

# Global Insights from Global Leaders

**Brand Value and Reputation:** The Role of the CEO as Thought Leader



# Can the CEO drive brand reputation and value?

What difference does the CEO actually make when it comes to the value of a brand and the company's reputation? If a CEO acts as the voice of the brand, can it do more harm than good?

At Vehr Communications, we think a lot about the CEO's role, and that of C-suite members more generally, in strengthening and protecting the value and reputation of a brand. And, we think about it from a world view. Indeed, one study suggests that nearly half of a company's value is directly attributable to the reputation of the CEO.

In today's world, the CEO's impact on brand value and reputation is an important question. The answers, however, may differ slightly based on where in the world the company is operating.

That's precisely why we asked leaders of global agencies who, like us, are part of IPREX (read more about IPREX on right), to share their insights on this important topic. From New Zealand to Austria, Philadelphia to China and Morocco, these experts provide their perspectives on the impact the CEO can have on brand value and reputation.

We've already shared the insights of other global leaders on whether the C-suite should be involved in social media on behalf of the company. In the future, we'll explore the CEO's role in crisis management and communications.

Sincerely,



Nicholas J. Vehr, President  
Vehr Communications, LLC  
IPREX Americas President



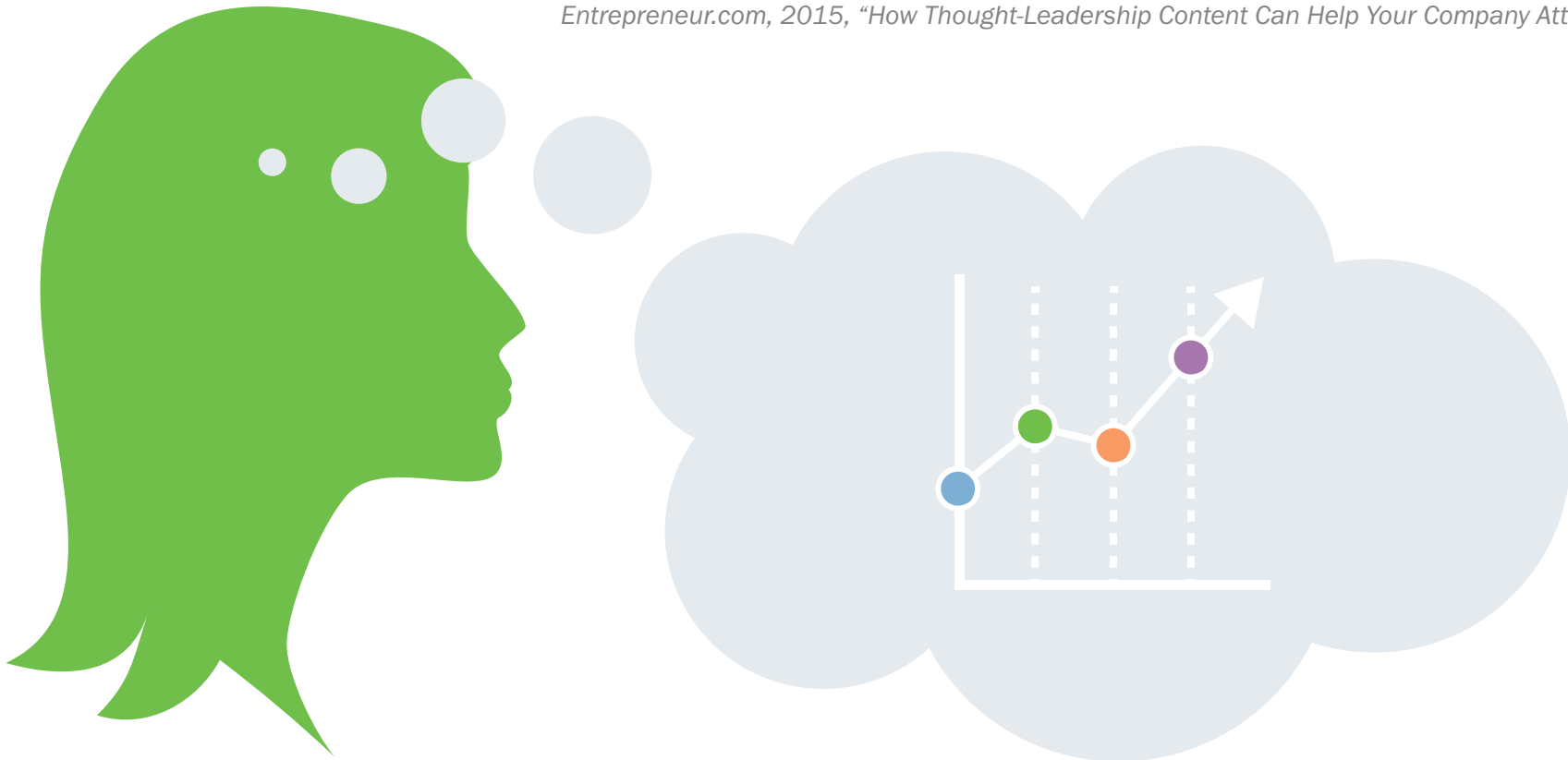
**IPREX**  
Global Communication

IPREX is a \$350 million network of communication agencies, with 1,800 staff and 115 offices worldwide working across the spectrum of industry sectors and practice disciplines. Vehr Communications has been a partner of IPREX for seven years and Nick Vehr currently serves on its global board as President of the Americas region.

It is clear that global communications leaders from China, New Zealand, Philadelphia and Austria all believe the CEO can and should add value to their brand. We agree.

“Thought-leadership content can help turn savvy companies into influential ones.”

*Entrepreneur.com, 2015, “How Thought-Leadership Content Can Help Your Company Attract Funding”*



# 1. How can a CEO's thought leadership add value to a brand?

Auckland, **New Zealand**



**Deborah Pead**

Pead PR

- 1) Build intangible value through reputation and respect from the company's consumer.
- 2) Create employee loyalty and a positive culture that delivers voluntary and willing buy-in to the company value and ethics. Colleagues will be proud to work in that company and be true authentic brand ambassadors. Having a leader of an organization that is a recognized thought leader helps to see the bigger purpose of the work they do for their organization.
