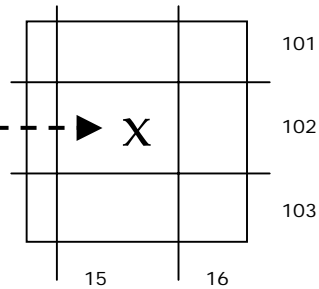


THOUGHT LEADERSHIP



When you need an edge - show how your thinking supports your position

For successful new business outreach, it's important to communicate how your company is both special and different. For this you need to set out your stall via taking a market position. Whereas it's relatively straightforward to adopt a logical position, it's a lot more difficult to own it in the minds of your decision-makers. In order to do this, you have to flesh-out your basis for adopting it, then energetically communicate it. This is where thought leadership comes in.

The opportunity for thought-leadership, is then principally, a by-product of effective new business planning. In this you would have identified what makes your offer compelling and would want to demonstrate how this factor creates both value for clients and advantages over alternatives. The process of creating, developing and refining your thoughts on what you stand for also has the effect of annealing your brand, thus enabling firm foundations for you to communicate its virtues internally and externally.

Next, you need to win the argument in the marketplace for why your message is better than everyone else's. Thought-leadership is about seizing authority in a niche in order to do this. It's about communicating your opinions, insights from your data and information, and your forward thinking. It should be informative. It can be controversial. It can't be what everyone else is saying or too obvious.

You can sound compelling in terms of whose message is best, via your 'proof points': case studies, peer group endorsements from awards, media profile etc. Many focus on these alone, because they overcomplicate what they think they need from thought-leadership. Don't. To establish your position and win the argument in your market you need to communicate that you are the best at what you do because you know most about what you do – then use the proof points to confirm it.

To create thought-leadership pieces you need to access the planners and thinkers in your business, remind them of what you stand for and enthuse them to want to contribute content for you, the new business / marketing person, to arrange, filter, and

schedule, as is appropriate to your marketing plan. Some find it tricky getting viewpoints from the planning team and so write it themselves then get the planners to fine-tune and fill out the detail.

Typically what they provide will be in nature (1) open and educating, (2) more concealed - a teaser to invite interest, (3) a viewpoint on the cutting edge to invite curiosity or (4), a note on best practice to establish authority. Ideally thought-leadership activity rotates through these aspects over the course of a year.

The end output is highly useful for the purpose of proactive new business, because it's not easy to keep the dialogue with prospects going over time unless you've got something to say. Now more than ever, you really do need to build 'relationships' so that you are in the best position to get on the pitch list, get the brief, or even just get given the work. In doing this, you are cultivating your connection and staving-off competitors from gatecrashing the party when the pitch goes live or in the event that they make a luckily timed approach.

Thought-leadership works very well in the overall marketing mix and may be channelled in many different ways. In addition to direct marketing, it provides content for websites, seminars, conferences, PR, collateral, conversational dialogue, internal/stakeholder communications etc. And once you're used to doing it, it enables you to fluently adjust your market positioning to react to market conditions or competitor encroachment.

It's also valuable for agencies that wish to move from project income to retainers - from being perceived as implementers by clients and prospects, towards being accepted as strategic advisors. It enables agencies to move up the food chain towards AOR / incumbent status and better control their own destinies. Ultimately, it's about marketing agencies doing for themselves what they do for others – having a transformational and commercially powerful idea and then communicating it effectively to the people that might buy it. Now there's a thought.