of those pyramid scheming, MLM hacks, please put this book down and get a real job. Thank you.

Monday Morning

If you slipped up and didn't get a chance to follow up with people in a timely fashion, email them early (before business hours) Monday morning. Most people like to avoid working when they start their week, so they process email instead. If you've emailed them at 5am or so, you'll be close to the top of their inbox when they login at 8.

Carry a Pen

Take notes on the back of business cards. You will not remember.

I repeat: you will not remember.

Keep Your Mouth Shut

Your job title will cause people to make a bunch of assumptions about how much you know. In most cases, they will be more generous than reality. Don't blow your cover by opening your mouth.

Don't Sell

No one wants to hear a sales pitch. Really, no one does.

If you find yourself starting to drone on or get excited about your product, service, or company, stop yourself. Apologize for launching into a sales pitch. Laugh about it. Give the other person a chance to talk instead.

Be yourself.

Unless you're evil.

If you're evil, be someone else instead.

Someone who isn't evil.

You've probably sat in a classroom at some point, listening to a teacher or professor. Maybe you've been to church too, and heard a sermon. If you're active in your industry, you've attended keynote addresses and break-out sessions at various workshops and conferences. Perhaps you've even been to an educational seminar.

In all of these instances, the person speaking was clearly the recognized expert on the topic at hand. Whether it was geometry or Leviticus or the latest trends in spinal manipulation, the person at the front of the room talking was designated the expert, worthy of everyone's attention.

Standing in front of a group of other people and sharing your knowledge and wisdom with them is the most ancient form of Thought Leadership, and is an absolutely vital element of creating it today, especially at the local level.

Like every chapter of this book, entire libraries could be written about this topic in particular. This guide is geared toward the would-be Thought Leader, so we'll focus on what to say and where to say it.

What to Say

Like all other content you provide as a Thought Leader, it's important that your public speaking is an opportunity to share useful information. And here's an important point to keep in mind—the information must be useful without a purchase.

I once went to a fantastic presentation, given by a CPA, which was all about important tax deductions for small businesses. Now I know whether I qualify for the home office deduction, how I should account for the business use of my car, and a bunch of other useful things. I didn't have to purchase this CPA's services in order to make use

of the information provided. That's a good Thought Leadership activity— it raised the CPA's reputation within the community (there were a lot of small business owners at this presentation) and it gave people who wanted and could afford the CPA's services an opportunity to opt-in to the sales cycle. Almost zero time waste.

Compare that to a presentation about the wonders of some Health Juice or Magic Bar. Lots of useful information, right? How to use the juice to lose weight, how to eat the bar instead of french fries. All of which is (theoretically) information... but it only helps if I buy the bar.

That doesn't make you a Thought Leader, it makes you a time waster.

Here's the trouble though. Everyone realizes that nobody wants an hour long commercial... except when it comes to my product. My product is so great, so innovative, so exciting, that everyone will love hearing about it, and everyone will buy once they've heard about it.

Down boy.

We've already heard about your product. Even if it's brand new, we already know about how it cures cancer, provides multiple streams of income, tastes delicious, is recession proof, ensures customer loyalty, and blah blah.

Getting over that is part of the process of becoming a Thought Leader, and getting over it in your public speaking is one of the harder places— because, of course, you love to talk about your juice or your magic or whatever.

You need to get in the habit of thinking through your customers' problems and providing useful solutions that DO NOT involve your product or service. Here are three ways of doing that:

- Think of the primary problem your product solves, and come up with five (or more) cost-free ways to solve the same problem.

- Think of the primary problem your product solves, and come up with five (or more) related problems that might be solved without buying your products.

Think of your primary purchaser, and come up with five (or more) problems they have, which are not in any way related to your product or service.

Any one of those makes a fantastic presentation. Or several.

If your product is words or ideas— you’re a writer, speaker, motivator, or something along those lines— then you already have a store of useful presentation material. You simply need to realize that you should give some of it away for free— the good stuff, not the sales copy.

Where to Talk

There are an abundance of speaking opportunities, if you’re looking for them...

Groups You Belong To

You’ve read the chapter on networking, so you now belong to a number of local clubs, groups, and industry associations, both formal and informal. There is a good chance that at least a few of the groups you belong to are looking for speakers. You can tell if your group is open to speakers by showing up and seeing if they have speakers at meetings (amazing trick). If you’re still not sure after that, ask the organizer.

Presentations in front of these kinds of groups usually fall into two categories: the longer educational talk and the shorter “About Me” talk.

The longer talks happen at groups devoted to an industry, specific market segment, or other self-selecting club. For example, a monthly meeting of real estate investors might want a speaker to talk for forty-five minutes each month about some specific real estate issue like tenant disputes or working with property managers.

The shorter talks tend to happen at “Business Networking” or “Business Referral” groups. If the group membership is stable, they usually like to give each member the opportunity to give a 5-15 minute talk about their business. While this is supposed to be a little ego-centric and sales-pitchy, and it is okay to talk about yourself and your services, you still want to provide some valuable, useful information to your audience.

Groups You Don't Belong To

You can't join every group. The schedule doesn't work out, they're too far away, or you don't actually meet the demographic. But you have useful, valuable, non-salesy information that they would benefit from.

Call them up. Or show up to a meeting.

And ask.

If that's too far out of your comfort zone, you might want to rethink your decision to become a Thought Leader.

You'd be surprised at how open groups are. If they have regular speakers, they will almost certainly say yes, providing you don't smell like a time waster. Groups that have regular speakers are always looking for good ones— they don't know how to find them, they are desperate. They end every meeting with, “If any of you would like to give a presentation, or know someone who would, please let us know.” Good speakers are hard to find.

The trick (besides showing up and asking) is to come prepared with an idea of what you'd like to talk about. Write up a description. Be prepared to say why this presentation would be useful and valuable. Be prepared to explain why you're an expert in the area. Be prepared to explain that you're not trying to sell anything.

Your written description should be easy to read and attractive, but it shouldn't be too “done up.” You want it to look like you put some thought and energy into it, but you don't want it to look like it was churned out by a publicity machine. Make it specific to that group, even if you're pitching the same talk to hundreds of other groups. Often you'll have to wait a few months— some groups plan their speaker rotation several months in advance.

Make sure you keep in touch with the group organizer in the interim, and try to go visit the group again if you can. Also, make sure you don't wait until there's a lull in your social calendar before you start approaching groups, otherwise that lull will stretch on for weeks and months before it picks up again.

