

CONTENT MARKETING

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According to a survey on Thought leadership conducted by ITSMA, 60% of the buyers consider thought leadership content critical or important in choosing their service providers while 73% of the services companies feel that thought leadership plays a critical role in their business development. With the increase in competition, more and more companies are now looking at Thought leadership as a differentiator, to establish themselves as a “thought leader”. Companies like Accenture, IBM and Deloitte have embraced thought leadership and have successfully established a reputation for themselves as a generous contributor of ideas to the industry.

BACKGROUND

B2B buyer behavior has been changing dramatically over the last few years as buyers increasingly refuse to be interrupted by outbound marketing tactics. Content marketing has emerged as a highly effective strategy to engage the reluctant B2B buyer who is actively searching for guidance and information online before making a complex B2B purchase decision.

The purpose of content marketing is to engage B2B buyers with compelling content (in the form of webcasts, videos, eBooks, white papers, blog posts, etc) to educate, inform, entertain, and guide them through each step in the buying cycle. And while you want to help buyers make pragmatic and informed decisions, your ultimate goal is to persuade buyers to select your solution over competing alternatives.

Thought leadership is “The Vision, research, and new thinking or ideas around current and future business or technology issues”. It is a platform for any organization to deliver uncommon insights on a key business problem and a superior way to solve it, with proof of solution. In short, it is a way to give a client a great sample of a company’s expertise.

A popular Indian IT company too has increased its focus and attention on thought leadership and has come up with a range of initiatives for the same. Some of the initiatives undertaken by the company as a part of the thought leadership program are:

- The Common Vocabulary
- Blogs/articles by SME’s
- Insights- the quarterly Journal targeted to CXO level audience
- Videos and podcasts
- Case- studies prepared by educational universities.
- Internal newsletters
- Research reports and whitepapers prepared by the domain and technology experts from the organization.

Within a span of two years, this company has taken giant strides on the thought leadership front and has been nominated for the prestigious ITSMA awards for the second year running. The company now wants to expand its horizon and leverage on the thought leadership channels to position itself as a knowledge organization by the integration of the content and GTM strategy. Having developed compelling content on business issues facing their clients and prospects, the company is now looking at

effective ways of delivering the content to the target and is also evaluating the prospects of social media as an effective content delivery channel.

PROJECT SCOPE

Primary Research Objective:

To evaluate the performance, impact and effectiveness of the current content dissemination channels for the Thought Leadership program and suggest better and alternative models to improve it.

Secondary Research Objectives:

- To identify effective content marketing strategies for the various forms of Thought Leadership content
- To evaluate the social media initiatives and strategies of competitor companies and suggest a social media framework
- To identify Blog promotional strategies

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The objective of the study is to evaluate the current content dissemination mechanism with respect to its performance, impact and effectiveness and suggest better and alternative channels of content promotion. The major outcome of this study is to improve the online presence of the company and establish it as a thought leader in the industry.

There are three modules under this study namely

- Identifying effective content marketing strategies for thought leadership.

- Evaluating Social Media as a content delivery channel.
- Identifying effective ways of promoting Blogs.

First and foremost, the focus will be on understanding the various initiatives of the Thought Leadership program and the current content management mechanism. This includes measuring the effectiveness of the TL initiatives currently in place.

Secondly, an in-depth analysis will be conducted on the Thought Leadership Programs at competitor companies like IBM, Accenture, Cognizant, Deloitte etc.

Thirdly, the critical success factors for the TLP will be identified based on the competitor analysis and the current initiatives undertaken under Thought Leadership will be benchmarked against competition on these CSF's.

Post a gap-analysis with the competition, various alternatives would be evaluated based on their impact on the target market and also based on its effectiveness as far as the ITSMA awards are concerned.

Finally, the best content marketing strategies would be recommended based on their impact and effectiveness.

The methodology will include secondary research to identify the industry best practices in Thought Leadership and also to identify the various content marketing channels adopted by the competition. Web analytics tools will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the various channels of content promotion. The implementation phase of the project will include identification of content hosting procedures on the various web-platforms and getting in touch with the respective stakeholders for getting the content listed.

FINDINGS

Thought Leadership – Critical Success Factors

The factors which are critical to the success of any thought leadership program are as stated below

1. Understanding the prospect and his stage in the buying cycle

A buyer goes through various stages in the buying cycle. The requirements of the buyer from the thought leadership per say is different in each of these stages. It is critical for the service provider to capture the attention of the buyer in each and every stage of the buying cycle and engage them. A survey conducted by ITSMA in 2010 revealed 42% of the buyers feel understanding them well is the most important factor while evaluating the alternatives and selecting the company to help them implement solutions. (Figure 1)

2. Create compelling and engaging content

The quality of the thought leadership content should be such that it presents a novel point of view on how to address an important market problem, backed by substantial and credible evidence. A survey conducted by ITSMA in 2010 on what buyers think revealed that the buyers want the thought leadership material to focus on their business segment and needs with substantial proofs. (Figure 2)

