

The ROI of Thought Leadership

From conference speakers to LinkedIn article authors to podcast hosts to social media influencers, the field of “Thought Leadership” is absolutely booming. It seems like everyone’s getting in the game these days.

But what’s the advantage?

If you’re going to take time to create and disperse original content, what’s the pay-off?

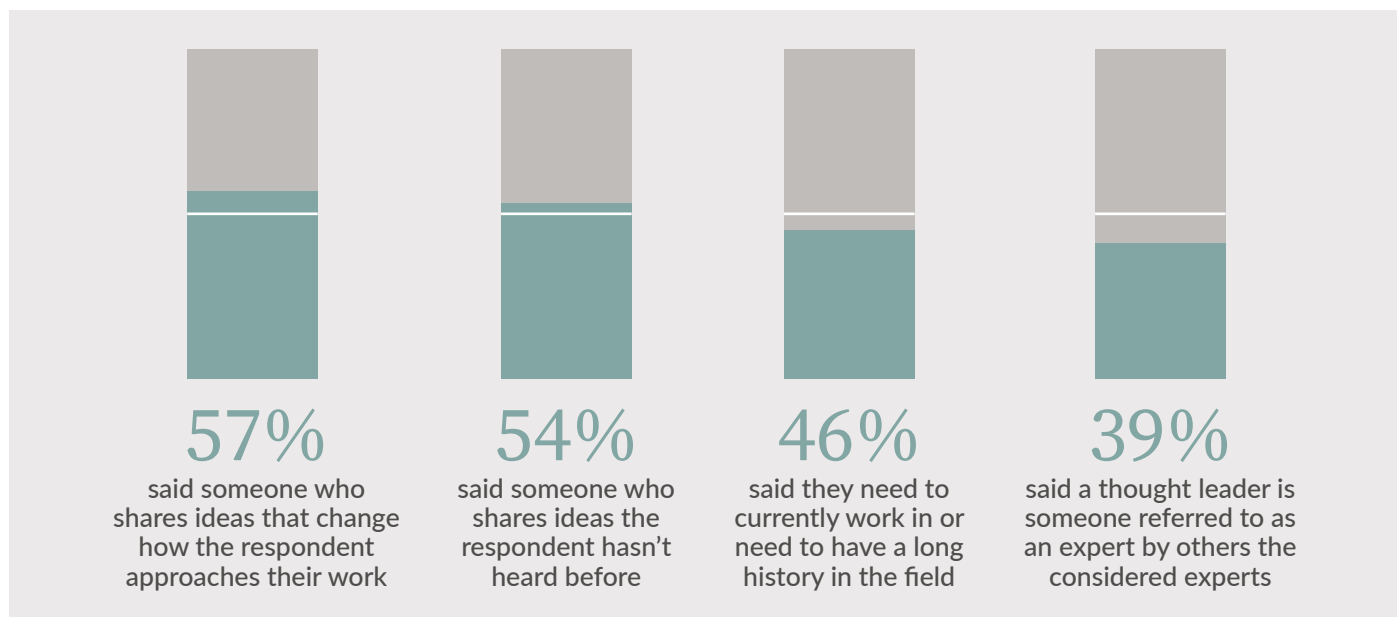
For some, it’s the sheer joy of sharing innovative, disruptive ideas. For others, it’s a method to bring more prospects to their business. The goal needs to be tailored to the individual.

Then, to properly evaluate the potential ROI, it’s important to look at the different types of audiences that follow thought leaders or industry experts.

Predictive ROI partnered with Audience Audit Inc to survey 325 professionals. The respondents came from a range of industries and each reported following “someone you consider an expert on a business topic or industry.”

Their findings help us hone in on how aspiring thought leaders should be thinking about, creating, and sharing their message.

