

Cutting Through the Noise in Thought Leadership



By Emily Primeaux

I recently attended a Stanley Cup play-off game, and the pregame arena video was enthralling. Highlights of the team's season flashed on-screen while a narrator told the story of a team of hockey underdogs who battled through injury, failure, and defeat to reach the final round of the Eastern Conference.

The story was captivating. The music, electrifying. And as the video neared the end, the crowd pulsed with anticipation and excitement. It was perfectly crafted for the setting, the venue, and the purpose of igniting a crowd to rally its team to victory. (And yes, the home team did, indeed, secure the win.)



It was marketing at its finest. A narrative created to build anticipation, value, and buy-in for a brand. This brand just happened to be a professional hockey team.

How we speak to customers is vital to gaining their interest and long-term support. Marketing communication methodologies have changed over the years to better suit the thoughtful and intelligent people with whom we communicate. Gone are the days of click-bait communication — instead, a compelling narrative is what moves people when deciding to trust a brand or company.

We've seen this with the increase in thought leadership. Before customers or other businesses engage with a company, they want to know they're working with an expert who inspires their industry with innovative and radical ideas.

Yet, as large-language model AI platforms such as ChatGPT enter the picture, we're left to wonder whether the content we consume has been produced by chatbots or given true human touch. Can we trust the brand if we're not entirely sure that we can trust the content?

AI vs. Thought Leadership: Is it Even a Competition?

The marketing, writing, and business communities are currently abuzz with the introduction of AI-powered chatbots that use deep learning techniques to generate human-like responses to text inputs in a conversational manner. These tools can generate essays, streamline copy, and answer almost any question.

But many recent reviews of AI-generated copy have noted its formulaic and repetitive blandness. Chatbots lack a human voice and are incapable of replicating the unique abilities found in human writers. I doubt a chatbot would have written such a powerful and rousing play-off hockey narrative without some sort of human intervention.

In fact, I took ChatGPT to task and asked it to complete a simple rewrite of a three-sentence, 90-word paragraph. It certainly delivered, cutting unnecessary language, simplifying complex thoughts, and distilling the information down to a more palatable paragraph.

However, it failed to prioritize the main idea or message of the paragraph. When I took my turn on the paragraph, I moved sentences and reimagined the actual delivery of the message, considering the audience and how they would best receive the content.



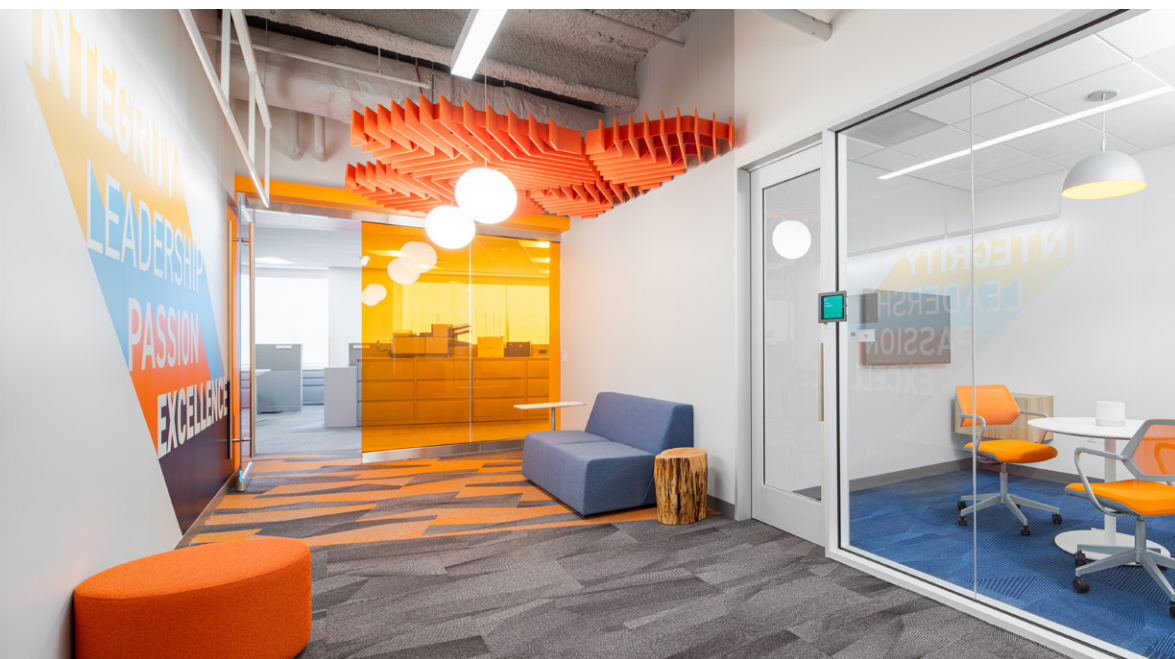
Can you picture generative AI becoming a thought leader when its only job is to crawl the internet for information that has already been heavily ideated?

