

# BRAND STAND

SEVEN STEPS TO THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

TWO  
CHAPTER  
EXTRACT

CRAIG BADINGS

## START IP: seven steps to brand thought leadership

How do you define and arrive at a thought leadership position for your brand or company?

A straightforward seven step method, START IP, will help you and your brand arrive at a thought leadership point of view. Thereafter, a range of different strategies and tactics are needed to deliver that view to the market.

Follow these seven steps and you will arrive at a thought leadership concept which delivers the consumer awareness you desire and need for your brand.

START IP is the beginning of the thought leadership journey. The START IP acronym stands for the following processes:

- **S**can the media and social media sites for issues impacting your brand or sector.
- **T**rack your competitors' share of voice to make sure your company is not competing in an already crowded space.

- **A**nalyse and understand the 'true north' of the company in order to define better the thought leadership areas it can enter.
- **R**eview your current intellectual property to see if it could spark a thought leadership campaign and review the alignment of your campaign with your company's values.
- **T**rend spot and identify the forces which are likely to shape your audiences lives now and in the future.
- **I**dentify a thought leadership champion to lead your campaign
- **P**anel means appointing a panel of thought leaders to bring in fresh perspectives from outside the organization.

Putting this thought leadership process into action involves a real commitment by key leaders in your company and your team. The challenge is how to roll out your thought leadership campaign and, in the process, how to engage with your audiences authentically.

Note the emphasis on 'engage with'. This is not about sending messages to an audience, it is about sharing information and, in turn, listening to your audience. It is a conversation, not a broadcast.

Listening is something many companies have struggled with in the past. This was probably driven by the way traditional mass media worked. Your company placed an advertisement, sent out a press release and hoped that the demographic reach would be met. This audience reach was clearly defined by the media buying department, and you hoped people would receive the message and act on it.

Traditional media have been a wonderful top down communications vehicle and will continue to work for many brands or services.

However, the internet, and particularly Web 2.0 and the advent of social media is changing all of this rapidly – as businesses such as Dell, Wal-Mart, BP and other smaller brands, such as Kryptonite, have discovered.

Brands will need to take this into account in rolling out their thought leadership campaign. The seven START IP steps to arriving at a thought leadership idea for your brand and implementing START IP are outlined in this and the following chapter.

## 1. SCAN

The first vital step is to scan the media and social media sites (blogs, blog posts, forums, chat rooms) for issues impacting your brand or sector.

Map the landscape of all the different stakeholders impacting your business from cradle to grave – that is from the source and supply of your raw materials, to how you market, distribute and sell your product or service, to how the product is recycled or disposed of.

You need to monitor the conversations that are taking place online on issues affecting your business or, if they exist, comments about your company or your brand. Ideally, your thought leadership ideas should be founded on issues impacting your product, industry or service, but more importantly those issues that impact your target audiences and their needs, dreams and aspirations.

Being in a position to understand how to align the values of your company, brand and employees with those of your customers will build loyalty and stronger brand equity.

You should be identifying a niche for yourself where none of your competitors are active or can compete. Fiona Czerniawska, a prolific writer on thought leadership in management consultancies, defines this space as the 'white

space'<sup>1</sup> – the topics or angles the competitors haven't spotted.

You will probably find most of your competitors are still stuck in the 'here and now' space. I define this as the obvious space. It is the space around a product or service which is supported by traditional and typical marketing approaches such as press releases, adverts, marketing collateral and websites focused on the attributes of the product or service.

Some may go further to talk about the benefits but very few look at the issues in their audiences' lives that relate to the product or service and how to add value to these.

It is around these issues, the day-to-day or longer-term issues affecting your consumers' lives that many of your thought leadership ideas should come.

For example a construction company could examine things like issues facing architects now and into the future; the drivers of a family's decision on where to live; what singles want out of their accommodation and the community that surrounds them; or the socioeconomic needs of the city or community in which it is constructing developments.

I have only mentioned a few, but you need to select the areas where your products or services start touching

the lives of your customers; areas that mean something to them in their day-to-day lives, and that reflect their needs, dreams and aspirations. These are the areas ripe for developing thought leadership ideas.

Once you have identified these areas you can research and tap into customers' needs and provide information or a service which facilitates debate around these issues; delivers a solution to your customers' problems, or helps pinpoint some of the answers. In this way you position your brand as the 'go to' company in that space.

