

Your thought-leadership toolkit

 By [Robert Gentle](#)

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Military power is typically projected through land, sea and air: it's the combination of army, air force and navy that makes for a powerful fighting machine.



Image source: Gallo/Getty.

Similarly, when it comes to projecting intellectual power – or thought-leadership – you need a combination of tools that work together as part of an integrated, strategic force.

Thought-leadership is not about promoting your products, services or successes – that is “traditional” PR, for want of a better word, and your organisation is probably already doing that.

Thought-leadership is intellectual. It’s about big-picture, strategic topics that influence your organisation’s ability to operate in the political, social and economic space. These range from tax, regulation and the environment to competition, globalisation and AI.

Thought-leadership puts across viewpoints that make people (customers, regulators, legislators, etc) reflect, question their assumptions and have a more informed perspective on a company or industry.

Here are the essential tools that allow you to do that, ranked in ascending order of importance– and pay particular attention

to the last item:

Letters to the editor

These can be devastatingly effective in getting a viewpoint across at short notice in the heavyweight dailies and weeklies. Unlike press releases, which may not even be opened, all letters received are read and evaluated. And the Letters Page has a big following.

Media coverage

This ranges from short comment press releases to in-depth op-ed pieces. Each has its pros and cons: for example, press releases can be sent to multiple publications, whereas op-ed pieces have a narrow readership and aren't always easy to place.

Speeches and presentations

These allow you to develop a topic in more detail in front of a captive audience – for example, at conferences. But speeches and presentations can also be done in-house – say, as a breakfast seminar for clients.

Videos

Some things are just more powerful when demonstrated visually. However, make sure to keep your videos short and interesting. You don't have to say it all; you just have to say enough. People are busy: three to five minutes should suffice.

Reports and research studies

These allow you to get into the nuances and complexities of big subjects. An interesting example you'll find online is Our sexual future with robots, by an organisation called Responsible Robotics. This is smart, well-timed thought-leadership for a controversial industry, and helps to create an intellectual framework for the vigorous debate that this subject will almost certainly provoke in the years ahead.

Media conferences

Nothing works as well as a media conference to get a big subject out there – particularly when it's backed up a report or research study. An obvious example you might want to consider is a media presentation on how AI will affect your industry and its consumers.

Your own online media presence

You can't rely solely on the media to drive issues that are of strategic importance to you. So, do it yourself through your own online publication (or blog); if your output is credible and interesting, journalists will run with it. This platform becomes the go-to website where people can view your opinions, watch your videos and download your reports. It should be a standalone website with its own branding. An example is [Mining for Zambia](#), an initiative by that country's mining industry to explain the risks, challenges and contributions of mining.

Notice how these tools reinforce one another to produce a powerful stream of intellectual output. Social media can then be used to amplify and promote that output. Most important of all, thought-leadership needs to be driven proactively, as part of a campaign. Instead of waiting to be caught off guard by events, you should be ahead of the curve, establishing your own narrative.

So, the next time someone senior in your organisation talks about the importance of thought-leadership, tell them to put their money where their mouth is and fund a proper campaign. You can no more project intellectual power without a thought-

leadership budget than you can military power without a defence budget.

ABOUT ROBERT GENTLE

Robert runs the PR training company, www.robertgentle.com. He has some 25 years of experience in financial journalism, public relations and training. He wrote the bestseller *Read This - Business Writing that Works*.

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