



PAYMENTS THOUGHT LEADERSHIP PLAYBOOK

How to Win More Business by Reaching the
Right Prospects at the Right Time with the
Right Message

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Introduction

In the past few years, we've worked with a number of payments companies of all sizes. Many are focused on serving ecommerce merchants. Some are gift card processors catering to Fortune 50 companies. Others provide the technology and domain expertise that help build disruptive payments products. They all had one thing in common before working with us: they built world class payments products but struggled to 1) create effective messaging around those products that resonated with their target audience, and 2) get that messaging in front of the right people at the right time.

It's the status quo in the payments space. All the resources go toward product development and marketing is an afterthought. We're not here to judge! Frankly, it's the status quo in many industries. But it's a death sentence for payment service providers, who are swimming in a highly competitive sea where new companies are emerging daily.

We put together this guide as a high-level checklist for payments companies to evaluate their current marketing program against.



What is Thought Leadership?

What is Thought Leadership?

Before we launch into the effective creation and dissemination of thought leadership as part of a holistic marketing strategy, it's beneficial to understand what thought leadership actually is.

Thought leadership taps into a company's domain expertise to create content that adds value by presenting helpful information and/or solutions about and for pain points and problems their target audience has.

Thought leadership can take the form of a video, white paper, ebook, article, Q&A, event, webinar, case study, or content that illustrates your brand's authoritative knowledge. The key is to harness your brand's know-how and experience and package it into a unique, in-depth, and thorough piece of content that provides value to your audience.



Basics of Thought Leadership

LEADERS...

- Inspire
- Educate
- Take Risks
- Challenge the Status Quo

THOUGHT LEADERS...

- Are a Trusted Voice
- Have Authoritative Knowledge
- Have Deep Experience
- Are Not Afraid of Controversy

EFFECTIVE THOUGHT LEADERSHIP ADDRESSES...

- Issues & Challenges
- Questions
- Market Pain Points

Thought Leadership Must Have...

- OUTSIDE OPINIONS TO SUPPORT (AND DISPUTE) YOUR IDEAS
- A STRONG POV
- DATA-BACKED FACTS
- OUTSIDE-OF-THE-BOX THINKING
- IN-DEPTH COVERAGE (LONG-FORM CONTENT IS BEST FOR GOOGLE AND TO ADEQUATELY COVER SUBJECT MATTER)

The Value of Thought Leadership

Understanding the benefits of thought leadership is integral before investing time and resources. Thought leadership should be tied into an overarching marketing strategy. Brands that align this element with overall marketing priorities and objectives will see the best return on investment.

Thought leadership is typically leveraged within content marketing efforts. Content marketing has become table stakes for companies of all types who want to succeed in the digital world, and thought leadership is sometimes overlooked as a critical element to a successful content marketing program. According to the Content Marketing Institute, 91% of B2B businesses report using content marketing.

The value of thought leadership is that it can elevate your brand's messaging beyond basic content marketing tactics. By creating compelling, forward-thinking, unique content, brands can build up their authority and reputation within a specific industry or on a specific topic. This, in turn, builds trust and relationships with your target audience. By injecting value into your content, you make people feel good about your brand, which ultimately impacts your bottom line. Here's how:

INCREASED VISIBILITY

People share great content. Creating valuable content makes people more inclined to share, raising awareness about your brand. Historically, the media creates and covers stories. Thought leadership enables your brand to own, create, and drive stories in the marketplace.

INCREASED ORGANIC TRAFFIC

When you publish high-quality content on your site, implement search engine optimization (SEO) best practices, repurpose long-form content into shareable snippets for multiple channels, and do a good job promoting all of that content, you get more organic traffic to your site. That's more opportunities to convert.

LEAD GENERATION

Offering high-quality, compelling content behind a gate typically inspires people to trade their contact information for your thought leadership content. That contact information can be used by marketing and sales to move people closer to a conversion. Conversions boost your bottom line.

DEMAND GENERATION

Offering high-quality content that is available to the masses can drive increased awareness and demand for your products and services. It also allows you to own your brand story and create interest in the topics you have deep experience in.

Insights On Lead Generation

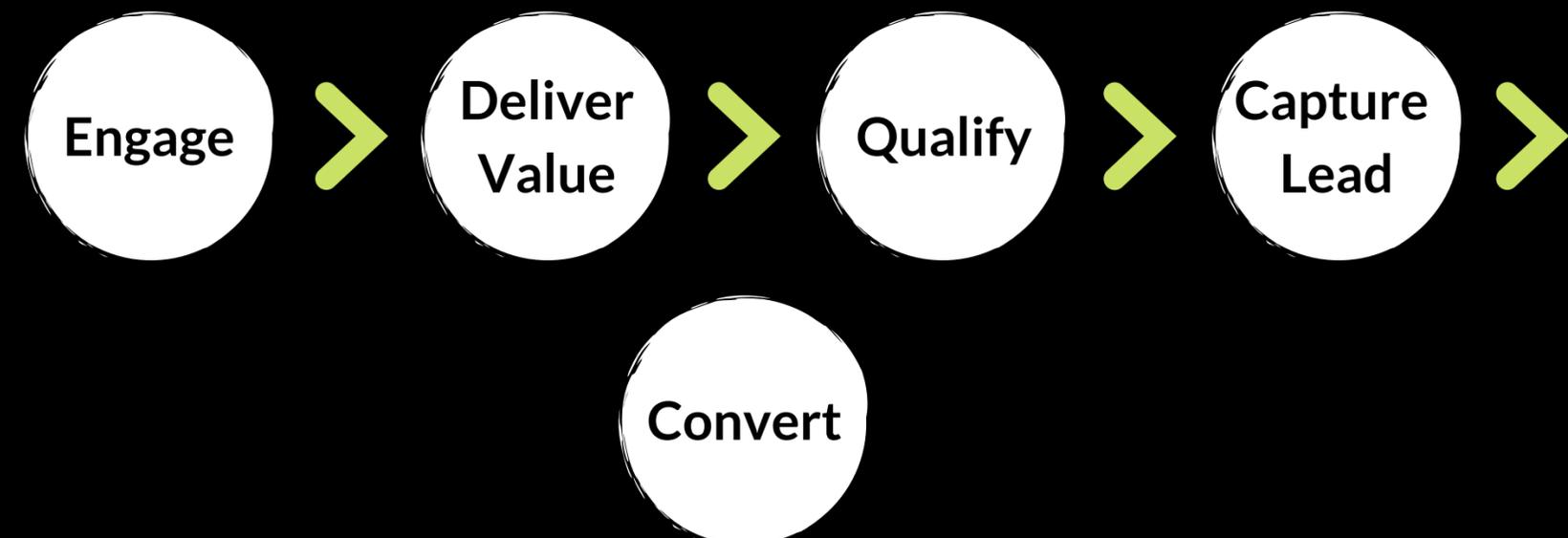
The thing about thought leadership that adds immediate value is that your leads already believe they've received something from you...for free. And they have. The more specific your thought leadership content is, the better qualified your leads will be.