The various stages which a buyer goes through are:

A. EPHIPHANY STAGE

In this stage of the buying cycle, the thought leadership material should focus on helping prospective clients identify needs and opportunities and also explore the various possibilities. The types of content which can assist a buyer in this stage of the buying cycle are:

- Whitepapers demonstrating the industry best practices
- Research reports and findings.
- Videos highlighting the problems faced by prospective clients
- Online forums or briefings that feature the providers' executives or subject matter experts
- In-person forums or dinners that feature the providers' executives or subject matter experts

B. AWARENESS STAGE

In this stage of the buying cycle, the thought leadership content should help prospective buyers to clarify objectives and should provide solution specifications. The buyer identifies the various alternatives in this stage and creates a short-list of potential solution providers. It is very important for the thought leadership provide the form of content which captures the attention of the buyer in this stage of the buying cycle. The main aim is to enter the awareness set of the buyer. The ITSMA survey on "What buyers think" in 2010 reveals the most effective tools in seeking the attention of the buyers.

The survey also revealed that discussion with the peers and web-search are the most helpful in researching for possible solutions. (Figure 3)

When evaluating alternatives and selecting the company to help you implement the solution, which one attribute is most important to your decision?
 % of Respondents (N=446)

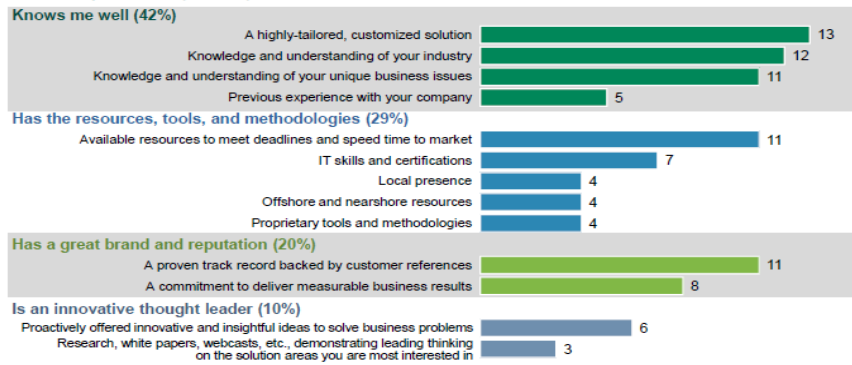


Figure 1

Source: ITSMA and PAC, *How Customers Choose Study, 2010*

What factors would contribute most to improve the quality of solution providers' thought leadership? % of Respondents (N=377)



Figure 2

Which sources of information are the most helpful when you are researching possible solutions? % of Respondents (N=486)



Figure 3

C. INTEREST STAGE

Having identified the alternatives, the buyer then evaluates the various alternatives in this stage of the buying processes. (Figure 4)

The thought leadership content addressing the buyer in this stage of the buying cycle should primarily focus on conveying knowledge and understanding of the client's industry. The types of content which engage a buyer in this stage of the buying cycle are:

- Case Studies of successful implementations
- Client Testimonials

3. Delivering the content in a personalized manner

Having developed compelling content, it is important to deliver the content in a personalized manner. The ITSMA buyer's survey in 2010 revealed that electronic newsletters and webinar followed by invitation to dinner are the most effective tools for capturing the attention of the buyer. (Figure 5)

4. Identifying the appropriate delivery channels

Having developed compelling content, it is vital to reach out to the buyers and deliver the content on platforms where they are present. A Marketers survey conducted by LinkedIn in 2011 revealed that the company micro-site is the most effective content delivery channel (Figure 6)

Whitepaper Hosting Websites

1. Web Buyers Guide

Salient Features

- Listing of content is absolutely *free*.
- Content distributed across the award-winning Ziff Davis Enterprise network of Websites including eWEEK.com, CIOInsight.com, Baselinemag.com, WebBuyersGuide.com and ChannellInsider.com - the most respected and influential IT websites in the industry.
- Target the distribution of information to only relevant areas within a list of over 1,000 pre-defined categories and topics.
- Network reaches 4 million highly qualified and influential technology buyers who are at every stage in the buying process and who have an average IT budget of \$59.8 million.

Audience Figure 7

2. Tech Republic

Salient features

- A high-level awareness and media program, deep-engagement lead generation opportunities for every stage of the business technology purchase process.
- Business Trax, a powerful proprietary reporting engine which offers unique insight into the success of marketing campaigns
- Ability to reach millions of IT decision-makers who are actively engaged in the business technology buying process.

