

3 Ways Analyst Relations Leaders Can Impact Thought Leadership Programs

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Initiatives: [Analyst Relations Best Practices](#)

A customer-centric thought leadership program with a unique point of view can differentiate and add credibility in competitive markets. Analyst relations leaders can curate cross-functional support and contribute to the business impact by sharing a POV with the analyst community.

Overview

Key Findings

- Subject matter experts at technology providers contribute content they regard to be thought leadership to support AR, but much of it doesn't reinforce a unique viewpoint or establish a differentiated customer-centric position to industry analysts or buyers.
- Analyst findings and perceptions in published research can be missed, overlooked or even misunderstood if thought leadership is too general, appearing disconnected from market trends and not positioning the organization's go-to-market strategy in a clear, consistent and relevant way.
- AR is often stuck implementing a strategy of one-off pieces of thought-leading content measured with short-term goals when success only comes from a long-term commitment and investment.

Recommendations

To help their organization establish best practices for improving thought leadership's impact, analyst relations leaders must:

- Collaborate with messaging strategists across the organization to develop a POV that is relevant to buyers and trustworthy to target analysts. They can do so by revisiting customer needs and the organization's unique position to lead in a given field of thought or endeavor.

- Build the market's trust in the organization and inspire stakeholders and subject matter experts (spokespeople) to articulate a compelling and consistent POV. This POV should validate corporate strategy by showcasing more than just evaluations, but also thought leadership and research that aligns to trends, as well as areas of transformation and disruption.
- Realign the ownership, implementation and goals of thought leadership campaigns to be in line with the organizational goals and business outcomes they serve, such as demand generation or brand awareness.

Introduction

Thought leadership marketing (TLM), if done well, can build trust by showcasing an understanding and vision for the future of the market, differentiating from competition and leading to increased awareness.

TLM is a reflection of your company's differentiation. It is intellectual property made tangible and applied to your ideal customer's future.

An analyst relations (AR) leader can also bring to light analyst content that aligns with your TLM strategy and can be used as a proof point or validation to buyers (see [Leverage Analyst Insights for Commercial Success](#)).

AR leaders often share customer use cases, trends and adoption profiles with analysts. Analysts and buyers are more highly engaged with technology providers when the latter have compelling and relevant customer success stories as these reinforce their claims to deliver value. The role of thought leadership is to demonstrate to analysts and buyers that providers understand trends impacting their target market and customers.

TLM communicates a unique point of view (POV), introducing visionary concepts to an audience, paving the way for more specific interactions across the buyer's journey.

A truly effective TLM program is not a finite project owned by a tactical team in relative isolation. Instead, it is a long-term initiative involving considerable investment and cross-functional orchestration including content strategy, product marketing, digital marketing, analyst relations and product strategy/management.

Analysis

Establish a Differentiated Customer-Centric Position

Establishing a strong POV on trends that are most impactful to your target audience is critical to success. This is especially true as technology providers are still responding to market disruptions caused by the pandemic and evolving economic trends, like inflation. Thought leadership programs are critical to establishing and reinforcing your positioning and POV with analysts and buyers in the markets you serve. Content plays a big role in that success, but needs to support a well-thought-out positioning strategy.