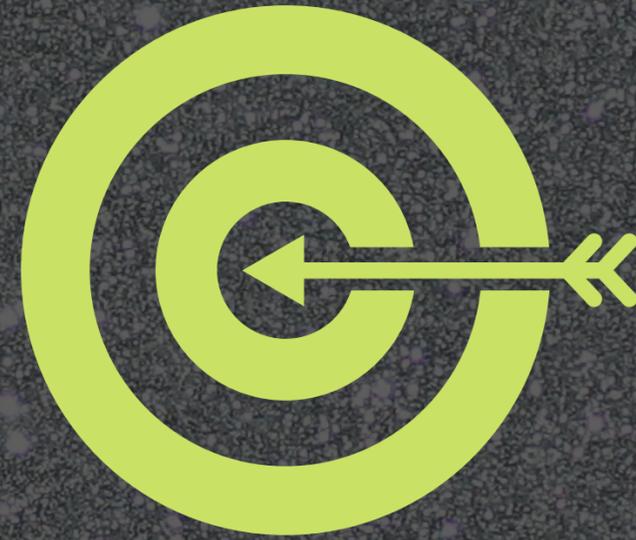
It's also important to remember that a lead nurture strategy is an important part of any lead generation campaign. Later, we'll discuss how your thought leadership can be chunked up and re-used for different content pieces, including lead nurture content.

TRADITIONAL **LEAD GENERATION** LOOKS LIKE THIS:



EFFECTIVE **THOUGHT LEADERSHIP** CHANGES THE GAME:





How to Create Thought Leadership Strategy

Creating an Effective Thought Leadership Strategy

A great thought leadership strategy will enable brands to answer an audience's most pressing questions and help solve their most serious problems. This requires good planning and effective execution. The result is moving targets closer to a conversion by continuing to provide relevant, valuable information at regular intervals while removing doubts and objections and building your brand's credibility for that audience.

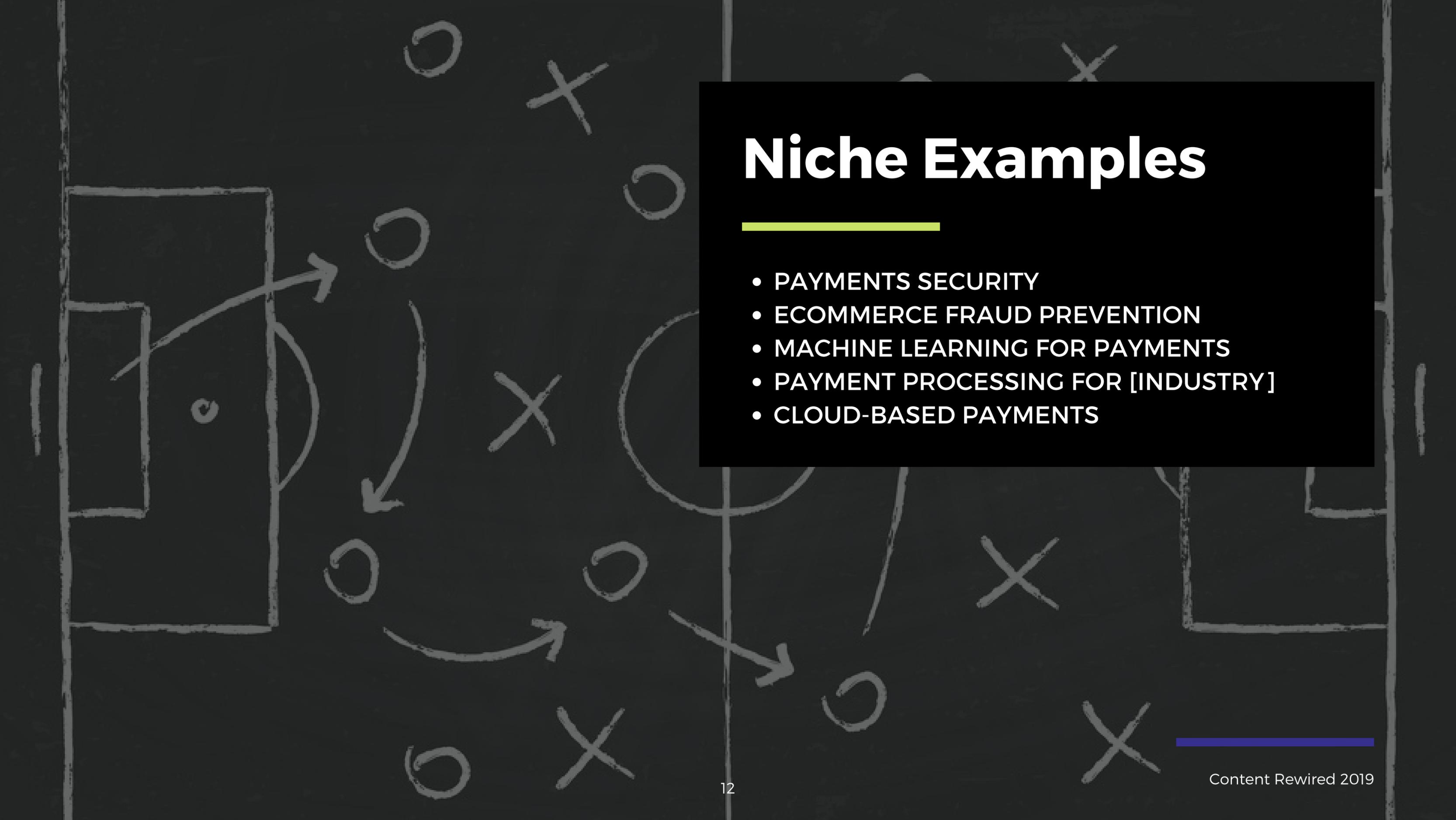
So what does an effective thought leadership strategy look like?