Small Business Organizations

Your local SBA (Small Business Administration), and an extensive network of other government, private, and non-profit groups like the Small Business Development Council, regularly offers educational classes and events. Go ask if you can offer one.

These are not usually regularly scheduled meetings, but rather classes, seminars, workshops, and events they just host whenever a presenter would like to offer one. They advertise for them in a number of community calendars, and (if the topic is compelling) they draw a good crowd of entrepreneurs, sales people, and business owners.

These groups tend to be both more open to presenters (they want them) and a little more discerning about who they let speak. They might even have a formal process for deciding who can give a presentation. Your best bet is simply to ask. Have a brief proposal ready, and ask what the process is for giving a presentation. The proposal you have in your bag might be all they want. If they need more, they'll tell you.

Your Own Seminars and Workshops

You can organize your own workshops and seminars— and you should. The upside is that you don't have to convince anyone that it's a good idea, so there's a little less hassle on the scheduling end. The tough part is that then you are responsible for filling the room.

If you have some kind of network of people who pay attention to you— blog readers, twitter followers, newsletter subscribers, website visitors— this is fine. You schedule the event about two months ahead of time, and push out invitations and announcements. If you're cool and connected enough, you could try to get other people with a

good following to advertise for your seminar. And you must talk about it at all the networking events you go to.

People often feel the hardest part of setting up their own workshop is finding a venue. If you don't have an office space (you work from home) and you don't have the money to rent something, what are you supposed to do?

A lot of restaurants will provide free rooms, especially if they anticipate that some people will buy dinner. Some even provide free hors d'oeuvres. If you network a lot, you'll start to notice that one or two places in town get a lot of traffic. It's probably because they are easy to work with. Ask them.

You can also partner with someone in an allied field who does have office space. They host, you talk, everyone gets exposure. Which brings up a good point— if you have office space or access to a venue, try hosting other people's workshops and presentations. It gives you exposure as a leader in your community, and takes almost no work (other than cleaning up after people).

Conferences and Trade Shows

Unless you've invented a new industry (you haven't, by the way), there is a conference or a trade show for people who do what you do. There are probably several. You should go to them. You should speak at them.

You're unlikely to get a keynote address just from trying, but there's no reason you can't lead a break-out session. It's often just a matter of asking. Almost every conference has a website with a "Be a Presenter" button on it somewhere. Click it (click it good). If you can't find something to that effect, call the organizers and ask. Be prepared with a useful, valuable topic. They may ask for anything from a formal proposal to a copy of your entire presentation. Sometimes more, sometimes less. Just ask, "What do I need to do?" and "What's the process?" You won't get every one you try for, but you'll get one or two a year. And that will make you more of a Thought Leader than 99% of your competitors. Competitors who will now view you as an authority.

Putting Your Presentation Together

Read other books about presenting and public speaking. Watch free online videos. Take a class or two if you need it. An in-depth study of public speaking and presentation-design skills is way beyond the scope of this book. But, to get you off on the right foot, here is a list of good ideas and things to keep in mind:

Power Point Points

Think hard about Power Point, and whether or not you want to use it.

It's okay to use, it's okay not to use. Consider whether it would add to the information you are presenting.

Do not use your slides (if you have them) as a memory aide.

No one wants to see you turning around and saying, "Ah, yes... As you can see..."

Do not fill your slides with text.

Title, three bullet points. Or a picture.

If the text, image details, or graph titles are too small for the last row, change them or get rid of them.

Get a clicker.

If you are using PP slides, get a wireless remote control— and make sure you know how to use it. No one wants you to be talking with your "Slide Guy," and no one wants to watch you fiddle around with the thing when you accidentally advance too far.

Don't skip through slides.

If you aren't going to use them, get rid of them.

Use a custom, branded template.

General Tips

Practice.

People get nervous because they haven't prepared enough. Your excuse is that you want it to sound conversational instead of canned. That's just an excuse— it sounds way more conversational if you've practiced it a lot.

Make sure you leave time for questions.

If you've been given twenty minutes, do not build a twenty minute presentation.

Final Thoughts

Sharing our stories and ideas by speaking to a group is an activity that is deeply rooted in human nature— we've been doing it since before we could write. Those who have the courage to stand up and say, "This is the way it is, listen to me," have been revered as leaders and teachers.

After all these eons, and with all our other ways of communicating, we still have a built-in deference to those who are willing to stand out from the crowd and share their experiences.

We still call them leaders and teachers.

If you seek Thought Leadership, if you want to be recognized as an expert by your community, there is nothing more powerful than simply standing up and talking to them.

FOUR

LONG FORM CONTENT

While short web content can get you found online, long-form content is the real driver of Thought Leadership. The person who “wrote the book” on a subject is the ultimate authority.

Thankfully, we live in a time when technology has both opened the doors to traditional publication and created non-traditional approaches to book distribution. It is easier than ever to write a book, design it, publish it, and distribute it... yourself. Traditional publishers and literary agents are no longer necessary. At the same time, there has been a rise in the demand for long-form online content like e-books and white papers.

All of these things give you the opportunity to position yourself as a respected author, which brings you an amount of credibility you simply will not believe.

White Papers

Originally, white papers were government research documents. Some ministry of the British government would commission a study on crime or road safety or the economic impact of whatever. The findings were written up and published in a white paper, which was made publicly available. The idea was that providing the best information possible to the public and to other ministries and policy makers would help everyone make better decisions.

Eventually large corporations got in on the act, using white papers as a way to influence public policy and build credibility (they didn't call it Thought Leadership back then). They also realized that it was a fantastic business-to-business marketing tool: a ten to thirty page testament to a company's experience and vision, disguised as a useful report our customers actually want to read.

White papers are a fantastic way for even the smallest of businesses to reach out to their clients and prospects in a useful manner, building trust, loyalty, and Thought Leadership.

While a white paper can be almost anything (not white, not printed on paper, not like anything any one else is doing), there are some common trends in white paper writing you can use as a guide, or jumping off point.

Purpose and Scope

White papers tend to retain some amount of a research slant, providing an analysis of some data set or case study. This is often pushed to the limit (health benefits of the product you're selling is a lot like sales copy), but the trend is still on the side of useful research information.