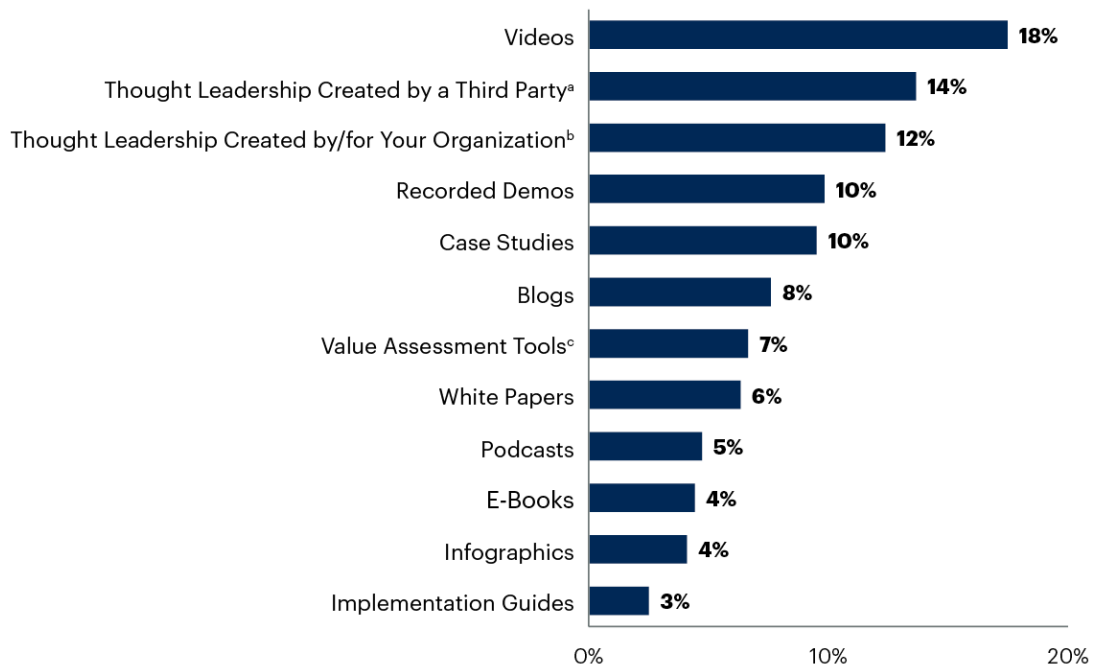
Positioning is an effort that captures and communicates the essence of the go-to-market strategy and must differentiate based on the business outcomes your solutions enable. Technology providers must align positioning to the needs and wants of their target markets. This is an important step in cross-functional teams' processes for establishing and maintaining trust as thought leaders, even more so amid market disruption and dynamic market needs (see [Positioning Revisited](#)). It is also important to revisit your positioning when undertaking acquisitions, new product introductions or operational changes to improve performance.

Thirty-seven percent of Gartner-surveyed technology buyers cited receiving thought leadership content from a solution provider as the most-preferred approach to learning about new technology solutions from a vendor. ¹ In addition, 14% of Gartner-surveyed technology providers with over \$100 million in revenue indicated that this content is their single highest driver of marketing-qualified leads (MQLs) in the top of the marketing funnel (see Figure 1). ²

Figure 1. Highest-Performing Content Types (MQL Volume)

Highest-Performing Content Types (MQL Volume)

Percentage of Respondents



n = 320 respondents with \$100 million or more in revenue, excluding “not sure”

Q. Which is the best-performing content type; i.e., which generated the largest number of marketing-qualified leads (MQLs)?

Source: 2021 Gartner Technology Marketing Benchmarks

^aTrade or industry association, publication, media, or analysts

^bPrimary research or other data-driven content

^cROI calculators, total cost of ownership calculators

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To be most effective at building trust and establishing expert reputation and credibility, thought leadership programs and their content and messaging must:

- Relate directly to your target audience
- Offer them advice that they can or must act on
- Offer perspectives that could change their views regarding market trends
- Relate directly to what you do in the market
- Present a focused, unique POV that aligns back to your buyers

