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## **DO YOU HAVE YOUR CEO'S VOTE FOR YOUR THOUGHT LEADERSHIP CAMPAIGN YET!**

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Secret to Thought leadership marketing success- Make your CEO the brand ambassador



As a thought leadership marketing specialist, I have realized that the best way to ensure that the thought leadership marketing efforts percolate throughout the organization is to make your CEO the brand ambassador for it. But how do you ensure that you get the CEO's attention as their time is invaluable. CEOs spend most of their time in defining strategies that yield operational innovation and drive execution excellence, so as to combat the unrelenting pressure to improve shareholder value. They are constantly looking to generate value out of each minute that they spend on various activities – talking to clients, attending meetings, listening to presentations, or even reading a report. So if you are trying to put across an idea or a recommendation for a long-term business strategy like thought leadership to a CEO, it takes all of the following:

- Extensive background research to collect data that supports your idea
- A complete knowledge of costs, benefits, risks and rewards associated with the implementation of your idea or recommendation, and
- Impeccable communication skills which enable you to articulate the point in the shortest possible time and in an effective manner without wasting a minute while keeping the CEO interested

Thought Leadership induces stakeholders to acknowledge companies' demonstrative excellence and reach out to them to find solutions to their concerns. To ensure the success of the implementation of a Thought Leadership strategy the CEO should act as the face of the organization in taking it through the "carrying-out" phase of the initiative.

So what should a marketer keep in mind while planning to engage the CEO in this program. To gain some headway, the marketer should structure his/her argument along the following 4 lines:

**1. Begin with a gist of the conclusion** – Succinctly justify a CEO's participation in a Thought Leadership program; a quick glimpse will give your CEO a reason to anticipate some positive outcome from the discussion

**2. Describe the business rationale** – As Thought Leadership programs have traditionally been a one arm function and quite isolated from a CEO's scheme of things, there is a need to reinforce the business need for Thought Leadership in an organization (highlighted in my earlier post on Thought leadership- a marriage of marketing & strategy). Some benefits that can be highlighted to the CEO include:

- Brand building – building customer relationships: A right thought leadership strategy can sustain a brand value in the longer run, without relying on creative, but shallow marketing campaigns. It also helps in engaging with the customer in a more meaningful dialogue
- Competitive edge: Companies can gain a considerable head start over the market as Thought Leadership implies establishing expertise through cutting edge research positioning the company as a trusted advisor. Widening the scope of the business: Thought leadership can provide a business access to opportunities which are otherwise difficult to venture into.
- Attracting talent: In a scenario where companies entice talent through hazy claims, Thought Leadership is a parameter by which capable talent can identify growth opportunities and is a bridge that matches brilliant brains with the right kind of companies.

**3. Elucidate the vital role of a CEO in realizing these advantages:** Once you have enunciated the business rationale, validate as to how a CEO's participation in a Thought Leadership program can realize these benefits. Some facts that can tick the argument in your favor include:

- CEOs can help companies erase the reticent aura surrounding them as they are more likely to connect with an audience, than anybody else in an organization. When they opine, people jump in to share their views and comments. The ongoing dialogue between a CEO and his audience promotes a business like no other marketing tool can; it fuels a continual process of constructive brand building.
- Better than anyone else in the company, it is the CEO who can create awareness of the outcome that a company's product or service can deliver, in order to position and differentiate that offering and stimulate demand for it.
- A CEO being personally associated with cutting edge research initiatives can inspire confidence in untested ventures and persuade customers to stake time, effort and investment to such ideas; an exemplified endorsement from a CEO is a proven business accelerator.

**4. Give the roadmap to implementation:** Finally, a CEO must be convinced that the strategy is not another concept on paper. He or she must be furnished with the following details:

- How can the CEO Champion the program? – This needs both internal as well as external championing eg: from an internal evangelizing perspective, my experience in a large IT services company has shown that, when the CEO is personally involved in the selection & induction of thought leaders into the research council, they feel privileged & the success rates have been higher. Just a small invitation note from the CEO personally congratulating the selected members for the council or honoring the best contributors to the initiative can make them feel privileged to contribute & hence the success rate will be higher. From an external evangelizing perspective, a good approach would be to map the CEO to leading academia/thought leaders globally. These thought leaders are usually consultants/ on board of fortune companies. This provides a platform for the CEO to position the company in a strategic manner so that the next time there is any project on offer; the person has your company on top of their minds to recommend.
- What are the tools that a CEO must use to be effective? – Contribute on external Blogs- this not only positions the company in a better way but also encourages more thought leaders from the organization to contribute views & share the limelight with the CEO, author joint papers with leading academia which again enhances the image of a company as a trusted advisor, Twitter, videos for example
- An outline of the time and expense budget – resource allocation, external collaborations etc
- Control system to measure the effectiveness of the strategy –number of touchpoints created, inquiries from prospects, followers on twitter, views on online video channels etc
- Action plan defined by different phases of implementation- ideate, generate, promote
- Thought leadership will be effective when it is imbibed throughout an organization and such pervasiveness can be achieved only when the person at the helm, i.e. the CEO, embraces it. Moreover, Thought Leadership should not be confused with just publishing content on tools such as Blogs, Facebook, or Twitter.

Thought Leadership is a commitment to innovation and gives sustainable competitive advantage over the long term. It is also a major commitment to consistently communicate that innovation so as to create followers willing to pay for that innovation. The onus is on a CEO to create such a strong stakeholder loyalty, by demonstrating his or her belief, commitment and accountability in Thought Leadership.

So do you have your CEO's vote for your thought leadership campaign yet!