Audience

- 9 million+ unique users
 - 55.6 million+ page views
 - 85% involved in business technology purchase decisions
- Average HH income is \$90k
- 57% IT professionals

Importance of Solution Provider Attributes

When evaluating alternatives and selecting the company to help you implement the solution, how important are the following company attributes to your decision? Mean Rating (N=484)

Attribute	Mean Rating	Top Box Score %
Knowledge and understanding of your industry	4.0	35
Available resources to meet deadlines and speed time to market	3.9	35
Proactively offered innovative and insightful ideas to solve business problems	3.9	30
Knowledge and understanding of your unique business issues	3.9	29
A commitment to deliver measurable business results	3.8	29
A proven track record backed by customer references	3.8	28
IT skills and certifications	3.8	25
A highly-tailored, customized solution	3.7	29
Previous experience with your company	3.7	24
Local presence	3.6	24
Research, white papers, webcasts, etc., demonstrating leading thinking on the solution areas you are most interested in	3.6	23
Proprietary tools and methodologies	3.6	23
Offshore and nearshore resources	3.5	20

Figure 4

Which types of marketing vehicles do you believe are most effective in getting your attention and encouraging you to learn more about solutions and providers? % of Respondents (N=355)

Marketing Vehicle	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Somewhat ineffective	Not at all effective
Electronic newsletter from the solution provider	25	32	29	14
Webinar	24	29	32	15
Invitation to a dinner discussion or evening roundtable with peers	23	33	25	20
Invitation to an in person seminar or workshop	23	39	26	12
Case studies describing successful customer solution implementations	20	22	39	19
Speech or presentation at a conference or trade show	19	22	38	21
Solution provider's blog or online community	17	30	35	18
Search engine hits when doing research or surfing the Web	16	41	27	17
Article in the business or industry trade press	15	33	30	21
Online advertisement	15	30	33	22
Direct mail brochure	13	32	31	24
Phone call or email from a sales representative from the solution provider	12	23	34	31
TV or print advertisement	11	30	40	20
Hospitality programs such as sporting event or golf outings	10	20	35	36

Figure 5

Ranking of the most effective content delivery channels.

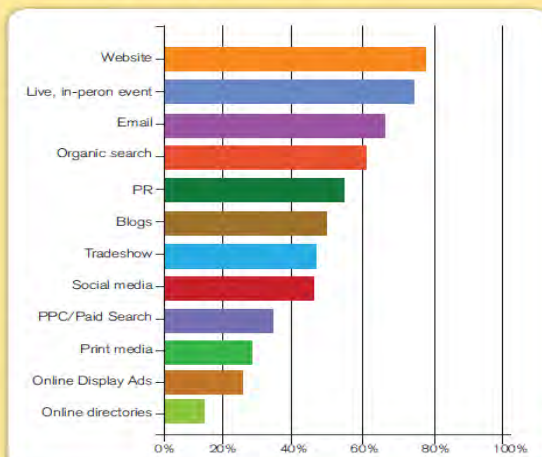


Figure 6

3. IDG Connect

IDG Connect pools a diverse range of technology white papers, technical reports and other IT resources from across the globe. Their database is built with market leading brands such as **CIO**, **Computerworld**, **Network World**, **CFO World**, **PC World** and **CSO**.

Salient Features

- Global database of senior IT and Business Decision Makers
- Ability to target any country in the world
- Full segmentation and targeting
- Targeted EDM programs also available
- Ability to deliver quantity and quality requirements
- Local language Telemarketing experts that can deliver and nurture leads
- Full Content Assessment tools to help you discover how your content is related and scores across market expectations
- Full Campaign Analytics for web based programs

4. Information Week

Salient Features

- Content Syndication activates the largest and most influential audience of business technology buyers by leveraging the trusted brands, rich content and active visitors of UBM Tech Web's network on online sites, including **InformationWeek.com** and **DarkReading.com**
- Business technology buyers are directed to the whitepaper hosted on the Tech Web Digital Library. Contextual links across the network combined with an integrated promotional campaign drives maximum visibility.
- A tight synopsis of the whitepaper promotes the download process to capture key lead contact information.

Audience

More than 14.5 million business and technology professionals actively engage in UBM Tech Web's communities and information resources monthly, including:

- CIOs, IT leaders and IT support managers
- Web & digital professionals
- Software and game developers
- Government decision makers
- Global telecommunications/service providers
- Line of business executives

5. Whitepapersdb

Whitepapers DB is a white paper site that allows free hosting of content. **Free** to ask download, **free** to search, **free** to read, **free** to preview, without the hide-behind-registration pages

6. Bit pipe

Bit pipe's comprehensive suite of services enable information-technology (IT) marketers to syndicate their white papers, product information, Webcasts, case studies, and analyst reports through the Bit pipe Network of IT and business-related partner sites, including **Bitpipe.com**, **Business Week**, **Google**, and other leading IT and business-related destinations.

Audience Figure8

7. Madison Logic

Salient Features

- Madison Logic's Lead Focus for Publishers is a comprehensive hosted ad serving platform that streamlines lead management functions and allows generating ever-greater advertising margins, resulting in increased revenue/profit, lower costs and improved operating efficiency.

