

# FOLLOW THE LEADER

Where next for thought leadership  
in professional services?

THOUGHT  
LEADERSHIP  
HELPS US  
WIN NEW  
BUSINESS



82% of legal marketers say  
thought leadership helps  
them to win new business.

CONTENT  
IS THE  
KEY TO  
PROFITABLE  
CONVERSATIONS



87% of accountancy marketers  
believe that content is the key  
to profitable conversations.

IDEAS  
ARE THE  
GREATEST SOURCE  
OF  
DIFFERENTIATION  
FOR MY FIRM



88% of consultancy marketers  
believe ideas are the greatest  
source of differentiation.

Man Bites Dog specialises in strategy and communications for the knowledge economy. We work with the world's smartest organisations to achieve rare thought leader status.

Our *Follow The Leader* study shares the latest research and insights from the Man Bites Dog team. To join the debate and receive future updates please email us at: [thoughtleadership@manbitesdog.com](mailto:thoughtleadership@manbitesdog.com)



Legal



Accountancy



Consultancy

*Follow The Leader* includes sector specific insights. We have signposted how the professions compare with law, accountancy and consultancy icons.

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# Introduction

The B2B marketing world is drowning in content. Regardless of sector and role, if you're a B2B marketer, you're involved in some form of content production with the aim of interesting and engaging your target clients. But ask yourself how much of your content is truly attention-worthy? Has it driven a measurable return? And does it really differentiate your organisation from competitors?

We asked marketers these questions and they estimated that two-thirds of their content and ideas are derived from competitors. In short, marketers are producing the same content as their rivals and expecting to achieve differentiation and commercial returns. Something here doesn't add-up.

Thought leadership is the ultimate expression of a great B2B brand, it's your organisation's expertise quotient, and it must be worked at and nurtured over time. Yet over the last few years we've seen a race to the bottom in terms of content quality and differentiation.

But times are changing. As the cat and mouse game between SEO and Google is reaching its denouement – with quality and relevance winning through – jaded B2B buyers are becoming more discerning in the content they consume.

Thought leadership, the creation and dissemination of ideas that lead, is the most effective form of marketing for the knowledge economy, but it's also the trickiest to get right. Nowhere is this more fundamental than in the "thinking professions", whose success depends on how they develop and promote their intellectual capital.

We set out to investigate the state of thought leadership amongst the organisations with the most to gain from thought leadership. In partnership with independent market research firm, Coleman Parkes Research, we interviewed 100 CMOs, marketing and communications directors from top 25 legal, accountancy and management consultancy firms.

Our Follow The Leader study examines the seemingly inexorable rise of thought leadership, its critical

importance to the professions, the gap between rising investment and falling effectiveness, and what firms can do to achieve elusive thought leader status.

We would like to thank the marketing leaders who participated in our study for their insight and candour, and we hope you find our report a useful guide on your own thought leadership journey.



**Claire Mason**  
Founder and Managing Director  
Man Bites Dog

# FOLLOW THE LEADER

# Follow The Leader

## The state of thought leadership in professional services

### The Rise and Rise of Thought Leadership

Thought leadership now dominates professional services marketing. 91% of professional services CMOs see thought leadership as the key battleground for their industry, with 87% venturing that the thought leaders of today are more likely to become the market leaders of tomorrow.

The vast majority of CMOs see thought leadership as critically important to their firm (97%) and becoming more so over the next three years (96%). It's clear that thought leadership tops the agenda for professional services firms, playing a critical role in communicating intangible insight and expertise, and helping partners to start profitable conversations with current and prospective clients.

More than nine in ten (92%) marketing leaders believe that thought leadership is the most effective way to differentiate their organisation from competitors. This is particularly striking in the context that almost half (47%) of professional services firms now believe they can no longer differentiate on service, a truly

significant change for a sector that invests substantially to maintain competitive advantage in this area.

Four in five (79%) professional services marketers believe that innovative ideas help them cut through competitor noise, nearly three-quarters (71%) of CMOs view thought leadership as the most effective way their firm can demonstrate expertise and two-thirds (68%) of CMOs view thought leadership as the most effective way to align their firm with buyers' needs.

CMOs have also matched their regard for thought leadership with significant investment of resources. Professional services firms have trebled marketing time dedicated to thought leadership in the last three years, now devoting a fifth (21%) of their time to thought leadership activity. Almost a quarter (23%) of marketing budgets are now spent on thought leadership and nine out of ten (87%) CMOs plan to increase this investment in their next budget cycle.

While building awareness, reputation and differentiation are key objectives for around nine out of ten professional services CMOs, firms are using thought leadership to support more diverse objectives. Almost nine in ten (88%) legal firms use thought leadership to create worthwhile

conversations with prospects, or to shift perceptions of their firm (88%). The vast majority of management consultancies use thought leadership to support entry into new markets or sectors (96%), to promote the introduction of new services (88%) or to increase client loyalty and retention (96%). Meanwhile accountancy CMOs are the most commercially focused, with 96% using thought leadership to help generate interest and contacts for new business development.

