



Bounce back with a thought leadership content strategy

transform
COMMUNICATIONS

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Learn to communicate differently



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I naively thought I'd seen it all – or at least a lot of it – working in communications across the public, private and not-for-profit sectors. Swine Flu, a major NHS restructure, hospital crisis communications, managing celebrities and members of the royal family at events. But none of it compares to the personal and professional impact of Coronavirus.

Many years ago, I studied history and learned that past pandemics have nudged societal change. And this has sometimes been positive. The Black Death led to the breakdown of the feudal economy and the Second World War paved the way for the Welfare State and the NHS. However living through Coronavirus feels more like a shove than a nudge.

The pandemic has without doubt increased the pace of change towards remote working and automation that was already underway. With an inevitable impact on how businesses connect with their customers and market when traditional routes are no longer available. Without face to face events, trade shows, exhibitions,

networking or award dinners, how do we build deeper bonds with our existing and prospective clients? And is it even appropriate to sell to people in the midst of a pandemic, when so many routes to market are at least temporarily closed?

After weeks of lockdown, and with an unknown future of social distancing ahead of us, there is a notable change in focus. From how we cope in a crisis to how we bounce back and manage the recovery. Humans want a level of control in ambiguous situations that is rarely achievable. Circumstances are seldom binary – stay at home vs go outside, go back to work vs work from home. So we need to be flexible and adaptable.

When we look to the future, people seem to fall into two camps. Either wanting to get back to normal as soon as possible or questioning what can we take from this to bring about change for the better. I believe that in order to grow and thrive, rather than just recover and return to where we were, we must learn. And we must learn to communicate differently.



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Understand your audience

Things have changed

The world will never return to exactly how it was before Coronavirus. There are many genres that will be hard to get back into their bottles – whether it's the daily commute and face to face meetings, home working or virtual events.

While we've all been meeting online during lockdown – for work and socially – there's also been an increase in online activity in the form of emails, social media, website traffic and of course, streaming. Yes, things have changed, but as marketers we must respond accordingly.

Don't throw out your past efforts on audience analysis and segmentation.



Do look at how your audience behaviours might have changed.



There are multiple tools to review the behaviour of your audiences & target groups remotely, whether it's quantitative, qualitative or secondary research.

We use all three at Transform Communications to help us understand our clients' markets. This might be surveys, focus groups, one-to-one interviews or or online research. Here are some prompts to get you thinking about how your audience behaviours and preferences may have changed recently:

Pain points
What are their pain points?
Be as specific to each audience as possible.

Analyse your audience

Interest mapping
What are each of your specific audiences interested in?

Check your facts
Have you made any assumptions that you need to correct?

Review needs
Have your audiences' needs changed recently?

Challenges
What are the questions and challenges that you can solve?

Changing behaviours

- 2 in 5 UK shoppers say they will make more online purchases after lockdown ends.¹
- Netflix gained almost 16 million new subscribers in Q1 2020.²
- TikTok downloads surged in Q1 2020, exceeding two billion lifetime downloads.³

A case study: Upskill People

A specialist e-learning provider for retail and hospitality, Upskill People needed to understand what customers loved about their products and services, and how to use this insight to attract more business. They thought their point of difference was their innovation and creativity. Their customers told us that this was great, but what they valued most was the ease and simplicity of their e-learning system.

Through this customer research project, we identified a unique brand proposition that transformed how the company promoted itself. We overhauled their tone of voice, launched a new website and reinvigorated the brand. Going on to support the launch of Upskill People Asia.