Figure 7

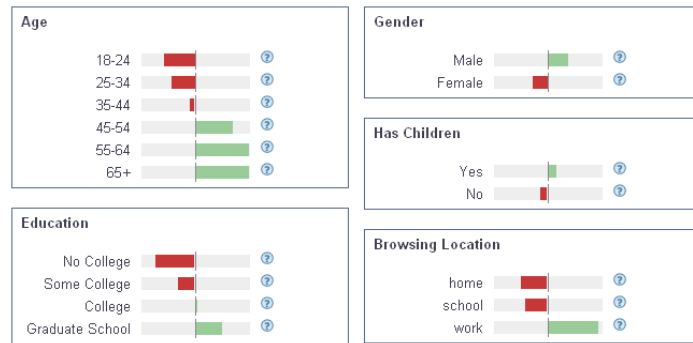


Figure 8

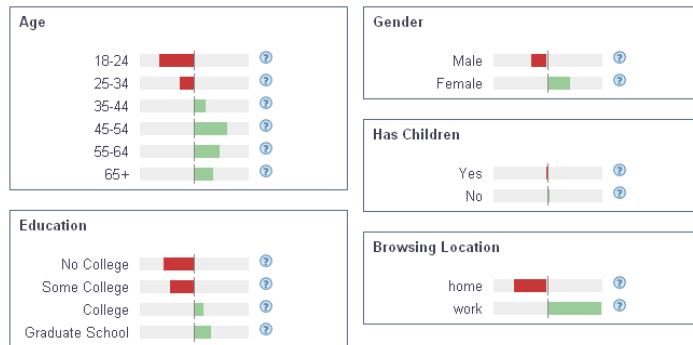
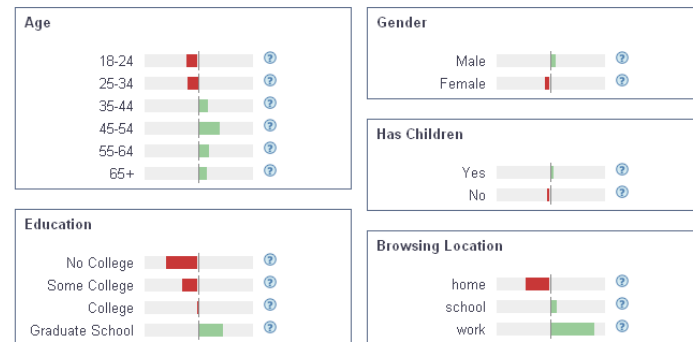


Figure 9



How influential are white papers in your purchasing decision? (influencers versus decision makers)

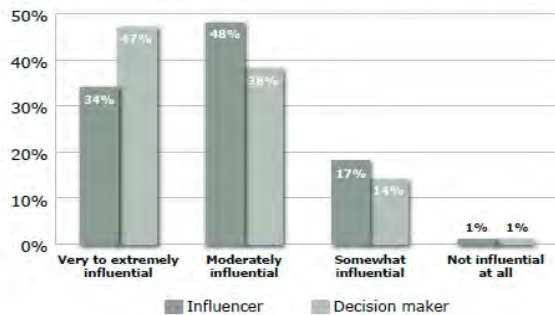


Figure 10

How influential are white papers in your purchasing decision? (influencers versus decision makers)

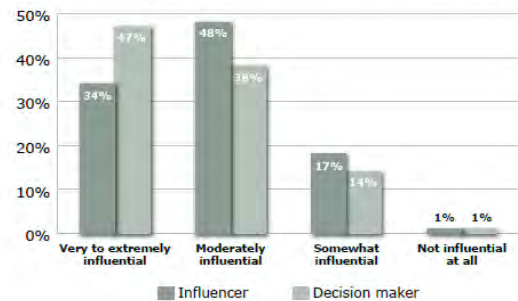


Figure 11

- Madison Logic's Premium Lead Gen Market Place is made up of only name brand publishers. The premium network ensures that advertisers are associated with high-quality site content and users. Publisher benefit from Madison Logic's advanced targeting and optimization technologies, which connect them with highly relevant advertisers resulting in an enhanced online experience.

Audience Figure 9

8. Tech Whitepapers

Tech-White-Papers.com is a vertical search engine for technology whitepapers, technical research and case studies. It allows technical decision makers to find technical white papers listed on thousands of company sites and thus make better IT decisions. It presents whitepapers from over 15,000 technical sites and 100,000 technology terms and concepts.

Technology Collateral Survey 2010

Whitepapers Figure10

Whitepapers play a vital role in influencing the buyers in the decision-making process. The whitepapers of the company under study have a poor visibility in the SERP.

Videos/Audio Figure11

Addition of videos/audio in written collateral has a positive impact on the reader.