What Qualifies a Thought Leader



4 Segments of Followers

Trusting Followers

- Most likely to be impressed by a thought leader's professional speaking career, social media presence, and other visible markers of popularity
- They often believe they have lot to learn about their industry, and are likely to trust that what they hear from experts is, for the most part, new and helpful information
- Worry about keeping up with the latest thinking in their industry
- See a "thought leader" as young, innovative, and disruptive, while an "expert" is someone proficient in the current way of doing things

27%

Jaded Skeptics

- Least likely to trust thought leaders
- Believe experts are in it for the self-promotion and rarely have something new to offer
- Tune out when they recognize the same old advice that's being repackaged and labeled "outside the box" or "disruptive"
- Expect thought leaders to be frauds, and need to be convinced otherwise

23%

Discriminating & Engaged

- Looking for thought leaders to help them and their organization stay up-to-date with trends, insights, and tools/resources within their industry
- Expect thought leaders to have many years of experience in their field and demonstrable success within their own business ventures. They should be widely-recognized as an expert, including by other experts
- Want solutions to common problems in the industry and tactics that can be implemented in everyday worklife

25%

Self-Described Experts

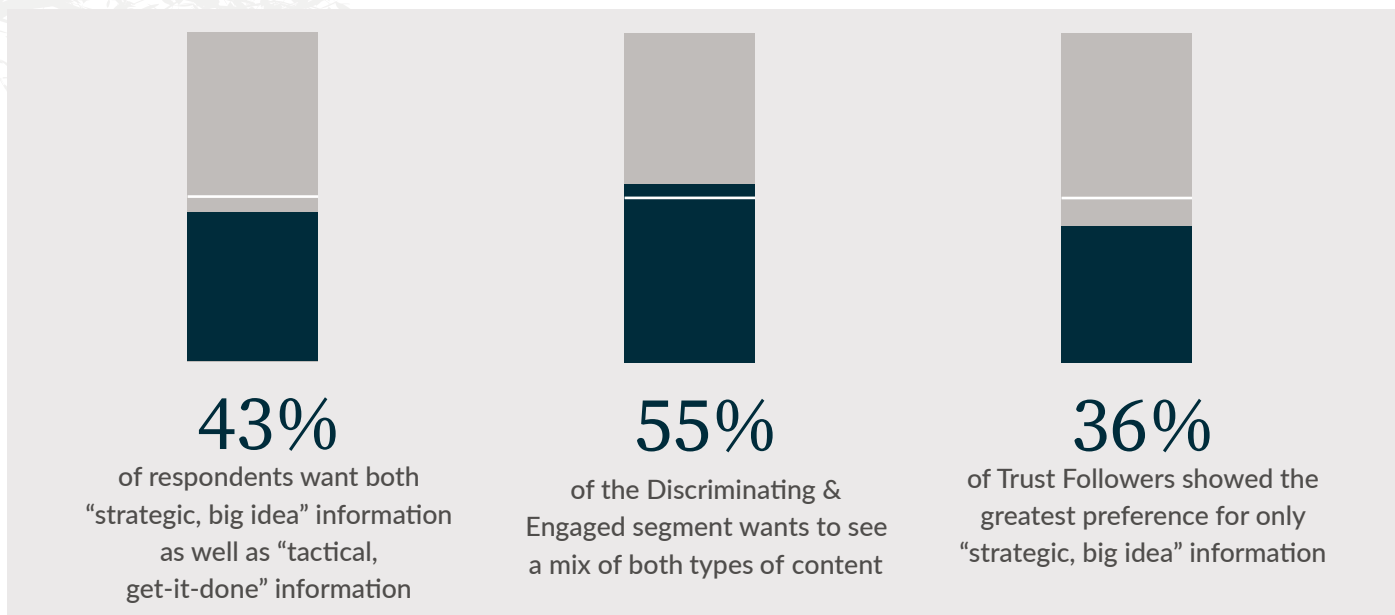
- Confident in their own knowledge, consider themselves an expert in their job or discipline
- Looking for other experts that have professional attitudes
- The length of time they've been in their industry does not affect how likely they are to see themselves as experts
- Most impressed by thought leaders that offer truly fresh, unique, and disruptive ideas that alter how the respondent approaches their day-to-day