Take the example of Philips Electronics, which teamed up with the Mall of America in Bloomington, Minnesota, to provide a solution for shoppers during the holiday season. On average the Mall of America had 50 shoppers a day who forgot where they parked their car, and during the season this soared to 300 or 400 a day. So Philips developed the Philips Simplicity Parking Program which enabled shoppers to send text messages to a number once they had parked their cars and they could then receive a message on their phone with information on the bay where they had parked.

Simple, yes, long-term thought leadership, no. But a very effective short-term campaign which

showed Philips understood the daily frustrations of shoppers over this period and provided a solution with no strings attached. While I haven't seen the research, I have no doubt the campaign would have created great word-of-mouth and an element of brand loyalty among shoppers using the service.

Bear in mind that most of the issues which impact your customers currently and into the future can be identified through scanning the media and through research, which I will come to later.

## 2. TRACK

It is no use coming up with a thought leadership idea or a point of view that is already owned by a competitor. So it is vital to track your competitors' share of voice.

If you do not complete this tracking exercise you may find your company competing in an already crowded space, and your chances of being viewed as a thought leader in that area will be greatly diminished.

When you are scanning in step 1, it is wise to automatically include a tracking system for your competitors. In addition, you should start building a database of mainstream journalists as well as bloggers who cover the areas in which you are interested.

There are many ways to track. You can use the traditional media

## TRACKING TOOLS

- Track your industry using [news.yahoo.com/rss](http://news.yahoo.com/rss) and [w.moreover.com/categories/category\\_list\\_rss.html](http://w.moreover.com/categories/category_list_rss.html). These sites offer RSS feeds for aggregated industry news and will let you track news that is related to your industry.
- Track media using [news.google.com](http://news.google.com). You can subscribe to Google alerts relevant to your company, product, a particular person or subject. You then get instant RSS updates of relevant news items.
- Track popular news topics/conversations using [www.dig.com](http://www.dig.com) and [www.reddit.com](http://www.reddit.com). These sites will let you track popular submitted news relating to your business.
- Track social media news using [www.technorati.com](http://www.technorati.com). This site will track social media sites and RSS feeds, giving you updates whenever a blog mentions the company, subject, person or topic you are tracking.
- Search blogs using [blogsearch.google.com](http://blogsearch.google.com). You can set up Google blog alerts to track blogs covering the topics in which you are interested.
- Track blog comments using [co.mments.com](http://co.mments.com). Tools such as this track the comments that people leave on blogs so you can get more insight into what people are saying about a topic, company or an issue.
- Track blog conversations using [www.blogpulse.com/conversation](http://www.blogpulse.com/conversation). It will help you track who is linking to particular blog posts about the company, issue or person.
- Track blog trends using [www.blogpulse.com/trend](http://www.blogpulse.com/trend). This site also lets you track things like how well your latest product or that of a competitor is going. It lets you track whether a keyword is receiving growing blog mentions or not.
- Bookmark using [del.icio.us/](http://del.icio.us/), which lets you share your bookmarked sites online. RSS feeds make it easy to track whenever someone bookmarks a web page including the company or person you are tracking.
- Track photos using [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com). You can use this site to subscribe to an RSS feed which tracks new images which match what you are tracking.
- Track videos using [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com). It allows you to search for new videos on the topic you are tracking.
- Track tags using [www.keotag.com](http://www.keotag.com), which lets you track the use of your company name, product name or a particular topic as key words.
- Track forum posts using [www.boardtracker.com](http://www.boardtracker.com), which tracks what people are saying about your company or people on popular forums. The site will alert you by RSS if your search word is mentioned.
- Track updates on [wikipedia.org](http://wikipedia.org), which lets you track what changes or updates people are making to the Wikipedia definition of your company/product.
- Track patents using [www.google.com/patents](http://www.google.com/patents). It lets you track patents that have been filed and are that are relevant to your company or industry.
- Track events using Yahoo's Upcoming at [upcoming.yahoo.com](http://upcoming.yahoo.com). Use it to track upcoming events or conferences against keywords.
- Track keyword referral using Compete at [searchanalytics.compete.com/site\\_referrals/](http://searchanalytics.compete.com/site_referrals/). It lets you track which websites get the most traffic for particular keywords.
- Track anything using Yahoo Pipes at [pipes.yahoo.com/pipes/](http://pipes.yahoo.com/pipes/). This lets you develop your own monitoring tool with your own search terms for RSS tracking.

