





How To Establish
Yourself as a
Thought Leader
Using Social Media
and Beyond!

# Ten Steps to Establishing Yourself as a Thought Leader... Using Social Media and Beyond!



by Mari Smith

Forbes' Top Ten Social Media Power Influencer Premier Facebook Marketing Expert

Thought leadership creates **trust**, **credibility**, **and visibility** that lead to exponential growth in your business.

As a thought leader, journalists and conference producers will proactively seek you out for **interviews and speaking engagements**. Radio, TV and podcast hosts will invite you to share your views on their shows. Fellow entrepreneurs will seek your expert input and collaboration. Publishers may offer you a book deal. And, prospective **customers will hire you** over your peers who may not have as much visibility and traction.

One great aspect of thought leadership is, yes, you earn a position in your industry as a **trusted and influential authority**. But, it's also a position that you *monetize*. It's not just about being a great source of wisdom and knowledge. It's also about building your business around your thought leadership.

"Thought leadership is not about being known; it's about being known for making a difference."

-Denise Brosseau



Thought leadership isn't something you create overnight. However, over time, with the right action steps and approach—such as those detailed in

this special report—you'll find yourself becoming known as a Thought Leader in your industry.

At times, I joke about being an 'overnight success ten years in the making!' I arrived in San Diego, California from Scotland in 1999 with £50 GBP and two suitcases. I had this absolute knowing that I was supposed to create a whole new life for myself in the US – and that's exactly



what I did! I diligently applied myself and, over time, built my own business as an online marketing expert. Facebook marketing fell into my lap in 2007 when I got invited to be on an app beta test team. And, it wasn't until 2009 that I had my big break out year. (I went through a personal transition and also began integrating more spirituality into my daily life, both of which had a profound impact on my success).



When a rock star suddenly blasts onto the scene in a big way, the public often assumes that person magically got a huge lucky break. But what the public doesn't see is the **years and years of diligent effort**, homework and

practice that went into becoming the rock star.

In today's age of lightening-speed viral videos and **mega social media campaigns**, it's certainly possible to accelerate your "rock stardom." But that fame may only be temporary and is only as good as your next viral hit, if you can get it.



"The world is begging for you to lead." -Seth Godin

Set your sights on becoming a THOUGHT LEADER and the game changes significantly – for you and for your budding audience.

Take your focus off the 'fame' and 'fortune.' Take your focus off of building a 'massive audience' and accumulating as many fans and followers as you can.

Instead, put your focus on truly **mastering your subject matter**, adding incredible value at every opportunity, and proactively creating as much visibility as possible (see step #10). And from there, your audience—and position as a thought leader—will naturally grow.

### thought lead er

noun

one whose views on a subject are taken to be authoritative and influential.

# 1. Choose your specialty.



Don't be a generalist, be a specialist. "Get rich in a niche." **Go an inch wide and a mile deep**.

Generalists try to be all things to all people and diversify too much; they go a mile wide and an inch deep and lack the depth that specialists have.

Specialists can typically charge more than generalists, regardless of whether you are a solopreneur or mega brand. You haven't heard of a thought leader across multiple subjects and multiple industries, right? We

come to know thought leaders because of their **deep expertise in a** specific subject.

A couple of my favorite examples are: **Brené Brown** who is a leading expert on vulnerability (perhaps you've seen Brené's most watched TED talk, with 15 million views?!).





And, **Amy Cuddy**, an expert on body language. Amy also has a wildly popular TED talk with 18 million views!

# 2. Ignite your passion.

Be a devotee. That is, devoted to your specialty, your chosen niche. **Understand** what truly motivates you.

What puts the fire in your belly that makes you leap out of bed in the mornings? **What** 



would you do all day every day, even if you didn't get paid?

You'll need to tap into this well of passion and devotion on the days when the ride gets bumpy or when you have to deal with a misstep, for example. It's your passion that will sustain you. Always. And that passion



has to be other-focused, not you-focused. It's intrinsically linked to your purpose. A great book on this subject is *Start With Why* by Simon Sinek.

