



MINDWORM

LEARN HOW TO EMBED YOUR BRAND
IN DECISION MAKER MINDSHARE

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ENGAGE. POSITION. INFLUENCE. CONVERT.

MINDWORM

Embed Your Brand in Decision Maker Mindshare

Yeah, a creepy title for an ebook, but it captures exactly what your personal/professional brand should be doing in the minds of decision makers. Like the musical earworm (a song you can't get out of your head), you can create a **brand mindworm** with one or more elements of your expertise that dominates decision-maker mindshare to the point it goes beyond creating familiarity with you and the value you offer. It starts to dominate their thoughts when they consider the best candidate, the best vendor, or the best option to pursue. Eventually, you want your brand to crowd out other competitors from the minds of decision makers. When your brand is their first thought among others, it can lead to feelings of trust and to a preference for your skills, knowledge, and experience.

“Hang on Sloopy, Sloopy Hang On...”

Back around 1965 or so, one of the hottest songs on the Top 40 was “Hang On Sloopy” by the McCoys. It was a simple three-chord song that topped the charts for one week. During its climb on the charts, DJs played the song more than once an hour due to so many listener requests, thereby infecting every portable radio and car radio across America. For weeks on end, people everywhere were humming or singing the infectious simple song until it became an **earworm** — a tune you can't get out of your head.

The Hang On Sloopy phenomenon even generated some humor: “Have you heard the news? Sloopy finally let go...”

The same thing happens when elements of your branded expertise and value dominate decision maker minds.

It's All About Positioning Your Value

OK, creating a “brand mindworm” is simply a method to be seen, heard, and preferred in an overcrowded marketplace. It’s part of your overall platform, which is The path to mindshare dominance is through repetition. It’s why no one ever creates one advertisement spot or why commercials consume about 12 minutes of every hour-long program. Advertisers are trying to establish a pattern recognition with viewing audiences through the repetitive use of imagery, verbiage, and even spokespersons. It’s the battle for your mindshare.

For example, when you see Mike Lindell on TV, you immediately think of the “My Pillow” commercials; when you see former football great Joe Namath of TV, you probably associate his image with those annoying Medicare Coverage Helpline commercials. Nearly all commercials have a call to action (“call now” or “buy now”) to take advantage of your (presumed) attention.

When it comes to positioning, the idea isn't to invent something totally new and unique. Instead, it's about tweaking what's already in people's heads and re-establishing those connections that are already present.

Let’s take a look at how this works so you know how to use it to your advantage.

Associative Memory Model

Associative memory refers to the ability to remember relationships between concepts, and not just the individual concepts themselves. In people, this relates to visual and verbal information, such as remembering how two words are related (cat – dog) or seeing an object and its alternate name (for example, a football). See Associative Network Memory Model **Figure 1**