The point about all of these tools is that rather than tie you to your laptop they should be used cleverly to enable and inform more blue-sky thinking. It shouldn't be daunting but rather should provide insights which take up no longer than 15 to 30 minutes of your day.

tracking companies in your country or you can use a variety of online tracking tools available through various search engines, such as Google, Yahoo, MSN and AOL. I have provided a list of online tracking devices and sites (see previous page).

Tracking your competitors is useful from two perspectives. Not only will you gain an idea what they are doing, how they are marketing and the press coverage they are generating, but it could also highlight the gaps in your sector with regards to the issues important to your audiences.

### 3. ANALYSE

It seems obvious, but you should be asking lots of the right sort of questions of your client, your company and your brand manager.

It is at this stage that you can ask the sort of questions that differentiate a short-term, product-related, thought leadership campaign versus a long-term campaign inextricably linked to the company's values. For it is at this stage that you can identify the company's 'true north'. By 'true north' I mean brands or company's who know what they stand for and go about their purpose with singular focus and conviction.

Questions on the company's beliefs and values would include things like:

- What does this company truly stand for?
- What are we really doing here?
- What are the one to three core values which represent this company?
- How do our markets see this company?
- What does it want to be?
- What do we want to be remembered for?
- What is our legacy now and into the future?
- Who cares about us?

It is these sorts of questions which should drive a deep understanding of the essence or 'true north' of the company, which in turn will help define better the thought leadership areas into which it could consider entering.

Other questions you should consider in the analysis phase include:

- What differentiates us from our competitors?
- What intellectual property do we have that is different?
- What unique benefits do we deliver to our customers?
- Are there interesting ways in which we are engaging with our customers?
- What research do we have or could we commission which answer questions around pertinent topics in our industry?
- Do we have hidden pockets of existing intellectual property

which aren't being fully leveraged?

Sometimes intellectual property is taken for granted: 'It's the way it's always been done around here.' But packaged properly, with the right spokespeople backing it, this property can often be the thought leadership spark you are seeking.

Many companies are stuck in the mode of only selling their product/service benefits. However, while many companies have done and continue to do this very well, unless one of their products is quite clearly the market leader, there typically will not be enough to differentiate it from the competitors, and there are always new and better products hitting the market.

The key to truly differentiating your product is to find that thought leadership point of view which really differentiates you from your competitors and which makes your clients exclaim: 'These guys get us.'

Once you have answered these questions and possibly identified and analysed the pockets of existing intellectual property in the company, you should move to step four.

### 4. REVIEW

This is a 360 degree review, which should cover two key areas: firstly, a review of your current intellectual property to see if it could spark

a thought leadership campaign and, secondly, a review of whether this campaign aligns with your company's values. This is how you would proceed.

#### REVIEW YOUR CURRENT INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

You need to brainstorm your current intellectual property with various people within the company. See if this could be bolstered to inform a thought leadership campaign.

For example if your product is an energy bar and you did general market research which explored eating trends around energy bars, it may not be quite enough to inform a thought leadership campaign. However, if your research explored mothers' concerns around obesity and Type 2 Diabetes and the association these have with snack foods, including energy bars, you would start gleaning the type of information which could be very useful to a thought leadership campaign.

These findings combined with the knowledge from the previous START IP steps and trends will better inform you about the issues and concerns of your target audiences and what matters in their lives.

Once you have these insights, you have the makings of a potential

thought leadership campaign. The energy bar company could possibly start further exploring the broad issues of diet, school snacks, eating healthily at work and the impact on productivity, for instance. It is this sort of thought process, driven by the START IP methodology, which will begin illuminating possible areas for a thought leadership campaign.

**REVIEW WHETHER IT REALLY FITS YOUR COMPANY VALUES**

The second part of the review process is probably harder, but it will help define a more integrated, holistic and longer-term campaign for your company/brand.

It involves aligning your brand and your company values with your thought leadership position. It is no good embarking on a great thought leadership campaign if it doesn't align with your brand values. It could be a shortcut to disaster for your campaign.