1. Channel Advisor and Dynata, 2020.
2. Financial Times, April 2020.
3. Sensor Tower, April 2020.

THE BRAIN BIT

We all make snap judgements before we've even realised – it's only human.
Our emotional brain works far more quickly than our rational brain.
We all need to look out for different types of bias. Here are 3 to be aware of when you're trying to understand your audience:

Confirmation bias

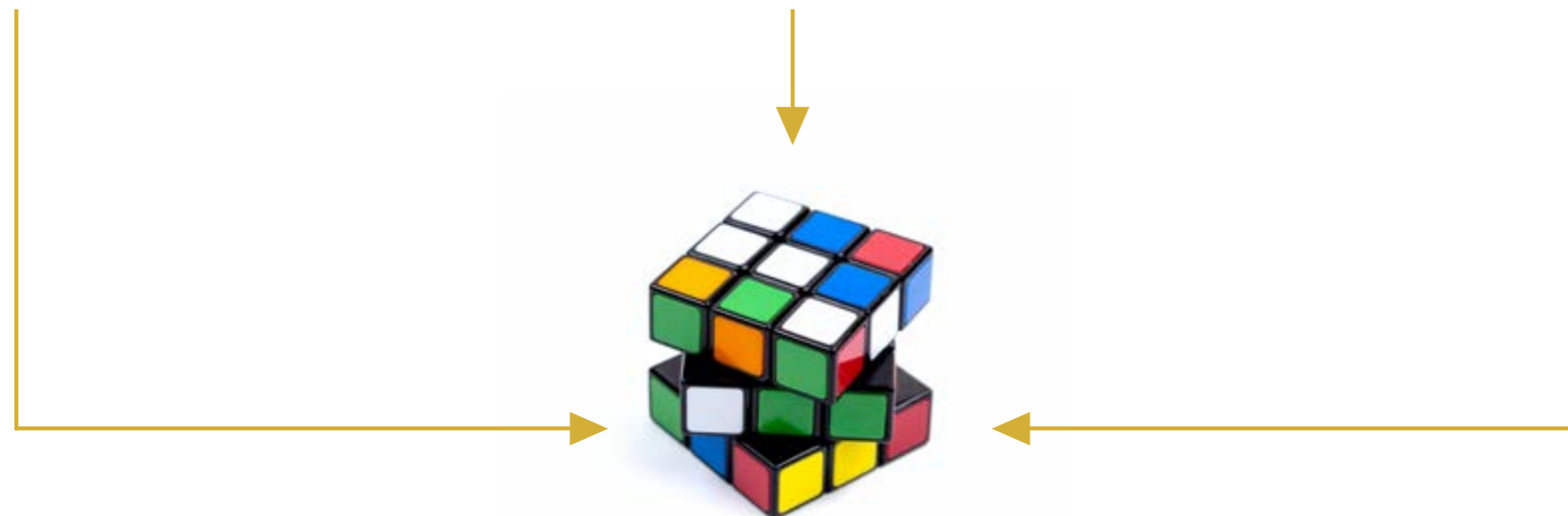
Focusing on information that confirms your existing preconceptions.

Anchoring effect

Relying on the first piece of information you get to make a decision.

Stereotyping

Assuming a person has behaviours or opinions because they belong to a certain group.



Understand your competition

Heads up

It's important for marketing teams to avoid being too introspective. We all know how easy it is, particularly when we're busy, to be heads down and focused solely on delivery (guilty as charged!).

When the landscape has changed so much, it's more important than ever to look at what your competition are up to. Again, don't throw out any competitor research that you conducted before the pandemic. Dig it out and explore what might have changed:

- Who are your competitors?
- Are they the same as a result of Coronavirus?
- Have they survived?
- Have new businesses entered the market?
- What are your competitors up to?
- What content are they putting out?
- How are you different?



Top tools for competitor analysis



There are loads of tools out there that will help you to conduct a thorough competitor analysis. And you don't need a big budget. Here are some of our favourites:

- **SEMrush** (paid for) – analyse your competitor's website traffic, traffic sources, top pages, engagement, paid traffic and organic performance.
- **Ask the Public** (limited free searches) – we love, love, love this tool that shows you every phrase and question that people are Googling around your keyword.
- **LinkedIn** (free) – don't underestimate how much you can learn by following your competitors.
- **Google Search** (free) – sounds basic, but have you Googled your main competitors? Check out the News tab and set up Alerts to let you know when your competitors show up in Google Search.
- **Google AdWords Keyword Tool** (free) – you don't need to buy AdWords to use this. Find out whether competition for certain keywords is high and see keywords related to competing brands.
- **Feedly** (free basic version) – a content aggregator that allows you to see the topics your competitors are covering without having to constantly check their websites.
- **Hashtagify** (free basic version) – find out which hashtags are popular and who is using them.

