



2022 B2B Thought Leadership **Impact** **Report**

Breaking Through to Buyers in Economic Uncertainty





Executive Summary

This study is the fifth annual collaboration between Edelman and LinkedIn examining how thought leadership influences buying behaviors among B2B decision-makers and C-suite executives.

Our previous research confirmed the full-funnel, business-generating impact of strong thought leadership – and the tangible risks of publishing low-quality content.

Please view our [2017-2018](#), [2019](#), [2020](#) and [2021](#) reports.

As we face a potential economic downturn, this year's research reveals that high-quality thought leadership will be more important than ever for organizations 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.

We've gathered insights from nearly 3,500 management-level professionals to help marketers, communicators and salespeople understand the value and role of thought leadership amid times of great uncertainty.

The findings shed light on how your organization can refresh and improve the way it approaches and delivers thought leadership – ultimately giving you the tools you need to position your products and services as crucial to your customers' success during a time of increased scrutiny.

Joe Kingsbury
Edelman

David Bersoff
Edelman Trust
Institute

Tusar Barik
LinkedIn

Tequia Burt
LinkedIn

Jamie Montoya
Edelman

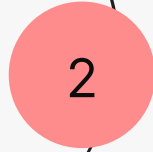
Teresa Balistreri
Edelman



Key Learnings



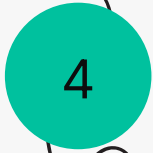
Most B2B companies are planning for an economic downturn in 2023. That means it's going to be more challenging than ever for suppliers to get the attention of decision-makers and successfully pass the procurement process.



If a downturn does materialize, 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 can help prospective customers succeed, even during tough times.



Thought leadership is one of the most effective tools an organization 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.



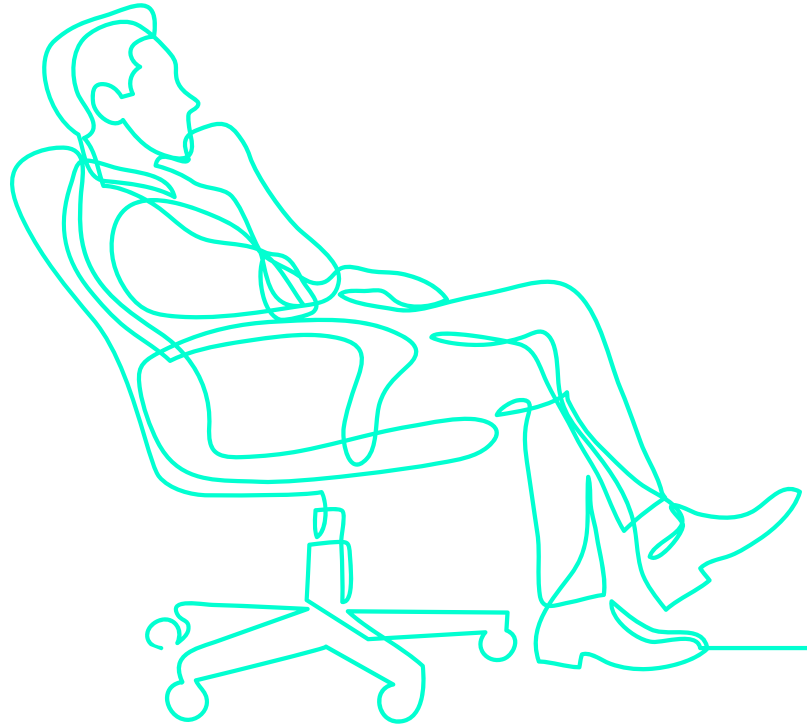
Decision-makers expect high-quality thought leadership to offer a strong, data-backed point of view on how to succeed during a downturn. And they report it can make a difference in winning their business.



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.



Terminology



Thought Leadership

Thought leadership refers to content that offers expertise, guidance or a unique point of view on a topic or in a field. It includes content like thought pieces, essays, videos, webinars, live presentations, PowerPoint slides, and research reports that organizations make available to the public for free (or in return for registering or giving contact information).

