

# Story Mining.

A guide to uncovering insights to  
power thought leadership campaigns



# Introduction

Thought leadership has increased in prevalence as B2B marketers recognize its value through the purchase funnel. Even to the extent that a 2020 study by SurveyMonkey found thought leadership is “top priority” for two-thirds of marketers. However, only 26% of marketers consider their current thought leadership program to be “very successful.”

Since most marketers prioritize thought leadership, why do such a small percentage consider their strategy to be successful? Because they’re not leveraging the full potential of thought leadership — and to do that, they must get into the heads of their company leaders and industry experts. That’s what story mining can offer.

In this guide, you’ll discover why story mining is such a valuable tool in your thought leadership arsenal, who makes for the best thought leaders to start, and what questions you can ask to gather their thoughts, opinions and “hot takes” that power successful thought leadership campaigns.

# 1

## What can story mining do for you?

A part of developing excellent thought leadership for SaaS, story mining is what it sounds like: dedicated time spent digging for and otherwise uncovering information to be used to develop stories. PR professionals ask subject matter experts (SMEs) questions about their roles, industry trends, new product developments — anything that could reveal something interesting. Like many aspects of PR, story mining blends a variety of skills including research, relationship-building, writing and interpersonal communication.

*Why spend time story mining?*

Story mining helps create the narrative structure underneath strategic PR development, especially from a thought leadership standpoint. Conversations with a company's executives lead to fresh ideas that drive thought leadership campaigns, and regular story mining sessions enable PR teams to tell bigger stories with consistent narratives that don't require company news or data. Because the thought leadership campaigns derived from story mining sessions don't have to be tied to a company milestone, the practice also allows PR teams to stay proactive. For SaaS brands working with an agency, story mining can lead to more collaboration, a deeper understanding of the brand and its industry, and ultimately a more consistent cadence of message-based media coverage.

# 2

## Thought leaders to access

Unlocking story mining's value begins with interviewing the right people. Matching the right people to the right topics — and drawing out the best points — drives successful sessions and lays the foundations for needle-moving narratives. But who should you talk to first?

### **CEO/Founder**

The CEO or founder (and, sometimes, the same) will embody a company's purpose and work. They act as a natural north star to guide growth and evolution — so they should likely be on the media front lines, guiding the messaging.

### **Sales leader**

Speaking of front lines — sales teams are the first faces many prospects meet, and they hear the problems that bug buyers every day. Since story mining uncovers topics that whet media's appetites — and, by extension, their readership — PR teams will want to incorporate buyers' burning pain points within the PR strategy.

### **Industry experts**

Industry experts are chock full of industry-specific insights that'll wow audiences. They may include C-suiters, though department heads or directors often work equally well. SMEs will likely vary depending on the targeted industry: For example, for martech, we may recommend the CMO; for governance, risk and compliance, we'd recommend a director of compliance or security. Companies can also deploy multiple experts to cover different facets of an industry.

Those developing thought leadership campaigns need access to these thought leaders and their thoughts. Marketers should make sure they communicate to SMEs on why they're conducting story minings and invite their thoughts — because, without them, you're not truly doing thought leadership.

# 3

## Questions for Your CEO or Founder

To get key information from leadership, your questions should remain as broad and open-ended as possible, as their job requires them to focus on the bigger picture and an organization's overall direction. PR teams should come into sessions with a solid understanding of the B2B CEO/Founder role and active industry conversations to walk away with the most relevant and timely information.

**Question #1:** Tell us about your career path so far. What inspired you to enter the industry, and what led you to your current position?

Asking about their background and what led them to their company and overall industry lets them steer the conversation to a topic that resonates with them the most. Story miners can then ask more probing, in-depth questions throughout the session.

**Question #2:** What are the biggest pain points/concerns your industry is facing right now?

Knowing what the leader sees as top pain points can lead you to valuable insights on how to overcome these issues, thus the opportunity to position them as the subject matter expert.

**Question #3:** What are your business's short- and long-term growth plans?

Understanding their goals and projections will help you explore potential story angles for company growth and business leadership and give you a sense of where to set priorities in terms of verticals and broader storytelling.

Question #4: Where do you see the industry heading in the next 5-10 years?

Company leaders often have a unique and sometimes surprising perspective on how their particular industry is evolving and why. A hot take on any industry's future is always relevant, regardless of the timeframe.