Micro-site Figure12

Company micro-site is the most effective content deliver channel. Some of the key findings in this regard are:

- The current micro-site of the company under study is inadequate with respect to customization and usability.
- There is improper categorization of the thought leadership content.
- Irrelevant landing pages from linking sites

Blogs Figure13

Customers and influencers are not interested in product and service pitches; they are looking for news, research, and ideas that can help them understand and overcome business challenges. Blogs, especially ones that focus on a specific target audience, are excellent platforms for discussing and debating industry issues. Independent advisory boards lend credibility to blogs and help generate ideas. Blogs need a content engine to sustain them over the long haul

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Content Marketing Strategies

Whitepaper promotion Figure 14

The whitepapers, case-studies and research reports can be promoted by getting them hosted on hosting websites and publishing websites. Some of the websites where the papers and reports can be hosted are

These websites have been identified based on their demographics, reach and friendliness with the popular search engines.

Videos/Audios

The technology collateral survey 2010 revealed that as high as 62% of the buyers feel including an audio or a video in any written collateral will have a positive impact. So, the whitepapers and the case-studies should be made more interactive by including audio/videos. Videos should be created on compelling business issues.

The buyers want videos/audio while the search engines want keywords. In order to address this issue, Videos and opinion speeches from top leaders on current and future trends should be supplemented by a written version of the speech. This should be part of the SEO strategy.

Newsletters

Newsletters are the most effective mode of delivering personalized content. Weekly/Monthly newsletters should be sent to prospects. The degree of personalization can be increased by creating newsletters based on interests identified and collected via website registration.

Secondly, the subscribers should be provided with an option to share the content of the newsletters on social media. Social sharing ensures that the following objectives are met.

- Increased brand reputation and awareness
- Extend the reach of email content to new markets
- Increase the ROI from email programs
- Generate more qualified leads
- Accelerate the growth of email lists

Debates

Debates are a recommended form of content where in two subject matter experts dissect the issue from multiple angles. A point and a counter-point are presented and the two experts share their insights on the issue. Also, there should be an interface on the website which allows the readers to voice their take on the topic and the poll results can be displayed.

Some of the advantages of debates as a form of content are:

- Engages more people in a discussion
- Increased traffic to the micro-site
- Allows viewing today's pressing issues from multiple angles
- Clearer views of immediate impacts and long-term consequences.

Micro-site

The technological collateral survey 2010 revealed that the company micro-site is the most effective content delivery channel. Some of the recommended changes to the micro-site are:

- **Content Preview:** There should be an interface on the website which provides a preview of the content which is available for download. The preview could be a picture snapshot of the whitepaper/research report/case-study along with a brief summary of the same.
- **Recommendations/Suggestions:** There should be a separate place-holder on the micro-site which provides recommendations to content on similar topics based on search queries.
- **Relevant landing pages:** The main aim of the company micro-site should be to avoid bounces which bring the rankings of the website on the search engine down. The landing pages from other back links should be relevant and should directly lead to the content which the user is looking for.
- **Whitepaper search interface:** The whitepapers should be categorized and a search interface should be provided on the website. Each and every whitepaper should be associated or tagged with the following attributes.
 - Industry (If any. Otherwise Cross-industry)
 - Technology used/ Business need addressed
 - Type of solution – Technology/ Consulting/ Outsourcing