## 3. Develop your own unique style.

The world doesn't need any more 'me too's.' Cultivate your unique viewpoint and personality. **Stand out from the crowd**. Study what other industry leaders are doing and focus on *authentically* differentiating yourself.

As my friend Nancy Marmolejo said many years ago, 'At the end of the day, be the **voice that is remembered**, not just heard.' And that certainly rings true in today's online daily cacophony competing for everyone's attention.



As Denise Brosseau says, "Get comfortable with controversy and being the lone voice. If you're saying what everyone else is saying, you are not a thought leader, you are a thought follower. To be a thought leader, you have to be okay with saying what others won't say. You need to be thinking three steps ahead ... what are the risks that you'll get it wrong."

Don't be afraid to speak up and have a point of view. Sometimes you may need to be controversial. Often, audiences respond well to controversy. In fact, 'the masses' tend to respond to negativity. However, part of my own unique style is being **the eternal optimist** who always has a good word to say about everyone. I love to build people up and encourage others at every opportunity, even if it's a simple virtual high five.



A wonderful example of a thought leader with an exuberant, unique personality is none other than my fab friend, **Gary Vaynerchuk**. Gary used to host a wildly popular online wine

tasting show at WineLibrary.com and went on to take his family wine business from a \$3 million business to a \$45 million business through the power of social media. What I love about Gary is he passionately "gives a crap" about everything he turns his hand to. He's determined to own the New York Jets one day, and I wholeheartedly believe he will.

### 4. Write more.

A thought leader is an authority.

The root word of 'authority' is

'author.' If you want to establish
yourself as an authority, you simply
must write more.



Publish regular blog posts, articles, and/or an email newsletter. Or, if writing is not your thing, at least **find your favorite vehicle for publishing content** – it may be audio (e.g. podcast) or video instead or as well as print. The key is to get your voice (thoughts) out there as much as possible.

Do have high standards and don't get caught up in just cranking out anything for the sake of having content. It has to be high quality and relevant to your audience.

The great news here is that you can combine your own CREATED content with CURATED content, which is what I call 'OPC: Other People's Content.'



As an example, take a look at my friend **Michael Stelzner**'s incredible success with SocialMediaExaminer.com – one of the top ten business blogs for many years in a row. Mike's model is

to feature daily blog posts written almost exclusively by guest bloggers. It's a win for everyone: Mike as the platform owner, the writers as a terrific way to gain coveted exposure on a prestigious site, and the readers who get great diversity on all social media marketing topics and always of a high standard. Mike's email list has grown to well over a quarter million subscribers and he runs a multi-million-dollar empire.

Another great thought leader example is my friend **Ekaterina**Walter who used to head up social media for Intel, then published her own book (*Think Like Zuck*) based on what made

Mark Zuckerberg, CEO and Founder of Facebook.com, so successful.

Ekaterina then left Intel and went on to cofound Branderati, a digital marketing agency. She's an in-demand speaker and sits on the board of Word of Mouth Marketing Association (WOMMA).

## 5. Speak more.

If you're just starting out in your particular current career path, you might consider accepting as many speaking invitations as you feasibly can. This will give you tremendous visibility, assuming the stages and audience are the right ones



for you. If public speaking is not your thing, do it anyway! © Practice, practice, practice, Join your local Toastmasters. And/or, look into Speaking Circles.

You're not limited to physical stages at in-person events. Proactively **seek out virtual stages**, too. What online events, telesummits, and webinars can you contribute to? Also, seek out guest opportunities on radio and podcast shows. Anytime someone has a chance to **hear your voice** expressing your thought leadership, you increase your chances of getting more invitations to speak!

As I heard recently at the *National Speakers Association* annual convention, "**If you want to speak more**, **speak more**."



"It's a truism that thought leaders tend to be the most successful individuals or firms in their respective fields."

—Forbes.com

I've said for years that there is no amount of sophisticated technology that will ever, ever take the place of real, live, in-person connecting — where you can look into the person's eyes, feel their vibe, and read their body language. However, the next best thing is video, particularly **live** streaming video. As with public speaking, you may need to do your best to overcome fears of being on camera and just go for it. Google Hangouts on Air is a great technology to lead your own webinars.