## We go way back

Asking questions about a thought leader's background may seem natural, but consider going back further to before their career started. Publications focused on leadership, like Inc. and Fast Company, crave stories about what makes successful leaders tick. In many cases, the foundation of a successful leader forms before their resume. Questions about adolescence and early careers can uncover new opportunities to differentiate a thought leader.

For example, a story mining session with Moz CEO Sarah Bird uncovered a story about her first mentor, ultimately leading to a feature in Inc. In addition to her story, the article also touched on Moz's success as a company.

# 4

## Questions with sales leaders

While sales leaders can certainly serve as public-facing SMEs, they often contribute more behind the scenes by helping develop PR campaigns. Their insights from story mining sessions can sharpen a thought leadership campaign with valuable intelligence like specific buyer pain points or create new directions altogether. They contribute to the overall narrative building so critical to successful strategic PR. Questions for them should keep these goals in mind.

**Question #1:** Why do prospects purchase our solution over the competition? Understanding the strengths and differentiators of your solution (both real and perceived) helps you position your solution to prospects. These responses should not be a comparison of features, but rather should showcase the unique benefits that drive prospects to buy.

**Question #2:** Why do we lose? This question will help you understand what weakness to address up front in your content.

**Question #3:** What are the top three customer pain points our product solves? To ensure you're meeting your target audience's interests and needs, take time to identify and understand the most common pain points of your prospects.

**Question #4:** What are the common questions and objections you receive? Having the answer to common questions or objections will provide you with a solid understanding of potential hangups for prospects.



## Reasons to ask about buying habits

Something else to ask a sales leader: “What’s an interesting trend or shift in buyer habits you’ve observed in the industry in the past year?” This question can uncover trends that subject matter experts are seeing from their daily conversations and industry research they’ve found useful. Need more reasons to ask?

**Reason #1:** Identify industry trends and customer pain points.

**Reason #2:** Uncover opportunities to address disconnects between customer perception and intended value proposition.

**Reason #3:** Develop unique PR angles.

These are all valuable outcomes of a story mining session and could lead to unique angles for thought leadership placement in target outlets.



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## Questions to ask other industry experts

Good story mining questions for industry experts should be personalized and tailored to their experience and role. While that's true for anyone you story mine with, it's especially the case with specific industry experts — the goal is to define a company's position and SME's opinions within their industry. This deeper dive doesn't require a story miner to have the same knowledge level as their SME, but brushing up on the company's technology and common terms can help prepare them for a successful conversation.

**Question #1:** How did their career journey bring them to their current position?

LinkedIn can give you the details of the SME's work history and current role, so use story mining to ask more about what drew them to the company. What excites them the most about their job? If the SME is a longtime company employee, find out why they've stayed so long.

**Question #2:** How did you build your field expertise?

How did the SME get into their job functions? What intrigues them about it? What is it about the subject matter that continues to hold their interest? How did they make their way into the industry or the category? And if they pivoted along the way, what prompted their change?

**Question #3:** What makes you different from the rest of the industry?

Ask SMEs for their opinions or "hot takes" on their job functions or the direction of the industry. If a company is really technical or the product is particularly confusing, ask the SME to describe the company in a non-technical way. How do they explain their work to friends and family?

**Question #4:** What makes you tick?

What topics interest the SME personally? A lot of evergreen topics are applicable to SaaS (e.g., innovation, future of work, entrepreneurship, leadership) but not the SME's day-to-day work. By identifying their areas of interest, you can pursue thought leadership on broader topics to net more coverage.

Story mining is the secret ingredient to outstanding thought leadership campaigns. Beginning with your CEO/Founder, sales leader and industry experts enables you to build out informed PR strategies and position your company and its leaders at the forefront of your industry.



## Getting into the weeds

Industry expert SMEs can be especially great at providing actionable insights for potential end-users. For example, with its focus on GRC, LogicGate's spokesperson bench includes those working in compliance and security, who can speak to the issues and trends others working in the industry face.

These types of narratives are well-suited for trade publications. Story mining with Joe Schorr, VP of Alliances at LogicGate, led to various opportunities to discuss topics like vulnerability management and cyberdefense in trade publications targeting IT and security professionals, including TechRepublic and Security.

## About BLASTmedia

Established in 2005, BLASTmedia is the only PR agency in the US dedicated to B2B SaaS, representing companies in all growth stages—from startup to publicly traded. BLASTmedia understands the unique challenges associated with scaling a SaaS business and uses media coverage and thought leadership campaigns to impact four primary pillars: investors, employees, partners, and customers.

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