Demand for thought leadership comes from a number of quarters including senior leadership (66%), helping the firm to win new business (73%) and the need to differentiate in an increasingly commoditised sector (75%). However, the single greatest driver for thought leadership is clients' expectation that firms will be thought leaders and produce insightful content as a matter of course (82%).

There is now no debate that thought leadership tops the agenda for professional services firms, playing a critical role in communicating intangible insight and expertise, and helping partners to start profitable conversations. With battle lines drawn, firms must take a thought leadership stand and articulate ideas worthy of attention.



**91%** of marketers believe thought leadership is now the key battleground for professional services firms

# 97% of professional services marketers see thought leadership as critically important to their firm

## The Thought Followership Epidemic

Despite investing more importance, time and resource in thought leadership than ever before, our research reveals an epidemic of "thought followership" amongst the thinking professions.

Three-quarters of CMOs (75%) believe that ideas are the greatest source of differentiation for their firm, yet they remain locked in an echo chamber of copycat ideas, following their competitors rather than producing the industry-leading insight their clients and prospects demand.

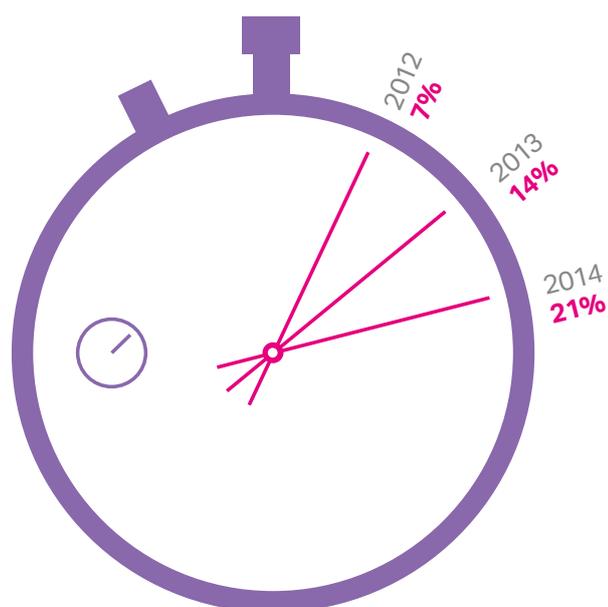
CMOs in the UK's largest professional services firms admit that two thirds (62%) of their own so-called thought leadership output is in fact thought followership, worthless content already covered by competitors. Nine in ten (91%) CMOs complain that partners actively push them to cover the same topics as everyone else, and three-quarters (74%) of CMOs admit that their firm tends to jump on the bandwagon rather than set the agenda.

Thought leadership is about ideas that lead: generating original thought and having the courage to lead a market. But we are seeing the thinking professions lose ground in an area they should arguably be leading, with CMOs frustrated by aspects of the culture and structure of firms which perpetuate this groupthink.

While marketers can see the benefits of a big idea in theory, thinking big is challenging in practice. 70% of CMOs believe their current thought leadership output lacks a big idea and 58% consider their content too sales-driven.

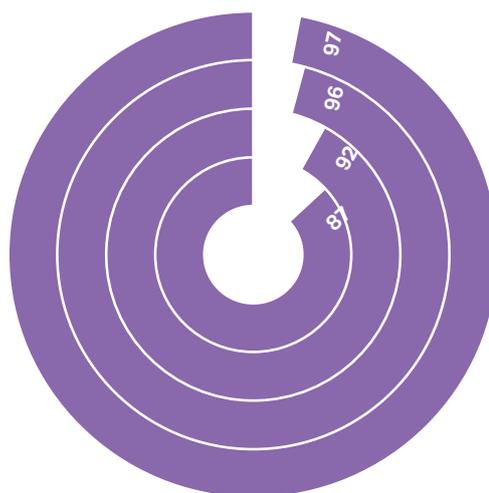
Idea generation is a critical challenge for CMOs, with campaign ideas driven by the marketing communications team in nine out of ten firms (87%), while almost half (46%) of CMOs struggle to gain any partner time and engagement for thought leadership campaigns. Nearly three-quarters (71%) of CMOs feel too close to the coalface to spot emerging issues and macro-economic trends, and two-thirds admit their thought leadership output is too internally focused, based on what the firm wants to talk about rather than what clients need to know.

## What percentage of your time was spent on thought leadership?



			
2012	7%	6%	8%
2013	13%	13%	15%
2014	21%	22%	22%

## Professional marketers believe:



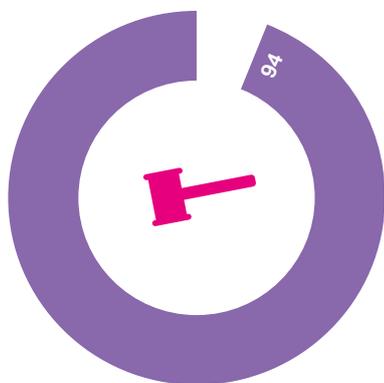
**87%**  
the thought leaders of today are more likely to be the market leaders of tomorrow