My friend and fellow social media thought leader, **Jay Baer** – founder of ConvinceAndConvert.com – is a great example of proactively becoming an in-demand speaker. Jay set himself

on a mission to seek out the best stages for his expertise and has continued to appear on grander stages live and virtually.

## 6. Build your tribe.

If you'd like to get on the **fast track to building an audience**, find ways to do so *proactively*. [Just stay away from purchasing fans and followers – I'm not an advocate for that practice at all.] Of all the social networks, Twitter remains the one where you can proactively grow your followers by finding people to follow and many will follow you back.



Use a tool such as **ManageFlitter.com** (or FollowerWonk.com) to search the bios of people you'd most like to connect with: that is, your ideal audience, target market, industry influencers and other resources.

Be sure you also have a consistent daily content strategy because, as people go to check you out, they're going to want to see what you tweet about. If you want more followers, be 'followable!'

Remember to also engage; respond to your @ mentions on Twitter and comments on Facebook. **Consistent quality content + engagement + passionate caring = Growth**.

**Jessica Northey** built a sizeable tribe (587k+ followers on Twitter!) and is a leader in community building and marketing for country music artists.





**Michael Hyatt** is another great example of tribal leadership – he's a prolific content producer and has a fiercely loyal audience who just love his blog, podcast, and events.

# 7. Listen deeply to your audience.

#### Get to know your people inside out.

What keeps them up at night? What are their needs, wants, desires, hopes, and dreams? How can you be their #1 trusted resource?



How are your competitors servicing their customers? Is there a gap that you can fill?

"The most important thing in communication is to hear what isn't being said." —Peter F. Drucker

Armed with as much information as you can gather about your audience, you'll be much better equipped to **produce the best quality content** – free and paid – that solves their problems.

Tap into your Facebook Insights to gather more data on your audience. Also, try out the **advanced analytics** of services like SocialBakers.com.



Consider regularly **surveying your audience**. You can also use some of the survey results to produce a white paper. For example, every year,

SocialMediaExaminer.com produces a **comprehensive industry report** as a result of conducting a detailed survey of its subscribers. The report is one of the most

respected and anticipated tools in the social media world.

## 8. Create your own body of work.



As you produce your own content that you put out there for free, you should definitely also carve out time to **create your own models**, your own graphics and infographics – your own body of work. You can turn this body of work

into information products, books, courses and live events all of which you offer for sale.

Now, this is where some folks may balk. Folks who think you should just give all your content away for free. But that's not a business model, now is it?! Certainly you can do what some Internet marketers call, 'move the free line.' That is, where you do indeed give more of your content away for free, but you're still monetizing the rest.

"Becoming a thought leader is about making money and making history." —Forbes.com

I'm reminded of a wonderful concept that David Allen talks about in his book Getting Things Done – he says we are all knowledge workers. And that knowledge work is never done. You write an article and could easily go back to perfect it and update it a dozen times, but you have to press the pause button and just get it out there at some point. If you've written a book, I'm sure you'll empathize with that feeling – the moment it's in print you want to rewrite whole chapters! © So, on this note of being a knowledge worker, as a thought leader who produces both free and paid content, you'll never run out of ideas because there's no limit to your thoughts!

Some good examples of businesspeople that successfully created their own body of work are:



Sally Hogshead

Creator of the Fascinate personality assessment.

**Joe Pulizzi**Founder of the Content Marketing Institute.





**Brian Clark**Founder of Copyblogger.com.

And an example of an up and coming thought leader is my new friend **Justin Wise**, who recently created an online event called Build Your Influence. Justin features a range of guest experts, including Gary Vaynerchuk and yours truly! (When I first fell in love with Facebook marketing back in 2007, one of the first things I did was

interview leaders on their approach to Facebook for business use; I later turned the recordings into a training product.)

# 9. Attend industry conferences.

Whether you do public speaking or not, for sure research a variety of live events that you can attend locally and nationally, possibly internationally, as well.



There's tremendous benefit to attending industry

conferences: they are often terrific places to see and be seen. You can connect with influencers and industry leaders and begin to **foster genuine relationships**. Be sure to take plenty photos and post on your social sites, if appropriate! You might also consider shooting short video interviews with said leaders.