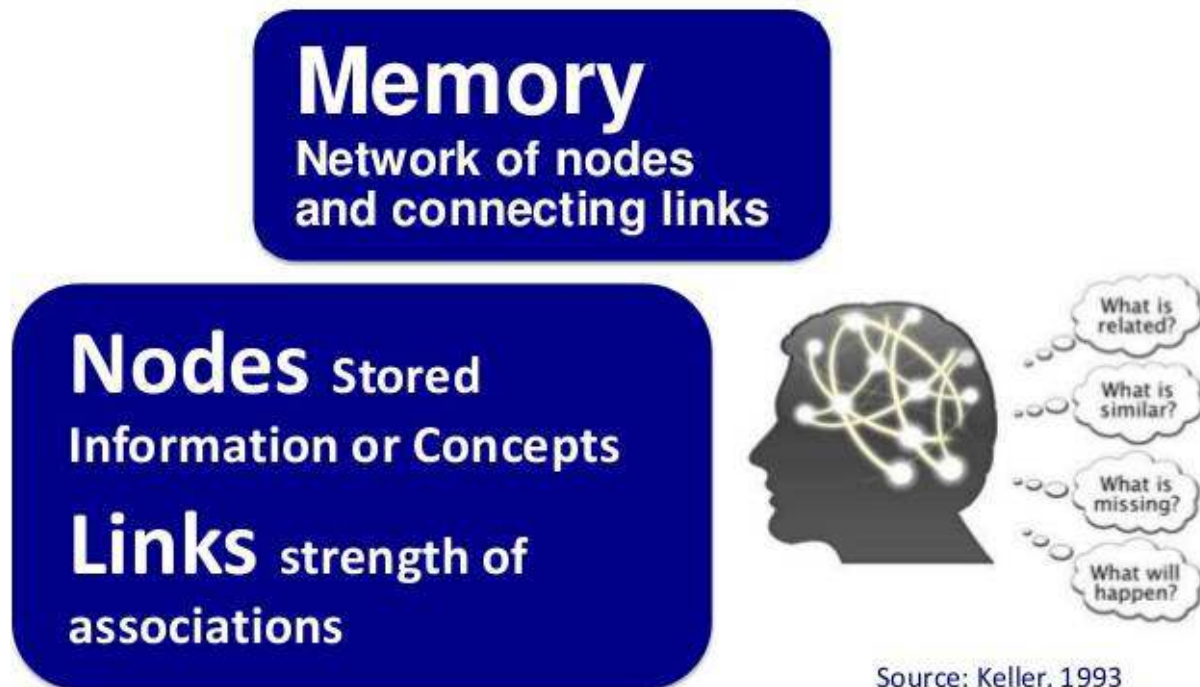
There's basically two types of memory: **implicit** and **explicit**. The first one occurs without you even realizing it, and it's all about *priming*. The second one, on the other hand, is all about *conscious recollection*.

Up to a point, repetition breed familiarity. Too much repetition, and habituation sets in, whereby there's a decreased response to some stimulus.

So how does this work in the minds of decision makers and hiring managers?

Figure 1. Associative Network Memory Model

Associative Network Memory Model



The E.P.I.C. Results[©] Model

About 10 years ago, I created a sequence of influence and persuasion strategies that I called E.P.I.C., which stood for “engage, position, influence, and convert.” (I also use it for “Enhancing Performance, Influence, and Connections.”) The brand Mindworm is associated with the pre-engagement phase, whereas the other sub-phases (in order) are direct engagement and post-engagement. **Figure 2** is an illustration of the overall EPIC Results model:

