

UST Global Embracing the Power of Thought Leadership

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In the IT services industry, a lot of people can “do.” As strategic partners, to stand out among our competition and to add real business value to our clients, we must demonstrate our ability to think in order to enable business outcomes.

Organizations of all sizes are facing tremendous pressures: technology is evolving faster than ever, the new cloud + mobile + social paradigm can change the competitive landscape overnight, and as the economy rebounds, there is pent-up demand for solutions that deliver tangible business outcomes.

In today’s New Normal, companies don’t need IT partners that simply take orders. Organizations need strategic partners who bring them ideas, innovate and advise – to help them reach the next level of growth.

At most companies, the people who work there know that their organization excels when it comes to thinking. For example, at UST Global I already know that we have the **expertise** about emerging technology trends, the **experience** of exploiting those technologies to achieve business outcomes for our clients, and the **vision** to see beyond what’s happening today to help organizations plan for the future.

The next step is to give thought leaders a voice.

That’s where a “Thought Leadership” program comes into play. The goal is to help key leaders:

- Identify their personal brands and core passions,
- Define their subject matter expertise,
- Share that knowledge through articles, blog posts, video blogs, white papers, presentations and more, and
- Deliver business outcomes for clients

As Glenn Llopis defines thought leadership in his ebook, “Why a Personal Employee Brand Will Save Your Career and Your Workplace,” a thought leader is:

A person who identifies trends, common themes and patterns within a particular industry and/or functional area of expertise to help others identify new opportunities and/or solutions for growth

I am spearheading the thought leadership initiative for UST Global. Here is an excerpt from a conversation I had recently about why thought leadership is so important for our company and for our clients.

Q: What does it mean to you to be a thought leader?

TV: Thought leaders provide an outlook for the future. They keep the conversation fresh, insightful and relevant.

They are experts in a certain subject – broadly speaking, that could be IT, marketing or human resources. They also likely have an expertise within that area – for example, in IT, it might be enterprise resource management.

But beyond that, they have a point of view. They select a handful of particular problems within the industry that they want to solve. Those “problems” create opportunities for people who are able to see them as such. Thought leaders seek to help others identify those opportunities and seize them.

Q: Why be a thought leader? Is it just about ‘showing off’ what you know?

TV: Thought leadership is about more than sharing knowledge. It’s about influencing others and initiating relevant conversations within the groups of people who matter most to you.

If you do it right, you’ll attract new clients and it will help you build your business. You’ll align yourself with the people who matter within your organization and within your industry. And you will stand out as someone with whom others want to be aligned. Those “others” might include new clients, valuable talent or key influencers.

Q: Why is UST Global empowering so many people to be thought leaders – rather than just focusing on those at the top?

TV: We have a lot of talented and knowledgeable people here. We would be wasting that talent if we didn't invest the time into helping them discover and promote their own personal brands.

We want to highlight the overall features and benefits of the UST Global Services Team, while optimizing each person's communication effectiveness. We want to do this externally, with clients and others in the industry. But we also want to do this internally, so that everyone within our organization is familiar with the deep pool of knowledge and expertise we have here. We want to ensure that our thought leaders are called upon to share their opinions, insights and discoveries with clients, analysts or anyone else as needed.

Q: But what does UST Global get out of this?

TV: We get to help our leaders define and refine their scope of expertise. We get to benefit from our experts broadening their own public profile within target audiences of people who might become clients, strategic partners or future employees. We get the advantage of having our people trained to think about how to align their own personal brands with our corporate culture.

All of this adds up to a more productive and fulfilling workplace – for our employees, for our clients and for our organization as a whole.

Q: What do UST Global clients get out of this?

TV: Clients gain access to the intellectual resources that we have. Through this program, we are essentially capturing and packaging our expertise in a way that's easy to share with others. We're keeping to a schedule for creating deliverables that put our knowledge and ideas in a tangible form.

This is about being a strategic partner, not selling.

Q: How does an individual identify his or her area of thought leadership?

TV: To identify your particular outlook, determine where your knowledge crosses paths with your passion. Examine the various categories of expertise – industry, institutional, product, technical, business systems or leadership – and make an honest assessment of where you can have an impact.

But that's just half of it. The next step is to put that expertise into action. Knowing how to effectively initiate a relevant, insightful conversation is a little tougher. It involves another set of skills or competencies, and it requires a plan of action.

Q: How does a thought leader initiate conversations? What are the skills needed?

TV: There are three core competencies that people need, in addition to their subject-matter expertise:

The first is Leadership Competence: the experience and skills that help one move from managing to leading.

The second is Emotional Competence: a combination of personal and social competence. Personal Competence includes self awareness (emotional awareness, self appraisal, self confidence), self regulation (trustworthiness, self control), and self motivation (drive, optimism). Social Competence includes social awareness (empathy, influence) and social skills (building bonds, collaboration and cooperation, sharing).

The third is Communication Competence: The ability to explain concepts and ideas clearly and powerfully, through written and oral communication.

Q: Then what? How do you put thought leadership into action?

TV: Make your thought leadership goals measurable. As with any IT project, create achievable yet ambitious milestones to keep yourself and your team members moving forward. Commit to some deliverables – write a certain number of articles or blog posts every month, deliver a presentation to an important industry audience by the end of the year, comment on another industry expert’s article, establish mentor relationships within your organization.

Then measure your success. Google yourself and see what appears in the search results. Take note of your followers on your blog or Twitter – not just the quantity, but also the quality. Who are you attracting? What kinds of conversations are you initiating? If you’re not reaching the audiences you want, how can you change your approach?

Q: Why is this so important to UST Global?

TV: The brands of our team members are critical components in the growth of the organization, in how we build or manifest client relationships. It benefits us to invest in those brands, to help our experts develop their thought leadership identities and skills.

Thought leadership also is a central thread that supports UST Global’s “Think, Plan, Build, Run” methodology. That’s the comprehensive approach we bring to client engagements. It begins with our ability to define and share our expertise, and to bring innovative ideas to our clients.

There’s a lot of competition – a lot of companies that can do adequate IT work. But clients need much more than “adequate.”

At UST Global, we are setting ourselves apart by our expertise, our bold thinking and our commitment to taking on the role of strategic partner. The only way to convey those strengths is to get out there and talk about them and prove them through a consistent stream of thought-provoking content.

This is our way of showing the industry how UST Global *thinks*.

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