Prior to attending events, do your research ahead of time. Scour social sites for updates with the event hashtag as one great way to find out more about who's attending. Select a few specific people and set a goal to **personally meet them**.

Whilst attending these events, consider **live tweeting nuggets** with the event hashtag, and/or crafting a summary blog post. These online reporting activities help establish your thought leadership further.



As an example, over the years, I've been blessed to have a great relationship with **Guy Kawasaki**. We connected in

person at a major blogging event around 2008. I then contributed a chapter to Guy's *Enchantment* book and he wrote the foreword for my book on relationship marketing. We also teamed up and created an online social media training program called *Social Midas*. More recently, Guy became the Chief Evangelist of the free image-editing platform, Canva, and I was happy to host a free webinar for my audience featuring Guy and his colleague Peg Fitzpatrick.

## 10. Create 'Radical Strategic Visibility'.

I first coined the term 'Radical Strategic Visibility' in 2007 and it means you're seen in all the right places, by the right people, at the right times. This goes for both the online world and online. It's a power-blend of



both. Depending on where you are at with your career path/business growth, you may wish to be more aggressive in seeking out opportunities to speak, write and provide your expert input.

By diligently applying the steps I'm talking about in this report: that is, passionately writing, speaking, and proactively seeking appropriate opportunities to get your voice out there, the compound effect will naturally kick in. Before you know it, people will be saying to you, "I keep seeing you everywhere." To which you respond, "Fantastic! My marketing is working!" ©

## **Bonus tips:**

The following tips are from another of my special reports, The Ten Tenets of Taming Your Ego in Social Media that I created a few years ago specifically to present to a spiritual group. I felt several of the tips were rather fitting in this Thought Leadership report and help to augment the 'soft skills' that are so important in today's connected world. (In my book,



The New Relationship Marketing, I dedicate an entire chapter to such soft skills.)

- i. Do a gut-check before each post. Before you share anything online, ask yourself, "What is my deepest intent?" "Do I have an agenda here?" Do your best to stay away from anything self-serving. Rather, focus on serving others and you'll deserve amazing success.
  Deserve comes from the Latin root "de servus": of or from service.
- ii. Always add value. We hear this phrase a lot, perhaps it has become diluted what does it mean? R. Buckminster Fuller said it best, "We are not meant to go after money. Instead set a goal that 'adds value'. That is, that improves the quality of people's lives or of the earth." Givers gain it's the law of reciprocity.
- iii. **Focus on quality over quantity**. This goes for both the audience you're building and the content you share. With the audience, it's not a competition or race to get the "biggest numbers." That's a fear of running out of people and with seven billion of us on the planet, there are plenty folks to reach! With content, be rigorous

about only creating and curating the best quality articles, posts, and resources. You'll become known as someone with high standards and a trusted go-to person in your industry. Over time, with a quality network and quality content, you'll exponentially build your presence and business.

- iv. Seek first to understand then to be understood. The more visible you become through social media, the greater the possibility that not everyone will resonate with you ... and some will feel the need to contradict you. If you find yourself in the midst of a challenging situation, best you can, listen very, very intently to what's being said (and what's not being said) before stating your position. Or, in some cases, silence may be the best solution.
- v. **Build everyone up**. By being a beacon of light and love to everyone you meet online and offline you can really make a difference to peoples' days. Encourage and acknowledge others; be personal and use their first name wherever appropriate. A simple 'Thank you,' or 'Congratulations,' or 'You go girl!' can make a huge impact.
- vi. **Keep a sense of humor.** Don't take yourself too seriously. Yes social media marketing is about building your own platform, and you do need to toot your own horn. However, by bringing levity to your interactions, you'll show others that life was not meant to be taken so seriously!!