**92%**  
thought leadership is the single most effective way to differentiate my firm

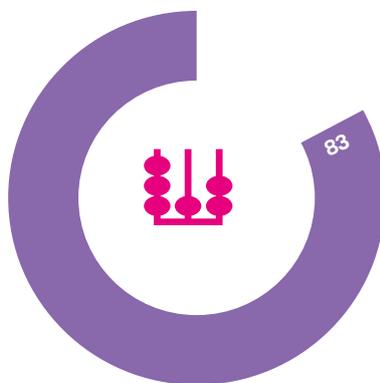
**97%**  
thought leadership is critically important to my firm

**96%**  
it will become more important over the next 3 years

## Professional services marketers estimate that **62%** of their content is thought followership



**94%**  
of legal marketers say partners push them to cover the same topics as everyone else



**83%**  
of accountancy marketers struggle to stop ideas being diluted



**88%**  
of consultancy marketers fail to generate genuinely unique insight

Without this critical insight from partners and subject matter experts, four in five (81%) marketing leaders confess that their firm struggles to generate any genuinely new insights or points of view.

And for those concepts which do germinate, professional services firms fail to provide a nurturing environment for new ideas, according to 73% of CMOs, with risk aversion watering down ideas and driving bland, “me too” content. Three-quarters of CMOs complain that their firm is too concerned about being seen to be negative or critical to say anything meaningful, and just a third (35%) of CMOs feel able to shepherd good ideas through the firm without dilution. Nine in ten CMOs regularly see good ideas being corrupted by too many competing voices internally (90%) and complain that ideas are stretched too thin by trying to reach too many audiences (85%).

The vast majority (96%) of accountancy CMOs complain that partners push them to cover the same topics as everyone else – firmly placing them in the majority that are treading water with “safe” thought followership ideas. More than any other sector, accountancy marketers struggle to preserve the integrity of big ideas, with four in five (83%) concerned that ideas get diluted and half (48%) of accountancy CMOs complaining that thought leadership campaigns are frequently cancelled.

Legal CMOs also face an uphill challenge when it comes to creating distinctive campaigns: nine in ten (94%) legal marketers complain that partners drive them to produce similar content to competitors, and four in five complain that their firm is a hostile environment for new ideas.

Management consultancies are trapped by a risk averse culture, with more than two-thirds (69%) of

consultancy marketers avoiding distinctive campaigns due to their fear of upsetting clients and prospects. This is reflected in bland content, with almost nine in ten (88%) marketers in management consultancies struggling to generate genuinely unique insight.

Professional services firms are trapped in a cycle of thought followership, copying competitors and releasing content that is already tried, tested and tired. In doing so, they are failing to generate, nurture and defend the big ideas that can help them to build differentiation, create conversations with prospects, and change perceptions of their firm. If they are to maintain their status as trusted advisors, professional services firms need to justify their seat at the table, step out of the echo chamber of recycled ideas and find something truly original to say.

# Curb Your Enthusiasm

## Putting the thought back into the thinking professions

The old maxim that “content is king” has certainly been taken to heart by professional services firms. The perceived need for constant content, driven by the 24/7 world of social media, combined with the ever-juicy carrot of promised SEO uplift, have pushed organisations into producing huge volumes of increasingly sub-standard thought followership.

As professional services marketers adapt to a world of diverse channels, three-quarters (72%) of CMOs feel under great pressure to produce large volumes of content, forcing senior marketers to operate at a more reactive and tactical level. Three in five (58%) CMOs admit that strategy gets set aside by the need to produce high volumes of content and more than a third (39%) of CMOs acknowledge that their firm prioritises quantity over quality.

For marketers to gain the mandate to focus on genuine thought leadership, they need to prove the effective commercialisation and ROI of their campaigns, but this can only happen when strategy and goals are well defined. Almost half (46%) of professional services marketers only “occasionally” set clear objectives for thought leadership campaigns and two-thirds (64%) of CMOs admit that they don’t evaluate their campaigns effectively.