A case study: Making ThankQ stand out

We changed ESiT to the brand ThankQ, a fundraising and membership CRM for the third sector. From extensive competitor analysis, customer research and internal workshops, we formulated a strong brand proposition, messaging and tone of voice. Taking the project from strategy through design to communication.

The result was a strong brand that resonated with the charity and marketing sectors. ThankQ was sold 18 months later to the Access Group.

“Although 86% of companies have a purpose statement, the majority (83%) have not yet considered what this means across departments or set clear targets.”

Find your why

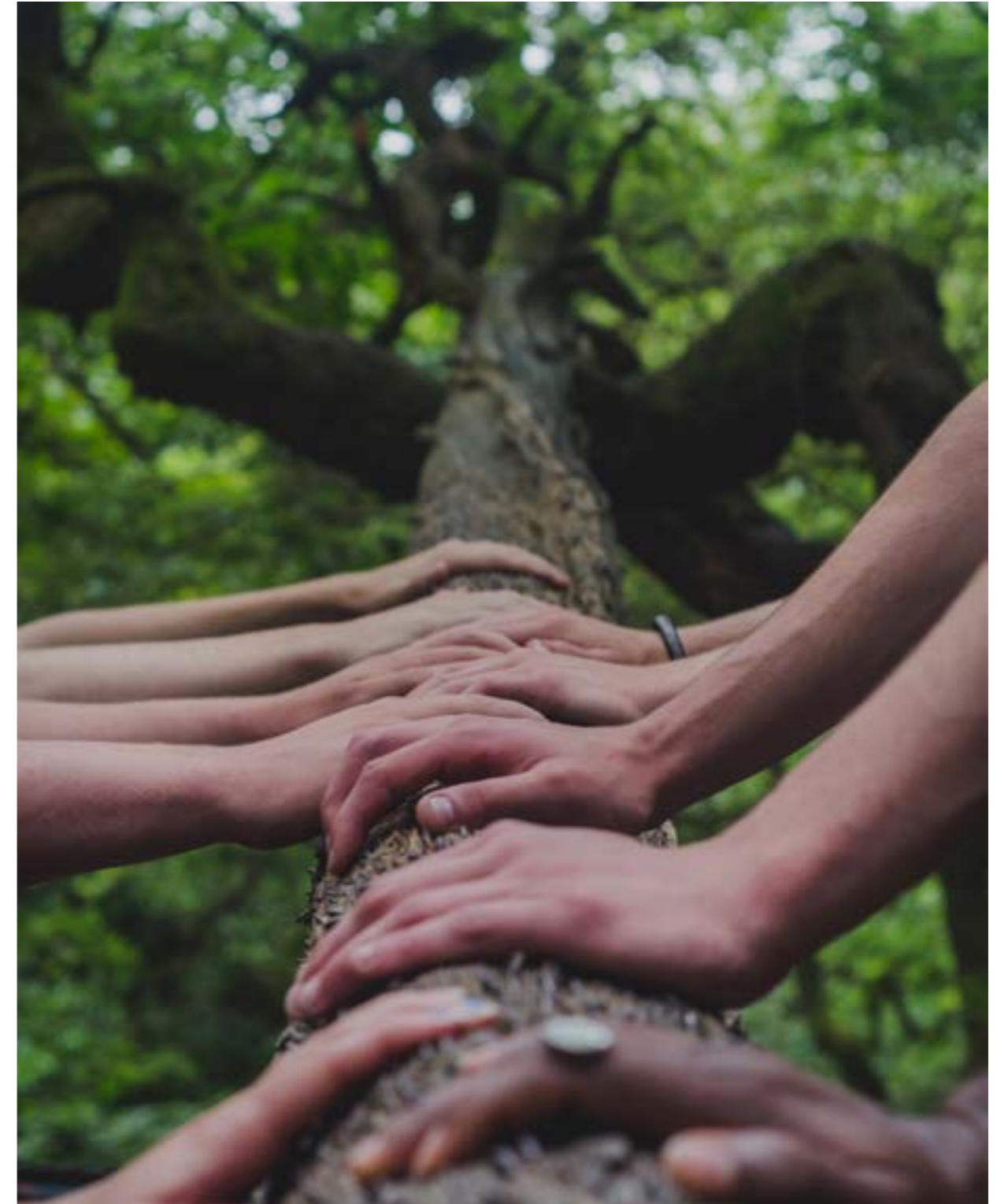
While it's important to start by looking outwards, it's also important to take a long hard look at yourself (who doesn't love a bit of navel gazing?). We've facilitated WHY Workshops with teams in person and remotely and they are a tried & tested method of finding purpose in a business.