The topics tend to be narrow and easily summed up in a title. A white paper exists to address a particular issue or problem. They tend to be short enough to be read in one (moderately long) sitting: 5-15 pages is pretty normal.

Graphics, Layout, and Design

The original white papers were black type-writer text on white paper. The biggest design choice back then was margin size. Today, the sky is the limit.

Text continues to be a major focus of white papers, and the most common visual elements are graphs and charts. Infographics (illustrated presentations of complex data) are becoming a common feature as well. There are not a lot of cartoons or drawn illustrations, but there is a lot of stock photography and iconography.

White continues to be the dominant color, but many other colors are being used as well. The overwhelming trend is towards black text on a light background. Few people are using brown, navy blue, or other dark text options, and

fewer still are choosing light text on a dark background. This is, I think, because the creators are hoping that white papers will be printed by the reader, but that's actually a very rare occurrence.

The majority of white papers have a clean, generically corporate look and feel to them: a tastefully empty cover page with the company's logo and paper title fashionably off center, two column layout in a safe serif font, stock photos of diverse men and women smiling and wearing suits, regular margins.

Format and Distribution

White papers are almost always free, downloadable PDFs available on the company's site. They are usually advertised in a sidebar widget on the front page or the blog (often in the top right hand corner). Firms that have several white papers also frequently have a whole page on their site listing and linking to their white papers.

E-Books

The line between an e-book and a white paper is a bit fuzzy. They are both useful content designed to position you as a Thought Leader. They are both distributed as PDF downloads on your firm's website. They are both intended to help your readers and serve your agenda, while not being sales-copy driven.

There are some common differences, though.

Length

The most usual and obvious difference is that e-books are longer. E-books tend to be over 25 pages, and 50 or more pages is certainly not unusual. They don't have to be readable in one sitting.

How to Make Your E-book a Product

You want your e-book to be seen as a product in its own right, not simply as a marketing message. This is the natural state for e-books, so you're halfway there if you just call the PDF an e-book rather than a white paper. Consider these additional strategies:

Price

People don't pay for advertising, they pay for products. If the e-book has a price tag, it's a product.

Advertising

Why would you advertise an advertisement? Obviously, if you're advertising something, that something must be a product.

Content

The more obviously useful the e-book is, the more it can be a stand-alone product. I wouldn't pay to be told why hiring you will help my headaches go away. I might pay \$34.99 for information about how to control my headaches by changing my diet.

Scope and Purpose

Since e-books tend to be longer, they tend to cover more topics than white papers. While white papers tend to turn data into information, e-books turn information into knowledge— providing how-tos and strategic answers to complex problems. This is partly because of their length, but it is also partly because of the general connotations of “e-book” and “white paper.”

A 15 page PDF that tracks trends in piano manufacturing over time is a white paper. A 15 page PDF on “getting the most out of your piano lessons” is probably an e-book.

Reader Perception

Readers tend to see white papers as advertising messages and e-books as products. This means you need to play to those expectations while at the same time using them to your advantage.

Since a white paper is often seen as an advertising message, it's probably best to back off the advertising a bit. This lowers the overall suspicion from your readers, raising their trust level a bit.

At the same time, an interested prospective-buyer might actually want some more in-depth information about products and services, so it might be a good idea to have specific white-papers created for the sales process, with an interested would-be buyer in mind.

On the other hand, e-books tend to be seen as a “product,” which means, in the consumer’s mind, the sale is already over and the advertising has more or less stopped. You can reinforce that feeling by making the e-book more like a product (in content, design, promotion, and pricing). Once you do that, it’s easier to slip marketing content about your other products and services (including other e-books) in.

Of course you have to be careful. Any sales messages in an e-book needs to be natural to the content, which should be useful even to non-buyers. You do not want your readers to throw up their hands in disgust, shouting, “That’s it?! A crummy commercial?!”

Price

White papers are almost always free. E-books are only sometimes free.

Some people make a living selling e-books. Obviously, they cannot give them away free (they may give away some, and charge for others). For entrepreneurs who are using e-books as an extension of their marketing to sell some other “core” product, free might make sense. On the other hand, perceived value goes up a great deal if someone has to pay to get it.

An e-book should either be free, or over \$20. Less than \$20 and the perceived value won’t be high enough to warrant getting out a credit card or dealing with PayPal. Over \$20, and the e-book looks like a legitimate product worth purchasing, and once purchased, read. Some e-books sell for much more than \$20. I’ve seen every price point you can imagine from a reasonable \$19.99 to a suspicious \$55 to an outrageous \$199.

And people buy them.

Distribution

Both e-books and white papers are usually available as PDFs on a firm's website. E-books, if they have a price tag, have another distribution outlet: affiliate sales.

There are hundreds of thousands of internet marketing entrepreneurs who make a living by selling other people's stuff online. They market and advertise using many of the Thought Leadership activities in this book, and then provide their readers, fans, and followers with useful links to products. Some third company keeps track of who referred whom to where, and pays the marketer a percentage of the sale.

If you have useful e-content, you can take advantage of these huge networks of internet marketers through a service like ClickBank. Upload the book, set a price, set a commission percentage, and let other people sell your book for you. You pocket the profits after commissions and service fees, and more people have just seen your name and logo. If your PDF has ample references back to your site, you can also use the affiliates to drive traffic. It's a fantastic way to leverage your existing resources.

The only negative here is that you usually can't control how the affiliates draw traffic or promote your book. Depending on the nature of your product or company brand, you may want to be judicious about how you use affiliates.

E-Content Design: What Could Be, What Should Be

Some of the major trends in white paper and e-book creation are trends for a reason—they are best practices. Other trends are holdovers from a time when page design meant print design. It's important to remember that the vast majority of both white papers and e-books will be read on a screen.

Page Orientation

Creators of white papers and e-books should seriously consider the landscape page format (the page is “sideways,” instead of the long side being up and down - this e-book is in landscape format). This allows your viewer to see a whole page on their computer screen at once, rather than having to scroll half way down the page before the screen jumps to the next page. Clicking through a PDF document is a much more pleasant experience than scrolling through one.

If you have a compelling reason to use the portrait layout (traditional page orientation), avoid using columns at all costs. The only thing worse than scrolling down a PDF is having to scroll back up on every page of one. This is a common mistake in e-content, and it is very annoying.

Write and Design for Two Audiences

White papers and e-books should be written and designed with two audiences in mind: skimmers and readers. There's a good chance you're already writing for readers, because you naturally assume people are going to read every word on every page. Some will, so make it good. But some won't.