25%

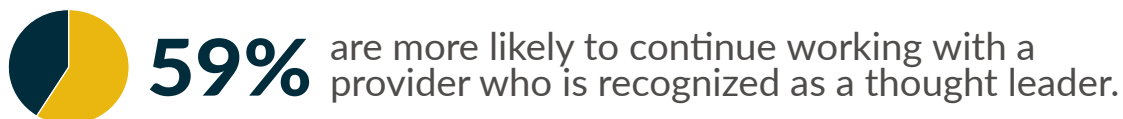
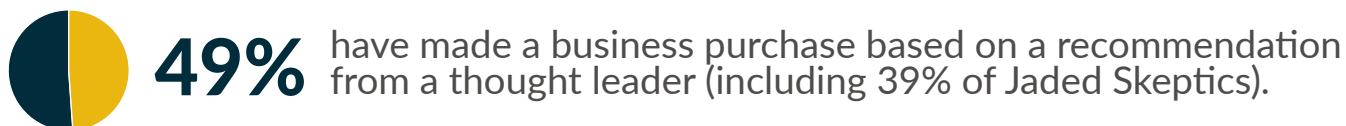
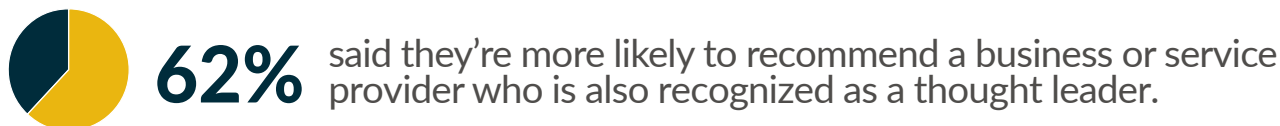
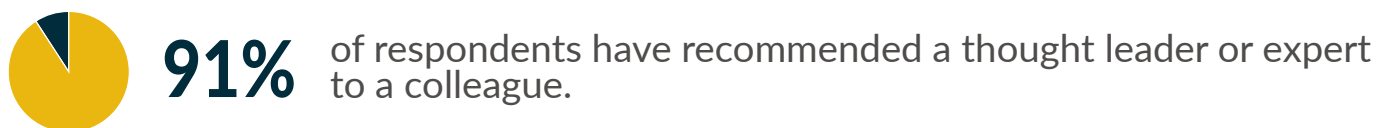
What this means: Each segment has a very different idea of what makes someone a "thought leader." Rather than trying to appeal to the masses, messages and resources should be carefully crafted and tailored to the segment a thought leader or expert wants to target.



Preferred Content



ROI of Thought Leadership



Ways to Target Each Segment

Trusting Followers



Offer advice, research, and tactics that challenge the status quo of the industry



Collaborate with other recognized thought leaders



Share information through highly-visible outlets (write a book, speak at a conference, build a social media following)

Jaded Skeptics



Differentiate yourself from so-called “thought leaders” by establishing your experience and the level of innovation in your ideas



Be very cautious about self-promotion; approach your findings from the angle of someone sharing their experience and ideas, then let your audience apply the title of “expert.” Focus on the findings, the work, and the outcome rather than on yourself



Collaborate with experts **outside** of your industry to get the most innovative and disruptive ideas

Discriminating & Engaged



Build your backstory. Show your audience your hard work and experience that led you to where you are now. This includes transparently sharing successes and failures



Create and contribute valuable content to high-profile outlets, such as Forbes or Business Insider



Give your audience access to your findings through eBooks, summaries, and other resources on your website

Self-Described Experts



Focus on building a community to help your audience further hone their expertise



Interview, collaborate with, or otherwise share findings from experienced professionals in your industry



Enthusiastically promote exceptional thinking and new ideas from other industry experts, regardless of how well they are known