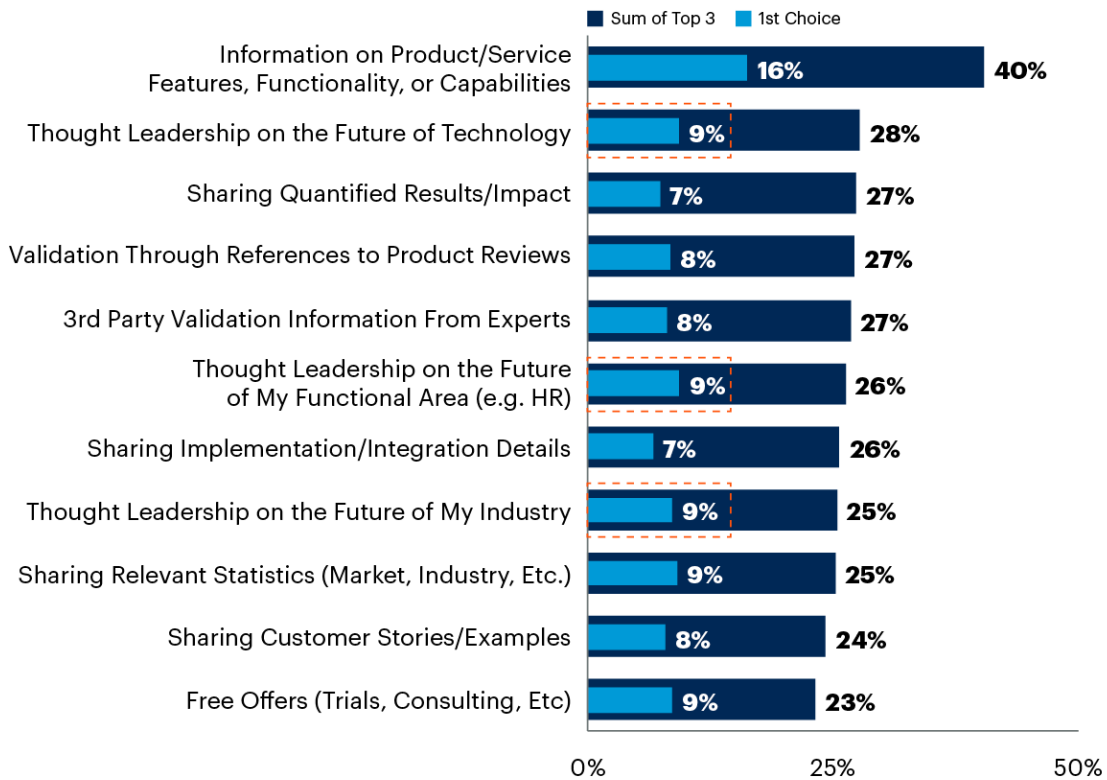
Although thought leadership programs should not include explicitly product-focused content, they should relate to the market in which you sell and provide guidance that influencers and buyers will find valuable, regardless of whether they recommend or buy from you (see [5 Success Factors of Effective Thought Leadership Marketing](#)). If done well, your POV should lead to your offering, while not overtly selling, emphasizing the criticality of solving the problems that your offering addresses. Your thought leadership must be applied and emerge from the work you do to further the mission of your customers to deliver solutions and experiences that their buyers value.

Build Trust Around New Lines of Thinking

Shifting your thought leadership POV to create and maintain relevance in a changing market landscape is one step toward building and maintaining trust with your target market. However, technology providers must also have content to support this POV with influencers and buyers in all stages of the buyer's journey. Gartner asked technology buyers what information is more likely to catch their attention and inspire them to explore a provider's product and services (see Figure 2).³ While 16% of respondents indicated their first choice was information pertaining to product/service features, functionality or capabilities, 27% indicated some form of thought leadership content as their first choice. Categories of thought leadership were balanced with 9% each choosing the future of technology, the future of the buyer's industry or the future of the buyer's functional area. This reinforces the important role of thought leadership in establishing new lines of thinking that attract and engage buyers early to build trust. It also emphasizes how it is equally important to consider not just technology trends, but your target buyers' industries and roles as well.

Figure 2. Information Inspiring Technology Buyers to Explore Products

Information Inspiring Technology Buyers to Explore Products



n = 1500, All respondents

A2. And, which of the following are most likely to catch your attention and inspire you to explore their products or services further?