The usual response to skimmers is, “Use compelling (teaser) headings and bold text, which will make them slow

down and read the whole thing.” That only sometimes works. The better approach is to put useful content (not just teasers) into headings, callouts, and bold text, and include content-rich illustrations like graphs, charts, and infographics which can be understood without digging through the text. This way, the skimmer doesn’t have to change behavior in order to digest your message (since your goal is not to change online reading behavior, but rather to sell more office chairs or spinal adjustments).

Consider Additional Formats

HTML

Having all that juicy, keyword-rich content locked up in a PDF is not helping your SEO. Yes, Google can read PDFs, but common thinking is that regular HTML pages rank better. Also, it’s easier to get other people to link to a regular web page than to a PDF.

So, making the text of your e-books and white papers available in regular pages of your website will likely give you some extra Google-juice (and you need all you can get).

Additionally, some people would prefer to read your content on your website. Perhaps they don’t want to download a PDF viewer. Perhaps they need to increase the text size. Perhaps they are using an online text-to-voice converter. Perhaps they are using a website translator and are reading it in a foreign language.

You can even encourage your PDF readers to read it (again) on your website, by littering the content with really useful hyperlinks. Yes, PDFs can have hyperlinks, but people tend not to follow them. By adding this additional content, you can engage with your readers a second time, and guide them towards sales actions on your site.

All of this is much easier if you are using a good Content Management System to run your site. You can easily set up your white paper or e-book as a subdomain or section, keep the look and feel of your main site, and deliver

additional (sales) messages in the sidebars.

Audio and Video

It is neither difficult nor expensive to sit in front of a microphone or camera and read your e-book or white paper, and then make those audio or video files available as embedded media on your website or as actual CDs and DVDs that visitors can purchase.

The only real expense is the microphone or the camera. For quick podcasts and video-blogs, a cellphone is alright, but for longer form content (and especially for CDs and DVDs) you really should be using at least a moderately good microphone and camera. If you can't afford one, Bootstrappers borrow.

There are a number of free, open-source video and audio editors available. You may even have one already on your computer you don't know about, since they often are included in the base software from the store.

Using a print-on-demand service like CreateSpace, you can make professionally pressed CDs and DVDs of your content available on your site with little or no up-front investment.

Print Books

If you've already written an e-book, there is very little reason that it cannot be repurposed into a "real" book. You may need to add additional content, and you'll definitely want to redesign with a print format in mind. Along with CDs and DVDs, this can be a fantastic way both to position yourself as a Thought Leader and further monetize your marketing efforts. Again, CreateSpace and other print-on-demand services have made this type of self-publishing easy, inexpensive, and very good.

There is nothing quite like writing and publishing a book.

A huge number of Americans dream of writing a book, but never do. If you've ever wanted to be a published author, it is easier than you think to fulfill that lifelong dream and also increase your market value. Once you do, you'll have completed the number one "bucket list" item in America. You'll be amazed at yourself; your friends, prospects, and competitors will be amazed, too (and a bit jealous).

Besides the self-esteem boost (which is reason enough) and the dream fulfillment (even more reason), being a published author makes you an expert. Depending on the industry or subject matter, it might even make you THE expert. Which means that taking time to write your book isn't just a foolish pursuit of a childhood dream, it's an important business and marketing strategy.

This whole book is about Thought Leadership. There is very little you can do to build Thought Leadership that has as much power as writing and publishing a book.

Reasons Not To

I hope the reasons to write and publish a book are obvious: being a published author makes you an authority, which helps you build your business. That's the whole point of Thought Leadership activities.

Let's look at reasons you might not want to or not be able to write a book.

I Don't Know Enough

This is the number one reason I hear. Well— I should call it the number one excuse, really, since it's a terrible reason not to write a book.

If you're a chiropractor, a plumber, a personal injury attorney, a church pastor, music teacher, an A/C technician, a butcher, a baker, a candlestick maker, or any other profession, you know more about your subject matter than almost anyone else in the world.

If you're a hobbyist of any kind, from piano playing to role playing, from scrap booking to crossword puzzling, you know more about that hobby than most of the people on this planet.

You don't have to write a book directed at other people in your industry. Write a beginners guide. Write an introductory manual. Write a bunch of opinions.

And if you really don't know enough, maybe you ought to spend some time and energy learning. If you read three books on a subject, you'll know more than almost anyone else. Read five and you can probably put "expert" after your name on your business card. Block out a certain amount of time each day for reading and studying. After a month or two, start writing during some of that time.

I Don't Know What to Write

Try "(Whatever) for Beginners." I know you think that hundreds of versions of that book exist already, but that's okay. If ten million diet books all make money, ten million and one will also. It doesn't matter that someone else has already written a beginner's guide, a dummy's guide, a guidebook for the complete novice, a manual for the total moron. There continues to be no shortage of beginners, dummies, novices, and morons who need your book.

Beyond that, you may have a unique way of doing your job or looking at your industry. That point of view can

probably be leveraged and lengthened into a whole book.

I'm Not a Good Writer

This is almost a reason, but it's still really an excuse. Mostly because I'm reminded of Robert Kiyosaki's statement: "I'm a best-selling author, not a best-writing author."

You're not writing literature, you're writing non-fiction. Get over your hangups and the crap they told you in English class (well, not all of it) and start writing.

Have a smart friend who reads a lot go over your text to make sure it makes sense and communicates at least reasonably well, and then hire a good editor when you get close to publishing.

And you know the two best ways to improve your writing?

Read more.

Write more.

I Don't Have the Time

Shut up.

Do you watch TV?

You have time.

There's No Point...

Publishing is too hard and too much trouble...

Ah, yes.

This was actually my big hang up. The whole idea of working with an agent and selling my idea to a publisher and all of that has always been really unattractive to me. And I know what the odds are like for getting accepted by a publisher (they're not good).

I have a natural aversion to rejection, as well as a pretty strong anti-establishment streak, so... what exactly is the point of trying to get a book published through some major publishing house?

But then... if the book is never going to be published, what's the point of writing it in the first place. Better to blog a bit and then watch TV.

But then I discovered that you don't need a publishing house and an agent. Book publishing has finally been democratized.