In this context, “thought leadership” does not include content that is primarily focused on describing an organization’s products or services or thought leadership that you pay to receive — such as client deliverables, subscription services, or reports that must be purchased.

Audiences in this Report

B2B Decision-Makers

Company executives who consume thought leadership and are involved in making final decisions on their company’s choice of professional service providers or products.

C-Suite Executives

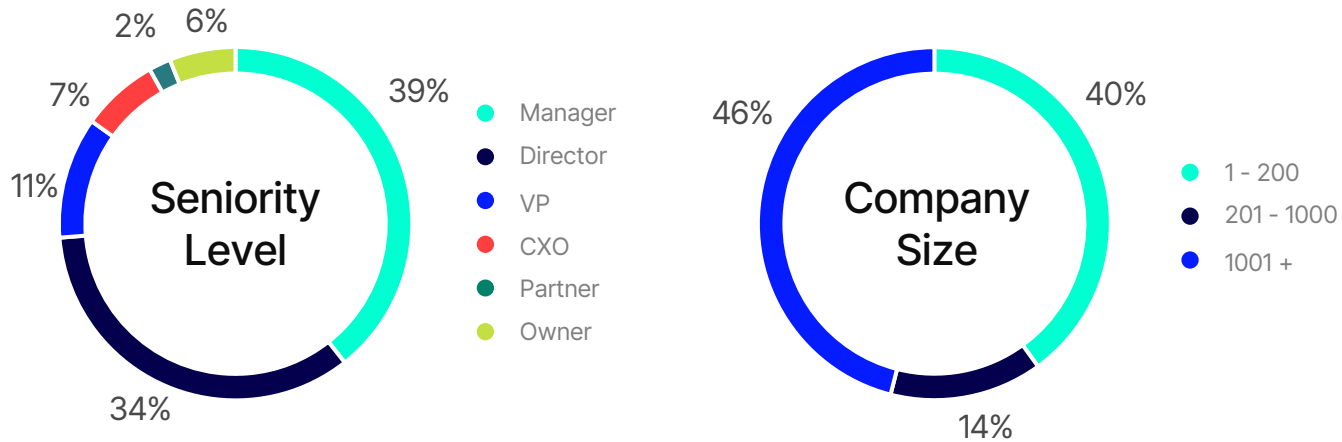
Company owners, partners and founders with complete or partial ownership of a company, or C-Suite Level executives with responsibility for a business function.



About the Study

Survey Respondents & Methodology

To help B2B companies understand the impact of thought leadership, Edelman and LinkedIn surveyed 3,449 global business executives across a wide range of industries and company sizes.



Data Collection

Online, using the LinkedIn platform to survey LinkedIn members

Markets Surveyed

United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Singapore, Australia, India (all surveyed in English)

Fielding Dates

November 2022

Survey Length

10 minutes

Margin of Error

+/- 1.67%



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.





B2B companies are already preparing for stormy times ahead.

62%

of C-suite executives say their organization is planning for fiscal year 2023 assuming there will be a period of economic downturn.



It will be harder than ever to break through and win business.

64%

of C-suite executives say that their organization's procurement process has been made tougher or more rigorous in anticipation of challenging economic times ahead.

44%

of decision-makers say that they will be personally less receptive to sales calls and marketing outreach if there is an economic downturn

Source: 2022 Edelman-LinkedIn B2B Thought Leadership Impact Study. q8_fiscal_2023: In thinking about financial planning within your organization for the year ahead, how much do you agree or disagree with these statements? My organization's procurement process has been made tougher or more rigorous in anticipation of challenging economic times ahead. 5-point scale, top 2 box, agree. C-suite executives, 6 country average. q9_procurement: If there is an economic downturn, how (if at all) do you anticipate that affecting your company's procurement process? Choose all that apply. I will be personally less receptive to sales calls and marketing outreach. Decision-makers, 6 country average.



