

It is thought leadership that will empower you to differentiate your financial brand as the subject matter expert in the communities that you serve. Sheila asks, "Is there a difference between thought leadership and content marketing?" Well, that's a great question, Sheila, and one that I look forward to answering for you on today's episode of Banking on Digital Growth.

Greetings and hello. Thank you for tuning into the 97th episode of the Banking on Digital Growth podcast, where I, , your digital anthropologist and coach guide you along your digital growth journey as you commit to guide people beyond their financial stress towards a bigger, better and brighter future.

Today's episode is part of the Inside Digital Growth series and I'll be answering a question from Sheila, a content and communication professional at a financial brand on the east coast. Once again, Sheila asked, "Is there a difference between thought leadership and content marketing?"

Well, first off, Sheila, content marketing is exactly what it sounds like, you produce content. For example, blog posts, videos, images, social media posts, podcasts even, and that content is going to contain the messages that you want to communicate to your ideal market segment.

Now, we define content marketing here at the Digital Growth Institute as well-defined systems and processes that position a financial brand as the expert within the communities that financial brand serves to work towards three specific goals. Number one, to attract the right people. Number two, to capture and nurture relationships online, specifically digitally, and then number three, to create value for the financial brand by creating value for the right people that the financial brand is nurturing relationships through this content to ultimately convert those leads into loans and deposits.

Now, this is not done by using content. Once again, what is content? Blog articles, videos, images, social media posts, podcasts. This is not done by producing and promoting content that promotes the same commoditized products and services, the lookalike laundry list of bullet features that every other financial brand is promoting and offering. This is done by positioning the financial brand as the premier expert in the communities that the financial brand serves.

And it's this last point of positioning around expertise or of banking on expertise, if you will, this is where thought leadership comes into play as thought leadership is established through the production and promotion of insightful compelling content that brings something new, bring something of value to the audience. Thought leadership is in fact part of a content marketing strategy and can be used to establish expertise and spotlight your financial brand as the leader in your community.

I'll put that another way. Content marketing can be independent of thought leadership, but thought leadership is dependent upon content marketing. And thought leadership will require some type of research around a particular topic or subject area. So for example, buying a home, and more specifically, buying a home in your local community. I think this is where there's an opportunity to build some deeper level local community expertise or starting a business in your state, doing some research around the local market. What are some of the questions? What are some of the concerns? What are some of the pain points that people feel and experience when doing X, Y, or Z, buying a home, starting a business, buying a car, getting married?

On the flip side, what are the opportunities? What are the trends? What are the patterns? What are the hopes and dreams that people have in these stages of life? And then use this research, which research,

at its root, should be framed around pattern matching, use this research to craft your thought leadership, and use the thought leadership to position yourself, your financial brand as the expert lender for small businesses in the Houston market, as the expert home lender in the Florida market.

All of this thought leadership that you gain from the research that you do, and more importantly, from the insights you share, that's what you package up through the content that you produce and promote, the videos, the podcasts, the articles, and the articles more specifically optimize for local SEO search and then can be shared and distributed even further via social media posts that can be boosted and optimized and also can be utilized to share from internal team members to help build up their own personal brands.

And for thought leadership to be a success, you're going to have to commit to go all in on consumer personas. This is why I think so many financial brands struggle with content marketing, let alone thought leadership, because they have not planted a flag in the ground into who the personas that they are going to go all in on in the first place.

And going all in on consumer personas is an acronym, ALL, and then you can add another L at the end if you want. The first A is simply asking, asking questions. That's your research. The number two is just listening, listening to what people have to say. And there's a lot that can be done and learned and gained by asking and listening. That brings us to the second L, which is learning. And then and only then you can come to the final L, which is to launch content framed around answering the questions that people have.

And on this idea of going all in, asking, listening, and learning, and then you launch your content, not the other way around, because I see a lot of financial brands just launching content, producing content, and it's not framed around any specific questions or concerns, or if it is, it's a very broad sense.

I highly recommend listening to the conversation that I had with Marcus Sheraton in episode number 83, where he and packs a very good framework that he shared in his book, They Ask, You Answer. Also, when thinking about thought leadership, this plays very closely, and I mentioned this before, thought leadership plays very closely with building a personal brand, and this has been a reoccurring theme on this podcast, and I'm having to wonder why. Is this the next level up for financial brands to maximize their digital growth potential? Is thought leadership, when combined with a personal brand, the way to humanize digital experiences?

I think so, and we're going to continue to dive deeper into this area of focus, this area of study and this area of research here over the next 12 months because I think, I really do believe that there is something just waiting to come out at a larger scale here.