Self Publishing

In the past, you only had three publishing options:

Traditional Publishing— high barriers to entry, no control

Vanity Publishing— expensive and exploitative, little control, no distribution

Self Publishing— expensive and low quality, no distribution

All that has changed with the advent of online book sales and print-on-demand publishing.

Print-on-demand services allow you to create books with little or no set-up costs. This brings your barrier to entry way down. Books are only printed when they are ordered. This means no one has to guess about how many books

you might sell, and you never waste money printing books that no one will buy.

The quality of the printing has gone way up in recent years, which means that someone holding your POD self-published book will probably not be able to distinguish it from a “real book.” In fact, the line between self-published books and “real” books has never been less defined. Of course, a big part of achieving a convincing look is good design. It’s the weird little details like font spacing and margin consistency that convince people your book is legitimate or not, so don’t just throw something out there and wonder why people don’t believe it. Still, most of the barriers have been removed, and even the design hurdle isn’t too expensive anymore.

The last step is distribution. It doesn’t matter how good your book is if no one can buy it. Lucky for you, book-buying habits have changed drastically in the last few years.

While it will be very difficult (impossible) for your self-published book to show up at your local big-box book retailer, placement on online bookstores like Amazon is usually part of a self-publishing package. Very few people will ever question the legitimacy of a book because they can only get it on Amazon and not at the bookstore.

What Service to Use?

While the landscape is constantly changing, and new companies are always popping up, at the time of this writing I highly recommend CreateSpace for self-publishing (and they don’t pay me to say so).

CreateSpace is owned by Amazon, which means you get free distribution. They are the least expensive option I can find, and their quality is excellent.

I do not, however, recommend their design services. Templated cover and layout designs look exactly like what they are: cheap and generic. Hire a real designer to layout your interior and create a fresh cover. If you can’t afford one, trade, beg, or find a friend.

How To Do It All

Actual writing technique is beyond this book's purpose.

But here is my very strong advice:
Don't get ahead of yourself.

If you start thinking about sales channels and publishing platforms before your book is finished, you risk never finishing your book. It's easy and fun to fool around with e-commerce solutions and talk to designers and all of that. It is much less fun, and much more work, to sit and actually write a book. I know this because I am, this very minute, sitting and writing a book, even though I'd much rather be surfing the internet and playing around with a really cool e-commerce project I started recently.

If you need to see the end result before you can move forward, that's fine. Take a day to research POD and self-publishing options. But don't take more than a day.

Once you have an idea, even a vague idea, start writing.

Once you are inspired by what your book can do, start writing.

As soon as you possibly can, start writing.

FIVE

BRINGING IT TOGETHER

Visual Branding is a difficult thing to write about.
How do you convey in words abstract principles of design?
How do you codify art?

Well, you don't. Or at least, I don't.

Instead, we're going to talk a bit about what visual branding is and why it's important from a Thought Leadership perspective, and then look at a few important, non-negotiable principles.

What is Visual Branding?

Visual Branding is designing, shaping, and controlling the way your company looks. This is a lot more inclusive than most small businesses bother to think about. It isn't just your logo, website, and business card. It's also your Social Media presence, your letterhead, the font you use on your invoices, the way you or your salespeople dress in public, the thank you cards you send (you do send them, right?), the way your office looks (if you meet people there, of course), the forms you use, your computer desktop background.

If it's connected to your company, and someone sees it, it's visual branding, or should be.

Visual Branding and Thought Leadership

Visual branding accomplishes several things, all of which are incredibly important to Thought Leadership.

Visual Branding signals the presence of your company.

If I see a piece of mail from you, glimpse your business card in my file, or click through to your off-site event registration page, your consistent Visual Branding lets me know that all those different interactions are related to you and your company. Assuming all those things are positive experiences, this helps build trust and loyalty.

Visual Branding signals quality.

Very basic.

High quality design = high quality company.

Cheesy, low quality design with little consistency =
cheesy, low quality company with little consistency.

It's amazing how many small businesses, especially sole-practitioner professional services, have crappy business cards, crappy websites, crappy offices, and think that it doesn't matter because, "my business relies on my sales skills and networking, not on branding and PR."

I like to ask them, "Would you buy from yourself, if this is what you saw?"

Visual Branding Isn't

Did you notice that I didn't say, "Visual Branding helps identify your products, service, or industry?"

That's because, usually, it's not a great idea to use iconography as a logo. If you use a little plunger, a spine, or a slice of pizza, how do we know that you are any different than any other plumber, chiropractor, or pizza joint? And what happens if you decide to add handyman services, nutraceuticals, and gelato? New logo? Rebranding?

Apple, Microsoft, Dell...

no computer-shaped logos.

McDonald's, Taco Bell, Pizza Hut...

no food-shaped logos.

Nike, Reebok, Adidas...

no shoe-shaped logos.

Amazon, Borders, B&N...

no book-shaped logos.

While a custom, stylized icon can work sometimes — Burger King sort of looks like a Burger — the usual result looks like it came off a free clip-art website (which it frequently did), makes you look like a small-time operation, and hinders your ability to grow and change your company.

Visual Branding signals culture, values, and style.

Conservative? Fun? Safe? Daring? Hip? Crazy?

Big huge companies spend a lot of time, energy, and money deciding what they want to be and who they want to appeal to. If you're a solo shop or a very small company, you are who you are, and you will do best to appeal to people who will respond well to who you already are.

Visual Branding can go a long way toward making sure people understand what they're going to get when they work with you, which helps the right clients and customers self-select into your services.

That's one of the reasons templates or generic designs are such a bad idea—they may look “professional,” but they are, by definition, not specific to you and your culture.

Three Non-negotiable Elements of Visual Branding

The range of Visual Branding possibilities is infinite, so it's next to impossible to say, “Do this, don't do that.” Still, there are three absolutely required elements.

Effective Communication

Your visual branding must help your company communicate with the world. If your swirly-font logo is hard to understand, if your color scheme disappears in the sunlight, or if your right-aligned text slows down your reader, it's bad design.

Your visual branding also needs to communicate about your company in a way that makes sense.

This goes back to the “culture, values, and style” idea. If your daring internet startup looks like a conservative law office, you have bad branding.

Everything communicates something. Be sure your branding communicates what you want it to.

Consistency

The same font, the same colors, the same angles, the same, the same, the same. It needs to look the same online, offline, in print, in person, and in your office.