Source: 2021 Gartner Technology End User Buying Behavior Survey

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As markets continue to evolve, customer needs will change and technology vendors must sense and respond to those needs to establish and maintain credibility as a thought leader in the market.

AR leaders must drive alignment across functional teams to ensure a consistent message in the market and build trust with technology influencers and buyers as a result.

In addition to a consistent message, AR leaders must validate messaging and customer stories with analysts in order to build credibility around a thought leadership POV in the market. This can lead to analysts leveraging this information when your POV aligns with their research or gives them alternative information to consider, which can help amplify their perspective of the market. When AR is strategic, it engages analysts to gain feedback on TLM content to ensure the messaging is differentiated and clear to end-user buyers. At the same time, this enables analysts to learn more about a vendor's stance on specific topics or use cases (see [Drive Higher-Value Analyst Engagement Through Content Review](#)).

The AR leader can inspire both external and internal audiences with thought leadership that goes beyond product reviews and coverage. They do this by surfacing, and often presenting, research and organizational thought leadership content that aligns to trends, transformation and disruption that can inform strategic business decisions regarding things like market focus and where to invest resources.

In addition to thought leadership content developed internally by a technology provider, third-party vendors can provide supporting content that extends beyond internal expertise or specific market knowledge to give an unbiased view of the market and technology buyer preferences. This third-party content can complement the thought leadership content created by the technology provider, with input from analyst relations. And, it can provide a perspective that reinforces the provider's thought leadership POV, especially as market trends shift during times of economic and other disruptive cycles. While third-party thought leadership content can add credibility to the provider's POV, care must be taken to select content that does not detract from the storyline but rather supports the provider's primary message.

Messaging and content in the later stage of the buyer's journey are equally important. During this stage, technology buyers want to understand what the postpurchase experience will be prior to making a purchase decision (see [Accelerate Buying Decisions Through a Customer-Centric 'Questions to Answer' Content Strategy](#)). Many types of important non-thought-leadership content, such as customer case studies and implementation guides, are required throughout the customer life cycle. However, so much of the content launched into the public arena is undifferentiated. Content targeted at buyers in the late stage of the buyer's journey proves that a technology provider is fully prepared and able to deliver against shifting market demands and trends. AR leaders must work with technology marketers to align downstream content with the promise being delivered through the thought leadership POV and programs in order to avoid market confusion about the value story being told.

Align to Long-Term Thought Leadership Goals

In a 2021 survey, AR leaders' stakeholders responded that AR's objectives should be to bring independent third-party validation to company offerings, raise market awareness, and complement and amplify marketing/communications/PR initiatives (see Figure 3).⁴ These objectives align with the long-term thought leadership goals of establishing and reinforcing consistent messages that differentiate from competition, lead to increased awareness, and build trust by showcasing an understanding and vision for the future of the market. This reinforces the need for AR leaders to be more involved in supporting cross-functional efforts to develop a common storyline for thought leadership programs across the broader organization that can improve their ability to influence market needs and opportunities.

Figure 3. What Are the High-Level Objectives of the Analyst Relations Function?

High-Level Objectives of Analyst Relations Function

Percentage of Respondents, Multiple Responses Allowed



n = 179, All respondents

Q. What are the high-level objectives of the analyst relations function?

Source: 2021 Gartner AR Stakeholder Survey

^aIn the form of messaging/positioning/offering

^bInternal teams (e.g., strategy, product management, marketing and sales)

