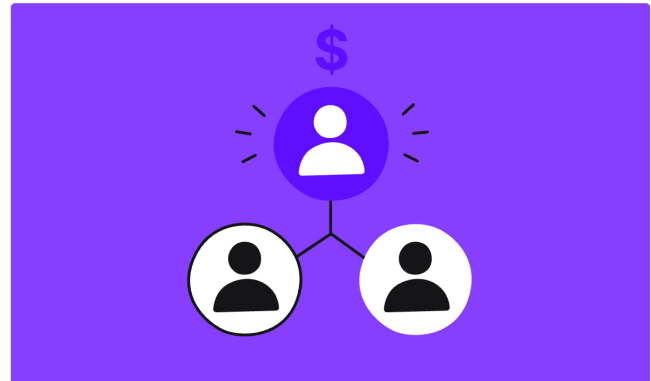


Should Sales Reps Rebrand as Thought Leaders?

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11 Min Read



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What is thought leadership?

What is the purpose of thought leadership?

Thought leadership examples of reps who bulldozed their way into the spotlight!

How can sales implement thought leadership?

Two essential thought leadership development strategies

Key takeaways

Give me the TL;DR ↓

Throughout history, thought leaders have held a lot of power.

Take **Guy de Chauliac**, for example.

He was a French physician who in the 1300s spoke out against another physician named Theodoric Borgogononi. What did he speak out against? Cleaning wounds. Yup! It's a standard practice by medical professionals today, but de Chauliac followed the teachings of ancient Greek surgeon Galen, who believed pus was good for the body. De Chauliac was successful in his challenge of wound-cleaning, his views spread throughout medieval Europe, and some historians believe his idea set the development of antisepsis in surgery back by 600 years.

That's the power of thought leadership in any industry. Anyone who's an expert in their field, has a respected voice, interesting thoughts, ideas and opinions can sway their audience in their favor. So, does that mean sales reps should position themselves as a thought leader? I mean, if it comes with that much power, why the heck not? Well, let's put it this way. Would you want to buy from someone who does not consider themselves an expert on their product or service?

Thought leadership is a huge part of sales today. [Decision-makers](#) are flooded with sales pitches in their email inboxes and on social media. In order to carve out a stage for their sales organization—that no one can speak over—some sales professionals must position themselves as experts on their product or service, and hold challenging conversations that help their customers grow as professionals.

We'll explore the thought leadership definition and how to implement this approach in your sales tactics and content marketing. We'll also offer tips on how to build authority, so you can influence your audience like de Chauliac—but in a good way—and learn how to close way more sales than you do today.

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What is thought leadership?

Thought leadership is a form of marketing and branding that positions a person as an expert, visionary, voice, and/or a leading figure in an industry or on a topic. A thought leader is accepted by their peers, colleagues and sometimes even those outside the industry as someone who's trustworthy and who will educate them on their specialty.

Can any sales rep be a thought leader?

That's an easy answer—**no!** Especially SDRs in the beginning of their careers. You can't just take an average Joe, sit him on a throne, hand him a crown and expect him to be king. Thought leader is a title that's earned over years of hard work in sales, product training, dedication and strategic positioning; only then will you earn the respect of your peers, and even more importantly, your customers and audience.

But when it comes to content marketing for B2B brands, the thought leadership meaning can get a little muddled. It's a popular approach to content at the moment, and a lot of companies are claiming to deliver thought-provoking and original ideas. Unfortunately, not all of them are. True thought leadership pieces host experts' opinions, information, ideas, data, studies and reports that are exclusive to your company. And because salespeople now play a huge role in content marketing, especially on platforms like LinkedIn, this approach to content, outreach messages and sales pitches can be applied to closing deals.

What is the purpose of thought leadership?

Industry thought leadership is all about shaping someone's perception of you. When you're seen as a trustworthy authority, decision-makers are more likely to read your pitches instead of pressing delete, to take your cold calls rather than hitting ignore.