I don't mean you have to be boring. I mean that if your business card and your letterhead both have a green stripe, they're the same exact shade of green. I'm not saying you can't use different fonts, I'm saying that the body text on your letterhead ought to be the same as the body text in your catalog. You want to use something different for titles? Great. Make sure all the titles get changed, not just some of them.

Consistency is one of those tiny, subconscious signals that tells people whether you're a legitimate business, or some basement chop-shop.

Depending on the nature of your business, it might be worthwhile to put together an In-house Style Guide. This is basically a (well-designed, consistently branded) catalog of how things in your company are supposed to look: fonts, colors, logos, proportions, margins, watermarks, paper grades, finishes. If your company exists solely online, this might be nothing more than a text file listing fonts and HTML color hex-codes (a streamlined, human readable version of a CSS file). If you have a lot of client interaction and produce a great deal of printed collateral, you may need a physical book.

Quality Control

Words and pictures accidentally overlapping. Trifold brochures with uneven folding. Poorly cut business cards.

Websites that break in IE6. Crooked labels. The last line of text stretched out for no reason.

It makes you look cheap. It makes you look crappy.
Do you want to hire a company that cannot produce quality?

I'm flabbergasted by the number of people and firms that think this stuff doesn't matter.
It matters. Don't suck.
Why would you want to suck?

Bootstrapping Design

Design and Visual Branding is one of the few things I do not recommend people do themselves. Your ability to manipulate a template or fool around with Dreamweaver does not make you a designer. Sorry.

Hopefully, if you're adept at using free and cheap tools for other aspects of your business, you'll have saved enough money to afford to pay for design.

Still, good design doesn't have to be expensive. Here are some ideas for stretching your design dollar.

Startups and Small Firms

This is pretty obvious, but often smaller firms simply have lower prices and are more willing to be flexible about what they can do for you. If they don't have a large and convincing portfolio, look at their own branding.

Students

This is not your 13 year old cousin who's great with Photoshop. This is (young) adults in design school. Not a good way to go if you need a lot of stuff over a long period of time, but it can be great if you need reusable templates or a logo.

Online Services

You should be a bit weary of the ultra-cheap not-really-custom “custom” design sites. Even more so than working with students, this is absolutely not the way to go if you need ongoing work over a long period of time. They simply cannot provide consistency or quality control for you. Great, though, for one-off designs, like a single book cover or a one-product internet company sales page.

Combined Approach

There's no reason you can't use different providers for different things, assuming you do so in a sane manner that doesn't drive you or your vendor crazy. For example, if there's a great little startup design firm who can oversee quality control, layout, UI design, and ongoing consistency issues at a price you can afford, you might still save a few hundred dollars by having your logo crowd sourced.

If you want to do that, you need to be honest and cooperative with the design shop. If they are going to oversee implementation, they will want and need to have input on the design specs sent to the outsourcer. In this case, you'll want to think of your in-person team as project management, regardless of how many out-sourced providers are used. Only by using a project-management approach will you achieve consistency and quality.

So talk to them first, before you “save money” by getting a logo or a template that has to be redone later.

It's amazing that big companies will spend millions of dollars picking out a particular shade of red, while sole-practitioners honestly believe that it doesn't make any difference.

It does make a difference.

Every interaction you have is an opportunity to be seen as an expert and Thought Leader, or as a mediocre hack.

Content is king, yes—
but don't make your knowledge base fight an uphill battle.

There are an infinite, and growing, number of things you can do to market your business and position yourself as a Thought Leader. Instead of chasing after every type of cool new technology, the bulk of this book is dedicated to the essentials— those things you have to do if you're making a serious attempt at Thought Leadership.

But there are so many additional great ideas!

Here are just a few.

Multimedia

Podcasting

Podcasting is goofy name that really just means distributing audio (usually mp3 files) as part of your blog. People can then listen to you online or download the file and listen to you on their mp3 player or iPod.

You probably think you have a terrible voice, that no one would want to hear you, that you'd just die if you had to hear your own voice.

Get over it. Everyone thinks that, even the people who make a living with their own voices.

Podcasting is a fantastic way to extend your influence. It gives you a chance to be follow someone around on the subway or at the gym. It lets you subliminally drone on in the background while your potential client does something else. It gives you a platform for interviewing experts and satisfied clients. It makes you look really cool because your competition probably isn't doing it.

People tend to think the barrier to entry is really high. Expensive recording equipment, software, tech skill.

But it isn't hard at all. A decent microphone can cost under \$50 (incredible, right?), and basic software you need is free.

Video

Some people use the word vodcasting. That sounds dumb, so I just say "video."

Again, people have all the same hangups they have with audio, but even more so. And again, people think the barrier to entry is high.

Well, as hard as it is, you are just going to have to get over, "I hate the way I look on camera."

As with podcasting, the tech barrier is much easier than the psychological one. A great digital video camera costs less than \$200. You can upload your videos for free to your YouTube channel, and then embed them in your blog. If you need to splice or edit, there's free software for that.

Advantages of Audio and Video

Accessibility

Not everyone likes to read. Not everyone can. Making more formats available simply makes it more likely that people will engage with your content.

Speed

While the learning curve might take you half a day, once you're up and running it is much easier for most people to talk than to write. So podcasting and video give you the ability to quickly create useful content and get it published.

Portability

No one is going to take your blog post to the gym with them. They might just take their iPod, though. Similarly, you can take your flip video camera places and create videos a lot easier than you can stop what you're doing to capture the moment in words on your blog or even on Twitter.

Coolness

As easy as it is, most people are just not doing it.
You could easily become the only podcasting magician in your county.

SEO Note on Audio and Video

Search engines don't really index the content of video and audio files.
If you want your media to help with your rankings:

- Use search friendly file names. No one searches for "2009-01-05-vid2764f.mpg."
- Transcribe the verbal content (by hand or with text-to-speech software) and put that on your site as well.

Branded Social Networking

The popularity of Facebook and MySpace have made a lot of companies think, “What if there was a Social Networking site for our fans?” Right— a whole community of people brought together because they all eat the same brand of noodle. I’m sure that’s all sorts of value-added.

On the other hand, if there’s a really good reason why your community of potential buyers would want to network specifically with each other online, the technology exists to make that happen.

The current leader in low-cost branded Social Networking is ning.com. If you’re interested in creating a branded Social Networking site, that would be the place to start. Just make sure that you couldn’t accomplish your goals easier on a Facebook fan page (another good idea, depending on your demographic).