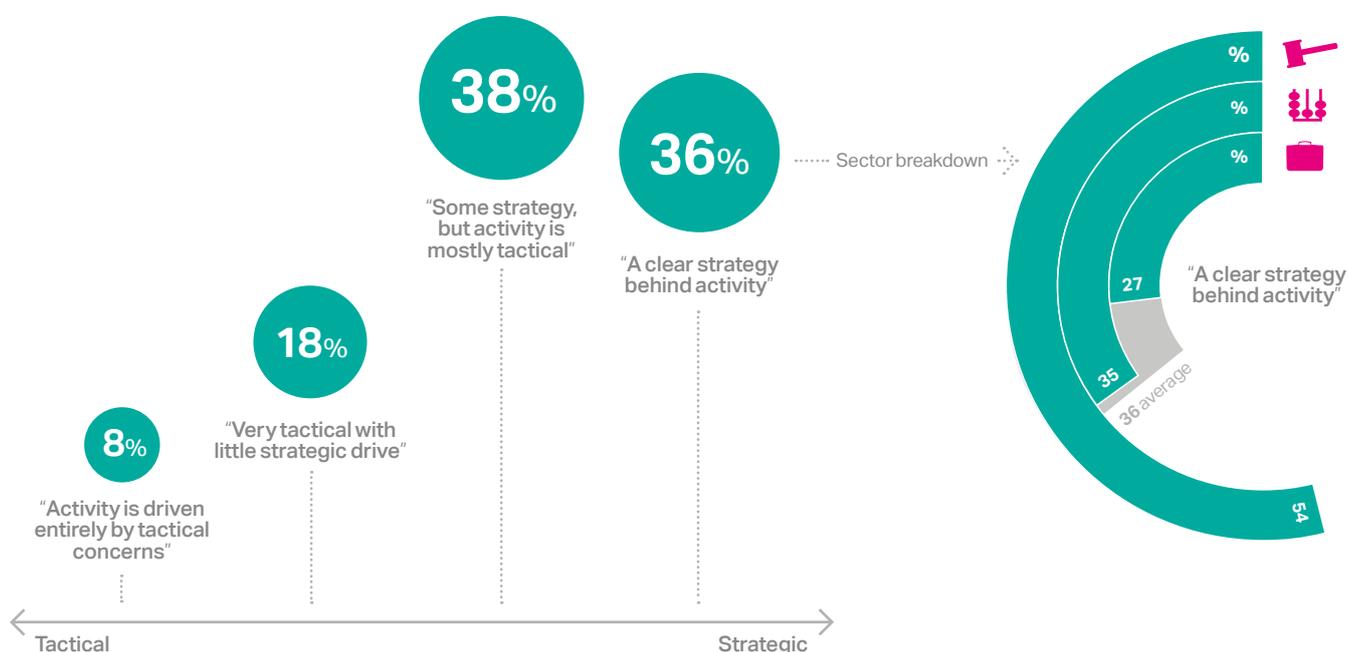
While the majority of firms measure reputation impact and interaction with thought leadership content, CMOs are struggling to measure the outcome of thought leadership in terms of relationships and revenue. Media coverage (67%), clicks and downloads (77%), and awareness (72%) are the most commonly assessed KPIs for thought leadership, with just two-fifths of CMOs monitoring uplift in new business (38%) and interest generated (41%).

Almost half (46%) of management consultancy CMOs admit that their approach to content has no clear strategy behind it, which may explain why some management consultancies are failing to effectively commercialise their thought leadership. Four in five legal (82%) and accountancy (78%) CMOs state that thought leadership helps their firm to win new business, but just half (50%) of consultancy marketers agree.

Eight out of ten (81%) consultancy CMOs feel under great pressure to produce large volumes of content, with half complaining that they are driven to produce relevant content for SEO at the expense of genuine client engagement.

While accountancy marketers are confident that their thought leadership strategy is closely aligned with their business strategy in theory, in practice eight in ten (78%) complain that their strategy is often set aside in order to produce high volumes of content.

### Only one third of marketers have a clear strategy behind their activity



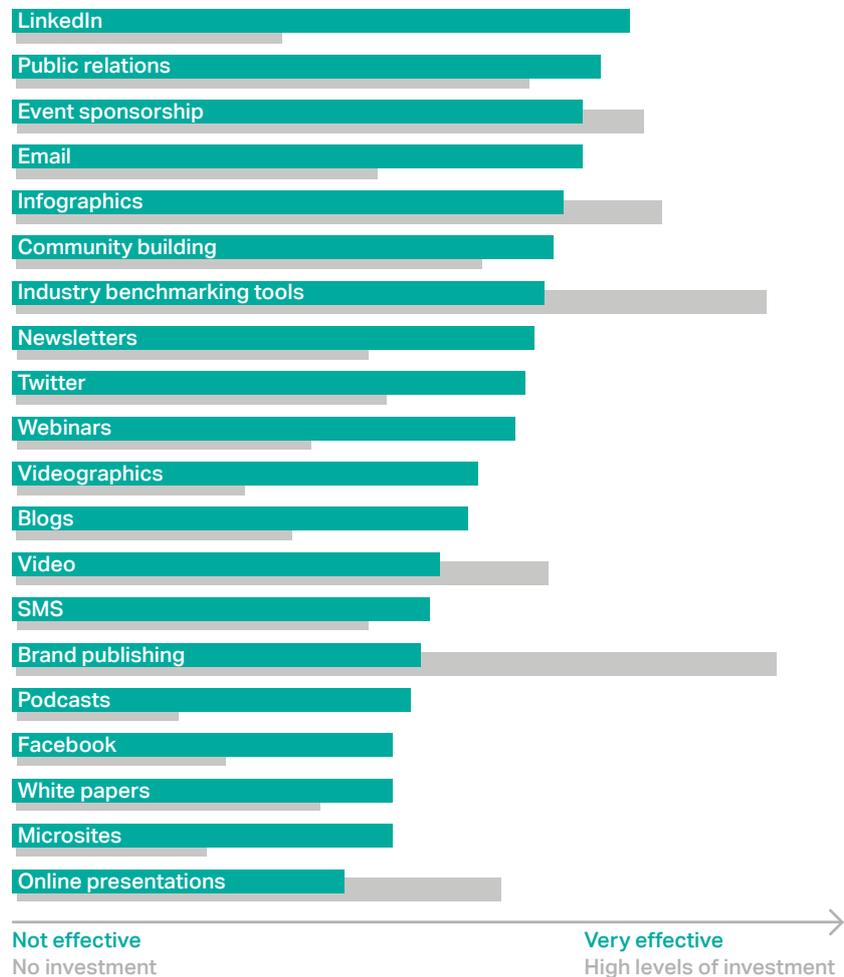
# 72% of professional services marketers are under great pressure to produce large volumes of content

Three-quarters of legal CMOs are frustrated that they could do “so much more” with their thought leadership given free rein to do so.

