


# Penny for your thoughts: Becoming a thought leader

 By [Ronelle Bester](#)

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Thought leadership is an underused and misunderstood element of the PR mix, but in a world of noise, it's this contemplative approach to publicity that ends up being most effective.

The point of thought leadership is to establish your market authority organically, assuming the mantle of leadership by driving conversation, rather than by pushing the virtues of your product.

By offering a unique perspective on key topics within your industry, you can quickly become an authority within your field, and come to be regarded as an influential voice among your peers.

## So why is this important?

Particularly in the B2B environment, where complex and long purchasing decisions involve a multitude of people, it's your innovative content, rather than repeated mentions of your name, that's ultimately going to get you noticed.

Thought leadership content can help people involved in the business decision-making process to establish alignment with your company, facilitating better understanding of your business values and key offerings.

Ultimately, your job as a thought leader is to inspire buyers to take the next step in the purchasing journey.

## How do you become a thought leader?

The key to thought leadership is recognising a core area of expertise in which your company excels. Industries like IT can be quite broad, so the more specific your topic (or group thereof), the easier it'll be to really own it.

Next, you'll need to decide how best to implement your thought leadership strategy. Here are some of the best ways to make your mark:

## Thought leadership articles

Choose a knowledgeable spokesperson to speak about topical issues in your industry and offer a fresh perspective. By associating your company with a consistent, trusted voice, you'll be more readily identifiable and more easily associated with your chosen area of expertise.

Target leading industry and vertical publications with thought-provoking, by-lined articles to educate readers about your topic and how it affects the sector at large. Offer new perspectives as a way to intrigue, challenge, and inspire industry influencers and decision makers.

## Public speaking

Visibility is key to establishing your authority in your industry, so offering your insights at industry panels and networking events can quickly raise your profile amongst peers.

By extending your public speaking scope beyond industry-specific events, you'll be able to educate other vertical markets about the importance of your own sector. Remember, you'll be able to deliver more engaging, inspirational presentations by avoiding commercial messaging and focusing on relevant, topical content.

## Research

Releasing research is a fantastic way to add clout to your cause. By using quantitative results to back up your points of view, you'll add substance to your argument, and should find it a lot easier to position yourself as an insightful authority.

Local research is particularly sought-after in the media environment, both because it's hard to come by and due to the fact that international findings often correlate very little with South African reality. So, if you don't have any research at hand, consider undertaking your own.

## Get blogging

These days, you no longer need to wait for journalists to publish your content. Thanks to Wordpress and the abundance of social media platforms at our disposal, everyone's a publisher; so don't miss out on the opportunity to get regular insights out onto the web.

Ensure you've got all your bases covered by pushing your blog content onto your various social media channels, particularly LinkedIn, which is increasingly becoming a go-to network for businesses.

## Fill up your trophy cabinet

Boasting a series of awards and accolades is one very effective way to set yourself apart from your competitors. However, these aren't simply going to fall into your lap. While you'll undoubtedly need to earn any honours on merit, you won't win if you don't enter, so make sure you identify which industry awards might be relevant for your business and put yourself in the running.

If you've succeeded in building a thought leadership profile, your chances of winning are likely to be far better, as you'll already have established yourself as a well-known and respected presence within your industry.

## ABOUT RONELLE BESTER

Managing Director at Red Ribbon Communications. With over 20 years of experience in PR and Marketing, Ronelle is one of the South African communications industry's most influential voices.

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