

Thought leadership key for B2B in economic downturn

Edelman and LinkedIn's fifth annual [B2B Thought Leadership Impact Report](#), offers insight into the buying behaviours of B2B decision-makers and C-suite executives during an economic downturn.



Source: © SEJ [SEJ](#) High-quality thought leadership is more important for B2B marketers during an economic downturn

This year's study reveals that high-quality thought leadership will be more important than ever for organisations seeking to break through with decision-makers at current and prospective clients. It also identifies what B2B decision-makers and C-suite executives expect from thought leadership during this time.

Simply put, thought leadership refers to content that is made available for free and shares insightful and unique perspectives in your field of expertise to help solve customer problems.

Businesses around the world are facing a potential economic downturn that will disrupt many aspects of their operations, services, and activities. For many B2B companies, it is likely that budgets will tighten while sales cycles will extend – forcing decision-makers and C-suite executives to take a hard look at which partners are critical to running the business, and which are not.

The report taps the collective perspective of nearly 3,500 management-level professionals to help marketers, communicators and salespeople understand the value that thought leadership can provide amid times of great uncertainty.

The findings shed light on how an organisation can refresh and improve the way it approaches and delivers thought leadership.

Key findings

1. Most B2B companies are planning for an economic downturn in 2023

That means it's going to be more challenging than ever for suppliers to get the attention of decision-makers and successfully pass the procurement process.

The research finds that B2B companies are busy preparing for stormy times. 64% of C-suite executives say their organisations have tightened up their procurement process in anticipation of looming challenges. Additionally, 44% of decision-makers say they will be personally less receptive to sales calls and marketing outreach if a downturn hits.

The bottom line is that it will be harder than ever to break through and win business.



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Kate Walters 5 Dec 2022



2. If a downturn does materialise, those products and services deemed non-critical will likely be first on the chopping block

Sellers navigating a stricter procurement process cannot just “meet the brief” and expect success. Instead, they must prove they are essential to helping prospective customers succeed, even during tough times.

Some products and services will remain critical to customers' business operations – their value will not be in question. Everyone else, however, will need to prove that they are worth the investment of valuable resources.

Despite this gloomy reality, there is a flicker of good news. The research found that 91% of decision-makers say that non-business-critical providers can still take important actions to increase their chances of surviving a more cutthroat environment. In particular, 54% of decision-makers say that such companies can increase their chances of winning business by proving that they will increase profit margins or minimise losses, while 52% say they can do so by showing they can help them outperform, or take market share, from competitors.

3. Thought leadership

This is one of the most effective tools an organisation can use to demonstrate its value to customers during a tough economy – even more so than traditional advertising or product marketing, according to B2B buyers.

In B2B marketing, it's well known that nothing matches the value of a direct referral. But among the many tactics in the marketer's toolbox – advertising, trade shows, in-person sales pitches and more – thought leadership emerges as the most effective in demonstrating a provider's potential value.

In fact, downturns can heighten the power of thought leadership in helping organisations win business.

Research shows that 50% of C-suite executives say that high quality thought leadership has more impact on their purchase decision-making during economic downturns than when times are good.



4. Decision-makers expect high-quality thought leadership

These offer a strong, data-backed point of view on how to succeed during a downturn. And they report it can make a difference in winning their business. Research over the past four years demonstrates that while good thought leadership can strengthen a business' position in the marketplace, it's always been difficult to capture the attention of customers.

For providers deemed non-critical, breaking through during a downturn will require thought leadership that's finely tuned both to broader economic realities and the specifics of a customer's industry.

In this regard, decision-makers expect the following of thought leadership from providers:

- Demonstrates an understanding of their organisation's major pain points. (43%)
- Identifies new opportunities or industry trends stemming from the economic downturn (48%).

It's important to recognise that many of those who consume thought leadership also produce it. Of the thought leadership consumers surveyed, nearly 1,000 of them work for organisations that also produce their own thought leadership.

Moreover, they tend to have high expectations for the thought leadership they publish. Specifically, 60% expect it to keep their brand and capabilities top of mind during a downturn even among clients or prospects who cannot buy from them because of budget constraints. And 49% expect it to protect their current client relationships from disruption or shrinkage.

5. Producers of thought leadership have high expectations for its ability to support their business during a downturn

Yet, many have low confidence in its quality. This period of unpredictability offers an opportunity for B2B companies to improve the way they deliver thought leadership and measure its impact.

There is an opportunity to better measure thought leadership's impact – and, importantly, connect it to business wins. Research shows that just 40% of thought leadership producers say they measure its effectiveness by linking business wins back to specific pieces of content. Rather, the most common way their organisations determine effectiveness is by looking for increased website and social media traffic (51%) – a metric too broad to be meaningful in this regard.

As we enter a period of uncertainty, there is an opportunity for B2B companies to improve how they deliver thought leadership and measure its impact. Doing so can help you position your products and services as vital to your customers' success during a challenging period.

(Source: [5th annual B2B Thought Leadership Impact Report](#))