

Harris Poll
Thought Leadership

Unlock revenue and engagement with thought leadership

Why your brand needs to be **Credible,**
Creative and **Culturally Relevant**

Introduction

This report includes proprietary insights from executives around the current state and future value of thought leadership. We explore:

- **Thought leadership stakeholder strategy:** Building trust with internal and external parties
- **The value of thought leadership:** Thought leadership drives annual value of \$2.7 million according to executives; among Fortune 100 executives, this number jumps to \$3.6 million per year
- **Why thought leadership falls behind:** Gaps in importance versus effectiveness of thought leadership today
- **Unlocking revenue through thought leadership:** Building a point of view that is credible, creative, and culturally relevant

About Harris Poll Thought Leadership

Building on 50+ years of experience pulsing societal opinion, we design research that is credible, creative, and culturally relevant. Our practice drives thought leadership and unearths trends for today's biggest brands. We are focused on helping our clients get ahead of what's next.

Want to build thought leadership for your organization that is credible, creative, and culturally relevant? Reach out to The Harris Poll Thought Leadership Practice.

Subscribe to our [newsletter](#) and [podcast](#)



Libby Rodney
Chief Strategy Officer
The Harris Poll



Abbey Lunney
Managing Director
Thought Leadership

Research Methodology

This report is based on a custom survey that was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll between May 18-24, 2022, among 500 full-time employees at director level or higher representing a mix of industries and function.

9 in 10 executives believe thought leadership is critical to building authority, but only 20% are effective

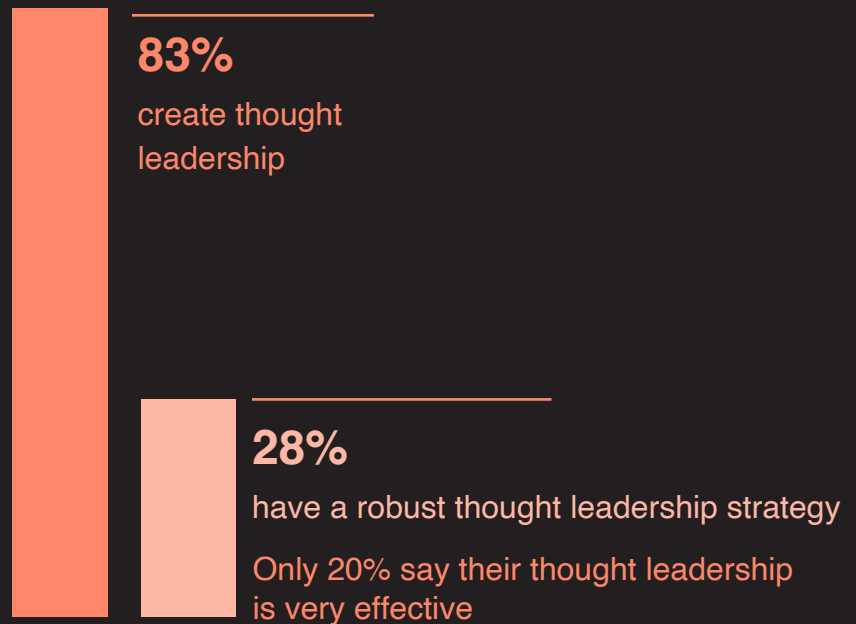
Executives acknowledge the essential role thought leadership research plays in today's world, as over 9 in 10 say, "thought leadership is critical to building authority in my industry" (92%). The vast majority of business leaders consume thought leadership themselves (90%) and view it as "an indicator of a category or industry leader" (93%).

Despite acknowledging its importance, executives admit their organizations are falling short. While most say their organization creates some form of thought leadership,

just over a quarter say they have a robust thought leadership strategy. Furthermore, a mere 20% characterize their organization's thought leadership as being highly effective.

Most acknowledge a lack of variety and innovation as 8 in 10 say, "Most organizations check the box on thought leadership but don't push the envelope on thought leadership" (78%). Two-thirds also admit, "The market feels oversaturated with uninteresting thought leadership today" (66%), including 72% of those in B2B industries.

Executives report a gap on thought leadership strategy and quality



78% agree, "Most organizations check the box on thought leadership but don't push the envelope on thought leadership."



Building authority in a hybrid world: 93% of business leaders say, "Thought leadership is more important now compared to pre-pandemic because it's harder to get noticed in a more virtual working world."

Thought leadership builds trust across across stakeholders and drives value across the organization

Executives rely on thought leadership to build credibility and connection among a variety of internal and external stakeholders. Employees are the number one audience for thought leadership efforts and executives report that it has benefits across the entire organization, from sales to the C-Suite to R&D.

