

# HOW TO CREATE DIFFERENTIATED THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

FINDING THE  
WHITE SPACE

## THE CHALLENGE

Global asset management firms tell us they are grappling with the same issue. “How do we make our thought leadership stand out when our competitors are all covering the same themes?” The topics and trends are ubiquitous: risk, productivity, disruption, shared value, ESG, active vs. passive investment strategies. The list goes on.

Even the term ‘thought leadership’ can generate suspicion among industry audiences who believe they’ve heard it all before. Insights that look promising at first glance turn out to be nothing new, just old ideas in a new wrapper. As a result, they’re less likely to give genuinely fresh thinking their attention.

Yet the creation of insight rich content remains a rewarding way for asset management companies to demonstrate their expertise. The trick is to make sure that your messages aren’t muddied by the sheer volume of providers saying the same thing.

# DISCERNING, DEMANDING AND DIFFICULT TO ENGAGE

Trying to reach investment decision-makers at the world's largest sovereign wealth funds, public and corporate pension funds, endowments and foundations, insurance companies, hedge funds, banks and independent advisors is no easy task. They are time poor and overwhelmed by the sheer volume of content they receive.

Simply sending out blanket thought leadership to your entire investor universe hoping it hits the right targets won't work. From the CIO, CFO, COO, CRO and CEO through to trustees and consultants, each role has different strategic needs. To cut-through, you need to demonstrate you know who your audiences are and differentiate your insights around the specific issues they face with precision.

Audiences are becoming ever more selective about the content they consume. But they will reward brands that can show original, tailored insights with increased loyalty and advocacy. To succeed, you need to put their needs ahead of your own.



## A TAILORED APPROACH

According to a 2017 survey into the Asset Management Sector by NMG Group, Blackrock's "best practice thought leadership tailored to specific asset owners" was a significant driver behind the firm's positive citations from survey respondents for investment capability and breadth.<sup>1</sup> This is precisely how great content marketing should work to support brand and business objectives.

The audience for targeted content will be smaller than that of a catch-all communication, so marketers must consider how they can measure that content's value and impact. Typically, asset management thought leadership falls into one of three buckets:



### CLIENT-FOCUSED:

demonstrating that managers understand institutional businesses and their investment priorities and challenges



### INVESTMENT-LED:

supporting asset management buyers in understanding emerging investment themes and concepts



### MANAGER-FOCUSED:

facilitating effective communication between portfolio managers and asset management buyers

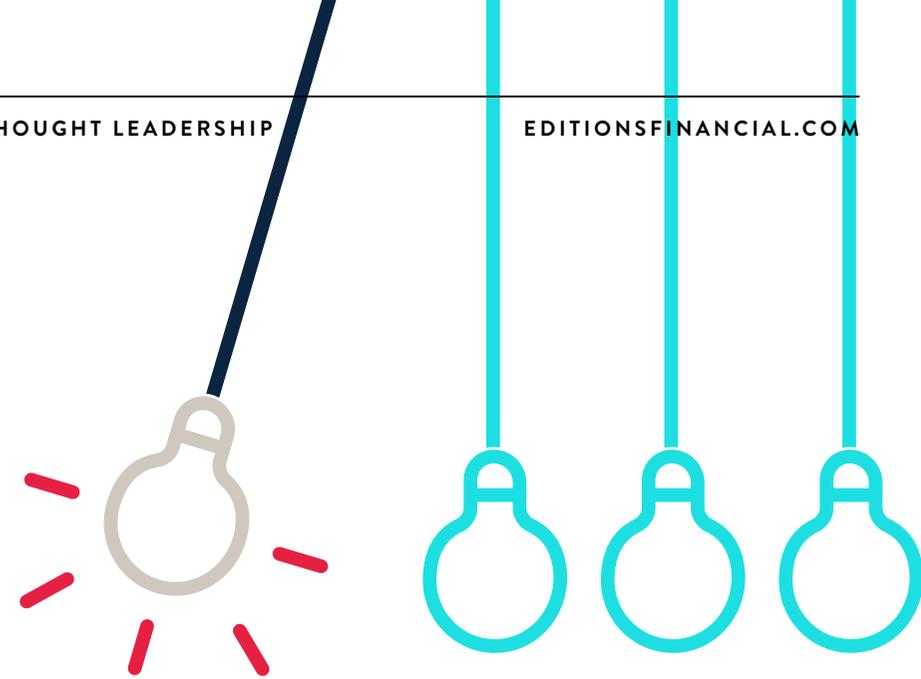
Content that fits squarely into one of these categories is unlikely to astound buyers. Thanks to the saturation of thought leadership in the market, they have seen it all before. Marketers either need to think entirely outside of the box (which the business may not be keen to get on side with) or consider combining some of the above categories into a more distinctive thought leadership offering.