Getting there takes strategic and calculated moves to showcase your expertise publicly, initiate and host conversations and debates between key people in your industry, and share your message widely.

Once this happens, decision-makers are more likely to follow you on social media and engage with you, which opens up the opportunity for social selling. And if you play your cards right, after a while, the deals will naturally flow into your pipeline and you can cut back on sending hundreds of emails and calls daily. (Doesn't that sound great?)

Thought leadership examples of reps who bulldozed their way into the spotlight!

We've talked about what the thought leadership definition is and what it takes to be one; now let's take a look at some real-life thought leaders in [B2B sales](#). We'll take a look at three professionals, their impact in their industry, what conversations they are having to challenge their audiences and the results they've gotten for their bottom line. And, you'd be surprised, many figures on our list are less than a decade into their careers, which gives hope to a lot of younger salespeople!

Michael Tuso

[Michael Tuso](#) is a sales expert, coach, mentor and guide. Crunchbase has listed him as one of the top 54 sales leaders to follow on LinkedIn. Michael is famous for his philosophy of giving SDRs more freedom; at the same time, he tells salespeople that without a coach or mentor, they'll never truly progress or grow in their career. "Coaching is a critical part of our growth as individuals," he writes. "Without it, it becomes increasingly more difficult to have that third-party perspective that everyone needs in order to grow."

He's also the Head of Business Development and Enablement at Chili Piper, where he oversees a remote sales team. In the podcast [StartupSales](#), Michael speaks more about building a coaching culture in the office and how giving employees more freedom helps prevent burnout. Giving trust to your team will motivate them to work hard and commit more to their job. Michael also believes in rewarding hard work; after they hit a huge revenue goal, he flew his entire company to Paris!

Jordan Arogetti

[Jordan Arogetti](#) is a senior account executive for SalesLoft. She's been described as an influencer and one of the top 38 dynamic women in sales by SalesHacker. Most of her sales career has taken place at SalesLoft, and she's shared plenty of insights on how she rose so quickly in her organization's ranks.

Jordan provides thought leadership pieces on [prospecting, being an SDR](#), work-life balance, and being a woman in sales tech. One idea Jordan sets forward is to win every day—whether it's closing a deal or developing an innovative idea for your job role, whether it's a big win or a small win, salespeople should give themselves a win every single day. Jordan participates at several conferences like Close(Her), Rev, and Rainmaker. She has over 5,000 followers on LinkedIn and continues to be a top voice in sales tech while closing \$1 million in annual revenue for her company!

Morgan J. Ingram

[Morgan J. Ingram](#) is a sales leader and SDR thought leader who [can be found on LinkedIn](#), Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram. What does he bring to the table to make him so renowned? Well, Morgan has had a meteoric rise through the sales industry.

In his first podcast, The SDR Chronicles, Morgan speaks about his time as an SDR in 2015 and how he was able to move up from that position in only a year, rocketing past colleagues who stayed stuck or hit burnout. He addresses the power of networking and mentorship, and challenges junior salespeople to go out of their way to obtain it, even if it means forgoing Netflix, letting go of weekends, and analyzing every single flaw you have and working to improve it. With many people criticizing hustle culture (overworking to climb the corporate ladder) today, Morgan's thoughts may be controversial.

But, it definitely worked for him! Morgan J. Ingram has quickly moved up through management positions and is now the Director of Execution and Evolution at JB Sales, where he trains other sales reps. Morgan posts daily content on LinkedIn, interviews former SDRs and, with an impressive 125,000 followers, has been named LinkedIn's top sales voice three years in a row!

How can sales implement thought leadership?

Thought leadership content needs a certain element to close a sale. You can't just spew out some ideas and expect your customers or audience to be swayed in your direction. When positioning yourself as a leader, you need a formula so every time you send out a message it's strong and makes an impact. If you don't do this correctly, you may be seen as a phony.