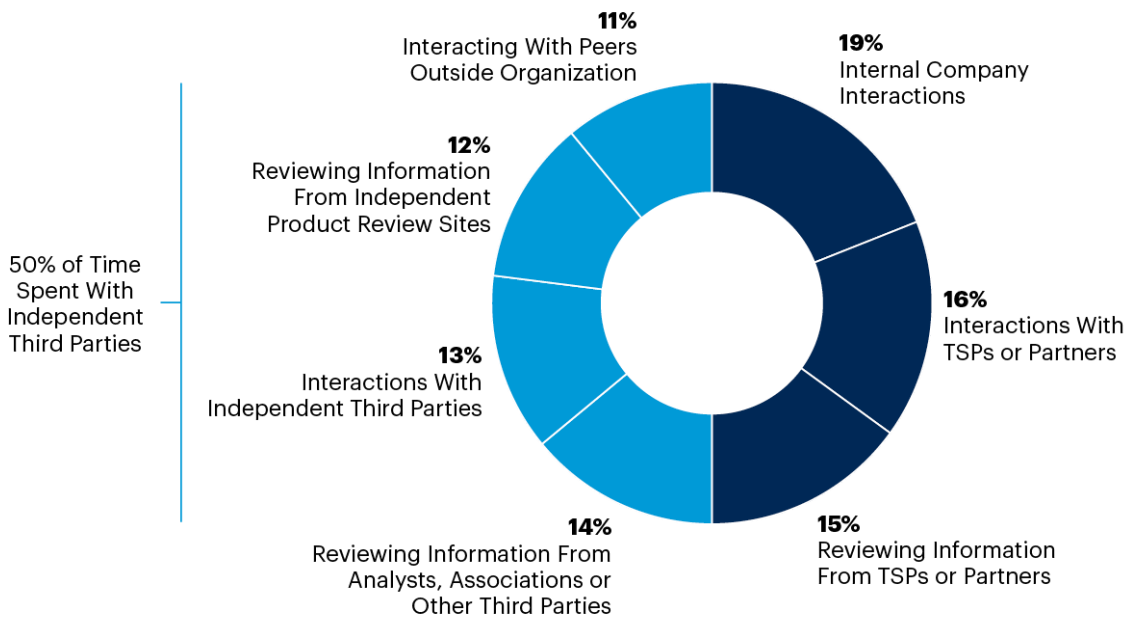
^cCorporate initiatives (e.g., product launches, mergers and acquisitions, and entering new markets)

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Technology buyers use many sources to formulate opinions about providers, and they consider third-party influencers, such as analysts, as offering credible proof of value. In fact, buyers spend 50% of their time in the buying process with independent third parties (see Figure 4).¹ Additionally, buyer engagement with independent sources increases the likelihood of the purchase being a high-quality, low-regret deal by 2.6 times. Buyers want the added confidence that the technology and service offerings they’re evaluating satisfy business requirements and have a proven track record of driving positive business impact (see [Build a Technology Influencer Social Marketing Program That Delivers Results](#)).

Figure 4. Sources of Information for Buyers

Sources of Information for Buyers



n = 1,464

Q: What is the estimated percentage of the time spent doing each of the following activities during the purchase process for this project?

Source: 2019 Gartner End-User Buying Behavior Survey

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Thought leadership programs must evolve over time. Discrete pieces of research or content creation efforts do not constitute thought leadership. A coordinated effort is required to drive a consistent message across all potential influencer and buyer touchpoints. AR leaders should take steps to inspire collaboration and share plans and insights across internal teams and agency partners, where applicable. Doing so will help develop a unique POV based on customer needs and key market trends, as well as the organization’s unique position to lead in that given field of thought or endeavor. This investment in creating a more collaborative, aligned approach can help drive relevance with analysts, influencers and buyers.

Evidence

¹ 2019 Gartner End-User Buying Behavior Survey. This survey was conducted to further understand the buying process for enterprise technology. The research was conducted online from February to April 2019 among respondents located in the U.S., Canada, the U.K. and Germany. Respondents in organizations with more than 100 employees and \$50 million in revenue were surveyed. The 1,464 respondents were involved in large-scale technology purchases in one of the following seven categories:

- Application software (on-premises or cloud)
- Infrastructure software (on-premises or cloud)
- Data center hardware
- Security (hardware, software or services)
- IT outsourcing/managed services
- Professional services (related to technology strategy or implementation)
- Communications services

Respondents were asked about the purchase process, including general awareness generation and what factors impact purchase decisions.