We are huge fans of Simon Sinek and it's impossible to overstate how transformational it can be to examine not just WHAT you do, HOW you do it, but also WHY you do it. Not only does this help you to find your point of difference in the market, it also works in line with how our brains operate – from the inside out.

Make connections

We feel before we think. Identifying your WHY, and how you feel about what you do, will help you to communicate in a meaningful way with the outside world. When you make an emotional connection with your audience – whether it's a customer, client or employee – they will trust you and pay more attention to what you have to offer.

If you are a new business it's easier to find your WHY. You'll be closer to the reasons you set up your business in the first place. If you've been around for a while it can be trickier, and remember, your WHY needs to be unearthed – not created. You need to role model your WHY and it must be reflected throughout your business.

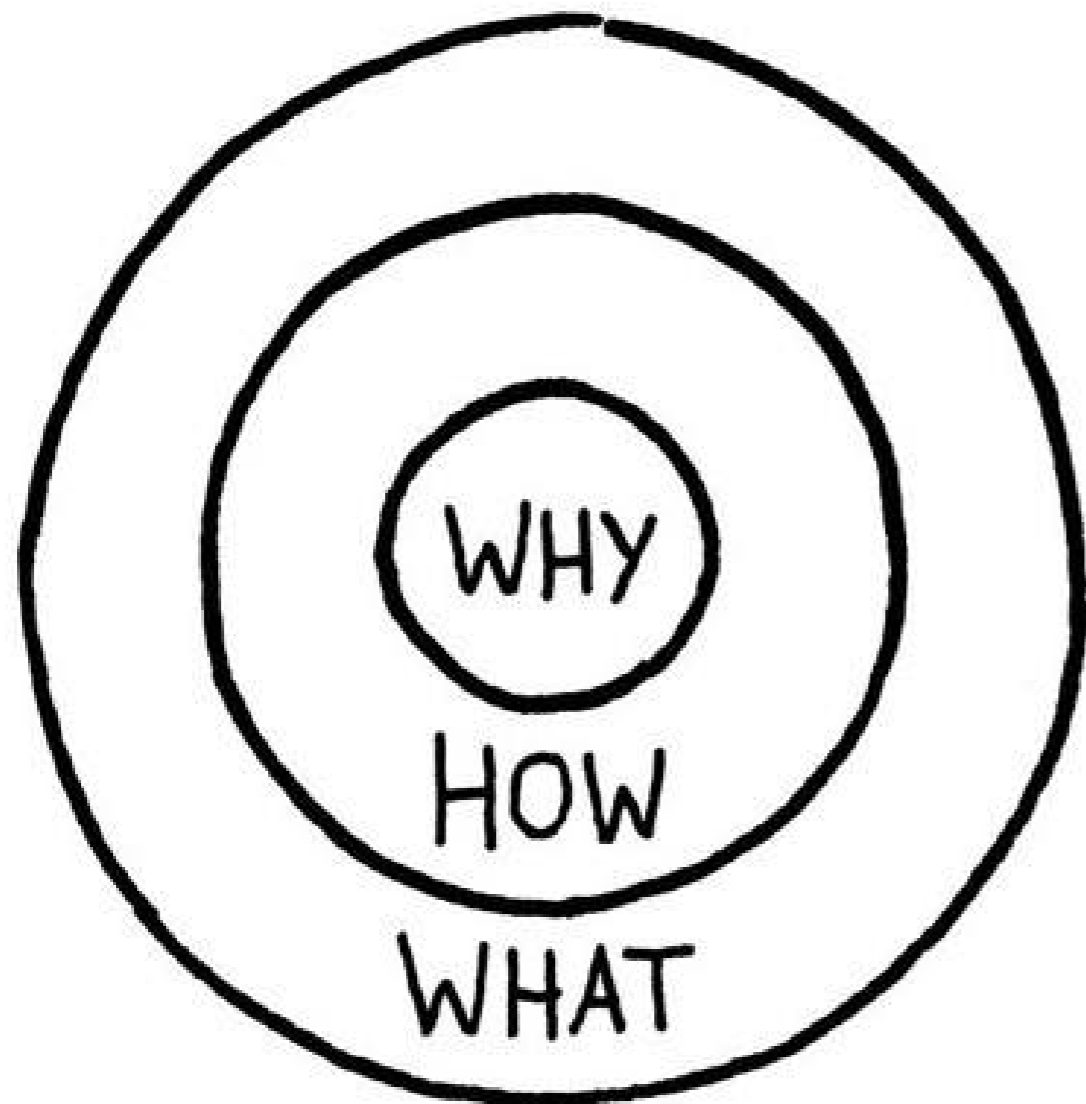


THE BRAIN BIT:

The Golden Circle

Simon Sinek's Golden Circle is based on the principle that every organisation knows WHAT they do, some know HOW they do it and their point of difference in the market. But very few organisations understand their WHY – a purpose, cause or belief that's the reason they exist. Your proposition will be far more meaningful – and effective – if you start with your WHY and work outwards.

In our WHY Workshops we explore your stories, what makes you tick, what drives you, what you believe. Because things have changed – people don't just buy what you do, they buy WHY you do it.



A case study:

Practice what you preach