Documenting Your Area of Expertise

This may seem obvious but it's a necessary exercise in order to produce the most meaningful content. In some cases, your area of expertise will be straightforward; you may be a chargeback remediation company, so your best thought leadership content will focus on that topic. For companies that have a larger area of focus—like payment processors—it is more important to accurately determine the best thought leadership niche.

In identifying your niche, it's important to nail down precisely what you do and which of your products and services make you an authority. So a payment processor doesn't necessarily have to talk about the life cycle of a transaction (though that's not entirely out of scope), but may want to hone in on best practices for accepting credit card payments online for merchants. Not only does this align with the brand's area of authority, but it provides helpful information to a key audience: online merchants. That's the sweet spot for thought leadership: the intersection of your expertise and helpful information for your target audience.



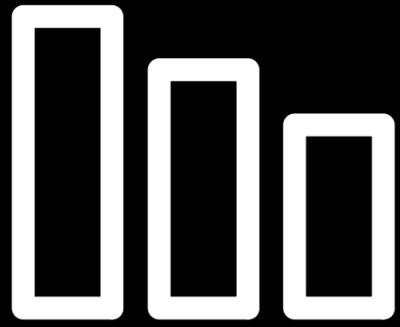
Niche Examples

- PAYMENTS SECURITY
- ECOMMERCE FRAUD PREVENTION
- MACHINE LEARNING FOR PAYMENTS
- PAYMENT PROCESSING FOR [INDUSTRY]
- CLOUD-BASED PAYMENTS

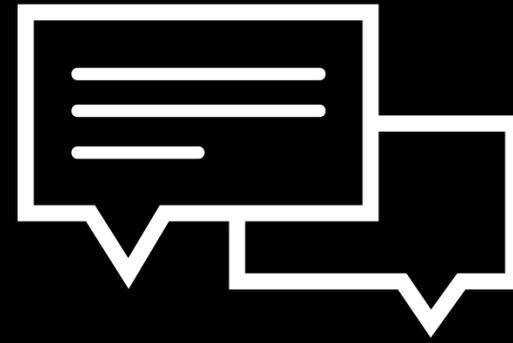
Understanding What Your Audience Needs to Know

To continually hit the sweet spot, it's imperative to thoroughly understand what it is your audience is looking for. Strategic thought leadership answers an audience's most pressing questions in order to be useful and to move the audience closer to a conversion.

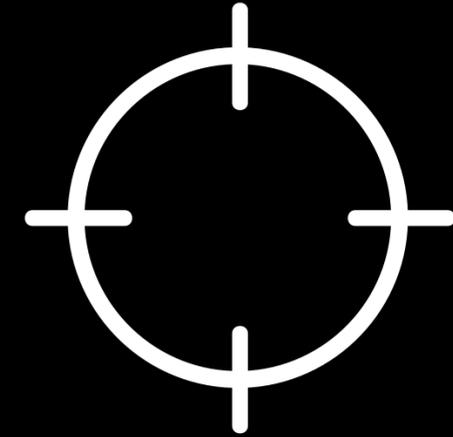
Honing in on the most pressing questions and most problematic challenges requires somewhat of a scientific approach. There are a few ways to mine what your audience is looking for.



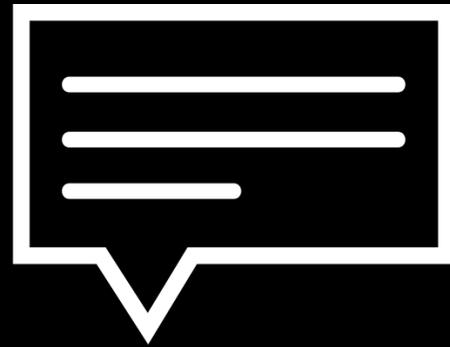
Keyword Research



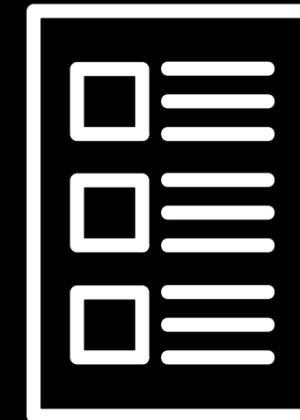
Forum Research



Competitive Research



Inbox/Customer Support



Persona Development

Keyword Research

Keyword research should be a foundational exercise for any content marketing program. You want to ensure your high-quality content derives SEO benefits. Keyword research can help you produce meaningful, SEO-friendly content that helps you rank in search engines. Subsequently, it can improve your inbound results, boost visibility and traffic to your website, and move prospects through your funnel. But it can also help you tap into what types of words, topics, and questions your target audience is searching—which provides fodder for your thought leadership content.