Now imagine an AI platform attempting to deliver authentic content with a unique perspective. Can you picture generative AI becoming a thought leader when its only job is to crawl the internet for information that has already been heavily ideated?

Additionally, the content that AI produces is often inaccurate. Generative AI currently relies on outdated datasets and draws from already-published material, which leads to repetitive, potentially

plagiarized ideas. Consider recent media coverage around chatbot-produced text:

- CNET found errors in more than half of its AI-written stories.
- OpenAI has noted that ChatGPT “sometimes writes plausible-sounding but incorrect or nonsensical answers ... is often excessively verbose ... [and] will sometimes respond to harmful instructions or exhibit biased behavior.”
- According to The Washington Post, ChatGPT invented a sexual harassment scandal and named a real law professor as the accused.



Swinerton construction company office, Concord, CA. RIM Architects. ©Tyler Chartier Photography. Tylerchartier.com.

1.

Define your expertise. Establish your area of expertise and focus within your industry. Identify the specific topics or subjects you want to address.

2.

Offer unique insights. Bring a fresh perspective to the table by offering insights that challenge conventional thinking or provide new angles on existing ideas. Look for gaps or untapped opportunities within your field.

Consider these writing tips as you approach your next article or thought leadership piece:

5.

Be authentic and transparent. Share your personal experiences, challenges, and lessons learned to add authenticity and relatability to your writing. Being transparent about your journey and insights can help establish trust with your readers.

4.

Support claims with evidence. Back up your statements and arguments with credible data, research, or industry statistics. This strengthens your credibility and adds weight to your expertise.

3.

Develop a compelling narrative. Hook your readers from the beginning by providing real-life examples, personal anecdotes, or case studies that illustrate your points effectively.

6.

Encourage critical thinking. Thought leadership sparks intellectual curiosity and promotes critical thinking. Ask thought-provoking questions, encourage readers to question existing paradigms, and provide avenues for further exploration and discussion.

7.

Address your audience's pain points. Tailor your article to address your audience's challenges and provide actionable solutions or insights that can help them overcome obstacles or achieve their goals.

8.

Provide practical takeaways. Offer tangible takeaways that readers can implement immediately. Actionable steps, tips, or strategies should demonstrate your expertise and provide value to your audience.





- The latest iteration of ChatGPT is still limited to 2021 data. According to Insider, some traders say ChatGPT gives them out-of-date information that they have to waste time fact-checking.

Thought leaders, on the other hand, have a deep understanding of human psychology and offer unique perspectives. They are pioneers who use authenticity, vulnerability, and genuine human experience to enhance their ideas and drive innovation. Human creativity, backed by informed experiences, sound data, and reliable research, reigns supreme.

Cutting Through the Noise

Recent research shows that decision-makers look to thought leaders to stay educated on the trends affecting their industries and to generate new ideas for their businesses.

Fifty-four percent of decision-makers and 48% of the C-suite say they spend more than one hour per week reading and reviewing thought leadership, according to the 2021 B2B Thought Leadership Impact Study by Edelman and LinkedIn. However, the study also found

that a pandemic-induced glut of low-quality content is diluting the perceived value of thought leadership among B2B decision-makers.

B2B thought leadership, when done well, significantly influences brand perception and buying behaviors throughout the entire decision process, according to the study. And according to Gartner, 83% of a typical B2B purchasing decision — researching solutions, ranking options, and benchmarking pricing — happens before a buyer engages directly with a provider.

Between the onslaught of lower-value content in the market and companies racing to test the latest AI capabilities, strong human voices will be what gives content the power to stand out.

And sure, where needed, turn to AI as a tool to assist, rather than to create. Generative AI can help you brainstorm headlines, suggest ways to clarify confusing sentences, and even provide basic information about a new topic. Just like any other instrument we use to hone our craft, AI chatbots can be helpful tools.

But when it comes to earning the respect and trust of customers, clients, and other industry titans, are you willing to put your name behind a robot? And is it even thought leadership if you haven't put your original thought into it?

When it comes to creating content that doesn't feel mass-produced, writers, marketers, and thought leaders should continue to tell their stories based on learned experiences and human connections. ■



Emily Primeaux is the writing manager at Dragonfly Editorial where she and her team deliver clear and compelling outsourced content.

Emily has experience across website content and magazine development, magazine production, marketing communications, and thought leadership. She has built her career interviewing subject matter experts such as Theranos whistleblower Tyler Shultz, former Enron CFO and convicted fraudster Andrew Fastow, and the DEA agents behind the hit Netflix show "Narcos."

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