



## TECHGEAR

The Blik RadioStation from Revo (about \$300, [www.revo.co.uk](http://www.revo.co.uk)) is touted as the world's first radio to receive and play digital (DAB/DAB+), Internet Wi-Fi, and FM radio signals. The device also serves as an alarm clock and iPod speaker system.



## WEBLINKS



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[LawPracticeToday.org](http://LawPracticeToday.org)

[LawTechnologyToday.org](http://LawTechnologyToday.org)

Both of these e-zines are produced by the Law Practice Management Section of the ABA. Every month they provide great, practical information on practice management and technology topics.

[Google Reader](http://Google Reader)

(<http://www.google.com/reader>)

Nowadays, busy lawyers need better ways to keep up with the latest in legal and other news. Google Reader is an easy-to-use way to have news and research delivered to you every day.

[LifeHacker.com](http://LifeHacker.com)

This blog features great tips on ways to make your life easier. I really love the computer and technology "hacks" they post here.

[Triplt.com](http://Triplt.com)

This is a new travel itinerary site. Just send all of your travel confirmation emails (from the airline, hotel, rental car, etc.), and Triplt creates a professional-looking itinerary, with maps and directions, too.

[Pandora.com](http://Pandora.com)

Create your own radio stations by naming an artist or a song you like. Pandora then plays music from similar artists.

[Google Notebook](http://Google Notebook)

(<http://www.google.com/notebook>)

Another great Google site, which allows you to create notebooks of snippets or other things you find on the Internet. When you find something to save, right-click and select "Note This" — that snippet will be saved to the Notebook of your choice.

# Thought Leadership – Build Your Brand Online

BY STEVE MATTHEWS

The selling of "expertise" has always been a crucial element to legal marketing. Why else would lawyers with heavy billable targets take months of their valuable time to write a book? Expertise, even more than having years of experience, is a key measure of qualification and a tool used to grade the modern professional. So the question presents itself: Does an expert rise from the ranks and develop out of peer acknowledgment? Or, is an expert a created entity, carefully crafted by profile building and marketing? I contend that the answer is found in the "gray area" between those two theories. We all know exceptional professionals or academics who are well respected in their small circles, with limited exposure, and we all know the so-called experts who can best be described as "all sizzle and no steak."

The concept of "Thought Leadership" is hardly new, of course. Lawyers have become experts off-line in their fields for years. There are, however, a number of characteristics unique to the online space. First, the barrier to entry has been lowered. While in the past web technology was limited to those with programming expertise, newer software technologies — such as blogs and social networks — have leveled the playing field for exposing one's professional knowledge and expertise. Second, the number of participants in these online

conversations is not limited. Those with a willingness to get online and participate will benefit from increased exposure. And lastly, the web is a mix of both those who innovate ideas, and those who diligently spread the word. Success can be found in either capacity, but a balance between "subject expert" and "online rainmaker" is probably the best approach for most professionals.

It is the concept of an "image" of being an expert that intrigues me. This is obviously a crucial element to building a lawyer, or any professional, into a marketable commodity. The selling of professional services on any level requires that an individual substantiate his or her level of expertise and establish credibility with potential clients. And only once a lawyer passes this test of credibility can the engagement potentially occur. This decision-making process is always in play, especially when it comes to marketing professional services over the Internet. There is, of course, one distinction worth identifying when it comes to building the image of an expert online: The web is just as much a social tool as it is a publishing tool. Lawyers who figure this element out will thrive, and those that don't risk becoming obscure (and often can't figure out why).

Thought Leadership is a phrase that has evolved in online communities to



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describe those individuals who become a hub within online conversations. These individuals are very recognizable. Their opinions are watched by hundreds, often thousands, who share common interests. Thought Leaders' online publishing power is driven by their social network as much as their individual ideas. And when they do publish their opinions, people seem to jump! Jump you say? How so? It's difficult to explain. Thought Leaders are in a very interesting position. Not all readers are supporters. And in some cases, naysayers outnumber supporters. It is not that Thought Leaders' opinions are the most respected (although this is the case for some, and an ideal position, really), it is that their voices drive others to respond. The end result is that they set online conversational direction, and if they join a particular discussion, that issue will be heard. These individuals carry an immense amount of "web profile" power.

For a lawyer who wishes to drive his or her personal brand through the roof, becoming a Thought Leader can deliver one of the longest lasting effects possible. Done properly, the position of being a Thought Leader could create value for a lifetime, or at least for the duration of one's professional career.

What are the benefits of being a Thought Leader? If we consider the fact that *links* are the currency of the modern web, and that incoming links are one of the key elements to boosting Google rankings, Thought Leaders are often in an ideal position to generate "buzz" related to their online presence. Those who believe that the web simply bounces from one innovation to the next should learn that the effects of Thought Leadership transcend the Internet trend of the moment. The method of publication is unimportant. It might be a blog post, a threaded discussion, or a list of bookmarks to what that person is reading — no matter: It is the "brand" of the Thought Leader that observers are watching. When web technology changes,

these individuals simply move on to embrace the new.

Another benefit worth noting is the amount of personal control retained by these individuals. The degree of success can obviously vary, but as an example, consider the many lawyers who are currently investing their time blogging. These lawyers decide when they have time to contribute, write commentary in smaller "chunks," and can focus exclusively on the narrow facets they find interesting.

The results that can be achieved, again from a business perspective, have been repeatedly demonstrated by current blogging leaders and are difficult to refute:

- increased media exposure
- a devoted referral network
- increased offers for speaking engagements

- more writing and publishing opportunities
- a dominant presence in the search engines
- behind-the-scenes exchanges with other experts, which increases one's exposure to an industry's leading strategies and tactics.

Being an online Thought Leader means you truly are a hub of your intellectual and social sphere. By keeping a balance between substantive discussion and social exchanges, lawyers have the opportunity to increase both their "image" of being an expert and to back up their professional credibility with commentary that demonstrates, and qualifies, their knowledge to potential clients. ✪



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