- 3) Foster confidence from the investor community and shareholder support. All of the above will help build the value of the brand far bigger than the value of the inventory.

Philadelphia, **USA**



**Christopher Lukach**

Anne Klein Communications Group

- 1) Humanizing a company – showing personality and accessibility. At times, showing humor. This goes a long way toward strengthening the connection customers feel with a company.
- 2) Building a repository of goodwill, especially if the thought leadership program is advocacy based.
- 3) And from an internal standpoint, employees and internal ambassadors often can more easily support individuals than they can “brands.” Well-planned thought leadership campaigns can build morale and ambassadorship among internal audiences.

Vienna, **Austria**



**Helga Tomaschtik**

Lang & Tomaschtik Communications

- 1) Maintaining the company line even in uncertain times.
- 2) Is willing to hear and accept expert opinions in order to achieve the company's goal.
- 3) Demonstrating creativity.

Of course, some CEOs are better at it than others. Our IPREX partner David Croasdale of Newell PR, with offices in Hong Kong, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Beijing, China, offers this case study of CEO thought leadership:

Thought leadership involves introducing new ways of thinking that will reinvent industries and significantly impact business models, customers and the marketplace.

Take the case of Alibaba, China's largest e-commerce company. Jack Ma, the chairman, is often sought out to give his views on the state of the Chinese economy and where it is heading. To tackle broad ranging questions, he often narrows the focus to one or two topics, normally advocating greater entrepreneurship in China. In so doing, he says that the economy can be taken in a new direction and produce the great enterprises of tomorrow. Of course, Mr. Ma comes from humble backgrounds himself and is a great reference point for such views.

The value of such thought leadership interviews is that it: 1) elevates the Alibaba brand by association, 2) makes Alibaba as a company more trustworthy, and 3) positions the company as ready for the future and not stuck in the past.

In line with this, Alibaba has been evolving quickly into new business areas, one of which is financial services. The company's affiliate ANT Financial Services Group, owns and operates Alipay, the largest online payment system in China by volume. ANT operates very much like a bank except that it has no branches and has no infrastructure. But what it does have is trust. And in banking trust is the most important thing.



