



## **Designing Thought Leadership Research**

A live online course delivered over Zoom

Available Summer 2026

### **About the Course**

This course is for companies that make primary research a key part of their thought leadership activities. They believe (as we do) that the ability to repeatedly develop groundbreaking insights from their studies would give them a competitive advantage in getting recognized as leading experts in their markets.

As such, they believe that their skills in selecting and researching topics are core to gaining such an advantage.

Who should attend this class? Our “Designing Thought Leadership Research” course is for thought leadership professionals who manage, design and/or conduct studies to position their firms as top market experts.

Two versions of the course will be available starting this summer:

- Public version: For 4 to 6 companies (with as many as three people per company).
- Private version: For a single company, open to as many as 15 people.

We’ll conduct the course over four 4-hour Zoom sessions held over 3 to 4 consecutive weeks. Why? The course material and exercises are intense – too intense to be adequately absorbed in a 1- or 2-day offsite.

We believe participants will best learn the skills if a) they can take the classes from their desks during their work weeks (and, thus, not have to go off site), and b) they have time between the sessions to design their studies – whether those studies are in the planning stage or are being considered for the future.

## **Core Need and Target Audience**

The market need for excellent thought leadership research today is big and growing. Edelman/LinkedIn, Buday TLP and other surveys of executives who “consume” thought leadership confirm this.

However, the number B2B companies conducting thought leadership on just about any business topic has also risen. This raises the bar of quality dramatically for thought leadership research teams. To stand out, thought leadership researchers need to design and execute studies that achieve two things more than anything else:

- A counterintuitive solution to the topic problem at hand.
- Extensive case study evidence showing the novel solution helped firms make sizable improvements in business performance.

This course is aimed at thought leadership researchers whose roles are to help determine researchable topics and design and execute research processes – i.e., what questions to ask, of who, how they will be asked, and through what streams (survey, case interviews, desk research, SME interviews, financial data analysis, etc.).

## **Key Skills to be Gained**

- Topic selection: Determining the topic to be studied, and the potential value of coming up with and marketing big insights on it.
- Topic scoping: Understanding what specific aspects of the selected topic to study – and not to study, given the limitations of time, budget, talent, and expertise.
- Research design: Determining how to shed light on the topic – the initial research hypotheses, the research streams,

## Classes

Here are the four sessions:

- **Session 1: Topic selection.** Key ideas: Choosing topics that meet the “3W” test – they’re in a firm’s wheelhouse; there’s market white space on it; and the topic is white hot.
  - Using generative AI to identify competing studies and summarize findings (to search for the “white space”)
  - Using generative AI and other tools to determine how popular a topic is
  - Determining the potential market opportunity (money spent) for services and products that address the problem.
- **Session 2: Topic scoping.** Key ideas: Bounding a topic so that it can be sufficiently explored given the limitations of time, budget, expertise and other constraints.
- **Session 3: Research design.** Key ideas: Determining the core issues to research, based in part on conducting generative AI-created real case studies of companies that have managed the topic at hand. Creating initial and counterintuitive hypotheses; deriving research questions from them; and determining how to collect the answers (e.g., surveys, financial statistics, case study interviews, desk research, etc.) Creating a target list of companies to secure interviews.
- **Session 4: Creating the research instruments.** Key ideas: Learning how to phrase and order questions for surveys; determine “banner” questions for categorizing “leaders” and “followers”; write questions for case study and subject expert interviews; designing desk research guides; and conducting additional generative AI research to surface best-practice case studies.

