



A GLOBALSPEC **WHITE PAPER** FOR  
ENGINEERING, TECHNICAL AND  
INDUSTRIAL MARKETERS

# How to Become an Industry Thought Leader in the Online Era

**GLOBALSPEC**<sup>®</sup>

## Contents

Introduction .....	3
What is thought leadership? .....	3
Thought leadership starts with a point of view .....	4
Develop content to support your thought leadership .....	5
Spreading the word.....	6
Track your results.....	7
About GlobalSpec Online Events .....	7
About GlobalSpec .....	8

## Introduction

Establishing your company as a thought leader provides benefits beyond what a marketing or advertising program can deliver on its own. As a thought leader, your company will gain credibility in the market and become a trusted advisor and partner. Potential customers will gravitate toward your products and services. Journalists will seek you out for quotes. Analysts will call you for your expert opinion. Industry Web sites will link to you.

While this is a compelling list of benefits, what exactly does it mean to be a thought leader? How does your company gain—and sustain—a thought leadership position? What tactics will help you become a thought leader in an era when a vast majority of the engineering, technical, and industrial audience goes online in search of information to educate and help them do their jobs better?

This white paper will answer these questions and help you develop a successful strategy for becoming a thought leader in your market space.

## What is thought leadership?

Granted, thought leadership is a buzzword. But as with many buzzwords, there is relevance behind the concept; there are persuasive reasons to pursue it.

Thought leadership means having a reputation in the market as a company with unique, innovative, and important ideas about your industry, the forces shaping it, the challenges confronting it, and the future awaiting it. While thought leadership is not a strategic objective on its own, it supports and fulfills other objectives such as lead generation, growth of market share, increase of share price—or all of these simultaneously.

For example, one of the primary motivators in business-to-business purchase decisions is the fear of making the wrong choice. Thought leaders can ease that fear in prospective customers by raising their level of comfort. Thought leaders are perceived as experts—and businesses want to hire experts. Working with thought leaders lowers the risk of making the wrong decision.

**Tip:** *An individual or a company can be a thought leader. And any size company can become a thought leader; you don't need to be big.*

## Thought leadership starts with a point of view

The first step in establishing your company as a thought leader is to develop a unique point of view. You can't simply parrot what others are saying about your industry and market; there's nothing special or worth paying attention to in that. You must have an angle—or point of view—that brings something new to the discussion.

Understanding and developing your thought leadership point of view can often be accomplished by answering a series of questions. While an executive brainstorming session might suffice, you may want to get input from employees and customers, or other industry experts and analysts if you have relationships with them. Ultimately, your thought leadership point of view comes down to distilling the answers to seven key questions.

### Seven questions that help establish a point of view

1. What is your company's position on how your industry is changing?
2. What new challenges will your customers face in the next 1-3 years?
3. How is technological advancement shaping your industry?
4. What innovations do you see on the horizon?
5. What is your company's approach to helping the marketplace understand and overcome challenges?
6. What differentiates your company's market position from others?
7. What can your company do in the market that other companies cannot?

Your answers to these questions will likely overlap. From this common ground you will begin to identify your unique point of view. Hopefully, others will adopt your point of view over time, coming to see the industry as you do, approaching and solving challenges the way you recommend. But when you are first setting out to establish thought leadership, your point of view belongs to your company and your company alone.

**Tip:** *Your point of view may not be unassailable—in fact, it can't be, otherwise you're saying the same thing as everyone else. You need an edge, but nothing too extreme. Your point of view must be respected and you must back it up.*

**Tip:** You'll need to stay up-to-date on what other thought leaders in your industry are talking about. One of the first questions you may be asked is: "How does your position compare to company X's position?" In other words, know your thought leadership competition.

**Tip:** Much of the content you create can be re-purposed into other formats. For example, the white paper is re-purposed into a presentation; blog entries become bylined articles. Re-purposing content helps save time and offers your audience choices on how to engage with you. It also keeps your message and point of view consistent.

### Four characteristics of a powerful point of view

When developing your company's thought leadership point of view, seek a position that embraces these four characteristics:

- **New**—such as a new way to think about an industry issue, or a new solution to an emerging or existing problem.
- **Relevant**—your point of view should be relevant to a market need or challenge.
- **Valid**—you should be able to back up your point of view, either with empirical evidence, research data, or customer case studies.
- **Practical**—building a position of thought leadership is not the same as having a grandiose vision of the future of your industry. Thought leadership must be practical and realistic. You must talk about ideas and strategies that can be implemented.

Combine new, relevant, valid, and practical and you can establish a thought leadership point of view that motivates people to follow you and take actions that you recommend.

### Develop content to support your thought leadership

Once you have a point of view established for your thought leadership initiative, you will need to develop content to support it. The content should be educational in nature, offering your audience helpful advice and guidance on solving the challenges and addressing issues that are important to them. Your thought leadership content should not be sales-oriented in any way. You're trying to build trust and gain the confidence of your audience—not sell them something.