The 360 degree view of a corporation from the perspectives of consumers, employees, NGOs and shareholders has seen big global players such as Nike overhauling their labour practices and mining giant Rio Tinto focusing on its impact in indigenous communities. A lot of consumer goods companies are also examining strategies on how to confront the obesity epidemic and

other issues, such as water use.

Customers are voting for their preferences through their buying behaviour, and this trend is set to increase.

Rob McLean, former Dean and Director of the Australian Graduate School of Management (AGSM), said in a recent issue of the AGSM newsletter<sup>2</sup> that the social context of business is playing a far greater role in business than ever before. His view is that we need to be equipping future business leaders with how to operate in a social context.

McLean points out that as businesses discover the importance of their social conscience they have realized that these issues cannot be 'pushed away or given to human resources or corporate affairs departments. The social context of business is now part of what all leaders have to deal with, and what winning is all about.'

He notes that 'winning is no longer simply about winning in the product market space or winning in the regulatory space. It is going to take this full 360 degree view of changing social context.'

Both forms of my recommended reviews benefit from a robust questioning process. The more the ideas are interrogated, the more aligned the final thought leadership position will be with the

Strength based thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ What has been working well?</li> <li>■ Where have we made progress?</li> <li>■ What are we most proud of?</li> </ul>
Feeling thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ What does our gut instinct tell us?</li> <li>■ How do we feel about this problem?</li> <li>■ What is our emotional response to this?</li> </ul>
Re-integrated thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ How could we have both of these possibilities?</li> <li>■ What strengths do these opposing positions share?</li> <li>■ What if we could have both?</li> </ul>
Insight thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ How has this problem been solved before?</li> <li>■ What do we know, from experience, matters here?</li> <li>■ What are the proven remedies?</li> </ul>
360 degree thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ How would others see this?</li> <li>■ Who would see this differently</li> <li>■ Could we hear all of the possible perspectives on this?</li> </ul>

**Approaches for interrogating a point of view**

corporate vision and values of the business.

In her book *Thought leadership: Moving Hearts and Minds*,<sup>3</sup> Robin Ryde delves deeply into questioning techniques. I have included here a table of the sorts of approaches she suggests for interrogating your point of view. However, this merely scratches the surface of Robin's excellent questioning techniques.

While cracking the big idea is an exciting moment, it is just the start. Once you have covered the last step in the thought leadership process you need to address the all important question of how you launch and drive your thought leadership campaign internally and externally. This is covered in more detail in Chapter 4.

**5. TRENDS**

There are many futurists and trend spotters around. Just plug the terms into any search engine and it will list a plethora of people predicting the future.

Visit as many of these sites as you can. Even if you pull just one or two ideas from each site, it may help inform your thought leadership ideas. These sites will give you an insight to the future forces shaping the markets in which your brand operates and more importantly, the forces shaping the lives of your consumers or the communities within which you operate.

Examining trends is a great starting point for helping deliver insights for thought leadership opportunities.

The brand winners of the future are going to be the ones that tap into these and other trends, and, more specifically, those which impact their customers.

For example, a study by Social Technologies, a US-based foresight consulting firm, identified 20 top lifestyle trends affecting global businesses and their consumers.<sup>4</sup> The top five are:

- Media spread, with media access becoming faster, cheaper and more widespread.
- Transparency, which is driven by Internet technology and social pressure.
- Networked world, with information and people increasingly networked.
- Women's power, as women continue to gain socioeconomic and political power.
- Ethical consumption, with price, quality and convenience meeting ethics and values.

Ideally your thought leadership campaign should hone in not only on issues that matter to your audiences now, but also ones that will be important in the future. Gaining some knowledge about the trends affecting your industry is a great way of informing your thought leadership point of view.

A 2006 McKinsey quarterly report<sup>5</sup> says that the case for incorporating an awareness of social and political

trends into corporate strategy has become overwhelming.

It makes the point that there are a host of issues out there which can impact your brand and, if you are not taking these into account, the financial and reputation consequences of mishandling them can be huge. On the flip side, being aware of trends can create new opportunities for companies and their brands.

Importantly the report talks about how companies have always had a social contract with society. While the formal part of this is regulated through law and regulation, the semi-formal or implicit expectations of society can become social expectations over time.