2

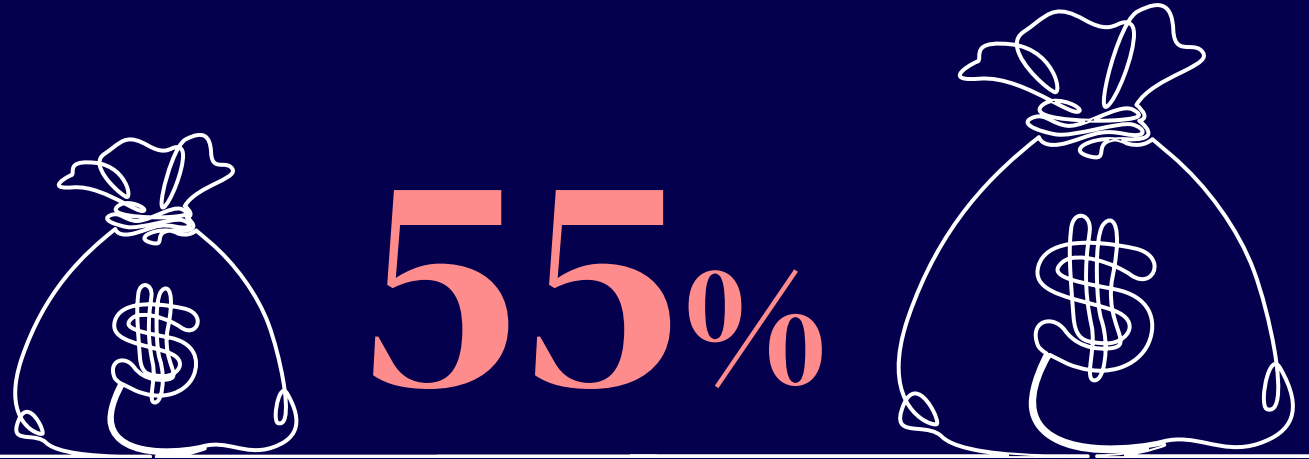
If a downturn does materialize, products and services deemed non-critical will likely be first on the chopping block.

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.

All others will need to prove they are worth the investment.



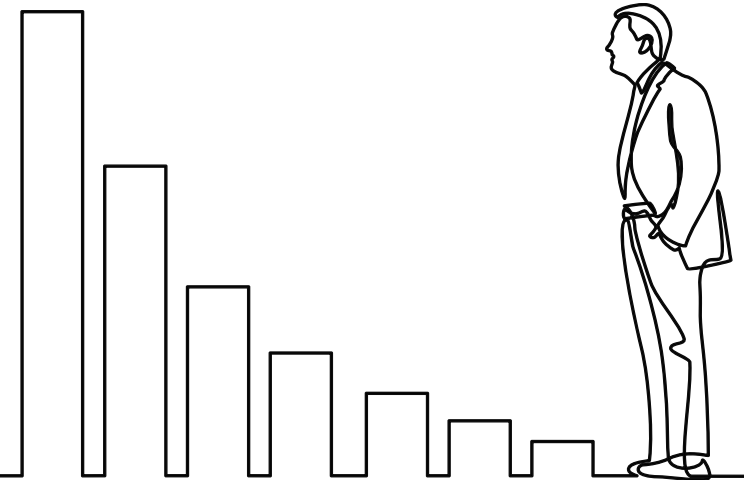
55% of decision-makers say that as budgets are cut, products and services deemed **nice-to-haves** rather than **must-haves** will be where any necessary spending reductions come from.



Despite this reality, there is good news.

91%

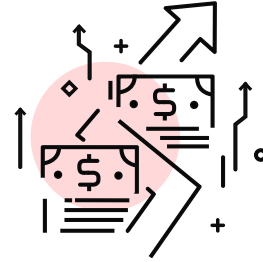
of decision-makers say that non-critical providers can still take actions to increase their chances of surviving a more cutthroat environment.