To get a better grasp of what these search terms and phrases might be, consider the following workflow:

Build a List of Generic Topics

Create a list of generic "bucket" terms that apply to your business. What are the broad topics people may search for and that you want to rank for in results? E.g., "payment processing", "payment gateway", etc.



Keyword Research (cont.)

Hone in on More Specific Phrases

Take the terms from Step 1 above and flesh them out to be more specific. For example, “payment processing” could morph into “payment processing for insurance”. The term “payment gateway” may be more accurate as “mobile payment gateway”. The goal is to brainstorm as many relevant phrases as possible. These represent phrases people may search for to find content on a related subject.

Build Out Related Search Terms

Use Google to determine other search terms that might be relevant. Type in some of the core keywords and phrases you already documented and see what Google suggests as “Searches related to x” (at the bottom of Google's results).

Add the relevant recommended searches to your list. Also try tapping into Google’s auto-suggest feature: type in one of your basic queries and see how Google fills in the blanks. It may drum up more ideas that you initially overlooked.



Keyword Research (cont.)

Turn Words & Phrases into Questions

Turn your existing list of keywords and phrases into relevant questions. For example, “payment processing for insurance” may yield questions like “how do I streamline payment processing for insurance?” or “managing risk in payment processing for insurance”. These questions tend to be much more specific and lend themselves well to content topics and titles. When ideating these types of questions, act like a journalist and cover the Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How of the keyphrase at hand.

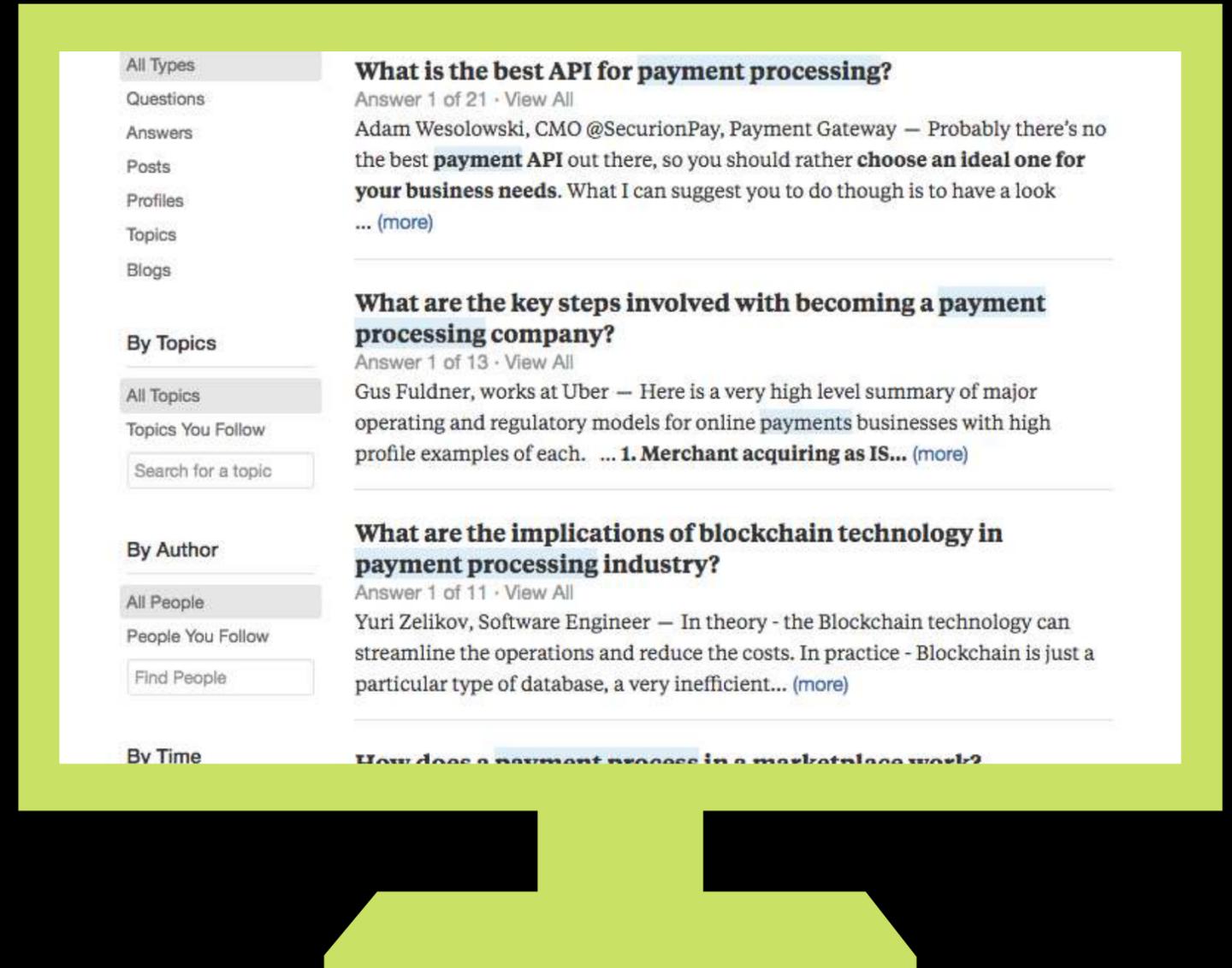
Keep a Running List and Add New Phrases & Questions Regularly

Effective thought leadership is an ongoing process during which you deliver fresh content at a regular cadence. To populate new ideas, it’s important to continually add to your list of phrases and questions. Use tools like Google's Keyword Planner, Google Trends, and paid tools like SEMrush to gather valuable insights on what your audience is searching for, peaks in search volume (which could indicate seasonality), and competition level. It may also illustrate changes in interest levels on certain topics and trigger new ideas for thought leadership content.