And I touched on this in Banking on Digital Growth a bit, with this idea of establishing a SMAG at your financial brand, a SMAG being a social media advocacy group as part of a content marketing strategy more from a distribution standpoint, but we really didn't touch on this idea of building a personal brand in Banking on Digital Growth. And I really, it's something that I feel that we could probably dive deep in and build a whole book and strategy around for financial brands.

And if you're listening and you wanted to have that conversation, please do reach out to me. Because like I said, it's one that we're going to continue to do some more study around here over the next 12 to 18 months.

But coming back to thought leadership playing very closely with a personal brand, this is where LinkedIn will come into play as LinkedIn is a great B to B opportunity rooted in thought leadership to build the brand of your financial brand experts, your business development officers, your business lenders, for example, even financial planners. But I'm also seeing a play for LinkedIn with other product lines, including mortgage.

For example, Jennifer Beeston, she is a nationally known mortgage originator. She's ranked number 45th in the nation by National Mortgage News. She just crossed 20,000 subscribers on YouTube. She has another 10,000 people following her on Instagram, another 10,000 plus following her a LinkedIn, another 7,000 following her on Twitter. And so this puts her total audience, people that have subscribed to her content, that have subscribed to her thought leadership at more than 50,000 people. Why? Because Jennifer's mortgage content is designed to do one thing, to help make the mortgage process easy for people to understand with zero stress.

And it is really interesting to watch the engagement she is getting with her thought leadership video, the video content that she is sharing framed around mortgages specifically on LinkedIn. Her YouTube videos have also been viewed more than 4.5 million times in just four years. And the reason that she's been successful with this content, with her videos, with her thought leadership is because it's not focused on Jennifer. It's not about her.

Jennifer is focused on answering the questions, the concerns that others have, to ease the pains that others might feel about buying a home, about the mortgage process itself, which we all know is so very complicated.


And when I think about Jennifer, I know, I am a hundred percent confident that you could do the same at your financial brand for your financial brand, whether that be you or someone else building a personal brand framed around thought leadership.

And here's the thing, with thought leadership, one plus one begins to equal 10 because there's an exponential factor to content production and promotion digitally.

This is also something that I've seen the Movement Mortgage team do. I've also seen the Loan Depot team do as well, as they have been focused on not only educating others, we'll call them consumers in the marketplace, but they've been focused on educating and empowering team members in this area and this area specifically around building thought leadership and personal brands.

And I highly recommend that you follow along the works of Alec Hanson at Loan Depot on YouTube. He's also on Facebook. He's on LinkedIn as well, as well as Casey Crawford, who's the CEO over at Movement Mortgage. And I think it's important to note Casey because he is the CEO. He is leading by example and he has done a tremendous job of leading with video content, of leading with social engagement for his team.

And that's the key lesson here. When it comes to thought leadership, when it comes to content, when it comes to building personal brands, marketing must educate, marketing must empower other team members for this idea of thought leadership, of personal brands to be an activity of success, specifically for lenders and quote unquote salespeople who aren't comfortable operating in a medium like this. In



fact, when we think about future growth, future growth requires the alignment between marketing and sales to work together. And what better way to jumpstart this journey than with an activity framed around thought leadership and personal brand building of CEOs, of loan officers, of branch managers, of business development teams?

Kerry-Ann Betton Stimpson, she actually shared insights on this subject in episode number 62, Putting Love and Respect Back into Banking. And as I mentioned before, these conversations have come up time and time again, including episode number 80, Thought Leadership is Earned Through Powerful Content with Doug Wilber, episode number 70, Building a Personal Brand Means Investing in Yourself with Greg Martin, and episode number 51, Humanizing the Digital Experience with Jay Palter.

All of these conversations come back to this consistent theme that we've been hearing, which is why I'm referencing them today when I think about your question, Sheila, what's the difference between content marketing and thought leadership. Thought leadership is a part of content marketing and it is thought leadership that will empower you to differentiate your financial brand as the subject matter expert in the communities that you serve, to go beyond the commoditized promotion of great rates and amazing service. Thought leadership is what will empower you and your financial brand to help first and to sell second.

As we wrap up today's episode that has been part of the Inside Digital Growth series, if you have a question like Sheila, I want to hear from you because I want to help you maximize your digital growth potential. Text me your question to 415-579-3004 and I will answer it for you in an upcoming podcast episode. And remember, the only bad question is the question that goes unasked. Until next time, and as always, be well, do good, and make your bed.