Driving sales and client relationships are top use cases for thought leadership, though many also use it to attract and retain top talent, stay ahead of where the market is heading, and build executive profile. Nearly three-quarters leverage thought leadership to influence policy and investment conversations.

Business leaders use thought leadership to connect with...

Customers or clients	76%
Employees/internal	75%
General consumers	68%
Prospects	64%
Stakeholders or the board	63%
Investors	62%
Media	53%

83% say thought leadership is likely to generate media coverage, including 93% of those at Fortune 100 companies.

Thought leadership drives value across the organization

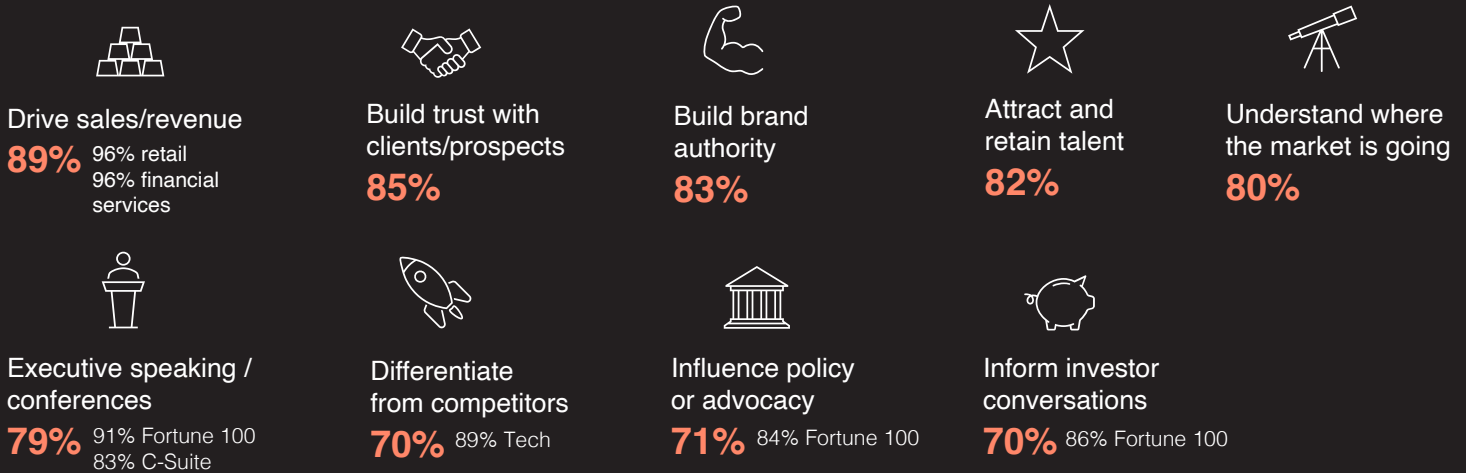
Executives report thought leadership benefits...




Majorities say thought leadership is tied to their organization (62%) rather than to individuals (39%).

Thought leadership fortifies position with a variety of stakeholders

% who use thought leadership for this purpose

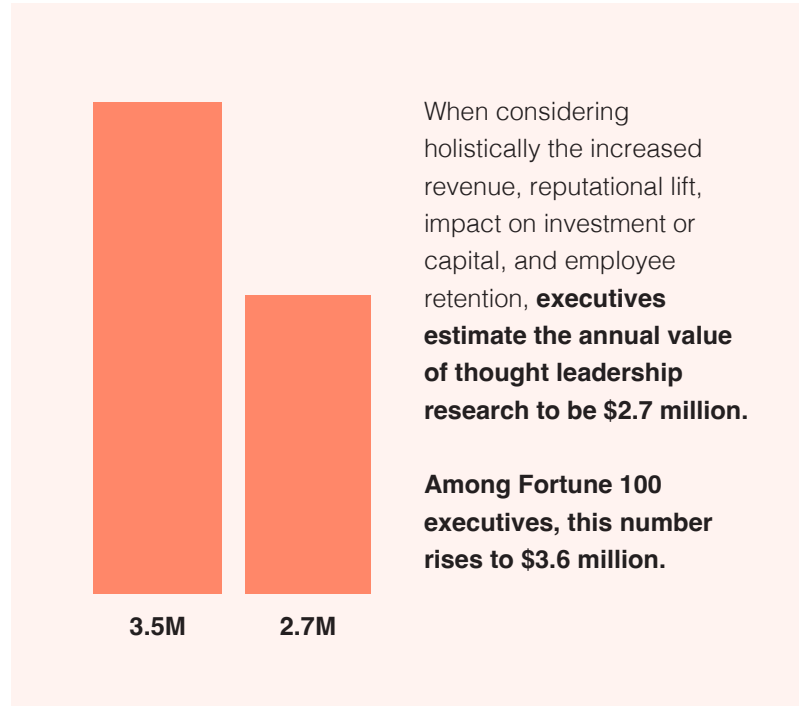


The feeling is mutual:  of executives say thought leadership has at least some influence on their decision when selecting a partner or vendor.