The Danger of Good Ideas

There are so many cool things to do, and every day someone invents some new cool thing to do. All of these things have great potential to improve your business, but they have an even greater potential to distract you from the essentials.

It’s easy to stop blogging so that you can play around with video. It’s easier to fiddle with setting up your own Social Networking site than it is to stare at a blank screen and try to write your book, or get on the phone and try to find a seminar venue.

Be diligent and disciplined about the things that really matter. If you want, set an hour aside every day or week to research new ideas or to play with interesting side projects. But keep your focus on the essential elements.

And a have a plan.

It's easy to get excited about tools and technology.

The Social Media world is filled with cool new toys, and every day some new site or service pops up. If you follow the tech-elite, you can be convinced that you need to do each new thing that comes along, and it's hard not to start thinking to yourself, "If I just got on that new network, if I started twoodling more, that would change everything!"

Even the lower-tech stuff can be seductive that way. "If I just write a book... if I just start doing seminars... if I just got out and networked more... oh, look— if I joined this group, that'll make all the difference."

The problem with a tool-based (or tactical) approach is that every new set of tactics that comes up looks just as attractive as your current set... or probably more attractive, since you've already discovered that your current tactics don't lead to instant success.

The way to increase your chances of success is to think through and create a strategy that pulls the pieces together into a unified plan of action you can implement over time.

Creating a strategy will force you to answer questions like:

Who are the people whose Thoughts you want to Lead?

How/where will these people find you?

How/where will you find them?

What will they see/hear/read at various points of engagement with you?

How will you keep yourself in their thoughts?

How will you prove to them that you are a trusted source of ideas and information?

How will you monetize those relationships?

Answering those questions will help you start to sketch out a plan. As you fill in the details of the plan, the answers to those questions will become clearer and more refined. You'll start to realize that you have to think through issues like conversion, customer relationship management, web site bounce rates, bandwidth, time management...

Your plan should take a long view of things like content creation, SEO, and social media interaction. You shouldn't plan to do everything all at once, and the order that you start doing things in should be based on a logical progression of client relationships— not on your ability to accomplish certain tasks or spend money on certain things.

Rough Sketch Thought Leader Plan

To get you thinking and moving forward, here is a (very) rough sketch of what a Thought Leadership plan might look like...

Website/Blog

This is home base, so get this up and running first.

Make sure to choose a good domain name and host, and install WordPress.

If you don't have money/time to customize a theme, just get a decent free theme.

The most important thing is start writing— get content up.

The more often you add good blog posts and articles, the sooner you'll be able to move forward.

Also, you might want to start working on local search SEO at this point.

Depending on the niche you're trying to rank for, this could be a matter of domain name selection and thoughtful keywording of posts, or it may mean behind the scenes content. This depends on how important local search is to your overall strategy.

Listening and Research

Some people say to do this first, but I'm afraid too many potential Thought Leaders will get stuck here. So I say, if you at least know the vague area of your field you'll be working in, start blogging first.

About the same time that you start blogging, or within a few weeks if you're also busy with serving existing clients, begin to listen in on your market.

Listening and research means finding the conversations, offline and online, that you will one day want to be a part of and help direct.

You do this by:

- Subscribing to worthwhile blogs
- Following people on Twitter
- Setting up Google alerts
- Going to networking events
- Going to conferences and seminars

As you hear more about what people are saying and doing, your content will start to take shape and be relevant.

Clean Up Your Site

Once you have enough content (that is, more than could be read by a potential client in one sitting), and you're ready to start making an active attempt to draw people into your community, spend some time and money making sure your website is ready to do its job.

- Custom design that fits your business
- Clean copy that clearly tells people who you are, what you do, and how to contact you
- Lead generation mechanism
- An easy-to-use subscribe function
- A way for people to engage and give feedback

Social Media / Social Networking

If you aren't doing social media, start. Social media should be thought of as ultimately about getting people back to your home base (your blog-centered, content-rich website), so once you've taken the time to clean the place up a bit, start building profiles and engaging with people.

Start with the essentials, the basics. Twitter is important these days, so is LinkedIn.

Depending on your market, Facebook might be a big deal too.

And then there's all those other places to talk to people online...

Instead of getting crazy and doing everything, or getting frustrated and doing nothing, try asking a few savvy clients or prospects what they are using. Chances are, other people like them are using that as well.

Attract People to Your Site

Once your site is ready to receive them, start telling people about it. Get new business cards with the URL right on the front. Put the address in your email signature and on your letterhead. Make sure anyone who knows you knows you have a website and how to get to it. Make sure all your social networking profiles have a link to your site.

Start participating in those conversations you've been listening in on. Comment on blogs (this is huge). If someone writes a blog post on a theme similar to one of your posts, comment and include a link back to yours. Start answering questions on LinkedIn Answers, or start participating in message board discussions.

If you have any kind of clear, on-site monetization— like an informational product to sell— this might be a good time to start looking at PPC (pay per click) or SEM (search engine marketing). But paying for traffic only makes sense if you have a way to monetize it immediately.

Go Live

Start networking.

You have enough content behind you that someone visiting your site after meeting you will believe that you're an expert, so go out into the world and start acting like one.

Keep an Ear Out for Speaking Opportunities

If you join a few networking groups, and start going to educational events, you'll start to hear, "We're looking for a speaker." Or you'll notice that some groups or venues have regular guest speakers and presentations.

You're probably not at the point where you can organize and host your own thing and get anyone to show up (if you are, go ahead), but if you can just show up and talk someplace with a built-in audience, that's fantastic.

Start Working on that Book

You've been writing blogs now for months. You haven't stopped or slowed down. You're posting at least once a week, maybe twice a week. You've started to realize you have a voice, a unique perspective, something valuable and original to say about foot health or organic vegetables. Start working on the book.

It will take you months to write, so now is the time to start working on it. You're working on attracting people to you, you've got a decent site that doesn't require too much attention (except continued blog posts), you're out meeting new people. If you start writing now, you'll have a pretty good audience by the time you're ready to publish next year.

Keep On Keepin' On... fix as you go

This is where the patience and discipline stuff kicks in. You can up the ante with new forms of content at this point— video and podcasting, for example. But you have got to continue on with blogging, engaging in online conversations, and networking.

Check your web site traffic stats from time to time and see what's working and what isn't.

Maybe you're getting a lot of traffic from two minutes of blog commenting and not so much from hours spent on message boards. Adjust your time accordingly.