If companies don't monitor these and take action in advance, they can be caught short. The tobacco industry is an example where responsibility shifted from individuals to the industry. Interestingly, the liquor industry could be next.

Your proposed thought leadership scenarios should be proof tested through carefully structured conversations with futurists, your staff, your customers and potential customers. Once this is done you should consider testing or verifying the idea through market research.

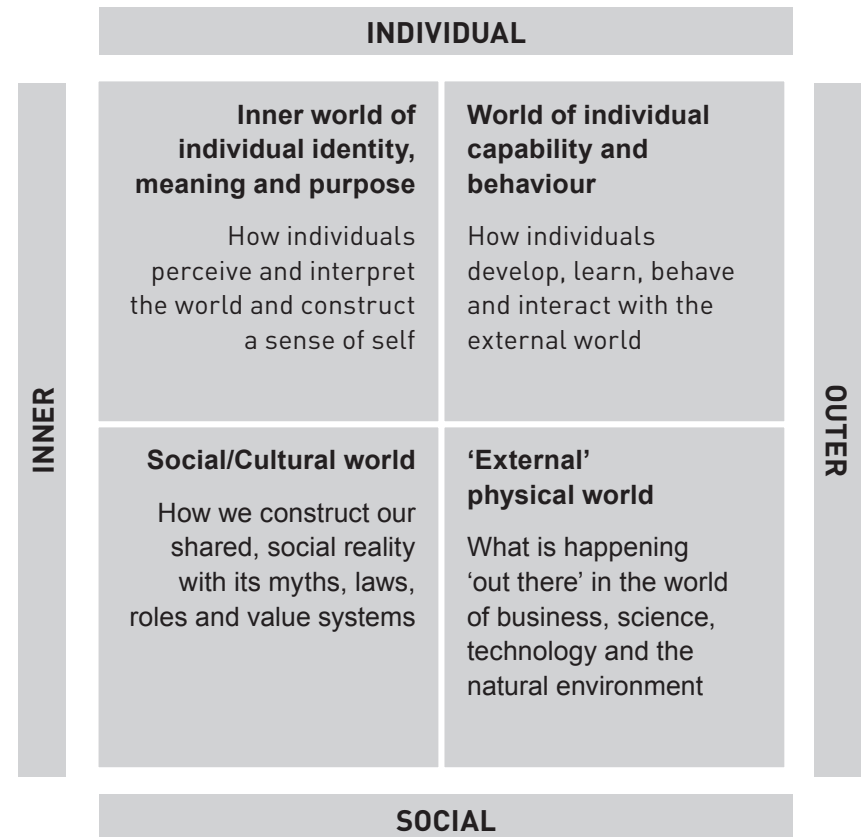
Dr Peter Saul, a director of the Strategic Consulting Group

and member of the Futures Foundation's Professional Advisory Board in Sydney, Australia, says in his paper *'This Way to the Future'*<sup>6</sup> that two common scenarios have emerged from research conducted for clients in Australia by the foundation. He maintains these mirror scenarios that have been generated by other futures projects in Australia and overseas.

He points out that the community world is characterized by a

resurgence in community and environmental values, a focus on local community and its resources and services, and the values and quality of relationships and shared risks.

Professor Richard Slaughter in his book *Futures for the Third Millennium* emphasized the need to develop views of the future that integrate thinking across four worlds identified by Ken Wilber in 1995 as shown in the chart below.



*Integrating thinking across four worlds<sup>7</sup>*

Why do I use this chart? Because if your company's thought leadership campaign can address all four worlds, it has the makings of a winner.

### CARING FOR MORE THAN HAIR

One of the best illustrations of a company taking these four worlds into account is Aveda, an international supplier of salon and spa products. Aveda initially took an external physical world view of the impact of its manufacturing process on the environment and, as a result, has witnessed profound impacts across the other three worlds in its business and the very culture of the organization.

Aveda founder Horst Rechelbacher had a vision of bringing products to his clients that were safer for them and the planet. His vision inspired the company to develop and integrate true sustainability into all its practices, from soil to recycling.

Says Aveda president Dominique Conseil: 'Aveda believes there is no responsible alternative to doing business other than through environmental sustainability. At Aveda, we also believe that profit and environmental responsibility will increasingly work together as more industries find out that "nature works" for both sustainability and the bottom-line.'<sup>8</sup>

According to Conseil, setting an example for environment leadership and responsibility has brought additional constraints in the company's daily work, but 'It also brings to all employees an empowerment, an invitation to break the rules and reinvent.'