Forum Research

Forums like Quora or industry-specific communities are treasure troves for researching your audience's top questions. Simply search your basic keywords and see what types of questions people are asking.

An added benefit is that you may be able to leverage some of the already-provided answers to build your outline for these content pieces. For newer questions that may have zero answers, earmark the link. This will be a ideal place to drop a link to your finished, published thought leadership when the time comes.



Inbox/Customer Support

Many companies overlook the value of content sitting in their inbox (or incoming mail/messages from customer support channels). Look to your sent folder for helpful answers/information you've already provided to prospective or current customers. Those answers can be respun into more in-depth thought leadership pieces that include a more detailed dive into the issue at hand.

Competitive Research

Looking to what your competitors are doing is a great way to get a handle on anything you may have missed up to this point in your research. Make a list of your top three competitors and peruse their blogs, resource centers, press releases, and other published content for topic ideas that you may have overlooked.

Persona Development

Audience personas help you gain insight into prospective customers and influencers so you can create compelling, engaging content tailored to their needs.

You want to spend some time on this step, otherwise your entire content marketing program could be a total bust. You want to be focused and deliberate in your content development and that requires a deep understanding of the people for whom you're creating content. The idea is "tell, don't sell" and to "tell" effectively, you need to understand what appeals to your audience. Don't shotgun it.

It may be tempting to jump right into content creation, but your mantra should always be quality over quantity. Quality requires data and data requires research.

Personas are research-based representations of your ideal audience(s). Note, this may be – and usually is – plural. It can be tempting to pigeonhole your audience into one distinct box, but the truth is that decision makers have different motivations, different goals, and different preferred content consumption methods. These should all be accounted for in your personas. Let's map out the foundation of a basic audience persona template:

Sarah



"I need a single platform for processing premiums and claims payments that also integrates with our core systems."

Age: 44

Work: Chief Technology Company (Insurance)

Family: Married

Location: New York, New York

Goals

- Platform for secure payment processing
- Streamline reporting and reconciliation
- System to engage policyholders on their preferred channels

Frustrations

- Need to reduce admin expenses
- Looking to free up treasury and IT resources

Bio

Sarah has worked for X Insurance Company for the past 7 years. She has been actively searching for an Insurance Payments Processor for the past 12 months to provide a better customer experience for customers.

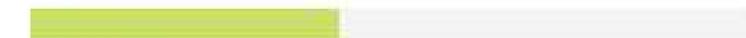
She has a strong technology background as well as deep knowledge of the insurance space. She wants a company that will shoot straight and partner with her company for the best results.

Motivation

Incentive



Fear



Growth



Power



Social

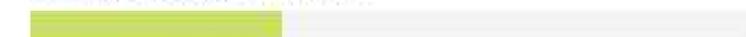


Preferred Channels

Traditional Ads



Online & Social Media

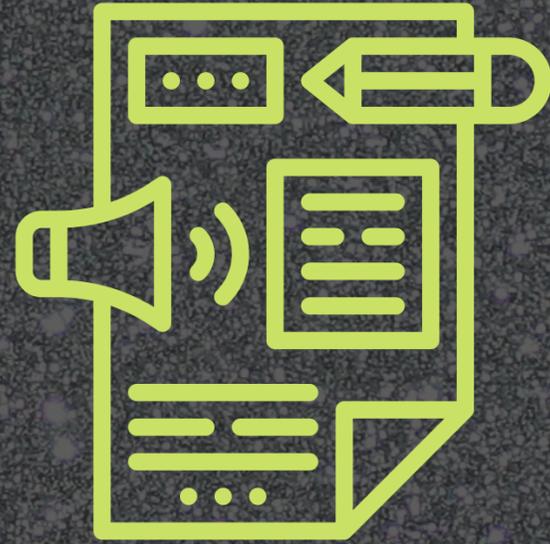


Referral



Guerrilla Efforts & PR





How to Create Thought Leadership Content

CREATING THOUGHT LEADERSHIP CONTENT THAT ADDS VALUE



FINDING THE RIGHT
MEDIUM



ESTABLISHING A
WORKFLOW



CREATING HIGH-
QUALITY CONTENT

Finding the Right Medium

Once you've done due diligence on researching topics, you can begin creating your thought leadership content. Your personas should be especially helpful in determining what types of content to create. You may have found that your audience prefers to consume video content, so your thought leadership should take advantage of that media format.

Let's explore the different types of content you may want to consider:



Blog Posts

Written content, typically conversational in tone and voice, that allows you or your company to provide insights on relevant topics.

PROS

It is generally easy to create and publish quickly.

CONSIDERATIONS

Thought leadership content that dives deep into relevant topics can be great as part of your blog mix, but you will also need to incorporate more basic educational pieces focused on core keywords to keep organic traffic to your site flowing in. Each plays a critical role in moving people closer to a conversion, so be sure you have these baked into your overall content marketing strategy to meet your objectives.

PROS

Leveraging sites with existing, targeted audiences to get in front of new eyeballs can broaden your reach.

CONSIDERATIONS

Your content is not being published on an owned channel, so you do not derive the SEO or traffic benefits of that content.