<sup>1</sup> Source: <http://nmg-group.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/NMG-Global-AM-Insights-Report-2017-2.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Source: <http://nmg-group.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/NMG-Global-AM-Insights-Report-2017-2.pdf>



“EFFECTIVE THOUGHT LEADERSHIP OFTEN COMES FROM A BLENDED APPROACH LINKING INTERNATIONAL THEMES OR BEST PRACTICE WITH A STRONG UNDERSTANDING OF LOCAL INSTITUTIONAL OBJECTIVES AND CHALLENGES.”<sup>2</sup>



## INFLUENCE THE INFLUENCERS

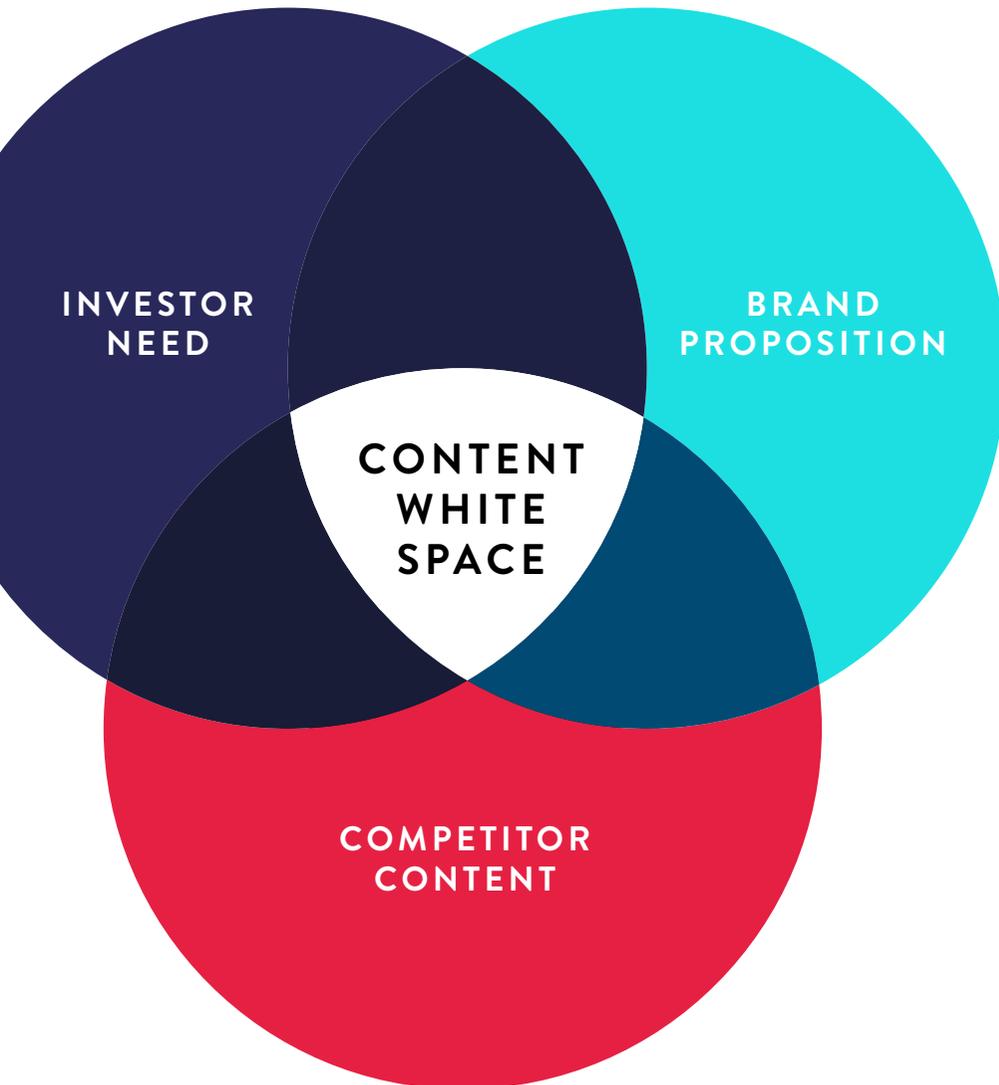
So, you have defined your target audience and have a stellar piece of thought leadership ready to go. Now you have to attract their attention. Simply pressing ‘send’ on an e-shot or buying a page in an industry magazine won’t guarantee a response.

Competing with overflowing inboxes and in-trays requires stealthier tactics. The best way to get a piece of content on the radar of a busy target can be to pass it to them through their influencer network. Your audiences are likely to trust their influencers and feel more inclined to read what they’ve recommended. For this reason, it is important to make your thought leadership as easy as possible to share.