He admits that while Aveda will not change the world, it can create a ripple effect that touches beauty professionals, customers, suppliers, farmers, the communities within which they operate and live, and other businesses.

'We business people can change the world by changing the way the world does business. How? By changing the way we do business.'

And how does Aveda do business that positions it as a thought leader?

A large portion of the ingredients it uses for its products come from tropical rainforests. Aveda long ago recognized the need to work with local communities in the Amazon and not-for-profit environmental organizations to help local communities develop businesses which farm natural resources in a renewable, sustainable manner.

For example, Brazilian nuts and Babassu palm nuts are just two of the ingredients gathered by local communities from the forest for Aveda. In addition, Aveda has

helped support a living pharmacy project to produce plant-based medicines. One local Brazilian collective which Aveda has worked with is becoming a certifying agency in organic agriculture.

Aveda has taken a true leadership stance by helping local communities pursue environmentally sustainable means of economic development.

Aveda is living the triple bottom line principle daily. This has meant expanding the traditional company reporting framework to take into account environmental and social performance in addition to financial performance.

Aveda is an example of how doing business sustainably and ethically can pay off in the long run. Aveda's mission is 'to care for the world we live in from the products we make to the ways in which we give back to society'.<sup>9</sup> It strives to set an example for environmental leadership and responsibility.

In Aveda's case, these sound environmental practices have significantly contributed to and driven its competitive advantage.

Companies should be taking a number of steps to make their trend plotting robust and more strategic. In this way they can spot new trends early, allowing them to plan and anticipate possible social or political

pressures in these areas. They can join and shape the debate on these issues rather than being caught unawares by emerging developments.

At the very least, if a company is unable to take a thought leadership view on a particular issue, understanding the trends will help it plan for potential risks to its brand and better inform and prepare it to engage strategically with the issue and to mitigate the risk as far as possible.

## Chapter 4

# START IP continued: champions and objectivity

The IP part of the START IP process is all about the importance of having a champion and, if you see fit, identifying and engaging with an objective external panel of experts from other fields to stress test and interrogate your thought leadership point of view along the way.

## 6. IDENTIFY A CHAMPION

Thought leadership needs a champion or preferably champions. So a vital step is to identify a thought leadership champion, who could be the brand manager, a line manager, the CEO, the CIO, the CFO, the marketing manager, an academic or an expert within the company. Without a champion, even the best thought leadership ideas will fail.

It is vital that the champion has authority, power and gravitas within the company and that his or her point of view will be nurtured and supported.

Importantly, thought leadership is not necessarily about knowing all the answers. Rather it is about convening the circles, articulating the questions, framing the conversation and directing attention to the issues that matter.

Thought leaders inspire change, heighten awareness, broaden perspectives and create a deeper sense of place and purpose not only internally within the organization but also among customers and suppliers.

Therefore your first challenge is to find an influential person in the organization who has the passion for defining a point of view and owning it, as well as the ability to take it to market. In addition, the individual should carry the authority or respect of the organization, so that he or she can be a spokesperson and deliver that point of view in the public domain.

Without a thought leadership champion, your potentially winning

concepts will struggle to gain traction internally and externally.

Initially one thought leadership champion will do. However, good thought leadership has a habit of pulling everyone along with it over time: it is a wave which gathers momentum.

Your thought leader champion will need to kick start the campaign, so choose someone who is brave enough to stand for something, someone who has a point of view to differentiate your brand or service.

This person need not be the spokesperson, although that does help, but she or he does need to champion the idea internally and drive it from a marketing and PR perspective. Obviously it helps your cause if the champion actively becomes your external spokesperson, but there is no reason you cannot use someone else like the managing director or CEO to comment on the thought leadership idea/project publicly through the media, and in talks with clients and prospective clients.

Truly great thought leadership ideas have the ability to ignite passion in others within the organization, thus creating a groundswell of support for the idea. Other people jump on the bandwagon and in time you end up with a champion surrounded by one or more thought leadership disciples.