#### RESOURCES

#### **Books**

- Ready to be a Thought Leader? by Denise Brosseau http://amzn.com/1118647610
- Tribes by Seth Godin: http://amzn.com/1591842336
- Start With Why by Simon Sinek: http://amzn.com/1591842808
- Enchantment by Guy Kawasaki: <a href="http://amzn.com/1591845831">http://amzn.com/1591845831</a>
- The New Relationship Marketing by Mari Smith:
   <a href="http://amzn.com/1118063066">http://amzn.com/1118063066</a>

#### **Articles**

- Rethinking Thought Leadership to Cut Through the Digital Clutter <a href="http://huff.to/UbS3cd">http://huff.to/UbS3cd</a> (via Hufffington Post)
- Do You Have What It Takes To Be A Thought Leader?
   <a href="http://amex.co/111KgV3">http://amex.co/111KgV3</a> (via American Express OPEN Forum)
- How Becoming A Thought Leader Can Build Your Business
   http://onforb.es/111Ksnu (via Forbes)
- 10 Event Thought-Leaders You Should Follow On Twitter
   http://bit.ly/1mT7P6H (via QuickTapSurvey)

#### **Videos**

- The Power of Vulnerability TED Talk by Brené Brown
- http://www.ted.com/talks/brene\_brown\_on\_vulnerability
- Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are TED Talk by Amy Cuddy
- <a href="http://www.ted.com/talks/amy cuddy your body language shapes who you are">http://www.ted.com/talks/amy cuddy your body language shapes who you are</a>
- How Great Leaders Inspire Action TED Talk by Simon Sinek
- http://www.ted.com/talks/simon sinek how great leaders inspire action

#### **Tools**

- Canva: <a href="http://canva.com">http://canva.com</a>
- SocialBakers: http://socialbakers.com
- ManageFlitter: http://manageflitter.com

#### Websites

- Start With Why Simon Sinek: https://startwithwhy.com
- Thought Leadership Lab Denise Brosseau's resources:
   <a href="http://www.thoughtleadershiplab.com/Resources/Linksandldeas">http://www.thoughtleadershiplab.com/Resources/Linksandldeas</a>
- **Build Your Influence** Justin Wise's online event: <a href="http://buildyourinfluence.co">http://buildyourinfluence.co</a>
- **Speaking Circles**: <a href="http://www.speakingcirclesinternational.com">http://www.speakingcirclesinternational.com</a>
- Gary Vaynerchuck: http://garyvaynerchuk.com
- Convince and Convert Jay Baer: http://convinceandconvert.com
- Social Media Examiner Michael Stelzner http://socialmediaexaminer.com
- Michael Hyatt: <a href="http://michaelhyatt.com">http://michaelhyatt.com</a>
- How To Fascinate Sally Hogshead: http://howtofascinate.com
- Content Marketing Institute Joe Pulizzi: http://contentmarketinginstitute.com
- Copyblogger Brian Clark: <a href="http://coppyblogger.com">http://coppyblogger.com</a>

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Tweet = "Check out @MariSmith's new #ThoughtLeader free report!

<a href="http://bit.ly/ThoughtLeaderReport">http://bit.ly/ThoughtLeaderReport</a> (Great tips!)."</a>

### **About Mari Smith**



Mari Smith is hailed as the premier Facebook marketing expert and one of the most influential and knowledgeable new media thought leaders in the world. She has been recognized as a Forbes' Top Ten Social Media Power Influencer four years in a row. She is author of The New Relationship Marketing and coauthor of Facebook Marketing: An Hour A Day. Fast Company dubbed Mari, "a veritable engine of

personal branding, a relationship marketing whiz and the Pied Piper of the Online World." Mari's passion is speaking, teaching, training and coaching via live events and webinars. She works with entrepreneurs and businesses of all sizes around the world. On a personal note, Mari is a founding member of the Southern California chapter of The Association of Transformational Leaders and works with many spiritual teachers and new age thought leaders, supporting them with their social media mastery. Born in Canada to Scottish parents, Mari lived in Scotland for two decades before moving to San Diego, California in 1999.

#### **Connect with Mari:**

Facebook: <u>www.facebook.com/marismith</u>

Twitter: @marismith

Instagram @mari\_smith

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LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/marismith

Website: <u>www.marismith.com</u>

Hire Mari to speak at your next event: <a href="www.marismith.com/training">www.marismith.com/training</a>