We don't always practice what we preach. Our own marketing often falls down the list when we have work to do for clients. But we all found the time when it came to our own WHY Workshop. Here's what we found out...

- For the business it's about uncovering the spark in an organisation.
- For me it's about clarity of communication. By sharing information that's easy to comprehend, we can increase understanding and help people feel better informed and often less fearful.
- For Ronnie it's about having interesting conversations with brilliant people, because it's through communication that we can change the world. This was a major motivation for starting our Transform Talks events & podcast.

Finding individuality

From Frank Sinatra's My Way to Katy Perry's Firework, there are numerous songs that speak to the need to embrace our individuality. It's a message that clearly strikes a chord for many of us (pun totally intended).

So why is so much marketing the same – obvious, boring and unexciting? I am certainly not claiming that everything I've ever done is completely original, and there are benefits to presenting people with something that feels familiar.

However, now is a particularly good time to review what you are saying and try something new. Original ideas demand attention. Thought leadership is about adding a new perspective and angle to an existing debate.

This is how we do it...

- **Secondary research**
Desk based research into the topics your competitors are talking about, what the media is currently interested in, and where the overlap might be with your business.
- **Subject Matter Expert workshop**
We will help you tread the fine line between looking at yourself and maintaining an outward focus. This is also a great way to get senior level buy-in.