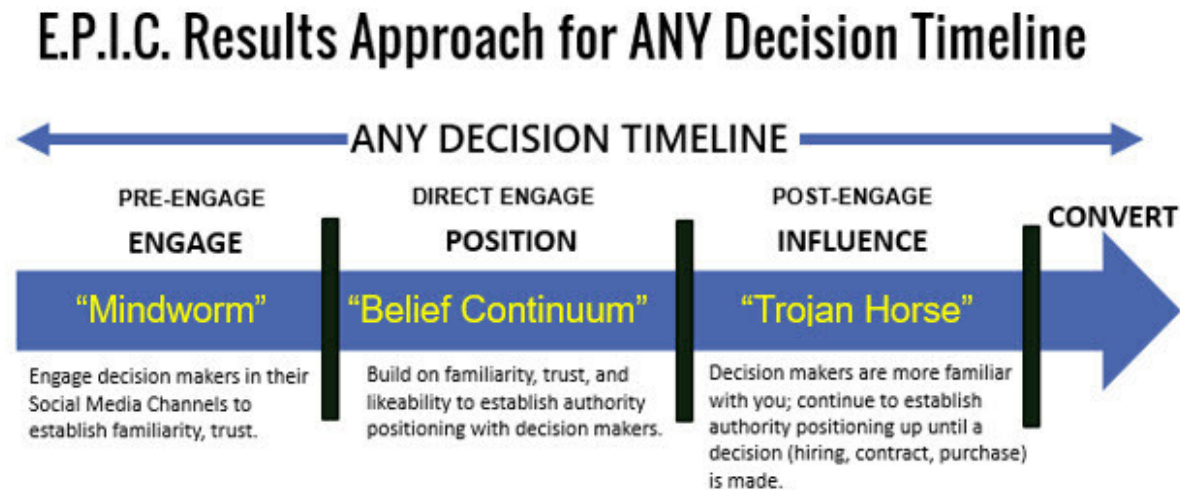


Figure 2. E.P.I.C. Results Approach to ANY Decision Timeline

In this model, you seek out decision makers with whom you wish engage well in advance of any direct meeting. With a pre-engagement approach, you begin building mutual familiarity and perhaps a degree of trust by engaging with decision makers (your “targets”) in their social media channels (likely LinkedIn) to establish yourself as a trusted advisor.

Pre-Engaging Decision Makers on Social Media

Nothing gets started in business without first establishing mutual familiarity and trust. People's fundamental beliefs and opinions are kept behind a well-guarded fortress because it keeps out conflicting perspectives through which they see the world. They need a compelling reason offered in a way that touches upon **what matters to them** before they consider lowering the drawbridge of that fortress to adjust their position, opinion, or belief.

They're looking for something to connect **you** to **them**; a narrative, a story that makes you relatable and relevant. People buy **YOU** first because who you are is always more important than what you do, how you do it, and why you do it. You have to be relatable in a way that connects others to you.

My main social media platform is LinkedIn. I tried Twitter for a few years and just never got the traction for the effort. Facebook is...well, Facebook. While I do occasionally cross-post to Facebook from LinkedIn, I use it to connect mostly with friends and family and in the past have run private Facebook groups there.

But where did my target market (at the time, senior executives) hang out? LinkedIn. Your target market may frequent a different social media platform. It makes sense to go where the fish are biting. When engaging others on social media, especially on LinkedIn, there's a productive way to do it by thoughtful comments about their posts and providing upfront value. There's also an unproductive way, which is pitching someone immediately when you get into their network with your online marketing package, coaching program, or product.

Lately, I rarely let anyone into my LinkedIn network who is too lazy to personalize their request to join. Avoid the banal and pre-written text: “I’d like to join your LinkedIn network” and try something that shows a little more panache and **novelty** (*see the eBook entitled **VisionShift** for how to create conversational novelty to get others to pay attention*).

You’re trying to mold decision maker perception with your request to you can enter a pre-engagement stage with them, so be unique and novel with your requests...that’s right, *requests*...**plural**. Engagement involves building familiarity and trust over time. You can’t do it in one swoop.

Here are some ideas to consider:

You want to connect with Robert, a senior leader at a fast-growing company...

“Hello Robert. I found your post about <subject> thought provoking and quite revealing about workforce engagement in the high-tech industry. I’d like to connect with you here on LinkedIn to follow your thoughts and ideas in future posts. Regards, YOU.”

Robert lets you into his network.

“Hello Robert. Thanks for including me in your network. Cheers, YOU.”

A few weeks later responding to another post by Robert...

“More great insight, Robert. I’ve dealt with similar engagement and productivity issues in the past and have developed some innovative, low-cost solutions. Be happy to answer any questions or help you with any issues you’re grappling with. Regards, YOU.”

A week or so later...

“Greetings Robert. I found this white paper (see link) on how Company XYZ resolved a similar leadership engagement problem. Sounded similar to what you’re dealing with. Hope this helps. Regards, YOU.”

*A week or so later you initiate the transition to **the direct engagement stage...***

“Hello Robert. Rehabilitating ineffective leaders is all I do all day long. Can I get 15 or 20 minutes on your calendar to offer up some ideas that will help put things back on track? Regards, YOU.”

Table 1 shows the approaches used in the *pre-engagement stage* of overall engagement.

Table 1. Sample approaches used with decision makers in the pre-engagement stage.

