

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP DISRUPTED

New rules for the content age

DOES THOUGHT LEADERSHIP STILL HAVE VALUE?

The content landscape has exploded, with publishers, brands and agencies all contributing to a very crowded space. In this context does 'thought leadership' retain the same currency it once did?

The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), in association with Hill+Knowlton Strategies, conducted a wide-reaching piece of research to answer this question and consider the challenges marketers face today in the new content age.

“The challenge for B2B content is that it competes in a huge array of media fighting for time against other always-on entertainment.”

John Rudaizky, Brand & Marketing Leader, Partner, EY

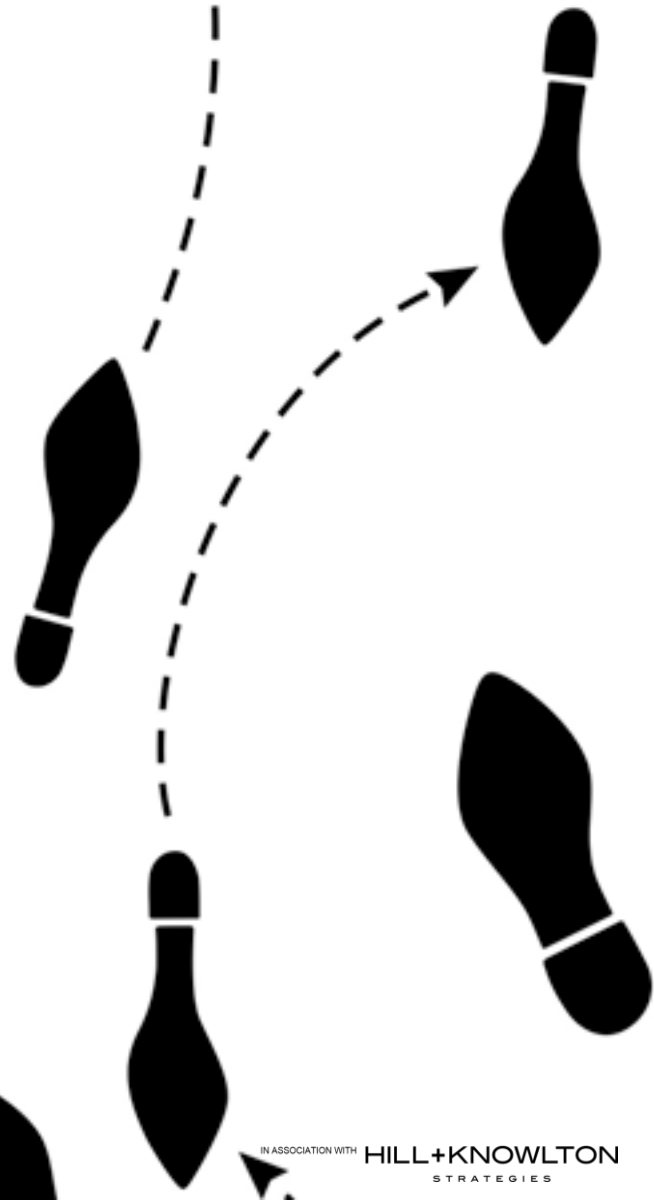
OUR METHODOLOGY

Phase 1

An advisory board meeting comprising 10 senior UK marketers to inform the focus of the surveys and shape our thinking.

Phase 2

An online survey of more than 1,600 global executives who either produce or consume thought leadership content, on their motivations, actions and perceptions.



The Results

Audiences are reaching content overload



3 in 5 global executives admit sometimes feeling **confused or overwhelmed** by the volume of content they encounter:

68% agree that **volume has gone up,**

with only **5%** thinking it has decreased

56% think that **intrusiveness has increased**

Nearly **16%** think the **value of content has decreased** somewhat or a lot

and, as a result, are refining their shortlists

- In the last 12-24 months, nearly **75%** of executives became **more selective** generally about the thought leadership they consume, with just over **80% citing the volume** of content as the reason for this change.
- **44% engage with less than 20%** of the thought leadership they see.