Executives say thought leadership is critical to growth — with 14x ROI

Executives acknowledge the benefits of thought leadership as strong majorities say it is likely to improve relationships with clients and prospects (93%) as well as brand perceptions (93%). Beyond driving relationships, business leaders report thought leadership drives tangible business value. 91% say it is likely to directly increase revenue and 77% say it is also likely to increase fees or ability to charge more of a premium, including 83% of those in the retail industry.

A growing investment in thought leadership reflects this value as executives report a 25% increase in spend compared to pre-pandemic. The average spend on thought leadership today is \$194,000. Based on the previously mentioned valuation of \$2.7 million, there is potential for a 14 times return on investment for companies that develop thought leadership that connects. Most imagine increasing their spend a further 31% within the next 2 years as over 9 in 10 say, "Thought leadership is an important part of our growth strategy" (91%).



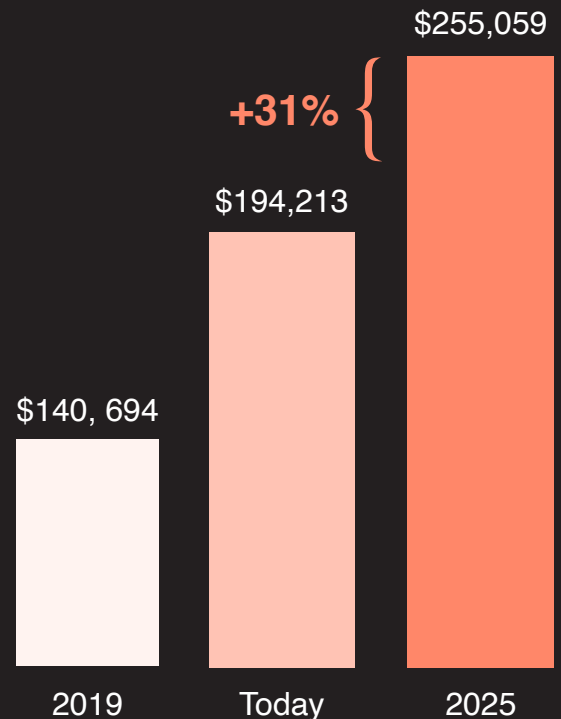
Thought leadership spend is trending upward

Thought leadership research spend

91% agree, "Thought leadership is an **important part of our growth strategy.**"

Executives say thought leadership is likely to...

Improve relationships with clients and prospects	93%
Directly increase revenue	91%
Increase fees or ability to charge more of a premium	77%



Unlocking revenue and engagement through thought leadership

Top challenges for developing resonant thought leadership center around credibility, creativity, and cultural relevance. Two-thirds say all of the thought leadership in their industry looks the same (66%) – including 70% of the C-Suite and 69% of those in B2B industries.

Executives struggle to create thought leadership that is...

Valid

CHALLENGE

Ensuring insights are **valid and will stand up to scrutiny** (70%)

75% also say **“It is challenging to create thought leadership that stands up to media scrutiny.”**

Innovative

CHALLENGE

Surfacing new or **innovative ideas** or topics (69%)

58% also say, **“My company is not investing enough in having a distinct point of view.”**

Relevant

CHALLENGE

Reaching **desired audiences** (67%)

61% also say, **“I am worried our thought leadership efforts can go unnoticed in a saturated market.”**

The opportunity is to create thought leadership that is...

Credible

79% of executives say, *“I wish we had better third-party validation as part of our thought leadership strategy.”*

94% of executives say, *“Custom research makes thought leadership more effective.”*

Creative

86% of executives say, *“I wish my organization explored more new ideas in our thought leadership.”*

95% of executives say, *“Well-executed thought leadership helps build a long-term point of distinction in the market.”*

Culturally Relevant

61% of executives say they struggle to surface interesting, culturally relevant ideas or topics.”

86% of executives say, *“I am looking for more actionable thought leadership in the market.”*

We build thought leadership that is credible, creative, and culturally relevant. Reach out to The Harris Poll Thought Leadership Practice to build an effective platform for your organization.

Building on 50+ years of experience pulsing societal opinion, we design research that is credible, creative, and culturally relevant. Our practice drives thought leadership and unearths trends for today's biggest brands. We are focused on helping our clients get ahead of what's next.