Thought leadership is an outcome, not a tactic. It is the sum total of all of a firm’s ideas and actions. Creating large quantities of content, rather than developing a sustainable position on a key issue over time, has trapped professional services marketers on a content treadmill – churning out low value material that quickly disappears from view.

Producing clear, insightful content that can cut through competitor noise needs time, patience and great ideas, yet the drive to produce too much content is preventing genuine innovation. Thought leadership should be a marathon rather than a sprint – creating compelling content that continues through the full sales funnel and triggers the conversations that will deliver the much coveted return on ideas that marketers strive for.

## Effectiveness vs Investment



## Tuning In To The Right Marketing Channels

Our research reveals a significant disparity between how marketers view the effectiveness of key marketing tactics and the level of investment they commit to them. While return on investment in public relations and events is relatively well matched, professional services marketers are investing heavily in brand publishing, but feel it is limited in terms of effectiveness. Meanwhile, although marketers believe LinkedIn is highly effective, the level of investment in this channel is relatively low.

Content channels are constantly evolving and professional services marketers need to go further than simply being on top of the latest trends. Consider how prospective clients consume information, how partners can help take thought leadership ideas to market, and what will make your ideas as compelling and shareable as possible.

Firms are increasingly using ideas as a Trojan Horse for relationship building, harnessing the power of content and marketing automation

tools to move from black-book, relationship-led marketing to helping their firms to develop contacts and connections in a more scalable way that the firm can own, track and measure.



**Toby Brown**  
Associate Director and  
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# The Fight For Ideas

## Meeting the challenge of thought leadership

Professional services marketers face particularly acute challenges in developing effective thought leadership, the most significant of which might be summarised as the four 'I's: Ideas Generation, Interference, Identity and Integration.



### Ideas Generation

Thought leadership is about activating ideas that are worthy of attention. Generating these big ideas should be the most important aspect of the thought leadership process – channelling partner expertise into genuinely useful insight for key stakeholders.

Yet partners in the professions are not engaged with this process, with nine in ten (87%) firms relying on the marketing team to develop thought leadership ideas. CMOs themselves dedicate less than a fifth (17%) of campaign time to getting the strategy and the big idea right, despite the critical impact of this stage on downstream sales and marketing activity.

The lack of time invested in ideas generation is reflected in an inability to create campaigns with impact. Less than a third (31%) of CMOs consider themselves good at generating strong campaign ideas, seven in ten (70%) admit that their thought leadership lacks a big idea and four in five (81%) CMOs acknowledge that their firm struggles to generate genuinely unique insight.

### Solution: Incubation

Extraordinary thinking doesn't happen by accident. Thought leaders require a formal idea incubation process, with a focused remit to develop concepts that will lead the market.

This requires the right combination of people, process and resource to

make thought leadership work for your firm. It's important to consider the right combination of job roles and personality types for the team, and the most effective process for engaging them in the task of generating ideas that align with the firm's wider strategy. By having a formal team and process, you can ensure that partners and subject matter experts are engaged from the outset in generating and championing ideas, rather than interfering in later stages of campaigns and derailing them.

This process requires time investment from the CMO, the ability to leverage a small amount of partner time to maximum effect and the courage to change the status quo.



### Interference

Finding the big idea is only the first, if perhaps the most important, hurdle for professional services marketers. The next challenge is protecting the big idea as it makes its way through the organisation, ensuring that your thoroughbred racehorse doesn't become a camel by committee.

Almost three-quarters (73%) of CMOs complain that professional services firms don't provide a nurturing environment for new ideas to flourish. Four in five CMOs (83%) admit that their firm struggles to preserve the quality of big ideas and complain that ideas "get diluted".

Nine out of ten (90%) professional services marketers regularly see good ideas being corrupted by too

many competing voices internally and almost a third (29%) frequently see campaigns cancelled at the whim of partners and directors. This problem is particularly acute for marketers in accountancy firms, with more than four in five (83%) CMOs facing a battle to protect the quality of ideas from competing partners.

60% of CMOs believe marketing does not have the power and autonomy required to drive innovative programmes through. Fragmentation of strategy and resource is a major challenge with half (48%) of CMOs complaining that budgets are too fragmented across the business and four in five (79%) CMOs complaining that diversity of fee earner priorities makes it difficult to drive new ideas through the organisation.

### Solution: Autonomy

Effective thought leadership requires focus: to be successful marketing departments need to have a clear mandate for what they will, and will not, do. Too much bottom up activity from sector and practice areas means fragmented and ultimately wasted time and resource. Instead this energy needs to be usefully guided into focused campaigns.