But there are rewards for getting it right

After consuming compelling TL most respondents 'do something' as a direct result:



70%
consume more
from that source



53%
sign up to a
newsletter



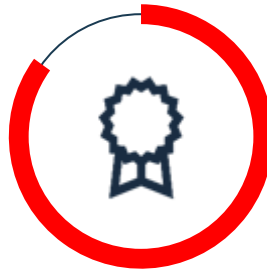
47%
share via social
media

Big rewards...

Thought leadership can build loyalty and sales



76%
of senior executives
are influenced in their
purchasing decisions



67%
would be willing to
advocate for that brand or
organisation **externally**



83%
would be influenced in their
choice of potential
business partner

And, the executive audience is still hungry

- **68% consume** thought leadership on at least a **weekly basis**. 33% do so daily
- **20% have increased consumption 'a lot'** over the past 12 months
- **Less than 5%** have **reduced consumption** either a little or a lot.



The bar is set high and getting higher

Executives and marketers agree: Compelling TL is **'innovative'**, **'big picture'**, **'credible'** and **'transformative'**.

According to executives unimpressive TL is **'superficial'**, **'sales-driven'** and **'biased'**

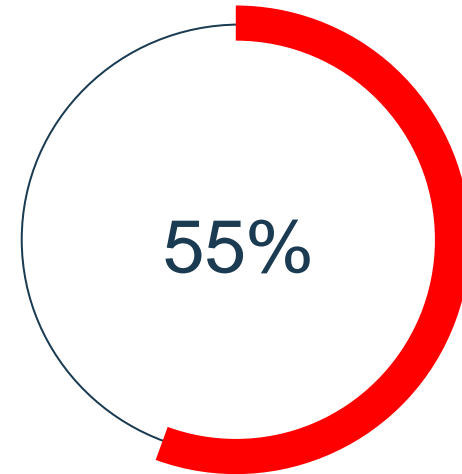
'Sales driven' does not make marketers' top 3 as a quality of unimpressive thought leadership. Instead they cite **'jargon-laden'**



And ‘credible’ brands have an advantage

Trust is established through the **quality or nature of the research** and whether the data is **‘credible’**.

‘Challenger brands’ who want to break through and make the shortlist must employ rigour: for an unfamiliar source to prompt engagement, it needs to be a ‘source of hard facts’ (47%).

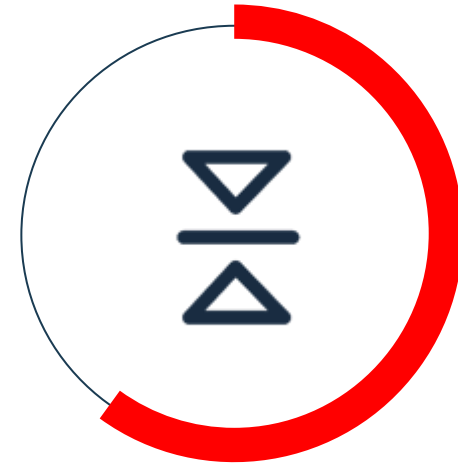


What's getting in marketers' way?

Mainly, themselves

More than 60%

strongly agree or somewhat agree that **internal alignment is a barrier** to thought leadership production.



But marketers seem undaunted by poor results



80%

of marketers plan to **increase the amount of thought leadership content** they produce in the coming 12 months



<20%

Nearly half believe that less than 20% of their current output **gets engagement**

Marketers are not truly focused on the audience

Nearly half of all marketers (47%) cite **differentiating** their company from the competition as a primary objective of thought leadership.

Four in ten (42%) cite **gaining recognition** for their company or key individuals as experts/authority in their field.

Only 28% of marketers cited **helping their audience** to become more knowledgeable as a key objective. Yet, 82% believe that to create compelling thought leadership, the content needs **to centre on the audience's interest** rather than profiling the brand.

