Become the Go-To Authority
People Turn to Every Time

the expert's edge

KEN LIZOTTE
the book *A Manager's Guide to Strategic Retirement Plan Management* (Wiley). As he explains

> I always e-mail prospects a PDF or two of my published articles early in the sales process, and I take along copies of my articles to face-to-face prospect meetings. I want to be able to hand a relevant article to a prospect at an appropriate point in the meeting so that the prospect will glance at it and be impressed. “Wow, this looks pretty cool,” may be all the prospect says or does, then we move on. But that’s sufficient to stamp my firm as something more than some run-of-the-mill small-guy consultancy, as a smaller firm that delivers the same if not better quality than a giant competitor, which is the way it is.

Touch points in the marketing/sales process are very few, Cassidy feels, so to expand and maximize them, he integrates his book and articles. “The typical consultant at a big firm doesn’t write and publish articles and books as I do,” he adds. “They just send big bills! That’s a message that becoming a published thoughtleader allows me to send loud and clear.”

**High Use, High Success**

A final source of evidence that thoughtleading ROI can be measured can be found in the work of Suzanne Lowe, president of Expertise Marketing. In her research measuring which marketing tactics work best, covered in her book *Marketplace Masters: How Professional Service Firms Compete to Win* (Greenwood Press), Lowe has identified thoughtleading actions as a major differentiator.

Sympathizing with the challenge of measuring intellect-based, intangible services, she cites ROI measurement as a traditional brick wall for professional services firms. She believes, however, that in the past 10 years, much has improved. Back a decade ago, in 1997, for
example, only 23 percent of respondents to her annual surveys reported bothering to calculate a monetary ROI from their promotional vehicles. Also, “most of them were measuring only the initial and most easily trackable cash outlays, not other important ROI features such as investments in time and innovation.”

Measuring clients’ opinions and impressions of the firm and/or its marketing programs didn’t get much more attention. Only 27 percent of Lowe’s respondents 10 years ago reported using formal surveys and evaluation forms. More often, she says, they relied on anecdotal feedback and comments—not exactly rock-solid, compelling evidence!

Now, however, based on her 2006 research on measuring the effectiveness of marketing in professional firms, Suzanne reports that firms are poised to treat marketing ROI more seriously and “with more sophistication and commitment.” To do it right, they need to rely less on measuring only their promotional activities and more on calculating their overall branding effectiveness. They also need to quit relying primarily on their gut in favor of focused attention on statistics displaying where their leads have come from, including which marketing actions produce qualified leads and which produce few such leads or none at all.

In her ongoing research, Lowe has found that some differentiation tactics that are in high use typically fall way down into the wrong quadrants of her marketing mastery grid. Others are firmly entrenched in quadrants labeled “High Use, High Success” or “Low Use, High Success.” According to responses from surveys of professional services firms, many companies simply assume, for example, that developing a new positioning or adding techniques and tools to “deliver” their services better must be effective tactics, only to report, upon reflection, that these did not seem to help their cause much at all (low success).

Other techniques, such as the thoughtleading action of embarking on a public relations campaign, tend not to be as widely used, yet when they are used, they can prove far more effective than many “high-use” practices. Lowe found, for example, that only 30 percent of the companies she surveyed had embarked on a PR campaign, yet for those who did, this action found itself in a “high-success” quadrant.
“It turns out that firms tend to underestimate the impact of many marketing tactics,” Lowe concludes. “When they measure them, however, the guesswork is gone and the facts speak for themselves.”

**THOUGHT NOTES**

**Too Narrow a Focus**

“Too many firms measure only the tail end of their marketing efforts,” Suzanne Lowe, author of *Marketplace Masters*, observes. This means they’re focusing on promotional data, such as e-newsletter open rates. This is a double-edged sword because (on the positive side) one has to start the measurement engine somewhere, so why not at the tactical level? Indeed, it’s good to see some of the bigger firms routinely measuring the ROI of their media coverage or new leads from client seminars, for example.

But for most of them, measurement for more significant strategic activities, such as whether their differentiation strategies are competitively effective, is simply not on the radar screen. Thus, Suzanne believes that measurements of thoughtleading and other marketing actions are typically conducted with too narrow a focus.