Maybe you're getting traffic, but nobody subscribes.

Is your subscribe button easy to see and use? Is it broken?

At this point I can't continue to give you generic strategy advice, because at this point you should be collecting enough input, both hard data and soft feedback, that you can move forward with a strategy that is specifically tailored to your business and the community you are building around it. Just make sure your decisions are based on input, not on vague ideas or theories you read on someone's blog (even mine).

Note of Warning on Strategy

Strategy is important. Metrics are important. Measurable results and ROI are important.

But so are community and relationships.

There is no way to measure the ROI of “I’ve blogged and twittered for months and one day a huge case just showed up at my door,” just like there’s no good way for a Financial Planner to measure the ROI of, “I have several rich uncles who like me.”

Your strategy, and your analysis of it, needs to take into account the human dumb-luck factor. One of the big advantages of Social Media and community building is that you open yourself up to more opportunities to be lucky.

*They say success is all about who you know.
They say it's about who knows you.*

Thought Leadership is about knowing and being known by lots of people who can share opportunities with you.

They say success is being in the right place at the right time.

Thought Leadership is being in as many places as possible for as much time as possible.

They say success is about more than being wealthy, that it's really about being rich in love and relationships and satisfying work, and finding success on your terms.

Thought Leadership puts relationships ahead of money and sales; it focuses on work that is well done and people who love you for doing it.

Thought Leadership is about finding success your own way.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“DIY” and “self-publishing” are complete misnomers.
I could not have done this by myself.

Neither can you.

Rather than having my acknowledgements section be a pointless ramble that you’ll surely skip over, I thought it might be instructive to point out how many people I owe my gratitude to and why, so you can understand that Thought Leadership (and entrepreneurship and success and all those wonderful things) is really about people and relationships. If you can only do one thing today to put yourself on the path toward success, you should become more open to the people who can help you.

Here are a few of the ones who have helped me.

A great number of people over the last few years have set me on the path of entrepreneurship and writing. As I sit to write this, I realize how ridiculous it would be to thank everyone from my elementary school English teacher to my first sales manager and all the random people along the way who have influenced me. The list of people who have contributed to this is incredibly long, and most of them will never know how much of an impact they have had on my life or how grateful I am to have known them.

A few particular thanks, though, seem to be in order.
I’ll start with those furthest from me and work my way back.

The people and organizations who have created the tools that allow me to do what I do are incredible.

I don’t know why someone would spend years working on open source software they plan to give away for free. I can’t imagine being creative and forward-thinking enough to invent new technology, new media, and new business models.

I wish I was awesome enough to be one of the “early-adopter” types who forge ahead, experiment, and then write books for the rest of us to read.

From this crowd of people I have (mostly) never met, and who will (mostly) never read this book, I thank:

- Matt Mullenweg and Automattic (creators of WordPress)
- Flynn, Bytes for All, and everyone involved with the Atahualpa Theme
- The community of WP-Plugin developers who are constantly creating everything I suddenly realize I need
- David Meerman Scott (who I did get to meet!), whose book *New Rules of Marketing and PR* laid the groundwork for what Social Bootstrap is and does
- Whatever brilliant genius at Amazon came up with the CreateSpace self-publishing service
- Tim Ferris, who I only like about 14% of the time, and who made me realize what was possible
- Jim Rohn, who I only dislike about 14% of the time, and who convinced me I could actually take control

I’ve had a few professional relationships along the way that have made all the difference in the world.

The one that stands out the most is Larry McGlaughlin, who hired me, taught me how to sell, and introduced me to the world of personal development and entrepreneurship.

Debra Gorham, who was my immediate manager at the time, was also an incredible teacher and cheerleader.

Everyone thinking about becoming an entrepreneur should spend a year in sales.

Networking has been an incredible realm of opportunity for me, and the Boston community of entrepreneurs, service providers, sales people, and complete wackos has provided me with dozens of new friends, new ideas, and new information.

- Exemplar Law, Revolve Nation, Chris Marston, and Jessica Manganello (good luck on your transition!); I can’t say enough about this amazing juggernaut of awesomeness

- Kelle Sparta and Stephen Labuda, both awesome in their own right, who have each done an amazing job of building a welcoming network in Boston

- WorkBar Boston and Evona Niewiadomska, the coolest co-working space ever and its awesome office-manager/marketing-goddess (I'm not sure of her actual title); they have given me a fantastic platform/arena for my ideas

- Mark McCurdy and Monique Morimoto Flaherty, who have both helped me stick my toe in the nonprofit ocean

- The dozens of law firms, universities, incubators, nonprofits, government agencies, corporations, venue owners, and other entities who think that giving away knowledge, time, and space is a worthwhile thing to do; I am constantly amazed at how much you can learn and who you can meet just by showing up. The list of these is long, but a few highlights: Foley & Lardner, The Emerging Enterprise Center at Foley Hoag, The Enterprise Center at Salem State, Northeastern University, Vlorá's restaurant (try the watermelon-feta tidbits!), Indigo Venture Law, the Massachusetts Society of CPAs, The Boston Lawyers Network, Microsoft Cambridge, MIT...

My incredible church family has provided an amazing amount of love, support, and guidance. Besides the emotional and spiritual support, they have told my wife and me over and over that if we go broke they will help out. It's much easier to go out on a limb when you have a safety net in place.

The other part of that safety net is my parents, who have also offered to "help out" with everything from money to "well, you could always move back in..." So far we haven't needed either, but it's good to know we won't starve or be homeless.

My wife.

My partner in life, love, and business.

I (quite literally) wouldn't be able to do any of this without her.

And I wouldn't want to.

God.

ABOUT

About the Author

Adam Wood is the founder of Social Bootstrap.
When not creating Thought Leadership, Adam:

- writes music
- cooks
- spends time with his wife
- lives intentionally

You can read Adam's blog at
<http://SocialBootstrap.com/blog>

And follow him on Twitter at
<http://twitter.com/SocialBootstrap>

Adam's favorite HTML tag is the unordered list.
This is his first book.

About Social Bootstrap

Social Bootstrap is a Thought Leadership marketing firm, which means that we help entrepreneurs and organizations attract new clients by becoming recognized as experts, or Thought Leaders, in their industry. We do this by implementing many of the strategies you find in this book.

You can learn more about Social Bootstrap at our website,
<http://SocialBootstrap.com>

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