

# Forward thinking

## The Bladonmore guide to thought leadership

An aerial view of the London skyline, featuring the Gherkin and other skyscrapers. A stylized tree graphic with green foliage and a white trunk is overlaid on the right side of the image.

## Leading from the front

The way in which companies institutionalise and make use of their knowledge will distinguish the most effective companies and business leaders in the 21st century.

This means actively managing the thinking and expertise you have accumulated, both within your organisation and its wider network of contacts.

A positive reputation as a thought leader influences everyone with an interest in your business. This is not just your clients but those who invest in it, work for it, supply to it and regulate in favour of it.

The benefits to your business and its profile can be significant if you are able to successfully develop a reputation as a thought leader in your field. Success will come to those who are able to communicate knowledge in an engaging and consistent fashion. It involves collaborative working with people inside an organisation and canvassing external opinions.

Get it right and companies and

commentators will look to you for insight and vision. Journalists will quote you, analysts will call you, websites will link to you and you will be in demand as a conference speaker.

Thought leadership is more than just placing tombstone adverts in newspapers or listing the work you do for your clients on your website. When skillfully implemented it engages with your key audiences on a more subtle level and establishes your organisation at the forefront of their perception.

## So what is a thought leader?

Thought leaders are trusted voices in their areas of expertise. That trust can take a long time to build and has a number of foundation stones. A handful of companies, such as McKinsey, Microsoft and Goldman Sachs, have been successfully using thought leadership to build their franchises for decades.

Each of these companies recognise the sheer power of their internal knowledge and use it selectively to strengthen their standing in the business community. At the heart of what they do is a deep understanding of the issues and a willingness to share that knowledge with their key audiences.

## What does it take to be a thought leader?

Bladonmore has developed a reputation for unlocking knowledge within leading organisations and presenting it in a way to positively influence the attitude of their most important audiences. We have conceived and delivered countless thought leadership campaigns for a range of UK and international clients, gaining valuable insight into the practicalities of developing and executing a thought leadership strategy.

Becoming a recognised and respected thought leader is no easy task – any strategy must be executed with precision and diligence. The following is an outline of a typical process:

### Scope out your audience

You need to rank the audiences that are most important to your organisation. Are you appealing to existing contacts first or prospective ones? Are you focusing on specific markets or sectors? How well do you know the people in this audience?

### Decide what you want to say

Once you have defined your key audiences, you can hone your



message to appeal to them. What is the single message you would like a member of this audience to take away from this project? Or from a first meeting with you? Does it relate to your expertise or your wish to do business together?

### **Refine your message**

Thought leadership demands extensive interviewing, research and (this may seem obvious) genuine thought. The project is likely to be refined as more intelligence and new questions emerge. You are likely to read more than one draft of the output and your feedback on its development is vital. You need to be willing to invest the requisite time if you are to maximise the return.

### **Determine your opinion and decide how strongly you will state it**

Thought leadership requires an opinion or a perspective on a subject. There is seldom a “right” and a “wrong” point of view. Not everyone will agree with everything you say. In fact, some may vigorously disagree. Are you willing to challenge people important to your business who may have a different opinion to you?

### **Determine what device you think will help you achieve this ambition**

The end product or device may take many forms. Budget will influence your decision but it could be

anything from a piece of copywriting for an authored article or a printed or online publication to a much deeper piece of research such as a book or a white paper. You might even host a specialist event or conference. All of these ideas – and there are many others – enable you to control the output.

### **Spread the word**

The end result needs to be distributed to ensure it gets into the hands of those that matter.

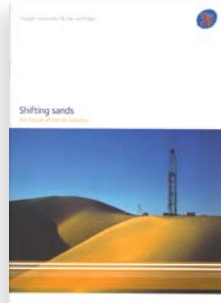
### **Speak**

Identify trade shows and conferences that customers and industry influencers are attending and get on panels or lead workshops. Bear in mind, however, that no one wants to listen to you pitching your product. You are there to inform and educate, to provide a unique perspective.

### **Measure the effectiveness**

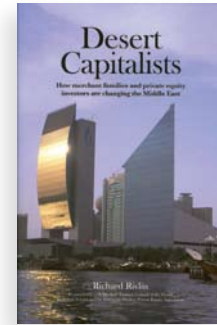
This is about being disciplined to track the contacts and leads that these programmes generate. Internally, you should appoint someone as the project manager for any campaign and ensure they are able to track exactly who accesses your thinking and decide on the most effective ways of following up. **B**

# Recent examples of our work include:



3i, the FTSE 100 private equity investor, has developed a highly successful thought leadership programme in recent years. Its sector-by-sector approach aims to boost deal flow within its core sectors.

Bladonmore has used a wide range of communication tools to reach key decision makers and business leaders in each sector. These include research papers, online blogs and conferences. For example, in the oil & gas sector, 3i has emerged as a respected commentator, with its recent *Shifting Sands* report on the future of the oil industry being covered in the *Financial Times*, among other publications.



The Arab Business Council of the World Economic Forum wanted a device to demonstrate the opportunity for business in the Arab world. At a time when the spotlight was centred on the political issues, Bladonmore was asked to find a way to highlight the opportunities for investment in this unique region.

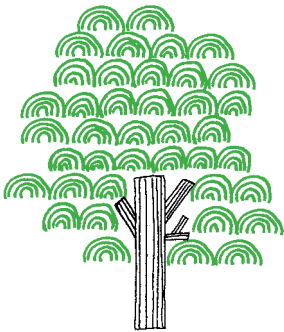
Bladonmore researched and wrote a book, *Desert Capitalists*, to showcase the emerging business leaders from the Arab world – including both the Gulf and the Levant – and make a positive case for the power of capital in the region.

Bladonmore was further tasked with promoting the ideas in the book. As a result, more than 6,000 copies were distributed to business leaders and politicians around the world. The author has also talked extensively on the subject to a range of international business media.



KPMG delivers financial advisory services to clients across the globe. It wanted to create a device to showcase original thought, incorporating the perspectives of key KPMG people from its network of offices.

The result is *Headroom*, a twice-yearly publication that is global in outlook and provides a platform for thought leadership to be delivered to key audiences.



# Bladonmore

COMMUNICATING KNOWLEDGE ●●●

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