

Think you have what it takes to be a thought leader?

By [Allela Liebenberg](#), issued by [GO Content Lab](#)

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In 2013, *Forbes* listed Eike Batista first in the unenviable position of their roundup of "The Worst CEO Screw-Ups of 2013". In one year, the flamboyant chairman and CEO of the EBX Group destroyed 10s of billions of dollars in shareholder value and his personal wealth went from \$30bn to \$400m. The reason for his disastrous descent? The clue could be in the fact that he famously added the letter X at the end of his company names to show the imminent multiplication of wealth he predicted for his shareholders. Sadly, it was the opposite for OGX, LLX and OSX.



In 2018, *Forbes Magazine* reported that: "The reputation of a company's leadership is directly responsible for 44% of a company's market value." In Batista's case, his reputation speaks for itself – in September 2019 he was convicted and until recently, spent time in prison for insider trading.

Executives can make or break companies. That's why it's important that if you are going to place your leaders or yourself in the public eye as thought leaders, you should show integrity in all your online and business interactions and have a valuable contribution to make to a specific topic or industry.

What is a thought leader?

A thought leader is an individual or company who is a pioneer or specialist in a field and whose authority and comment is sought out and often rewarded. They can be seen on LinkedIn with hundreds of thousands of followers actively engaged, asked to speak publicly at industry conferences and on webinars or asked for comment in the print or broadcast media. Think Simon Sinek, Dion Chang and Arianna Huffington.

The problem is that thought leadership is a term that has been overused and a title that has often been self-assigned. Gidgette Osborne, CEO of Go Content Lab, says: "In our work, creating thought leadership content strategies is a massive part of what we do and are passionate about. But much of what we in the media and communications industry are asked to create is, 'thought followers' rather than thought leaders." Or what Peter Elkins calls an oxymoron: "An echo of what others are saying."

The benefits of great thought leadership reach beyond mere 'likes' to:

1. Build trust

If the content disseminated is innovative, authentic and in your voice, thought leadership builds trust and integrity with your audience.

2. Create content bank

It creates a bank of high-quality content for the marketing team to disseminate and repurpose into videos, interviews, quotes, commentary, infographics, social media posts, blog posts and articles.

3. Help your audience

Excellent thought leadership content is focused on helping the audience succeed. When your audience succeeds, your business gains loyal clients.

4. Secure free publicity

You can secure space in a publication for free. This would normally be expensive if you consider the equivalent of advertising spend for the space you take up.

If you or your client wants to be a thought leader, here are a few best practice tips to help you succeed:

1. Be awesome, wherever you are

Thought leadership and personal branding go hand in hand. Take stock of what pops up when you Google your name or your company's name. If you can remove any questionable content, do so. (Remember that blog you wrote in varsity called DrunkDiaries.blogspot?)

Then when you are ready to share your thoughts, write what you know. Start with white space. Look at your speciality, look at your competitors and what they are saying. What are other thought leaders saying? How can you say something in a new or fresh way? Or if it has already been said, but said badly, how can you say it better? Think about the data you have available and how you can contribute new data and new angles to the same topic.

If you are not employing a good PR team, start by posting relevant, original LinkedIn articles on your personal page and in industry groups and leaving insightful comments on your peers' posts.

2. Are we there yet?

Yes, the number one question kids ask on a road trip is the same question we often get asked. Osborne says: "The process of putting your sincere ideas out there and getting it noticed by your ideal audience, takes time. You don't become a thought leader overnight."

Every successful business has unique intellectual property and subject matter expertise. That's why a good thought leadership strategy for a company addresses various touchpoints, be it the CEO's personal social media accounts, an article or well-timed opinion piece in response to a current news item.

It should also include different people from within a business while keeping one cohesive message. These valuable intellectual assets can be found between the ears of your employees – your product managers, top salespeople, solutions specialists and senior executives.

3. It's not about you

Here's the thing about being a thought leader that seems counter-intuitive: while you are sharing your ideas and drawing inevitable attention to yourself, it is not about you, but about your audience. If your content is not helping your audience then it's marketing material.

4. Give us all the details

Use real examples, not fluff. Give statistics. At least 72% of thought leaders don't back up their writing. (Okay, we made this up, but you get the idea?) Neil Patel is an excellent example of a thought leader who lays bare his strategies, business operations, statistics and results to help his audience.

5. It's not a sales pitch

This is not a brand positioning statement, and this is the hardest for business leaders to understand. They are used to paying for ads and being able to go for the hard sell. Thought leadership content cannot be 'sales-ey'. It will either be scrubbed for any marketing content by the journalist or editor who receives it or (most likely) it will be ignored.

Thought leaders lead. Every business leader can benefit from a thought leadership strategy if they are a unique, innovative voice challenging the norm. Ironically, the best thought leaders don't set out to be thought leaders at all. They share information to help their peers and teams.

The road can be long but partnering with a good team can help you build a platform where you speak to and help your ideal audience without having to add an 'X' behind your company name to prove it.

Ready to start? [Contact us](#) for a chat.

About Go Content Lab

Whether your customers trust you depends on the way you and your brand are perceived. The more human you are in the way you communicate, the more you are trusted. Unfortunately, perception is as fragile and vulnerable as it is essential.

We deliver exceptional results by creating digital and traditional media content in your voice, to establish trust.

We've done extensive work with entrepreneurs, thought leaders, large corporates and small businesses to pinpoint the trends and conversations that drive their business. This gives us an in-depth understanding of how to alter or amplify the 'word on the street' about your brand to change customer behaviour and ultimately drive sales.

Your image can change overnight. Whether you're igniting interest or burning your brand's integrity, at **Go** we know how to manage image and reputation, nurturing both through the art of social science.

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