## CONSISTENCY IS KEY

Once you have finally managed to connect with those hard-to-reach audiences, the last thing you want to do is lose them. Make sure your thought leadership content is consistent and of high quality. A regular carefully calculated frequency of communication is key. Too much or too little could put you back to square one. You don’t want your audience to feel they are drowning in your content, so use a variety of channels and formats to get your message across.

<sup>2</sup> Source: <http://nmg-group.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/NMG-Global-AM-Insights-Report-2017-2.pdf>



# FRESH THINKING, FRESH FORMATS

Rich content is about telling the story that:

**MEETS THE INVESTOR NEED**

**EMBODIES THE BRAND**

**IS DISTINCT FROM COMPETITOR CONTENT**

The white space on our diagram is thought leadership that's unique to you. Institutional investors, intermediaries and end investors are prepared to act on thought leadership that is original, informative, useful and based on validated insight. It makes sense to put these values at the core of your content. Journeys and formats can be developed around the white space you discover, but ensure you take time tell your story in sufficient depth.

Typically, investment houses have internal editorial specialists and investment writers. Your sales teams

might be telling you nothing other than dense, academic reports will work. Yet you may have had more marketing success with a wider variety of shorter content formats. The truth is there is value in both approaches.

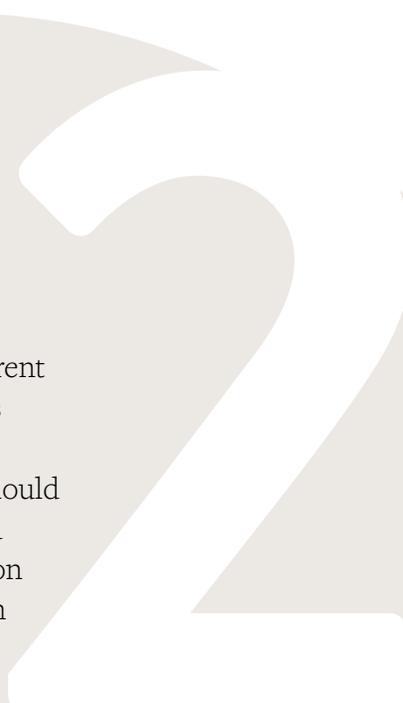
Audiences find value in shorter briefing documents, but they consider it a gateway to more content. They need to think strategically, which is why they opt for longer pieces that take them from hypothesis to conclusions based on credible sources of insight and data.



## INVESTOR INSIGHTS FIRST

Valid, reliable research that's genuinely customer-centric will pave the way to content that will reward your readers with actionable strategies. It's also the clearest path to justifying the initial investment internally.

# FIVE STEPS TO MAKE INVESTOR THOUGHT LEADERSHIP WORK



## YOUR BRAND DIFFERENTIAL

What's your brand purpose? What makes your asset management company different from the rest? Every firm has a story that provides a lens through which all content should be viewed. This will lead you towards a content proposition and that will be distinct from other competitors.

## TELL IT LIKE IT IS

Controversy or well-argued opinion is a good way to lead from the front if you're operating in a competitive sector. Don't sit on the fence if you are sure of your ground. If you can't own the investment theme, you can own your expert analysis of the story.



# 4

## DITCH THE QUARTERLY INVESTOR REPORT MENTALITY

Thought leadership doesn't have to hold you hostage to long-form reports. We use a COPE (Create Once Publish Everywhere) model to atomise the key tenets of any insight or themes worth communicating.

Additionally, first-class 'data' visualisation will get instant cut-through of long-form and dry copy.

Develop customer journeys based on insights and through detailed content campaign planning.

# 5

## MAKE YOUR EXPERTISE AN ACTUAL EXPERIENCE

Think carefully how you might be able to demonstrate your value to customers and prospects in an imaginative and interactive event setting. Use this platform to create proprietary, distinctive content that can then be campaigned out to reach the many in a targeted format.



## HOW WE CAN HELP

We provide specialist content marketing services to asset management companies across the globe. From retail to institutional, active to passive, traditional to alternative investments, we create content that engages, entertains and educates highly targeted audiences, helping them to make better decisions and operate at the highest level.

Our expertise keeps us close to the pulse of financial markets, global economies, equities, fixed-income, commodities

and all major traditional and alternative asset classes. We understand intermediary audiences – the financial planners who are advising investors on how to manage their wealth and strengthen their portfolios.

We know how to keep your brand front of mind when your clients are thinking deeply about the issues they face. We take pride in the commentary and insights we help to create. We care passionately about harnessing the intellectual capital of the most influential, innovative and formative expert voices in your firm.

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