Here are examples of content that can support your thought leadership position:

- White papers—for both executive and technical audiences
- Presentations/speeches
- Webcasts
- Podcasts
- Blogs—a great way to publish quickly, helping you stay current and topical; also provides an opportunity to listen to your audience through reader comments
- Videos—interviews with executives or executive presentations
- Bylined articles—if you are trying to position an individual as a thought leader, use their byline in articles
- Books—especially valuable if your point of view warrants a longer discussion
- How to guides—strategic counsel or practical instruction on how to solve an industry or technical challenge

**Tip:** *Online events provide an effective platform to promote thought leadership, allowing you to reach a geographically broad yet interest-specific engineering, technical, and industrial audience where they already are—online.*

### Six Benefits of Sponsoring Online Events

*Increase visibility, articulate your point of view, and build your brand through online events:*

1. *The industrial audience already spends work-related time online*
2. *This innovative media channel brings together influential engineering, technical, and industrial decision-makers in real time*
3. *Opportunities for keynote presentations, discussions, contributions to panels, and individual chat allow you to communicate your company's thought leadership point of view*
4. *High quality production helps attendees navigate, find valuable content, and interact with presenters, experts and peers*
5. *Audience impact and results can be tracked using online metrics*
6. *No packing, shipping, storage, travel, meal or entertainment costs to cut into ROI*

## Spreading the word

You have a thought-provoking point of view and you have developed content in support of your point of view. Your next step on the path to thought leadership is spreading the word.

It's important to use the right media to reach your audience. In the industrial sector, that means focusing a significant portion of your efforts in online media. Today, the engineering, technical, manufacturing and industrial audiences have significantly reduced their reliance on traditional information sources such as printed catalogs, trade shows, and trade magazines, in favor of online resources.

According to the 2010 GlobalSpec Industrial Buy Cycle Survey, the top three information sources used for work-related purposes are search engines, supplier Web sites and online catalogs—all online sources. In addition, when conducting research, industrial audiences make use of blogs, social media, Webcasts, white papers, and online communities.

When spreading the word about thought leadership, it may be useful to think the way a publisher thinks and determine the best channels to get the word out. Start by identifying and getting to know the important editors, blogs, e-newsletters, and Web sites in your industry. Offer to provide articles and other content. In addition, seek out industry events that may offer speaking opportunities and pitch a compelling idea for a presentation. Make your executives available for media interviews.

Put virtual events on your list of effective channels for promoting thought leadership. Online events are growing in popularity as traditional in-person trade shows decline in attendance due to lack of effectiveness as well as travel and opportunity costs. According to the Forrester Report, "B2B US Interactive Marketing Forecast, 2009-2014", investment in online events is expected to grow 11.8% in 2010.

One advantage of online events is that you can gain thought leadership and establish a reputation as an industry leader by sponsoring or participating in strategic-level presentations and discussions that are part of the event's agenda. You can also engage in virtual chat with "visitors" to your booth and communicate your point of view in that regard.

## Track your results

Positioning your company as a thought leader requires a long-term commitment. Unlike marketing campaigns that often have an established beginning and end, thought leadership is an ongoing process. It takes time for the word to spread and your reputation to grow.

However, the ongoing results of your thought leadership strategy can and should be measured—especially your online efforts, which easily lend themselves to measurement. For example, when you participate in an online event such as those GlobalSpec hosts, you will know exactly who viewed your content, among other metrics.

As another example, you can track the number of white paper downloads or visits to specific Web pages. You can track the number and length of views of videos and Webcasts. You can use tools such as Google Alerts to notify you when online media mentions your company.

By tracking the results of your thought leadership efforts, you will discover what type of content your audience finds most relevant. What is downloaded the most? What gets clicked on most often? You can use this data to help guide future content creation and media choices.

## About GlobalSpec Online Events

GlobalSpec online conference & trade show events can help you build your thought leadership visibility. Simulating the physical environment of an educational conference and trade show, GlobalSpec's events bring together influential engineering, scientific, and industrial decision-makers—your target audience—online and in real time, to experience the same essential benefits of a face-to-face event, all from the convenience of their desktop.

Online events offer you the opportunity to:

- Sponsor speaking sessions and presentations that identify your company with industrial leaders
- Contribute to conversations and communicate your point of view in a networking lounge environment
- Chat with others one-on-one in your booth
- Showcase your portfolio of thought leadership content, offering downloads to all attendees
- Discover who viewed your content
- Measure the impact and results of your presence at the online event

Visit [www.globalspec.com/advertising/events](http://www.globalspec.com/advertising/events) for more information about GlobalSpec Events.

## About GlobalSpec

GlobalSpec.com is used regularly by engineering, technical, manufacturing and industrial professionals worldwide to search for components, products, technical information and services. GlobalSpec users benefit from domain-expert search engines, a broad range of proprietary and aggregated Web-based content, 60+ e-newsletters, and online events—helping them search for and locate products and services, learn about suppliers and access comprehensive technical content. SpecSearch®, GlobalSpec's trademarked search technology, allows users to search by specification more than 153 million parts in 2,300,000 product families from more than 36,000 supplier catalogs.

For manufacturers, distributors and service providers, GlobalSpec offers tailored marketing solutions that put you in control and expert online marketing advice to help you find new customers. We provide highly filtered sales leads and marketing opportunities, qualified Web traffic to your site, product promotion and brand advertising platforms, and a wide range of e-media advertising and marketing solutions including keyword ads, e-mail marketing, banner ad networks, online events and industry-leading e-newsletter advertisements—allowing you to choose the options that fit your unique business needs.

The ability to find customers...to tap into new markets or new regions that are actively seeking your products...to understand what prospects are looking for...to gain an integrated marketing program and a wealth of practical advice about online marketing—this is the GlobalSpec approach. And it's why many manufacturers and suppliers choose GlobalSpec to help their businesses grow.

For more information on GlobalSpec's comprehensive marketing solutions please call 800.261.2052 or visit <http://www.globalspec.com/advertising>.

© 2006-2010 GlobalSpec, Inc. All rights reserved. GlobalSpec, the GlobalSpec logo, and SpecSearch are registered trademarks of GlobalSpec, Inc.

You are free to copy, distribute and display and create derivative works from this paper provided that you give GlobalSpec, Inc. proper credit as the source.