ENGAGEMENT STAGE	APPROACHES USED
PRE-ENGAGEMENT	Mold decision maker perception via social media
	Elicit & align congruent attitudes via social media
	Trigger social pressure to continue building connection (“Click here to download..”)
	“Habituate” your message (repeat, repeat, repeat)

**You Want to be Seen as the Trusted Advisor by
Decision Makers**

The Decision Maker's Dilemma

Prejudices, presuppositions, and expectations complicate any decision to hire, buy, or contract with the best available candidate. Such decisions are prediction-based, rife with uncertainty, and based on some expectation of future performance. To complicate matters, decision makers are faced with something called *irreducible unpredictability*. That's a fancy term for assessments they must make about a candidate's future on-the-job success based on previous performance history (résumé and cover letter, for example), interviews, and personal recommendations.

During the pre-engagement stage, decision makers are always on the lookout for **problem solvers**, **game changers**, and **solutions providers** (the *MacGyvers*) on the social media platforms they frequent, so you have to position your pre-engagement strategy to come across as someone who would be their trusted advisor.



In my experience, however, most candidates position themselves as just another worker (employee) — especially as seen in cover letter and résumés — and most organizations already have too many of those.

Most candidates confuse *task completion* with *accomplishment* or *achievement*. A task completion is part of a *duty and responsibility*— a minimal job requirement usually. It's what you need to know and do to get and keep a job.

An *accomplishment* or *achievement* demonstrably contributes to the higher strategic objectives of the organization *above and beyond* daily duties and responsibilities. Task completions and duties and responsibilities are **features**; achievements are **benefits**.

Understanding the “One Thing” with Decision Makers

In the movie *City Slickers*, the trail boss Curly (played by the late Jack Palance) told his city-slicker cow hands that the secret to life is “...one thing. Just one thing. Once you figure it out, you stick to that...”

Well, here's the “one thing” you need to know about decision makers: They *hire* you, *buy* from you, *contract* with you, and *promote* you for **one reason**: ***You help them get something they need or want better than anyone else.***

Yes, Hollywood understands this “One Thing” principle. In the movie, *The Wizard of Oz*, the Wizard grants Dorothy and her companions their wishes for one reason: OK, all together... ***They helped him get something he wanted (broomstick of the Wicked Witch) or needed better than anyone else...***



Heck, even the gatekeeper to the Emerald City recognized Dorothy had something valued by the Wizard...the ruby slippers.

The Elements of Your Professional Platform

Every professional seeking to elevate their career trajectory or accelerate their progress should understand the importance of a professional platform. **Figure 3** shows four major categories and respective elements of a professional platform:



Figure 3. Elements of a Professional Platform.

Let's look at these more closely because they provide the “escape velocity” with which your pre-engagement strategy lifts off from the launch pad.

Visibility

Your visibility in this context hinges on how you and your work are “seen” in the marketplace (and maybe even the workplace). Obviously, the more people that know you and your work, the more successful pre-engagement encounters will be.

Authority

Your work should speak for itself and should take one of two paths regarding the status quo of issues in your profession, industry, or field: You're either a vocal contrarian with a reinforced perspective on those issues, or you're a vocal advocate in support of those issues but a voice leading from the front. Regardless of your position, you'll also need...

Proven Influence

Nothing validates your position on issues like proven influence as evidenced by your visibility and authority positioning. “Influencer” and “thought leader” are labels others give you based on these platform elements; they aren't titles you give yourself (they have more currency when others provide them).

Target Audience

You've identified an audience (a niche within an industry, profession, or field) with a need and a want for your platform, expertise, and branded value, and that's where you place most of your platform-building efforts.

Mindworm in Action

Back in the late 1990s when I was working for a software startup, I received a phone call from a director at Intel Corporation. After introducing himself, the conversation went like this:

“I don’t know if you’re looking for other opportunities [...I wasn’t at the time...] but your résumé landed on my desk yesterday. I’ve heard you several times speak at conferences; I’ve read your insightful articles in the industry journals and other publications and was impressed with what you’ve done over your career.

“I’m flying to Austin next week and was wondering if you would be interested in having a conversation with me over dinner about a leadership position with Intel in their new Austin Design Center?”