For the purposes of this survey, large-scale technology purchases were defined as follows:

- For organizations with less than \$1 billion in revenue, the minimum contract value of the purchase needed to be \$25,000 (or the local-currency equivalent).
- For organizations with \$1 billion or more in revenue, the minimum contract value of the purchase needed to be \$50,000 (or the local-currency equivalent).

² **2021 Gartner Technology Marketing Benchmarks Survey.** The results presented are based on a survey conducted to benchmark demand generation, sales and marketing effectiveness metrics.

It was conducted online from 1 March through 15 June 2021 among technology-focused organizations with more than \$10 million in revenue located in Canada, the U.S. or the U.K. The survey respondents had to meet the following requirements:

- Respondents were required to have one of the following primary job functions or roles:
 - CEO/president/founder
 - Demand/lead generation
 - Marketing leadership
 - Sales leadership
 - Web/digital social marketing
 - Marketing operations/analytics

- Respondents were also required to have knowledge of the marketing budget and spend for their companies or business units and knowledge of the marketing campaign's or program's tactics. At the country level, quotas were established to guarantee a good distribution in terms of product offering (software, technology services and hardware) and company size (revenue).

A total of 500 responses were collected. This report is focused on the 326 respondents in organizations with more than \$100 million in revenue.

The survey was developed collaboratively by a team of Gartner analysts, and it was reviewed, tested and administered by Gartner's Research Data and Analytics team.

Disclaimer: Results of this study do not represent global findings or the market as a whole, but reflect the sentiment of the respondents and companies surveyed.

³ **Gartner's 2021 Technology End-User Buying Behavior Survey.** This survey was conducted to understand how organizations approach large-scale buying efforts for enterprise technology.

The research was conducted online from October through December 2020 among 1,500 respondents in organizations with at least \$1 million in revenue and 20 employees in the following regions:

- The U.S. (33%)
- France, Germany and the U.K. (15% each)

- Australia and India (8% each)
- Canada (5%)

Industries surveyed include:

- Manufacturing and natural resources
- Banking and securities
- Retail
- Government
- Insurance
- Healthcare
- Communications/media/services
- Education
- Utilities
- Transportation

Of note, technology vendors across industry categories were excluded from this sample.

Respondents were in roles at manager level or higher that involve evaluating or selecting products or services for technology projects and aware of large-scale buying efforts for technology (including net new purchases, renewals and replacements) occurring in the past two years.

For the purposes of this study, large-scale purchases are defined as follows:

- Organizations with fewer than 250 employees – more than \$15,000
- Organizations with 250 to 999 employees – more than \$25,000
- Organizations with over 1,000 employees – more than \$50,000

The study was developed collaboratively by Gartner analysts and the Gartner's Research Data and Analytics team.

Disclaimer: Results of this study do not represent global findings or the market as a whole but reflect sentiment of the respondents and companies surveyed.

⁴ **2021 Gartner Analyst Relations (AR) Survey.** This survey was conducted to determine more effective routes and approaches for bidirectional information exchange between AR specialists and analysts.

The research sought input from three audiences: Gartner analysts, AR professionals and AR stakeholders. Research was conducted online from August through December 2021 among:

- Gartner analysts: n = 327, representing the technology and service provider, CIO, IT leaders and technical professionals, supply chain, and marketing practices. To qualify, analysts had to have held a vendor briefing with an AR specialist in the past 12 months.
- AR professionals in technology and service provider organizations: n = 101, sample obtained from a third-party panel partner of people in this role.
- AR stakeholders: n = 179, sample obtained from a third-party panel partner.

The study was developed collaboratively by Gartner analysts and the Research Data and Analytics team.

Disclaimer: Results of this study do not represent global findings or the market as a whole but reflect sentiment of the respondents and companies surveyed.

Document Revision History

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