**David Croasdale**

IPREX APAC President  
Newell Public Relations



Just because they *can* doesn't necessarily mean they *should* ... be the voice, or face, of the company and brand. And, our experts from China, Morocco and Philadelphia concur. There are times when the person in the corner office needs to speak. There also are times when she/he should not. Just as the top dog can positively impact brand value, so they can have a negative impact.



**49%** of a company's reputation is attributed to the CEO's reputation.

**60%** of a company's market value is attributed to corporate reputation.

*Weber Shandwick, 2013, The Social CEO: Executives Tell All*

**“Thought leadership content can help anyone involved in the business decision to gain alignment among their peers, which is often no small task.”**

*MarketingInsiderGroup.com, 2015, “What is Thought Leadership? And When Should You Use It?”*

## 2. Are there times when the CEO should not be the authoritative voice of the brand?

Beijing, **China**



**David Croasdale**

Newell PR

A thought leader should stick to the topic he knows. It would be best to limit oneself to certain specific topics; ones which help people in an industry or, more specifically, within an industry.

Casablanca, **Morocco**



**Mehdi Bennis**

Ozé

This depends on the positioning of the brand, the market it evolves in and the customers' profiles. Customers usually like to mirror themselves in the brand; if the CEO is, for example, involved politically or religiously and the brand is destined to a large market, it may not be a good idea for him to be the authoritative voice of the brand.

Philadelphia, **USA**



**Christopher Lukach**

Anne Klein Communications Group

Effective thought-leadership programs both build and build on an executive's credibility. PR people need to take into consideration the CEO's perception within the community, area of expertise, history and all other characteristics when setting a thought-leadership course. For leaders who carry questionable credibility and authority, each opportunity must be considered as to whether it will help the executive regain credibility, or if it will instead take away from the intended message.

It's no surprise that, when it comes to measuring the value of CEO thought leadership, the insights shared from global leaders from China, New Zealand and Philadelphia differ. How to measure the value of communication activities, or the direct impact a CEO may have on brand value, while important, is not always so easy to measure. Whether quantitative or qualitative measurement, our global communications leaders all acknowledge the importance of measurement and being held accountable.

**“ Thought leaders don't constrain their thinking to preconceived notions of what works and what's appropriate. ”**

*Inc.com, 2015, "9 Ways To Become a Thought Leader"*

**“ Executive branding through thought leadership speaks to a company's sophistication, credibility and marketability - and content plays a critical role in developing the kind of authority that attracts investors. ”**

*Entrepreneur, 2015, "How Thought-Leadership Content Can Help Your Company Attract Funding"*



### 3. How should you measure the value of the CEO's thought leadership to a brand?

Beijing, **China**



**David Croasdale**

Newell PR

Thought-leadership discussions should be conducted with an eye towards developing brand value, not dollar revenues. The dividends of this may be intangible at first, but when thought leadership transforms from one of pushing content to pulling it (writers are seeking out the CEO's opinion, conferences are inviting the executive to present, etc.), then the CEO will know that he has a thought-leadership winner.

Auckland, **New Zealand**



**Deborah Pead**

Pead PR

There are many ways: 1) Research will tell you what people think of the brand. 2) Response to publicity and media engagement will provide a measure of the value of the thought leadership. 3) The more receptive the response the better the PR value. Sharing of content on social media — the earned value for word of mouth, buzz, viral sharing.

Philadelphia, **USA**



**Christopher Lukach**

Anne Klein Communications Group

Like anything else we do as PR people, thought leadership should be held to the same standards to which we hold other initiatives — changing attitudes and behaviors. Because thought leadership is so closely linked to an individual, his or her voice and his or her credibility, thought-leadership issues can shift to become about ego. They are not. PR is a bottom-line business function and thought leadership is no different. It must be thoughtful, strategic and results-oriented.

# About Vehr Communications

Vehr Communications, LLC seeks to be a strategic partner with its clients to help them manage their reputations, build valued relationships and deliver meaningful results.

To learn more about who we are, what we do and how we think, visit our website. While you're there, sign up for our monthly e-newsletter, visit our blog or download any of our publications designed to help you make the most of your strategic communications activities.

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