Marketers should have a clear strategy and firm objectives behind everything they do. This means defining the terms of the marketing team's activity and taking ownership of a firmwide plan and budget. Build this into your mandate and spend more time producing proactive content that shows your firm to be a thought leader.

Four in five (79%) CMOs believe they could have more impact if they had more authority to make the right decisions. There is light at the end of the tunnel, however. Two-thirds of professional services firms now have a marketing representative on the

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executive board (64%) and more than two-thirds of professional services firms now have a specific head of thought leadership (69%).

CMOs must assume responsibility for thought leadership strategy and become the final arbiter of quality. Ask yourself, is this content really worthy of attention? If the answer is no, it's not worthy of the name thought leadership.

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## Identity

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One of the most common defects in would-be thought leadership is a lack of alignment with firms' identity, both in terms of what you do and what makes you different.

While thought leadership presents a rare opportunity to differentiate, one firm's content looks much the same as another's, and substituting a logo is often all that would be required to break the connection between a firm and its thinking.

Firms also struggle to balance an appropriate level of commercialisation, with CMOs concerned that their content is either overly promotional brochureware or lacking all relevance to their services. There is also a tendency to approach themes from a broad perspective, rather than give voice to a clear angle. This can lead to bland reportage with a lack of actionable insight. But who wants an advisor that sits on the fence?

Clients crave genuine insight and expertise and can quickly spot

bought-in, off the shelf thinking. The days of simply putting your logo on someone else's generic content are over.

## Solution: Alignment

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The success of thought leadership is directly related to how integrated it is with your firm's proposition. Ideas should come from an area where your firm has the authority to speak and your message should resonate with your clients' concerns.

Thought leadership presents a tremendous opportunity to find an elegant solution to join up your firm's disparate voices, sectors and practice areas and unite resources for greater impact. Two-thirds (64%) of CMOs believe that thought leadership has the power to unite the diverse elements of their firm and make their fragmented core proposition coherent.

Ensure that all content is aligned either with your firmwide proposition or a particular sector or practice area. Consider how to turn up the volume on aspects of your business and your thinking that are unique and different. Select an area where your capability and experience gives you credibility and approach topics from an angle, rather than trying to swallow them whole. Think about how to promote the problem that you solve in order to generate demand for your services.



## Integration

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Professional services firms struggle to effectively integrate thought

leadership with marketing, business development and client activity. But if CMOs don't make a concerted effort to commercialise thought leadership in the form of ideas-led marketing, they will not get the investment of time, resource and effort required to make thought leadership work.

CMOs themselves are concerned that the pressure to produce large volumes of content is leading to a focus on quantity over quality, and that strategy and key outcomes, such as generating interest and sales, are set aside.

Thought leadership is a family affair and requires the concerted efforts of the whole organisation, from partners and experts to marketing and business development, to make an impact.

## Solution: Activation

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The more useful and relevant your content, the more likely people are to interact with it and pass it on. Thought leadership is about sticky ideas that spread quickly: it's about using the most appropriate channels at your disposal to activate your message.

There is a strong case that CMOs should focus on quality over quantity and aim to build a sustainable thought leadership position on key themes over the long term. It's about making every idea count and activating content across all channels.

Spend time assessing and sharing how your content will work with client communication, marketing and business development teams to make sure all of your great thinking actually gets to market. And remember, ideas worth sharing will propagate themselves.

# The View From The Trenches

## The different battlegrounds for thought leadership



### The Legal Challenge

Innovation in a cold climate

We have seen the legal industry evolve significantly in recent years, and with increasing competition comes the need for truly differentiated marketing content. Law firms are now investing heavily in thought leadership, dedicating a quarter (23%) of total marketing budgets to this activity in the current financial year and 88% of law firms are increasing this allocation in the next budget cycle.

However, legal marketers are clearly frustrated by a lack of support for innovation in their firms. Four in five CMOs complain that their firm doesn't provide a nurturing environment for new ideas, making it the least receptive of all the professional services sectors.

Partners are stifling marketing creativity and effectiveness, with too many pushing for content that competitors have already covered. While talking about the same topics as competitors may give firms the comfort factor, it will do little to drive the profitable conversations that fee earners crave.

Given the changes currently facing the legal sector, the news that so many marketers feel they work in an environment that is actively hostile towards innovation should be of great concern. There has never been a greater need for differentiation in the legal market and firms that don't embrace new ideas and genuine thought leadership – as opposed to thought followership – will be left standing as others race ahead.



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### The Accountancy Challenge

Running interference

Accountancy firms are planning to increase their thought leadership spend more than any other sector, with 87% increasing their thought leadership budgets next year and two-fifths (43%) revising this up significantly. The business case for thought leadership has been made, with 87% of firms regarding thought leadership content as the key to profitable conversations and establishing deeper long-term relationships with clients and prospects.

Marketing departments are delivering too. Accountancy firms are the most effective of the professions at commercialising their thinking, with all accountancy CMOs boasting strong alignment between thought leadership, business strategy and business development. This approach is clearly paying off, with more than three-quarters (78%) of CMOs stating that thought leadership effectively drives new business. Nearly three-quarters of accountancy firms use thought leadership for direct lead generation (70%) and to position their firm as premium in order to realise higher fees (74%).