John Doer, president of sales training company RAIN Group, puts it perfectly in his 16 principles of influence in sales:

1. **Attention** – break through the noise and differentiate your opinions and ideas
2. **Curiosity** – hint that your customer is missing out on something
3. **Desire** – help your customers get to where they want to be
4. **Envy** – show them someone who's already accomplished their goals with ideas or methods
5. **Emotional journey** – focus on one key emotion you want customers to feel
6. **Belief** – customers have to believe things can and will get better
7. **Justification** – they need a logical reason backed by facts to get on board
8. **Trust** – your customers need faith in your ideas
9. **Stepping stones** – give them bite-sized ideas to get started on a new path
10. **Ownership** – help your customer's journey move forward at their own pace
11. **Involvement** – involve your audience in the process; ask for their opinions
12. **Desire for inclusion** – help buyers feel like they belong
13. **Scarcity** – make readers feel they may miss out on an opportunity
14. **Likeability** – work to build loyalty and help your customers love your ideas
15. **Indifference** – good or bad, welcome all responses to your ideas or opinions
16. **Commitment** – get readers to commit to making change

Two essential thought leadership development strategies

If you're ready to get started on a thought leadership program for your sales organization, it's time to round up your top salespeople, the experts on your products, services, and industry. You want the people who have proven themselves to be leaders of the pack, the ones who are always blowing your mind with their creative content and aren't afraid to put themselves forward at conferences, at summits, in [video marketing](#), podcasts and feature articles. These two strategies will help them in the rebranding process.

Here are a few tips to get started.

Decide what you'll bring to the table

- **Contrarian beliefs:** Do some preliminary research and make a list of trending topics in your industry. Is there something you don't agree with? Write down your counter-argument ideas. There's nothing like a little controversy to get your audience engaged.
- **Personal stories:** Does anyone on your team have unique stories or experiences to share? Thought leadership content is always special when you open up. It also builds trust and likability.
- **Your professional connections:** Work your connections and bring other influencers and thought leaders to your platform. Host webinars, seminars, conferences, and Q&As for your audience.
- **Industry knowledge:** Decision-makers are always looking for concrete facts. If you have the resources to run studies and write reports that will be useful to your audience, make it happen. It's also a great way to get shares and backlinks to your website.

Step on some toes (strategically)

In thought leadership development, it's alright to teach your salespeople to think outside the box and possibly offend some people. It's true that people, including decision-makers, often fear the unknown. Contrarian ideas may make them feel inadequate in their job position, and you may instill fear that they're doing something wrong.

However, they'll need to get past that if they want to develop a growth mindset. After all, what are thought leaders? They have ideas and opinions that stand out, that cut through the common beliefs of their time, and they aren't afraid to go against the grain and defend their position against opposition and criticism. Stepping on toes doesn't mean you have to intentionally offend or be crass for the sake of being crass; it's being willing to fight for what you believe in and earn others' trust and respect so you can change their minds and help them grow in their careers.

Key takeaways

- What is thought leadership? A powerful marketing and branding [strategy that positions sales](#) representatives as experts on their product or service and leaders in their industry with content and messaging that shares original ideas, opinions, or information.
- The [customer adoption process](#) becomes easier when your audience has thought leadership content to help them make purchasing decisions with their team and spark interesting discussions.
- To get started, gather up the right [sales prospecting tools](#) and start researching who your customers are, where they stand on certain issues, and what challenges they face. Then start making a list of conversations or debates to have with them.



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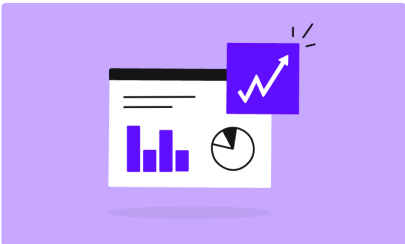
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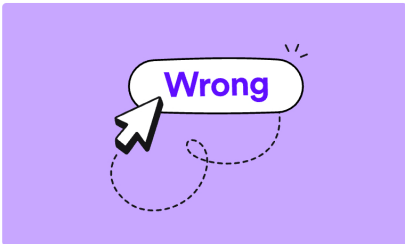
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