Guest Posts

Guest posts are a great way to get your thought leadership in front of new audiences that you might not otherwise connect with. Reaching out to relevant sites to have them publish your pieces can open new doorways and relationships with other, already-built up audiences.

White Papers

Thought leadership much more substantial than articles and blog posts that dive deep into topics related to your industry. A white paper should offer unique and key insights into trends, projections or market research surrounding that topic.

PROS

These can be gated pieces of content that live on your site, which means you collect user information (name, company, email address) each time someone downloads the white paper. This is a great lead generation tool. These can also be reworked into sales collateral as a benefit to your sales team.

CONSIDERATIONS

Without a good outreach and promotion strategy, these can fall flat. Make sure you consider how you will distribute and promote your white paper before investing the time and resources.

PROS

Similarly to a white paper, these are great lead generation tools if you choose to gate them. Even if not gated, they make great value added content pieces for your site . They, too, can be repurposed and leveraged for sales.

CONSIDERATIONS

You also need a good outreach and promotion strategy for ebooks. Offer solid, unique content. With so many businesses doing content marketing, it can be tempting to offer a replica of another brand's ebook content. This defeats the purpose of investing in thought leadership.

eBooks

This one is tricky because it can really be almost any type of content – or combination of content pieces – packaged as an online book. Length, tone/voice, and themes can vary widely.

Videos

There are several different categories of videos that can serve as thought leadership. Topical videos educate and inform viewers on a topic or trend. Interview videos may feature a subject matter expert exploring details of a specific topic. Animated videos can combine education and entertainment or be tied to a specific campaign.

PROS

Videos are highly shareable pieces of content. If you do a good job producing a compelling video, it could go viral. Video is a great medium for building trust, especially when people are featured. It enables viewers to feel like they are connecting with your brand on a more personal level.

CONSIDERATIONS

Poorly-produced videos can do a lot of harm. If you choose to invest in this medium, be sure you get it right. Releasing a sub-par video can actually detract from your brand's reputation, destroying trust in your abilities as an industry leader.

PROS

Podcasts are also shareable types of content. They are convenient for the audience. Your audience can tune in on-the-go, unlike a white paper, which requires them to sit down and read.

CONSIDERATIONS

Podcasts require a good amount of planning and production. Be sure you have the necessary resources to invest in this medium, or you can end up with a poorly-produced audio file that people are not interested in listening to.

Podcasts

Audio content that users can download to their computer or a portable media player. Podcasts are often created as a series and many businesses ask users to subscribe and receive the newest podcasts delivered directly.

Establishing a Workflow

Establishing a workflow is a critical component to effective thought leadership creation. This is where you streamline content production and get your thought leadership ducks in a row.

TIMING &
CADENCE

ALIGN
TEAMS

PROCESS

CONTENT
CALENDAR

WORKFLOW

Define Timing & Cadence

Publishing frequency is a key consideration. You need to account for the content resources you have available as well as how quickly you expect to reach your goals. Then you can start to think about how frequently you will publish content.

A good cadence may look like:

- Thought Leadership Blog-1x/month
- Infographic-1x/quarter
- White paper-1x/quarter
- Thought Leadership Guest Post-1x/month

Build a Process

Processes are super important for efficient and effective thought leadership creation. Here are a few considerations when it comes to processes and standards:

- Ensure 90-day lead time on content calendar buildout that includes the thought leadership topics you will cover.
- Be sure everyone is aware of their roles, including content creators, subject matter experts, third party vendors, and others.
- Build an internal resource center where people can find tone/voice guidelines, branding protocol, writing/citation styles (APA, MLA, Chicago, etc.), and other important tools to streamline the creation of content.

WORKFLOW

Align Teams

Whether you're using an in-house team or outsourcing to freelancers, be sure to give content creators the information and insights they need to successfully do their jobs.

- Make sure all have access to content calendars
- Provide briefs to help guide content development
- Consider using project management tools like Trello, Wrike, or others to manage content flow

Hold a bi-weekly content marketing meeting to align teams and share new ideas. Once your content marketing program becomes a well-oiled machine, this will also be the time people can report back on results, share insights learned during the process, and map out new tests to try.

Document Plans

Now it's time to take all this groundwork and begin mapping out an action plan. The best way to do this is with a content calendar. A content calendar will:

- Unify your thought leadership campaigns and supporting content
- Help you see what your 90-day outlook is (how much content needs to be created and which resources you will need)
- Work towards lead generation or other marketing goals
- Create powerful campaigns that are easily shared and coordinated among team members
- Provide team members with everything they need to be successful
- Benchmark your success and tie results back to content