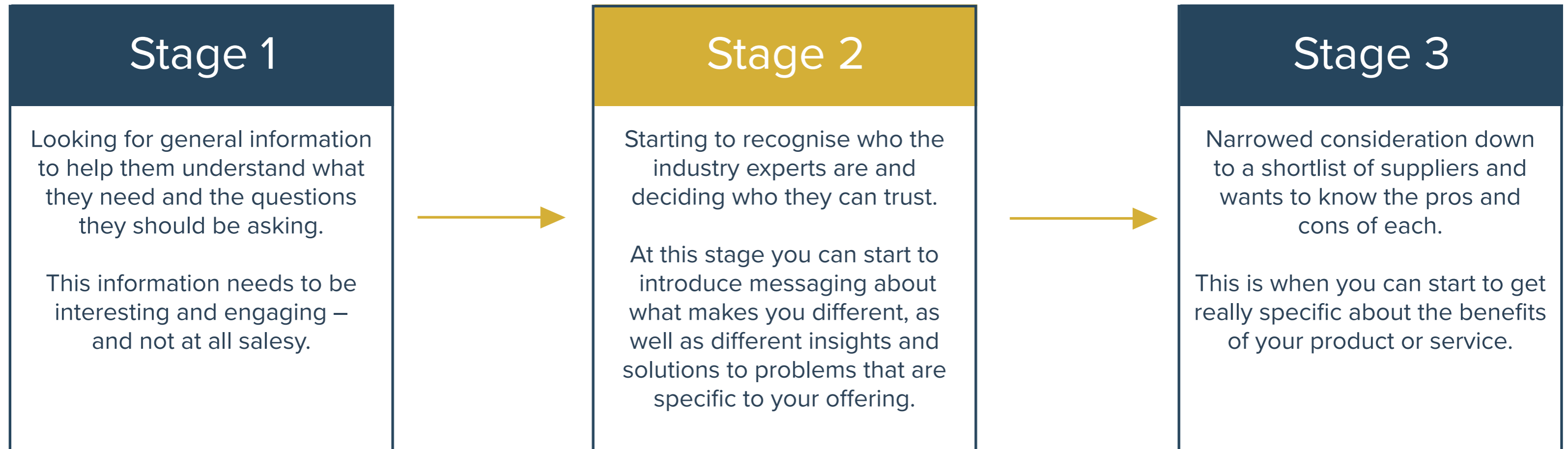
- **Themes and topics development**
Building on the results of the workshop. Often includes iterations, challenge and heated debate. This is when we identify key spokespeople.
- **Content development**
This might be article ideas to pitch to the media, media commentary, blogs, social posts, video, events. We call it the PRISM strategy. Taking one idea and refracting it to create multiple pieces of content.

A case study: Sharing Emotional Intelligence

JCA Global needed to spread the word about the power of Emotional Intelligence (EI) and increase use of their EI assessments. As well as establish their position as experts in the application of EI to drive business performance. We worked with the team to develop a thought leadership strategy that firmly established JCA Global as a market leader in EI.

- Over 50 articles featured in leading publications.
- Commentary in The Times, Forbes and Headspring.
- White Papers, guides, blogs, emails and social media campaigns.
- JCA Global acquired by PSI Services.

THE BUYER JOURNEY



Consumption of **thought leadership** amongst business decision makers is growing...

- 55% use thought leadership as a way to evaluate potential vendors and partners.
- 58% said that it had directly led to them awarding business to an organisation.
- 46% said poor thought leadership had decreased their respect for an organisation.
- 60% will stop following a writer or organisation after reading poor thought leadership.⁵

5. How thought leadership drives demand generation. Edelman, 2019.

Conclusion

There was a lot of innovative marketing in the pre-Coronavirus world, but there was also a lot of monotony and repetition. No prizes for spotting that many of the processes and ideas outlined in this document aren't brand new. However, they are new to many companies and bear repeating. We know this system works and have full confidence in it to achieve results.

Differentiating yourself through thought leadership is emerging. And it has to be done well. At the same time, as marketers we need draw from the Coronavirus crisis and the incredible outpouring of creativity it has prompted. To look at what we can do, and how we can do it better, in a post Coronavirus world.

We'd love to help you – get in touch!



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