I agreed to the dinner invitation, which was also extended to my wife, and we had a very productive conversation. After dinner, I accepted Intel’s very generous offer and enjoyed a great eight-year career there until Intel sold off the business unit to another company.

In this unusual Pre-Engagement example, elements of my platform, branded value, and expertise dominated this Intel director’s associative memory model, reinforcing the idea that I was his preferred candidate for the new position. The scheduled dinner conversation with him was simply the next stage of the engagement model: the Direct Engagement stage.

Platform Knowledge Inventory

I’ve used the elements of Figure 3 as a handout when I led masterclasses and seminars so you can score where you are today with the criteria and see where there’s room to improve. Great way to keep tabs on growing your Mindworm!

PLATFORM KNOWLEDGE INVENTORY

	5 = On Top of Things				
1 = Low or non-existent	3 = Good but not great				
VISIBILITY	1	2	3	4	5
How well do other professionals in your industry know you?					
Do they know your work or accomplishments?					
Do you communicate to others outside of your immediate position or sector niche what it is you do or you've done?					
Are other people and organizations aware of it?					
Do you distribute your visibility/expertise into other channels?					
Are you a member of online forums, social media, professional associations, etc? Basically, where do you make waves in the marketplace and within your profession?					
AUTHORITY					
How solid is your credibility?					
Are your credentials relevant and current?					
How much experience do you have in your specialty field?					
PROVEN INFLUENCE					
Are you being published in peer-reviewed journals/industry blogs?					
Are you presenting at conferences on a regular basis?					
How do you demonstrate being an "influencer"? Can you show where your work has made an impact and can you provide demonstrable proof of that impact (quantitative measures such as revenues generated, costs avoided, revenues recovered, or percent of arrests that led to conviction really help out here).					
Do others consider you a "thought leader"? Many business leaders have grown weary of the term <i>thought leader</i> . <i>Thought leader</i> , and other similar labels, should be descriptors others (your references, for example) bestow on you. Don't call yourself a <i>thought leader</i> .					
TARGET AUDIENCE					
Are you most visible to the most appropriate targeted audience?					
Do you know how to reach them?					
Is your work helping to build your brand within the circles where you already have visibility?					

Instructions: Place a checkmark or X in the appropriate column after each variable based on your current knowledge of your personal or business platform. This simple inventory will direct your attention to areas that require additional effort to solidify your platform.

Donn LeVie Jr. is a respected leadership influence strategist/consultant, award-winning author, leadership coach and mentor, and global speaker who focuses on how people speak (**linguistics**), how they think (**cognitive psychology**), and how they make decisions (**behavioral economics**).

In his roles leading people and programs for Fortune 100 companies (**Phillips Petroleum, Motorola, Intel Corp.**), government agencies (**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**), and academia (the **University of Houston Downtown College – Department of Natural Sciences and Mathematics**), Donn has been directly involved with global oceanographic research projects, multimillion-dollar offshore oil and gas exploration programs, high-tech chip design initiatives, and teaching fundamentals of petroleum exploration and production to undergraduate students.

Donn stepped away from the corporate world in 2013 to launch Donn LeVie Jr. STRATEGIES, LLC. Over his career he's spoken at more than 70 conferences and since 2011 has been a regular presenter and leadership strategist at the annual Global Fraud Conference sponsored by the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners.

Donn's client and audience list spans organizations from the public, private and education sectors, including the FBI, Dept. of Education Inspector Generals Office, New York Port Authority, National Science Foundation, FDIC, Enterprise Holdings, Ernst & Young, the City of Nashville, Franklin and Marshall College, and many more.

As an author, Donn's books have won the Global eBook Award and the International Book Award (*Confessions of a Hiring Manager*, 2012; *Strategic Career Engagement*, 2016). Donn's newly released books, *From the Underworld to the Boardroom: True Tales of Fraud, Corruption, Counterfeiting, and Cons* and *STACKING THE DECK: Career Strategies for Outsmarting the Competition* are available only through his programs.

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