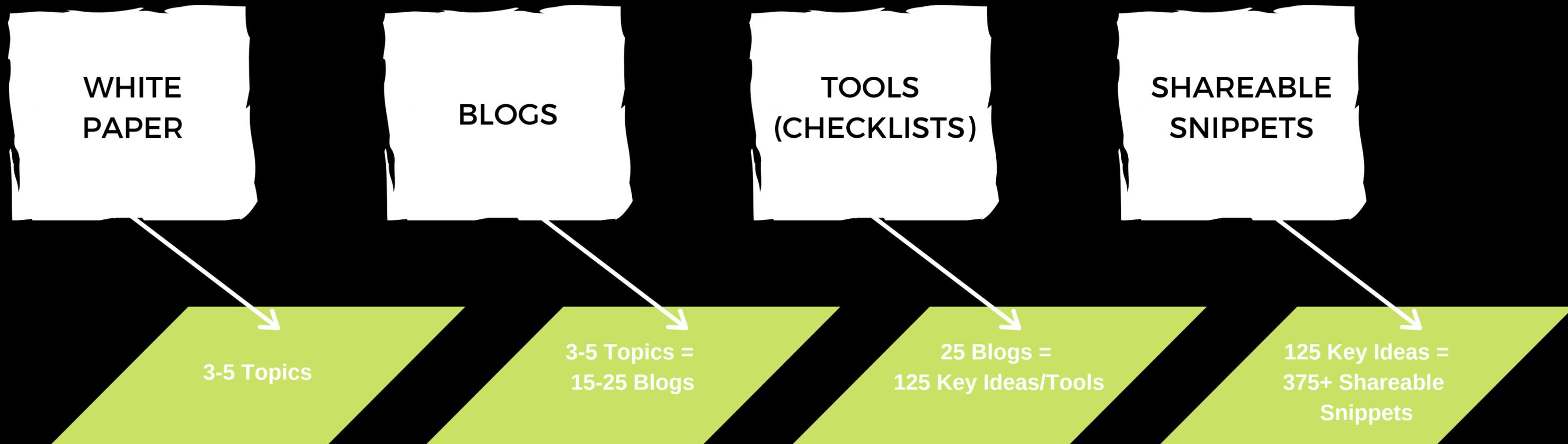
Creating High-Quality Content

You now have everything you need to start producing high-quality thought leadership content. Remember that your thought leadership should:

- Help your audience solve their biggest problems
- Address their gnawing questions and information gaps
- Be educational and helpful
- Be high-quality and make the life of your targeted visitor better
- Take risks!

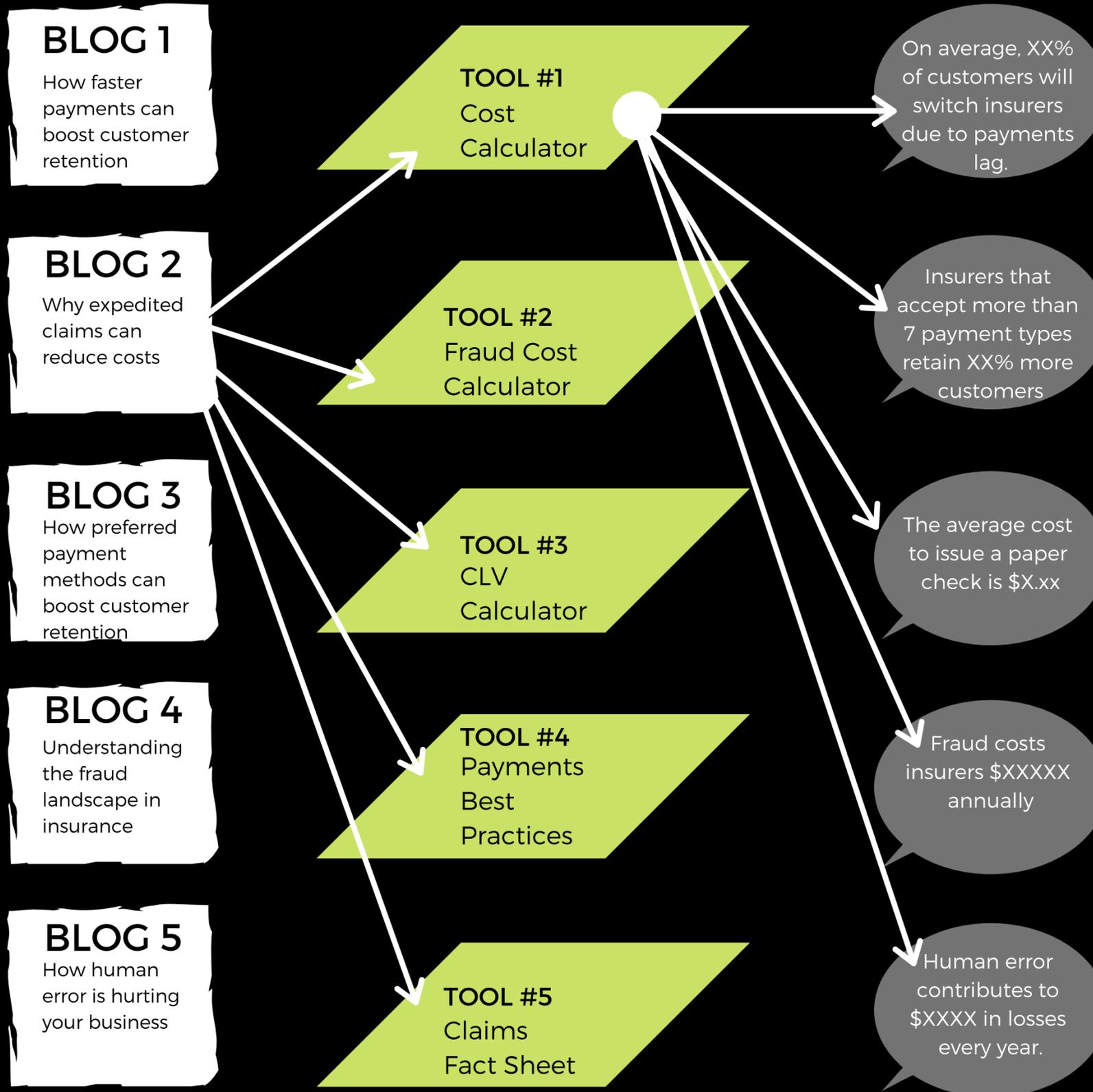
Don't forget that you will want to repurpose this content for other channels as well. Let's look at an ebook as an example. An ebook may cover 3-5 different topics, giving you a lot of content that can be spun into other pieces.