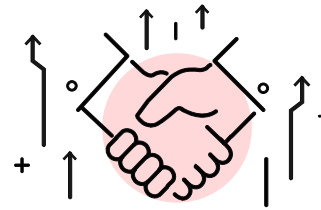
Source: 2022 Edelman-LinkedIn B2B Thought Leadership Impact Study. q11_nice2have: During an economic downturn, if a company does not offer products or services that are crucial to your basic business operations, what can it demonstrate or prove that will increase its chances of passing your organization's procurement vetting process? Choose all that apply. Data is percentage that selected responses other than: Nothing is going to be effective in getting non-mission-critical products and services through our procurement vetting during an economic downturn. Decision-makers, 6 country average.



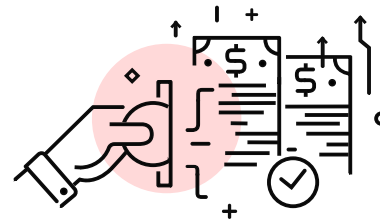
Non-business critical providers can increase their chances of winning business by:



Proving they will increase a prospect's profit margins or minimize losses **(54%)**



Demonstrating they can increase the likelihood that a prospect's customers/clients will continue doing business with them in a downturn **(51%)**



Showing they can help a prospect outperform, or take market share from, its competitors **(51%)**

Source: 2022 Edelman-LinkedIn B2B Thought Leadership Impact Study. q11_nice2have: During an economic downturn, if a company does not offer products or services that are crucial to your basic business operations, what can it demonstrate or prove that will increase its chances of passing your organization's procurement vetting process? Choose all that apply. Data is percentage of respondents who selected the indicated response. Decision-makers, 6 country average.



3

Thought leadership is one of the most effective tools an organization 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.

90%

Of decision-makers say that referrals from people they know and respect will be moderately, very or extremely effective in earning their attention and purchase consideration

Source: 2022 Edelman-LinkedIn B2B Thought Leadership Impact Study. q10_attention: During challenging economic times, if an organization does not already have an ongoing relationship with your company, how effective would each of the following be in earning your attention and potentially your purchase consideration? Referrals from people you know and respect. Data is percentage who chose "moderately effective," "very effective," or "extremely effective." Decision-makers, 6 country average.



Among the many other tactics in a marketer's toolbox, thought leadership emerges as the most effective in demonstrating a provider's potential value.



61% of decision-makers say that an organization's thought leadership can be moderately or a lot more effective at demonstrating the potential value of its products/services compared to traditional product-oriented marketing.

61%



Thought leadership could be even more powerful in an economic downturn.

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 to 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.



55%



55% of decision-makers say that during an economic downturn, it is more important than ever for suppliers who do not offer products/services that are essential to operations to produce high-quality thought leadership if they want to win our business.



There's no doubt that thought leadership is valuable, but it's always been difficult to capture the attention of customers.

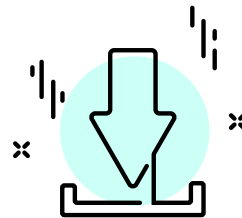
FROM OUR 2021 RESEARCH:



Approximately 4 in 10 Final Decision-Makers say there is more thought leadership content than they can manage or that the market is oversaturated with thought leadership content. **(38%)**



Buyers say if a piece of thought leadership does not pique their interest within the first minute, they will move on. **(55%)**



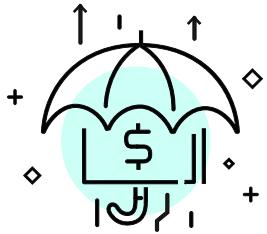
Buyers say they file away thought leadership content with the intent to revisit, but never actually get back to it. **(56%)**

Source: 2021 Edelman-LinkedIn B2B Thought Leadership Impact Study. Q2_glut: How would you characterize the amount of thought leadership currently being produced on topics of potential interest to you? Select one response. Data: % of Decision-Makers who selected either: There is more than I can easily manage or keep up with or The marketplace is oversaturated. The amount needs to be reduced. Q2_glut_b: When you cannot keep up with all of the thought leadership being produced on topics of interest to you, how do you decide which pieces to consume? Select all that apply. Data: % of people who selected I take a quick look, and if a piece of thought leadership does not pique my interest in the first minute I move on. q7_premium1: How much do you agree or disagree with these statements? Data: % of people who selected somewhat agree or strongly agree to If I file away a piece of thought leadership with the idea that I will revisit it later, I almost never actually end up getting back to it.