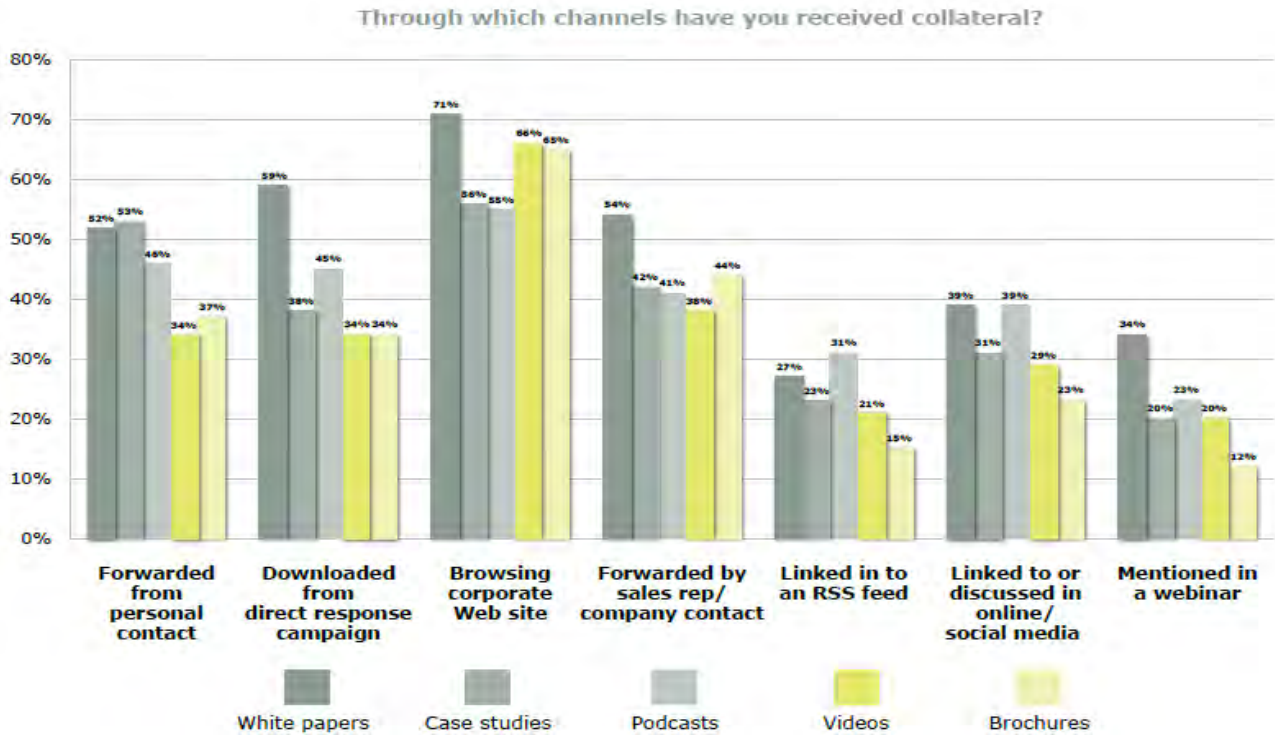


Figure 12

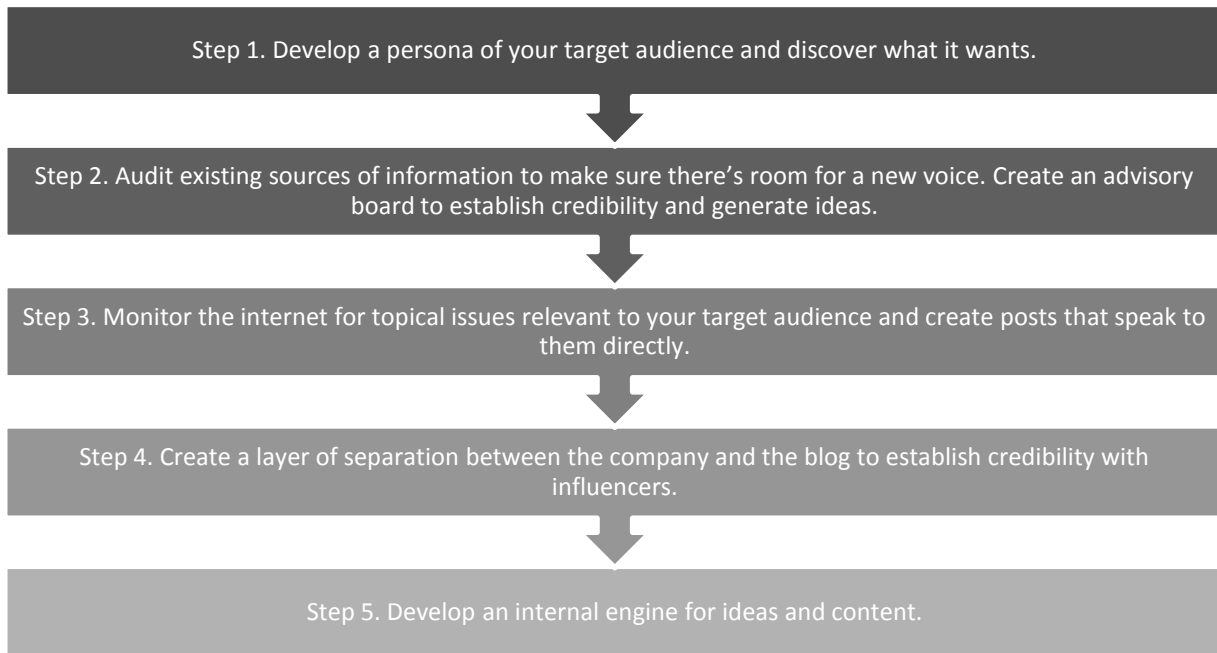


Figure 13: 5 Steps to Blogging Success

Free Hosting Websites	Paid Hosting Websites	Publishing sites
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • www.webbuyersguide.com • www.whitepapersdb.com • www.whitepapers.org • www.techrepublic.com 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • www.idgconnect.com • www.informationweek.com • www.bitpipe.com 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • www.madisonlogic.com • www.tech-white-papers.com