| Class Sessions                                    | Key Goals  | Problems Addressed   | Key Skills Gained  | Learning Approaches  |
|---|--|--|--|--|
| <p>Session1 (Week 1):</p> <p>Topic Selection</p>  | <p>Developing several potential topics and deciding on the optimal one.</p>  | <p>Choosing topics that are favorites of a few but not core to the firm as a whole (present or future).</p> <p>Having little understanding of the market need and potential value of providing services on a certain research topic.</p> <p>Determining where to present new light on the topic.</p>   | <p>Connecting topics to services and revenue of the firm.</p> <p>Estimating the size of the total addressable market for the firm's services.</p> <p>Understanding the current state of thinking on the topic (especially, content published by competitors).</p> <p>Evaluating topics through the Buday TLP "3W" test: "white space, "white hot," and "wheelhouse."</p> | <p>Having teams choose fictional or real topics.</p> <p>Estimating the value of services that address the topic (via generative AI).</p> <p>Conducting secondary research on them.</p> <p>Doing the 3W analysis on which topic is the optimal one to pursue.</p> |
| <p>Session 2 (Week 2):</p> <p>Topic Scoping</p>   | <p>Determining what aspects of the topic (topic issues) can be studied given the limitations of time, budget, talent and other resources.</p>      | <p>Scoping a topic so the research can explore new aspects of it, and thus has a better chance to shed new insights given the limits of time, talent and budget.</p>   | <p>Bounding a research topic.</p>  | <p>Determining the topic scope (what aspects of the problem are "in" and "out" given time and budget)</p>  |
| <p>Session 3 (Week 3):</p> <p>Research Design</p> | <p>Determining how to shed new light on a topic: what data to collect, what questions to ask, and how to collect the answers to the questions.</p> | <p>Determining the optimal research streams.</p> <p>To decide on the core issues to research, learning how to conduct generative AI-based research to identify 10 best- and worst-practice case studies.</p> <p>Formulating counterintuitive initial hypotheses on the problem and solution</p> <p>Determining the core issues to research</p> | <p>Research stream selection.</p> <p>Key issues determination.</p> <p>Counterintuitive hypothesis generation</p>   | <p>Problem/Solution framework guide to stream selection, issues determination, hypotheses determination, research instrument questions.</p>  |

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|  |  | Designing the survey questionnaire<br><br>Designing the case study interview guide.<br><br>Designing the desk research guide. |  |  |
| Session 4 (Week 4):<br><br>Creating the Research Instruments | Writing the tools of the research stream: survey questionnaire, case study interview guide, secondary research guide, generative AI guide. | Learning how to phrase questions in the optimal ways to get optimal answers.  | Designing surveys, case study interview guides, desk research guides, and ongoing generative AI research guides and prompts. | Survey instrument design.<br><br>Case study interview guide design.<br><br>Desk research guides.<br><br>Generative AI research guides. |

## Fees

For the public version of the course, the fees are \$5,000 per participant. For the private (single company) course, the fees are \$40,000 total (up to 15 participants).

## About the Instructor

Robert Buday is the author of “Competing on Thought Leadership,” a [book](#) that has been called the bible for companies that are making expertise development, expertise marketing and selling, and service innovation core to their business strategies. The book has received 13 publishing industry honors since it hit the market in January 2022.

Bob has designed and led more than 40 studies since 1987 that have helped companies such as Deloitte, Tata Consultancy Services, Unisys, RGP and CSC Index become recognized broadly for their expertise. Six of those studies were later turned into *Harvard Business Review* articles (one, by Deloitte, became a cover article in HBR’s print edition), one into an MIT Sloan Management Review article, and another featured in *The Economist* magazine.

Bob is CEO of Buday Thought Leadership Partners, and previously a co-founder and co-owner of Bloom Group LLC. Both were among the first consulting and marketing firms to specialize in thought leadership.

The “Designing Thought Leadership Research” course has been designed to complement four other Buday TLP courses on thought leadership research:

- “Generating Big Insights: Connecting the Dots from Research” (available in December 2026)
- “Developing Compelling Narratives” ([available](#) since 2021, and taken by 250+ people worldwide)
- “Creating Persuasive Client Stories” (syllabus [here](#))
- “Illuminating the Narrative Through Data Visualization” ([available](#) December 2026)

For more information, email Bob at [bob@budaytlp.com](mailto:bob@budaytlp.com) and visit his firm’s website at [www.budaytlp.com](http://www.budaytlp.com)