**Impact from Anecdotes**

Of course, anecdotal evidence too, while often not considered scientific enough to suit the most quantitatively oriented minds, will nonetheless impress many of the rest of us. In business, for example, there is rarely anything more convincing for a prospect than a concrete example or two of how a product or service really works. Customer testimonials can tip the scales too. Though only quantification will cinch the deal for the strictly
to-moment thinking. New ideas arise all of an instant, in the blink of an eye. Yes, a blink! You don’t necessarily set aside time to think and reflect—although you could. Instead, you develop a new mode of thinking that replaces your old way and now serves your thoughtleading objectives, all without any added burden of making more time or being distracted from your daily chores.

Suzanne Lowe, author of Marketplace Masters: How Professional Service Firms Compete to Win, puts it this way:

Does thoughtleading take too much time? Well, it shouldn’t. It’s not about time at all. Rather than being time-consuming, thoughtleading should be a constant process . . . small steps, great gains. It’s more about an approach to thinking critically. If you simply focus your thinking within a framework of wondering why or how did this or that happen, then you will fix on the substance of a situation and ask critical questions. Thoughtleaders possess an investigator’s mind, thinking like a detective moment to moment. It does not have to take any particular extra time at all. In fact, I thought up many of my ideas for my book while walking my dog! Thoughtleading is about employing a different thought process, not just taking more time to think differently at specified times.

Maria Thomson, author of Insurance Coverage for All . . . and How Businesses Can Afford to Provide It (Actex Publications), sees thoughtleading thinking as allowing oneself to simply be curious and wonder about things. To develop the forward-thinking ideas for the insurance industry that she eventually published in her book, she continually focused on the why of things, asking question after question of others as well as of herself.

“For many years I puzzled over a serious industry problem,” she recalls. “A number of solutions were tried by companies but none succeeded. I kept pursuing the answers. It was an interesting and absorbing challenge.”
I don't actually like that term “thoughtleader,” because to many people, it's simply a way of becoming more visible. But what we really should be talking about is breaking the mold of what has been accepted up until now, reshaping old ways and assumptions into things that are new and innovative. . . . You break it and remake it. Thoughtleading is much deeper than merely gaining more visibility and spreading around your thoughts in broader circles. It's actually about forcing yourself and others to push the envelope.

—Suzanne Lowe, author of Marketplace Masters: How Professional Service Firms Compete to Win

Failure Is Desirable

Accepting the idea that thoughtleading means standing up on a platform all by yourself and inviting a roomful of scrutinizers to take potshots at you may require a redefinition of failure. Experts, like all humans, want to do their best and to do things right, do things well, and get recognized for excellence. Succinctly put, they want to win.

Yet sometimes failure is winning, paradoxical as that must sound. There are actually many benefits to failing, so the trick is not to feel as if failing is the worst thing that can ever happen. In fact, failure is desirable.

Consider these three potential benefits of failure:
As the great bandleader Duke Ellington once remarked, "I don't need time ... I need a deadline!" With a deadline, and with a taskmaster as well, say a mentor or coach or editor, something great may magically emerge from an otherwise uncomfortable and unconfident beginning.

Thought Notes

243 Pages

Publishing my first book greatly increased my stature, something I find highly ironic because in fact all I really did was capture and organize all the things I have been talking and writing about piecemeal (in articles, presentations, and one-on-ones) for many years. Though it does have a ton of original work in it too, it's more the fact that I could actually have enough substance for 243 pages, a packaging that attracts a lot of attention. People react with an "Omigosh!" look in their eye, as in "You've written a book?" There's a catch in their voice. "It was published?" Yes, it was published! This truly impresses people.

—Suzanne Lowe, author of Marketplace Masters: How Professional Service Firms Compete to Win

Which Option Is Right for You?

Let's now assume that you have decided to go forward, that you are indeed ready to make the commitment to writing and publishing a book. The next step for you is not—I repeat, not—to sit down and start writing. You must first choose which publishing option is best suited for you.