Figure 14

Figure 15

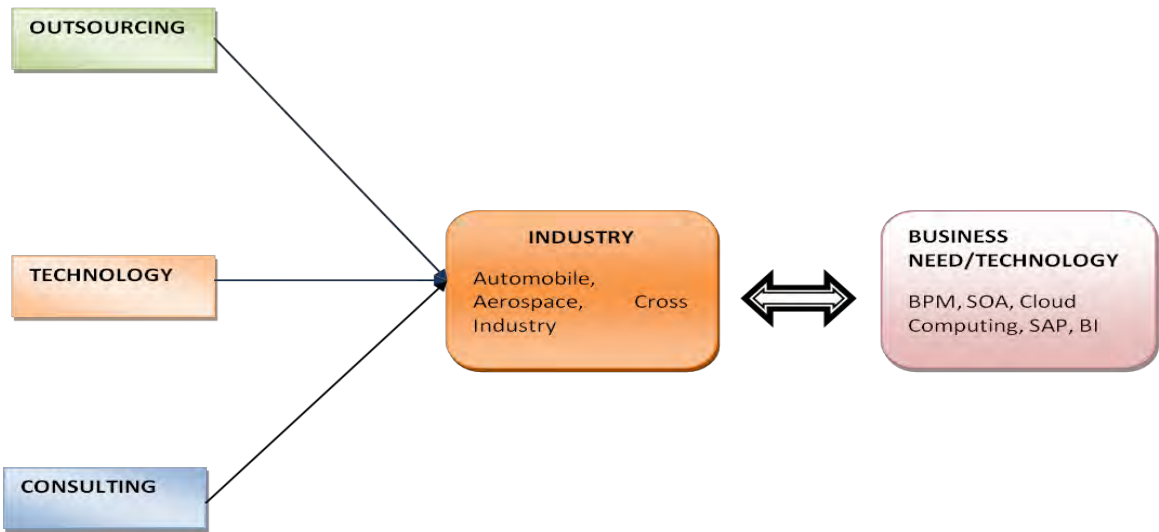


Figure 16

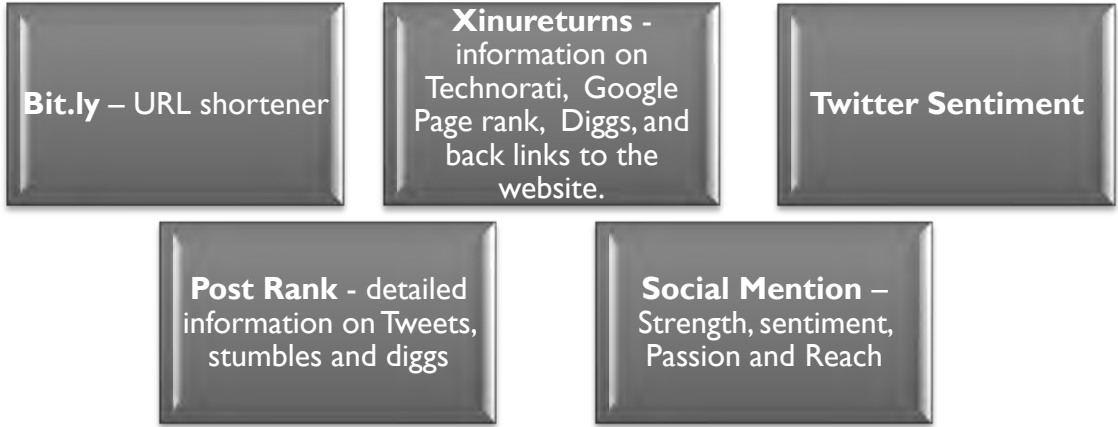
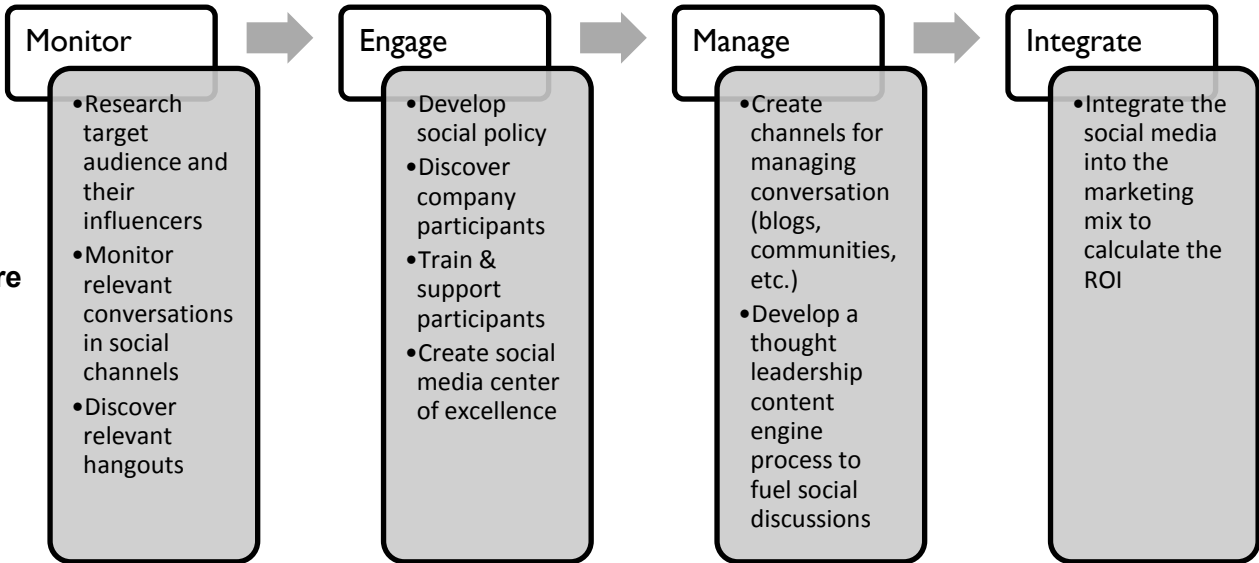