Thought leadership is working for accountancy firms, but despite this, accountancy CMOs are struggling to preserve the quality of campaigns, with four in five (83%) CMOs complaining that competing partners dilute big ideas. Marketing leaders suffer unacceptable levels of interference, with campaigns being cut back and almost half of CMOs (48%) frequently seeing campaigns being cancelled altogether.

Accountancy firms' financial investment in thought leadership now needs to be met with cultural change. Accountancy CMOs need to focus their efforts on moving partners away from downstream campaign interference into generating and championing, rather than derailing, big ideas.



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## The Consultancy Challenge

Harnessing the currency of big ideas

**As early-adopters of thought leadership marketing, management consultancies should be leading the pack when it comes to turning big ideas into business growth.**

But while it's clear that consultancies recognise the value of big ideas – 81% of CMOs see thought leadership as the key to profitable conversations and 88% view thought leadership ideas as the greatest source of differentiation for their firm – our research also shows that marketers in the original thinking profession are struggling to produce genuine, integrated thought leadership.

Consultancies find ideas generation more difficult than any other profession. Nine in ten consultancy marketers (88%) admit that their firm struggles to generate ideas and insight, and all consultancy CMOs complain that thought leadership ideas are driven by the marketing team without support from partners and consultants. As a result, they consider a staggering 72% of the industry's so-called thought leadership output to be thought followership.

Management consultancies are also surprisingly uncommercial, being the least successful of the professions in using thought leadership to develop relationships and win new business.

To break the cycle, marketers need to engage fee earners earlier in the process – generating big ideas aligned with their sales proposition to create a clear link with revenue generation and therefore a clear case for investment in thought leadership.

In an industry that differentiates on the quality of insight, those companies that leverage thought leadership for reputational and financial gain will have the competitive edge.



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## Creating Ideas That Lead

**Thought leadership is here to stay. Ideas-led marketing is the key battleground on which future commercial battles will be fought. There is now no debate about the critical role of thought leadership in differentiating professional services firms and demonstrating their expertise.**

However, thought followership is contagious. CMOs complain that they are trapped on a content production line with no strategy in sight, producing worthless thought followership, imitating competitors.

Professional services firms provide a hostile climate both for idea generation and preservation, with CMO's struggling to engage partners in idea incubation, and complaining of interference in the later stages of their campaigns.

While risk aversion has created an echo chamber of tired thinking, the potential impact of new insight in this context is tremendous. CMOs need to make the business case for ROI: Return on Ideas. An idea that is powerful enough to propagate itself will travel much further than another brick in the wall of groupthink.

We believe in thought leadership for good: genuinely useful insight and intelligence that can advance businesses, economies and society as a whole.

While professional services marketers face particularly acute challenges in getting thought leadership right, those with the courage to articulate original insight will win competitive advantage and earn their reputation as the thinking professions once more.

We hope that our study inspires you to stop following the leader and focus on ideas that lead.



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# Thought Leadership The William Morris Way

As firms emerge from recession and seek to capture elusive growth and competitive advantage, thought leadership is the new marketing battleground.

For the professional services sector in particular, ideas are the only true source of differentiation and content the essential foundation for business development. But what makes the difference between the bland and the exceptional?

Marketers could do worse than William Morris's golden rule: nothing in your communications strategy should be considered if it isn't both beautiful and useful.

## Beauty

The beauty of your thought leadership comes from the simple elegance of your ideas.

A big idea has the power to align disparate practice areas, sectors and target audiences, enabling the firm to be greater than the sum of its parts. A central concept is the critical ingredient required to focus an organisation and its stakeholders on a compelling and differentiating goal.

Like beauty, thought leadership is in the eye of the beholder – it's an outcome not a tactic. You can't simply

declare yourself a thought leader, the audience decides.

To achieve it marketers must overcome significant internal pressures to stay true to a vision which must weave together the threads of the firm as a structured and logical whole.

## Usefulness

Usefulness is about being bold enough to share genuinely new, actionable insight. The most useful thought leadership starts outside-in, anticipating the macro issues that move markets and transform industries.

It is a major challenge for professional services firms to think outside their day-to-day practice, take in the wider environment and make connections. Under pressure to think big, it's tempting to jump on the bandwagon of today's hot topics, which is why professional services thinking clusters around the same old themes. Here more than ever, there is an opportunity to differentiate from group-think by focusing on emerging issues, the pre-topical themes around which a true leadership position can be carved out.

Consider first what will have most critical impact for clients, the economy and society at large,

only then consider how it aligns with your firm's offer. Marketers who are able to resist bland, "me too" content and plough new furrows can transcend their firms' sales proposition and create a true connection with stakeholders.

Useful thought leadership gives you a call to action; promoting the problem your firm solves and helping you recruit others to solve it. It is never just about awareness, but about mobilising, persuading and truly engaging audiences.