Breaking through in a downturn will require thought leadership that's finely tuned to economic realities and a customer's industry.

DECISION-MAKERS EXPECT THE FOLLOWING OF THOUGHT LEADERSHIP FROM PROVIDERS DEEMED NON-CRITICAL:



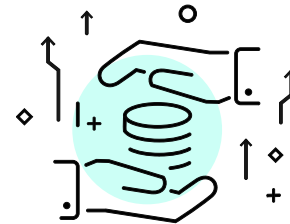
Identify new opportunities or industry trends stemming from the economic downturn (48%)



Give me information and insights that will make me more effective/successful in my job (44%)



Explain how the organization can help our business do well despite the economic downturn (44%)



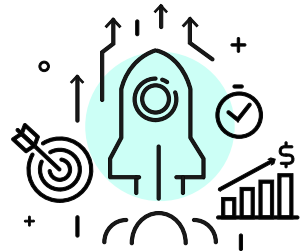
Demonstrate an understanding of our organization's major pain points (43%)

Source: 2022 Edelman-LinkedIn B2B Thought Leadership Impact Study. q13_get_att: During an economic downturn, what will a supplier's thought leadership need to do to earn your purchase consideration for its products/services if those products/services are NOT crucial to your basic business operations? Choose all that apply. Decision-makers, 6 country average.

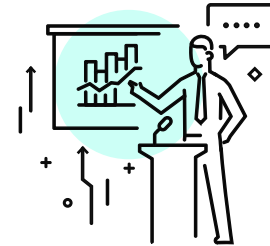


High-quality thought leadership should share a strong, data-backed POV.

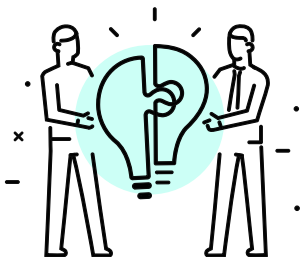
HOW TO INCREASE THE VALUE OF THOUGHT LEADERSHIP AMONG DECISION-MAKERS:



Make it quick and easy to consume and absorb (51%)



Reference robust research and strong supporting data (49%)



Offer provocative ideas that challenge people's assumptions (48%)



Offer concrete guidance on how to respond to the issues or opportunities discussed (45%)

Source: 2022 Edelman-LinkedIn B2B Thought Leadership Impact Study. q5_show_up: How much do each of the following attributes increase the value of a piece of thought leadership to you? 4-point scale, top 1 box, a-lot. Decision-makers, 6 country average.



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.



Of the thought leadership consumers we surveyed, nearly 1,000 of them work for organizations that also produce their own thought leadership.

1,000



And they have high expectations for it.

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

49%

Expect it to protect their current client relationships from disruption or shrinkage



Yet, they tend to express relatively little confidence in the quality of the thought leadership their organization publishes.