Figure 17



PRIMARY FILTER

The Primary Filter segregates the whitepapers based on the type of The company's offering/solution. The three main sub-divisions include

- Outsourcing Solutions
- Technology Solutions
- Consulting Solutions

PRIMARY FILTER (figure 15) SECONDARY FILTER

SECONDARY FILTER

Once the primary filter has been applied, the secondary filter allows selection of content based on two attributes.

1. Industry
2. Business Need/Technology

Secondary Filter Listing

- The listings of the two secondary filters are mutually dependant on each other.
- For a chosen industry, the business needs which is addressed by the whitepapers or
- the Technology described in the whitepapers is enlisted.
- For a chosen business need/technology, the corresponding industry is displayed.
- For a chosen business need/technology, if the whitepaper is not addressed to any specific industry, then there is an option in the industry tab to choose "**Cross-industry**".

Industry Listing

- The industry listing is dependent on the availability of the whitepapers based on the primary filter.
- The "**Gross-industry**" selection is provided for listing whitepapers which are not specific to any industry.
- For a chosen business need/technology, the industry listing enlists the all the corresponding industries based on availability of the whitepapers and "**Gross-industry**" for uncategorized papers.

Business Need/Technology Listing

- The Business need/technology should be a comprehensive listing with each and every whitepaper being associated to either a technology or a business need.
- The comprehensive list of topics under this filter will be dependent on the primary filter.
- This listing also gets dynamically updated based on the chosen industry.

2. Social Media

Social Media framework

Social media plays a huge role in the new B2B decision---making process. As aB2B marketer, you need to learn to leverage social media for building relationships, listening to the market and influencing buyers before they are identified as potential leads. The four components of the framework which any B2B business should incorporate are: Figure 17

Slide Share

Slide Share is a very effective social media platform for sharing presentations, documents and professional videos.

- The keywords from the website's search engine optimization strategy can be incorporated into Slide Share presence.
- Whitepapers should be converted into presentations and uploaded on slide share.
- Embed video/audio using Slide casts
- Use it as source of referral traffic

Social Media metrics Figure 16

Metrics remain the major hurdle to any social media initiatives and campaigns. In order to calculate the ROI on the social media investment, third party websites should be used by routing the requests from the social media channels. Some of the platforms which provide an indicator of the social media metrics are

3. Blogs

Blog Directories

The traffic to the blog micro-site can be increased by listing the blog micro-site on popular blog directories. These blog directories rank the micro-sites based on the number of visits, number and quality of back-links. Some of the popular blog directories where the blog site should be listed are

- Technorati
- Word press
- Bloggapeda
- Blogging fusion
- Blogged

Guest Blogging



Guest blogging is an effective way of leveraging the blogging expertise of subject matter experts of the company to increase the brand awareness and reputation of the company. This is a classic example of employee branding. Some of the guest blogging platforms where the SME's can blog are

- CIO.com
- Techno Pulse
- Tech-buzz
- MyBlogGuest

Social Bookmarking websites

Adding social bookmark links to the blog or web site makes it easy for readers to save and share the content. With the growing popularity of social bookmarking sites, it is critical to incorporate them as a promotion tool for blogs. Some of the most popular social book-marking websites where the blogs can be promoted are:



Blog Micro-site layout

The blog site should provide proper categorization of blogs into three categories

- Most recent
- Most commented
- Most viewed.

Episode blogs

The company should create an episode of blogs titled **“Technology Vision”** which provides an analysis of emerging trends and major technological changes that could have a significant business impact on the company under study and its clients in the next three to five years. High-performance businesses would use the Vision to help understand potential opportunities—and challenges—that lie ahead.

Results and Implications

The whitepapers and Research publications of the company under study were hosted on the whitepaper hosting websites mentioned earlier. 20 whitepapers were hosted on 5 hosting and publishing websites. Before this exercise, there was virtually no presence of the company published content on internet platforms. But, post this, the whitepapers and research publications of the company found high positions on the Google search engine results page (SERP). The SERP displayed the content hosted on websites with high Alexa ranking for relevant keywords thereby improving the reach of the content online.

The company blog micro-site was likewise listed on the blog directories mentioned earlier. This increased the traffic to the blog micro-site thereby achieving the stated objectives.

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- Content Marketing - LinkedIn Survey – 2011 Websites of IT Consulting Companies
www.accenture.com
www.ibm.com
www.cognizant.com
www.infosys.com
- Social Media channels
www.facebook.com
www.twitter.com
www.youtube.com
www.linkedin.com
www.slideshare.com