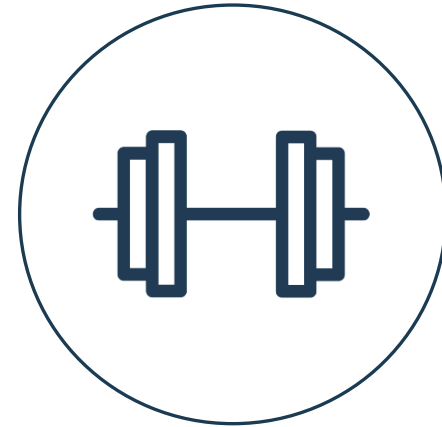


...and that's a challenge for marketers

The top ROI measures are achieving **policy/issues objectives and citations** in press or third party publications (35%, 28%).

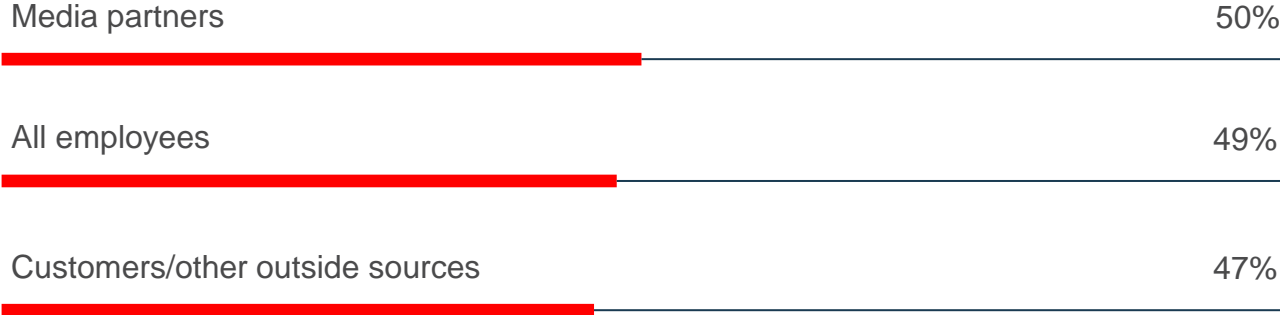
Only two in ten cited social media shares or time spent with content (24%, 21%).

The disconnect between these measures and the goal of creating content that is audience-centric underscores a duality with which marketers are struggling.



And the right people may not be involved in planning

When asked about who was not involved in the planning of thought leadership, but should be marketers cited:



“It’s important for all companies to have a clear idea of their brand internally before you go ahead and talk about how that manifests itself externally. To be credible you have to have a clear understanding of what you want to portray.”

Hamish Rickman, VP Marketing, Virgin Atlantic.

So what is effective thought leadership?



96% of consumers like to encounter thoughts and ideas that go beyond current thinking.

'It's mindshare before market share.'

*Rebecca Edwards, Chief Communications Officer,
GE Oil & Gas*

Appendix: advisory board & survey demographics



Advisory Board members

Aina Bolstad, Senior Marketing Communications Manager, Microsoft

Rebecca Edwards, Chief Communications Officer, GE Oil and Gas

Nicholas Graham, Global Director Digital Marketing, Huawei Technologies

Rachel Grant, Global Director of Media Relations, McKinsey

Sandra Higgison, AVP Product Marketing, Genpact

Hamish Rickman, VP Marketing, Virgin Atlantic

Severin Roald, SVP Corporate Communications, Telenor

Mark Rose, Brand Communications Manager Europe, BP

John Rudaizky, Partner, Global Brand & External Communications Leader, EY

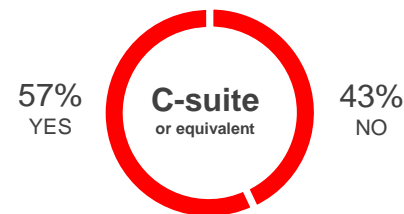
Andy Weitz, SVP, Global Marketing & Communications, Aon

We surveyed

806
marketers



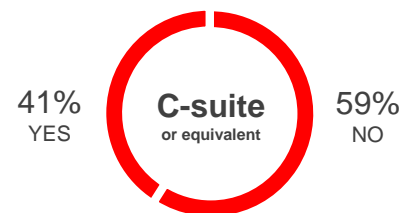
Samples annual global revenue



838
business thought leadership consumers executives



Samples annual global revenue



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