## Ideas Worth Following

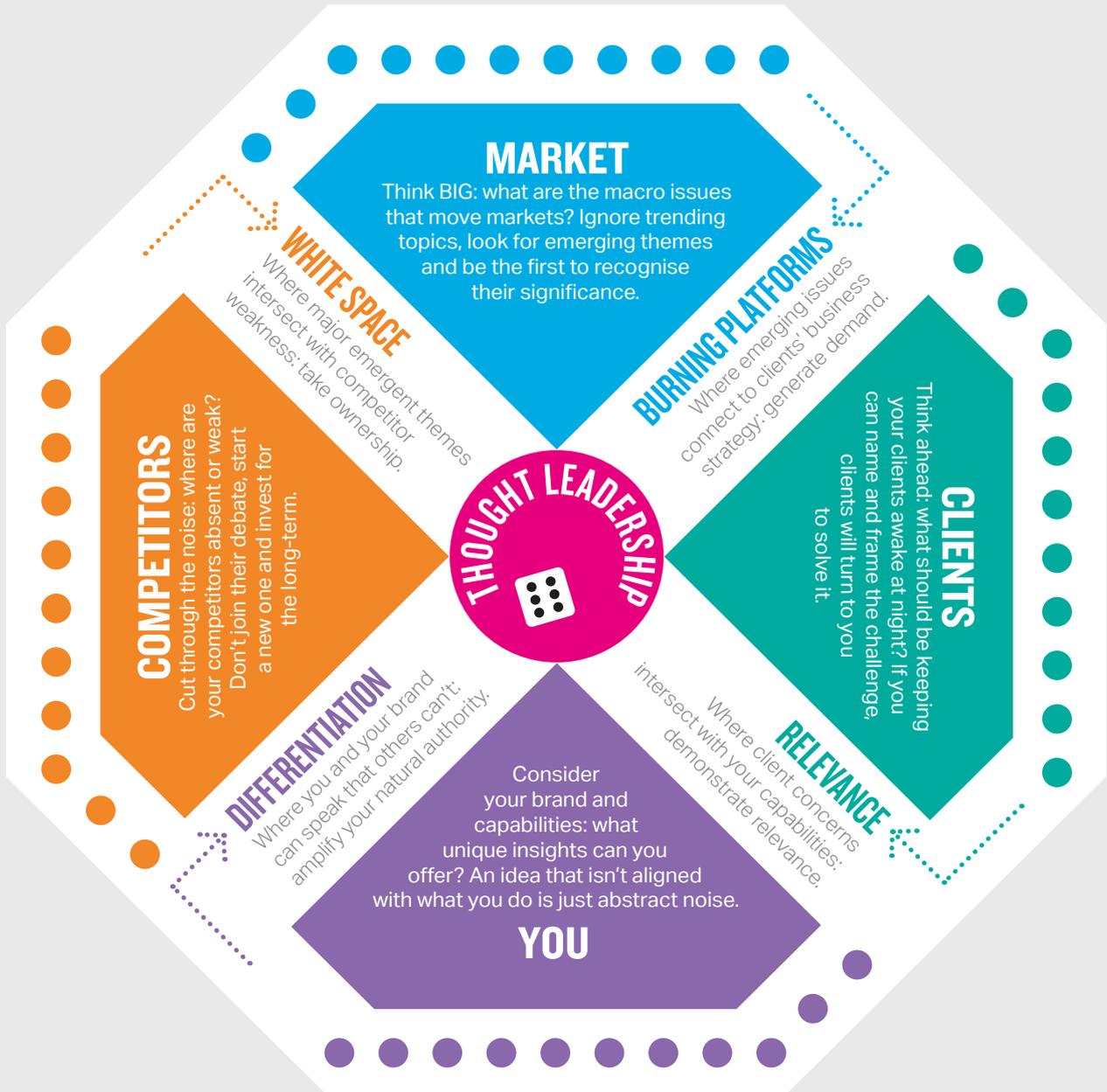
Professional services marketers face significant challenges in designing thought leadership that rises above the intricate tapestry of their firms. Complex organisations, partners' diverse objectives and a risk-averse culture can compromise the elegance of an idea and dilute its effectiveness.

To make thought leadership count, firms need to engage their knowledge capital. They must create beautiful, useful thought leadership that galvanises the firm and truly makes prospects sit up and take notice. To be a leader you must have the courage to propagate ideas worth following.

"If you want a golden rule that will fit everything, this is it: have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful."

# The Rules Of Game-Changing Thought Leadership

Thought leadership isn't a tactic – it's an outcome. The audience decides who wins. So before you play dice with your communications, stress test your ideas against our 4D thought leadership model to ensure you generate ideas worth following.



## Is it a Man Bites Dog story?

Is it genuinely new insight that starts or significantly furthers debate?  
Ideas worth following are self-propagating – would you pass it on?

## Does it have a clear direction?

Thought leadership should robustly evidence a clear hypothesis: is it based on facts, not just opinion; does it share insight, not just data?

## Is it aligned with your brand and capability?

Does the theme intersect with your area of natural authority and can it act as an umbrella to join-up disparate markets, practice areas and geographies?

## Can you move from content to conversation?

How can you harness a variety of channels to move your big idea through reputation and relationships to revenue?

# IDEAS THAT LEAD

## Get in touch

For a thought leadership health check, get in touch:

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