33%

of thought leadership producers



29%

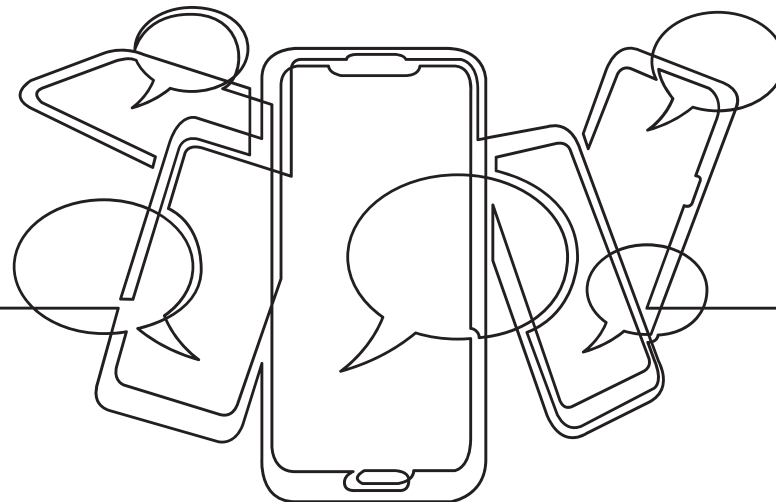
of C-Suite executives

Only 33% of thought leadership producers believe that the overall quality of **their content is very good or excellent**. That number decreases to 29% among C-Suite executives.



There is an opportunity to better measure thought leadership's impact – and, importantly, connect it to business wins.

Our 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 organizations determine effectiveness is by looking for increased website and social media traffic (**51%**) – a metric too broad to be meaningful in this regard.

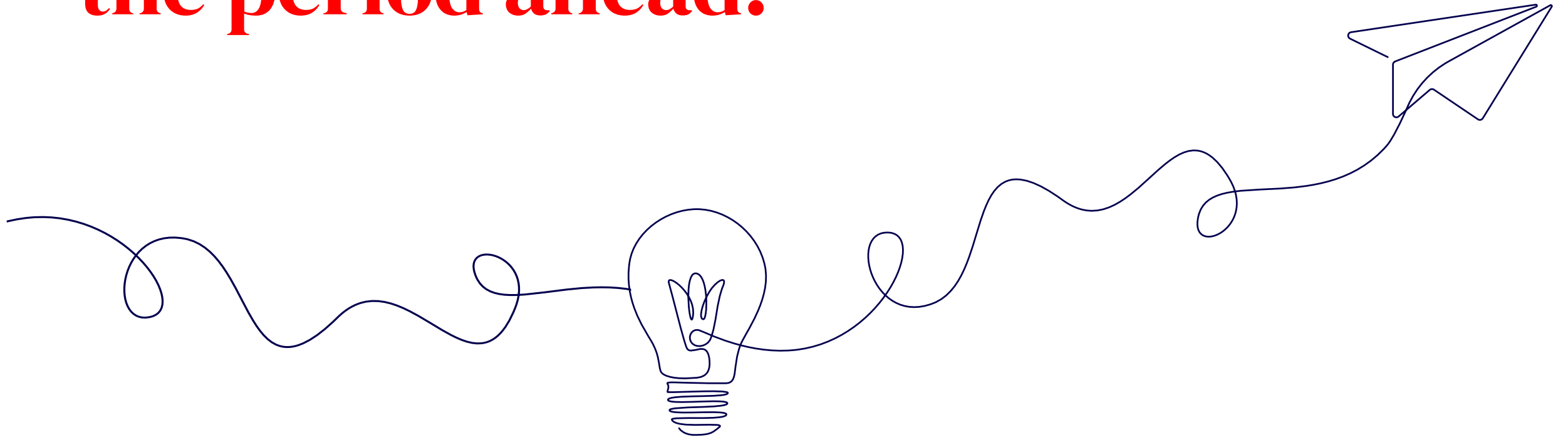


As we enter a period of uncertainty, there is an opportunity for B2B companies to **improve the way they deliver thought leadership and measure its impact**. Doing so can help you position your products and services as vital to your customers' success during a challenging period.





If they haven't done so already, companies should move quickly to adjust their publishing strategy for the period ahead.



Joe Kingsbury
Edelman

David Bersoff
Edelman Trust
Institute

Tusar Barik
LinkedIn

Tequia Burt
LinkedIn

Jamie Montoya
Edelman

Teresa Balistreri
Edelman

thank you

2022 B2B Thought Leadership Impact Report