There are no better brand ambassadors for your company or product than a group of people naturally inspired by the thought leadership vision of their company or brand. They feel a sense of pride in what they do. They find meaning in their work beyond selling.

Their thought leadership point of view gives them the opportunity to engage with their audiences and speak proudly about what they do and to speak with authority about what their company believes. Most importantly they inherently know that they are giving their audiences something of value beyond merely selling a product or service.

When your staff is inspired by a thought leadership view, they are empowered to speak with a passion about their brand and its place in their customers' lives. Passion is infectious: it is motivational and inspires others. A company or brand with this platform will grow and, over time, become recognized as the leader in its field.

While thought leadership is about defining a point of view for your company, brand or service in the market place, some of the true benefits lie in the impact it has on inspiring employees, especially your sales or brand team.

Identifying a thought leadership campaign which ignites the

passion of employees means you have a real winner.

### NOW WE ARE TALKING

There is a great example of a campaign started by Australia's largest telecommunications company, Telstra. In order to engage with its audiences, Telstra launched the *www.nowweareretalking.com.au* campaign.<sup>10</sup>

It is an online channel for the company to speak directly to its target audiences and for the audiences to engage with Telstra. It is also a place where employees can blog about topics that interest them, whether personal or work related.

Telstra believes that the campaign has balanced the market's perception of it as a more approachable brand – one which is more open and transparent than it has been in the past and that is prepared to engage with its audiences and enter into a conversation with them.

The key driver for the campaign was to bypass traditional media, because Telstra believed that it was not raising sufficient public debate around important telecommunication issues, such as a broadband infrastructure. However, the campaign has had a far greater effect: it has become a vehicle for changing the very culture of the organization

internally – it has opened up the lines of communication and Telstra's 'dinosaur' tag has changed.

You seldom hear about companies the size of a Telstra that do not muzzle their own bloggers. Admittedly it has taken a brave management decisions to go this route. The campaign has had its fair share of teething problems, but the results are startling and Telstra now leads the industry in social media and how to engage with its customers and broader audiences, rather than merely marketing to them.

This approach is best described in the Jan Phillips book *The Art of Original Thinking* in which she says: 'True leaders of our time are the ones who are not just imagining not just hoping for and waiting for the new dispensation to arrive but actively bringing it into existence.'<sup>11</sup>

Thought leaders do not maintain silence and they do not wait for others. This is all the more reason to have a thought leader champion, someone who can own and drive the cause. They are the ones who ignite imaginations, explode myths and illuminate the paths to the future for others to follow.

## 7. PANEL

The final step is to identify and form a thought leadership panel. The challenge most organizations face

is that they are inwardly focused and often struggle to look beyond their company view. Ideas are often rooted in past and present thinking, which limits the insights needed for truly imaginative and innovative leaps ahead.

If a company is to break this mould it is important for it to engage with fresh perspectives from outside the organization and, importantly, perspectives that look beyond the obvious. To do this the thought leadership panel needs to comprise experts from various fields. It could include consultants, business executives, academics, entrepreneurs, economists, scientists, futurists, suppliers and potential partners.

The panel's challenge is to open the company's thinking, to think laterally and take a world view of possibilities beyond the obvious. It should stimulate the company to look at things differently. The panel's purpose is to assist the company in identifying emerging trends and help it develop foresights about the future world and the opportunities this could present for the business and its customers.

Ideally, the panel should provide as wide a view as possible across fields as diverse as the environment, politics, social trends, technology, community and demographics.

The purpose of this panel is to spark innovation and strategic imagination and enable the company to explore areas not previously entertained. Innovation and thought leadership is inextricably linked to companies expanding their view and looking at trends inside and outside of their businesses. A well picked thought leadership panel should be in a position to help a company do this.

For this to work there needs to be a well-defined process for the panel. This starts with giving panelists as much information as you can to assist their strategic insights about the company, its products, intellectual property and consumers. Good thought and planning need to be given to this if the panel is to be successful and deliver the desired results to the company.

The panel may deliver several insights but, as I have said before, this is merely the start. It is useful to put these insights or ideas through the START IP process in the first instance, and only then develop a plan on how to take these ideas or insights to market.

*You can purchase Brand Stand: seven steps to thought leadership from [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com).*

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*Or follow him on twitter at [@thoughtstrategy](https://twitter.com/@thoughtstrategy).*

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