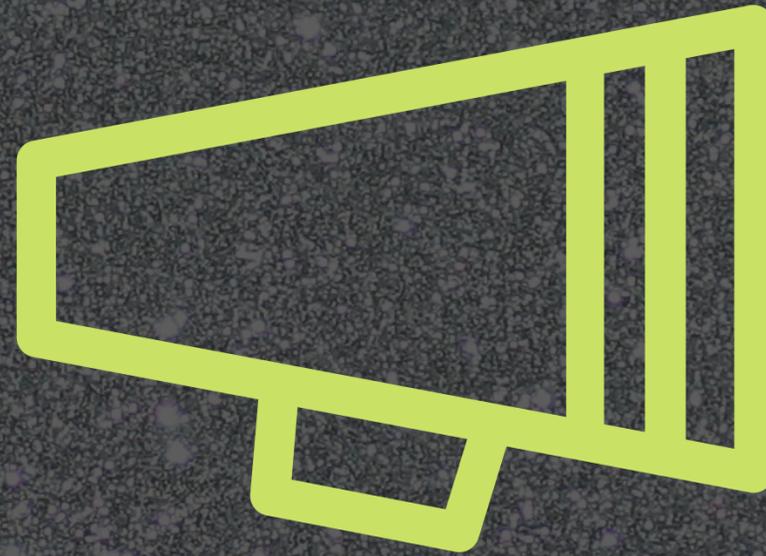




CUSTOMER PROBLEM

Abiding by procedures and regulations in place for paying a claim has traditionally been done by issuing checks via snail mail, increasing risks related to fraud and human error.





Amplifying Thought Leadership Content

Right Eyes, Right Time

Great thought leadership content is useless without promotion to get it in front of the right eyes at the right time. Use social media, blog posts, convertibles, guest posting, press releases and more to let people know about your content.

Each channel will likely have different objectives, particularly for B2B payments companies that have a longer sales/engagement cycle. It can be helpful to map out the objectives for each channel and where they fall in the buyer's journey. Consider product pages, landing pages, social platforms, email, and blog posts to start.





PAID

- Website
- Mobile Site
- Blog Site
- Social Media Channels

OWNED

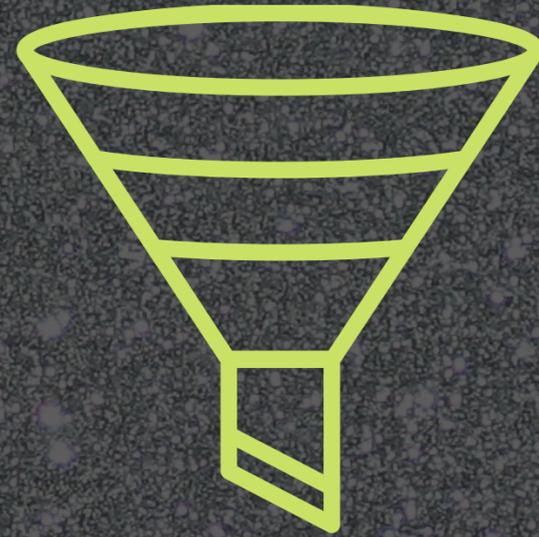
- Website
- Mobile Site
- Blog Site
- Social Media Channels

EARNED

- Social Mentions
- Social Shares
- Reposts
- Reviews

Opportunities for Thought Leadership Promotion & Distribution

-  Use callout quotes from a Q&A session or a white paper to promote your thought leadership on social channels.
-  Convert testimonials from case studies into infographics for social sharing.
-  Convert parts of white papers or reports to blog posts or guest posts that can be used to drive traffic back to landing pages.
-  Repackage research data used in white papers to infographics for social sharing.
-  Convert testimonials from case studies into infographics for social sharing.



Thought Leadership to Generate Leads

Thought Leadership for Lead Generation

Great content is the foundation of successful lead generation. High-quality content offers real value to your audience, facilitates engagement, educates, inspires, and compels people to take action.

Thought leadership naturally lends itself to effective lead generation because it should be a piece of content that identifies the biggest pain points in your industry and presents solutions.



Needed Elements

Lead Magnet

A lead magnet is something of value you offer to the prospect in exchange for their contact information. It compels a trade. Good examples of lead magnets are:

- White papers
- Ebooks
- Guides

These are gated pieces of content that compel visitors to trade their contact information for access.

Landing Pages

In order to successfully execute the “trade” portion of lead generation, where you provide valuable content in exchange for contact information, you need to have a way to collect that contact information.

Enter landing pages.

Your landing page is where you make a first impression with prospects; these should be dedicated pages with a single objective (e.g., promoting your ebook, white paper, report, etc.)

Needed Elements

Call-to-Action (CTA)

A CTA is a statement designed to compel an immediate action from the person reading it. It's an essential part of the landing page that gets your target audience to take a desired action.

Lead Nurture Emails

Your job isn't over after creating an excellent piece of thought leadership and publishing a landing page on your website. Once people fill out the form, you'll want to continue to engage them. Many may not be ready to convert yet, so you want to continue to add value and stay top-of-mind.

Lead nurture emails help you do this. Setting up a nurture sequence of five to seven emails is a digital way of tapping your lead on the shoulder and then giving them something they want or need. These emails must be relevant, conversational, coordinated and strategic. A great tip is to incorporate related and recent blog posts as a way of providing additional value. Remember to include a CTA to keep moving the lead closer to a conversion. It might be to set up a phone call or to view a demo.

About Content Rewired



Your Partner in Payments Content

Content Rewired specializes in the strategy and execution of custom content marketing programs for fintech companies. As a custom content and digital marketing shop, we excel in creating industry-tailored white papers, articles and thought leadership for fintech companies as well as digital marketing and distribution strategy and support. We serve clients in Payments, Insurtech, Regtech, IoT, Blockchain, and more.

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