

Think Bigger with Thought Leadership

Stacey Ross Cohen, CEO/President of [Co-Communications](#)

So, what exactly is a thought leader? And how can it benefit you? A thought leader is considered an authority on a particular subject matter or industry. They share their deep knowledge, insights and ideas with audiences through speaking engagements, media interviews and content development – – and have a truly distinct (sometimes disruptive) perspective which inspires innovative thinking in others. Establishing yourself as an expert in your field gives you a competitive edge and builds both mind and market share. When done right, you can reap many benefits – career advancement, higher salary, rewarding partnerships, new clients/business opportunities, and revenue growth.

Consumers make purchase decisions based on an emotional connection with a brand or individual. In order for someone to engage or buy something – they need to know, like and trust you.. Since thought leaders humanize a brand and are perceived as credible sources, they (positively) influence purchase decisions which drives sales. Below are five steps to become known as a thought leader:

Define Your Brand. Building a [personal brand](#) is the first step to develop thought leader status. Identify your purpose, strengths, values and passion. This is not about me, me, me – – it's about your value to others. You need to understand your target audience as well as competition. What's important to your audience? How can you solve their needs better than your competitors? Only then can you crystallize your expertise or niche and put your stake in the ground. Although it seems personal brands (and thought leadership) “just happen,” they don't – the best ones take years and require an ongoing

effort.

Create a strategic roadmap. Throwing spaghetti at the wall simply does not work. It's all too easy to jump into the tactics (e.g., creating a blog). You need to be both intentional and proactive and have a well-informed strategy. When we work with a new client to build thought leadership, we insist on starting with a plan which details objectives, target audiences, messaging, tactics and a 6–12 month timeline. It's also a good idea to create a monthly content calendar to schedule what, when, and where to publish. Align your content with trends and national holidays. For instance, if you're a climate change expert, you may want to step up your content during Earth month (April).

Develop Content That's Relevant (and Platform-Appropriate) Good is not enough – you need to create great content (curated and self-published) to capture your audience. Whether you develop articles, blog posts, ebooks, news releases, white papers or videos, make certain the content speaks to your audience. It is also important to be bold, share your point of view, and make industry predictions. Content is more than words; make use of striking visuals. Consider creating infographics to present data in a more digestible way. Also, showcase your value with a “wow” portfolio of client testimonials, earned media, achievements, success stories, and a professional bio/profile with headshot.

Become your own news channel: Once you have great content, you need to deliver through a multi-channel approach (websites, speaking engagements, social media, blogs, e-newsletters, podcasts). Select channels that are in sync with who you are and reach your audience – – you can't be on everywhere. Speaking is a top tool to build thought leadership. Capture your speaking engagements and make sure to publish them on your website and social channels. Create a speaker's bio and/or sizzle reel to further grow your opportunities within

the speaking realm. I recently interviewed Ryan Serhant, a top-ranking real estate broker, author, and television personality (*Million Dollar Listing New York*) who recognizes the importance of educating and entertaining his audience. With 2 million plus social media followers, Ryan is an example of “broadcasting” at its best. He is a *Forbes* contributor, YouTube Vlogger, speaks at industry associations, and is frequently interviewed and quoted by national media.

Grow Your Network. It’s been said that “Your network is your net worth.” Networking is one of the most important investments you can make to grow your following. Engage and build relationships with mentors, influencers, and industry leaders. Consider joining a board or committee (both professional and community). Be social – – attend virtual networking events and be sure to connect with your new contact promptly via LinkedIn etc. I have organically grown my LinkedIn followers to 27,000 which has given me brand visibility, higher search ranking, and business/speaking opportunities.

Thought leadership is earned and requires time, effort and reinforcement plus a large and engaged following to help spread insights and ideas. Ultimately, it is your audience who decides if you deserve thought leader status. Time to think big!

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About the Author: Stacey is an award-winning communications professional who earned her marketing stripes on Madison Avenue and at major television networks before launching [Co-Communications](#), an integrated marketing communications firm with offices in New York and

Connecticut. Co-Communications serves clients in education, healthcare, real estate, professional services, technology, and the nonprofit realm. Services include branding, website development, inbound marketing, PR and social media. Stacey excels at taking brands to market – leveraging each client’s unique voice to make an indelible impact on social media, in board rooms, and everywhere in between. She has garnered the Forbes Enterprise and PRSA Practitioner of the Year awards for her work in the communications field.

Stacey is a sought-after speaker and recently made her debut on the TED stage. She is a blogger at the Huffington Post and Thrive Global and has been featured in Entrepreneur, Forbes, Crain’s, and a suite of other national media. Stacey holds a B.S. from Syracuse University, MBA from Fordham University and recently completed a certificate program in Media, Technology and Entertainment at NYU Leonard Stern School of Business.