EXTRACT

source
forconsulting.com

Distributing thought leadership

What's new? What works? And where should you focus your effort?

JANUARY 2015

white space

Contents

white space

Introduction

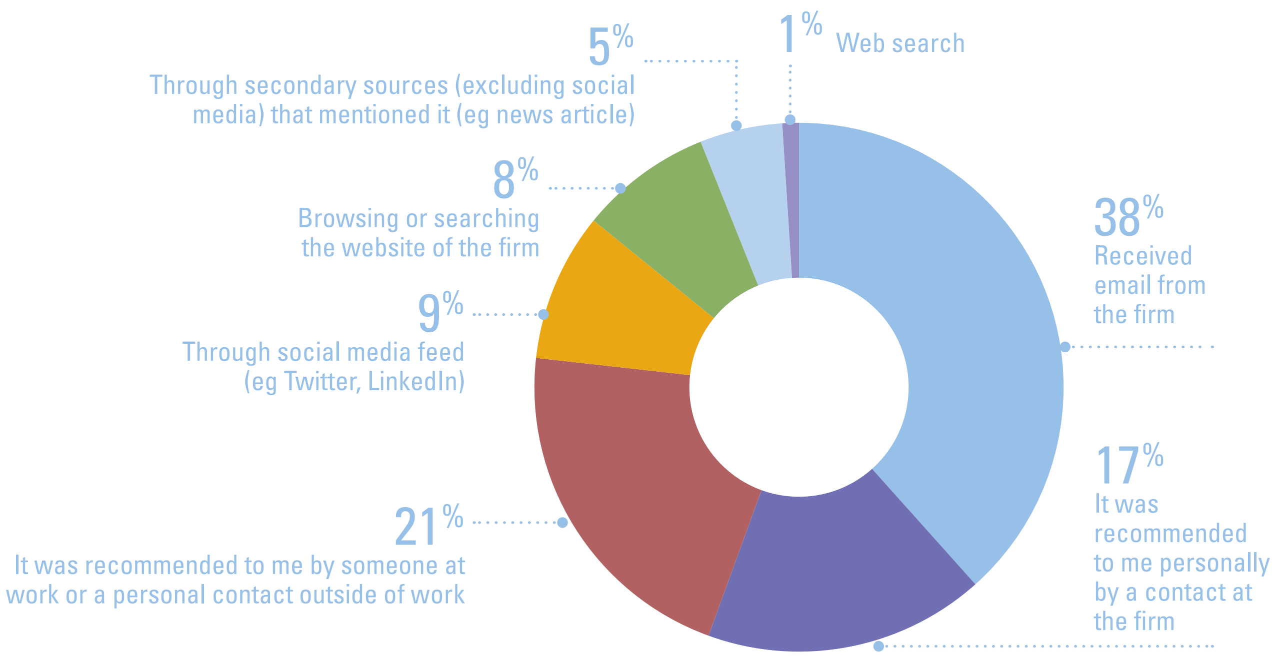
What the Net seems to be doing is chipping away my capacity for concentration and contemplation. Whether I'm online or not, my mind now expects to take in information the way the Net distributes it: in a swiftly moving stream of particles. Once I was a scuba diver in the sea of words. Now I zip along the surface like a guy on a Jet Ski.

Nicholas Carr, The shallows: How the internet is changing the way we read, think and remember

Today's digital world offers a smorgasbord of opportunities for creators of thought leadership to deliver their carefully crafted thoughts to their carefully chosen audience. No longer are thoughts confined to the written word laid out on the page; instead, insights may be shared through formats as varied as videos, podcasts, slides, interactive charts and online courses. Overlaying these formats is a mesh of opportunities to distribute that content. However, as with so many aspects of life, these opportunities also create a challenge: how to reach a potential client who is inundated with information. In this report, we aim to help marketing and thought leadership teams in consulting firms figure out how to distribute their thought leadership content as effectively as possible. We will leave the question of formats for later in the year; the goal for this report is to understand how firms can ensure that their content, in whichever form it is offered, receives the client engagement it deserves.

The starting point for our exploration is our 2014 survey[1] in which senior US executives (and your target clients) told us how they had come across their most memorable piece of thought leadership from the past six months (figure 1). Over half of the respondents pointed to a piece of thought leadership that they had engaged with because of either an email from the firm or a personal recommendation from a contact at the firm. In this report, based on a new survey and conversations with leading consulting firms, we dive deeper into each of these approaches.

Figure 1 How did you come across this memorable report?



[1] *The impact of thought leadership*, Source, 2014

Leveraging the personal recommendation

On the surface, "it was recommended to me personally by a contact at the firm" lags behind emails as a route through which people receive memorable thought leadership (figure 1). However, take into account how many personal recommendations are actually made versus how many emails are sent out (1 to 100? 1 to 1,000?) and it's clear that the former must have a really good hit rate. One personal recommendation is much more likely to drive engagement with thought leadership than one email from a faceless firm – and much more likely to be the start of a conversation.

We asked each of our interviewees whether getting individual consultants to contact the target reader (by phone, email, or in person) is a priority, and they all responded with a resounding 'Yes'. "I think it's relevant to any campaign," says Maria Jennings at PwC, reflecting the views of all we interviewed. "Ultimately we are always looking to build relationships, and I believe that thought leadership is a great stepping stone to engage with our clients strategically."

So how are firms making this happen in practice? Interviewees emphasised the importance of understanding the needs of different service lines, sectors, and geographies – and having the processes in place to tailor a report's findings to different audiences according to those needs. A very tangible example of this is the IBM global C-Suite study that, according to Linda Ban, has been cut in more than 60 ways to produce slide packs for different regions and industries. In other firms, material is tailored at the local level. Robert Brand at EY comments: "The content produced for the CFO agenda is developed at a global level but with the flexibility to be translated or tailored locally. We have a network of marketing professionals around the world that is responsible for working with our partners and business development executives in the regional and sector teams to tailor the content, develop the deployment plans (including client meetings), and measure the execution of those plans."

It's also about making it easy for consultants to share the material by, for example, creating email templates or giving consultants ready-made presentations to use face-to-face.

All of these efforts will fail, however, if consultants don't know about or aren't motivated to share material. As Geri Gibbons at Deloitte says, "We ensure it happens by considering our internal channels just as important as our external ones in capturing reader attention." This communication may be by email or in person. Josselyn Simpson at Strategy& gives an example: "The study's authors, senior partners from different regions, are the ones to tell the full partnership about the study, which ensures that the full partnership is engaged."

And finally, from our informal conversations with firms, we know that those who take this seriously are making big efforts to measure internal engagement with thought leadership.

In summary

There's a risk of burning out your own colleagues – and their contacts – if you try to apply this approach to every piece of thought leadership you publish. However, for significant pieces, it is clearly worth doing – and worth doing well.

- Are you paying as much attention to your internal channels as your external ones?
- Do you ask your consultants what they need – in terms of both format and content – in order to share material directly with their contacts?
- Are you able to tailor content effectively?
- Are you making it easy for consultants to share material through a range of different channels (eg through email, in person, on Twitter or LinkedIn)?
- Are you tracking internal use and sharing of content?

What Source can do for you

Source has been collating and analysing the quality of consulting firm thought leadership since 2002. We work with the world's leading consulting firms as they strive to maximise the impact of their investment in thought leadership.

For creators of thought leadership, we offer:

- Access to our White Space database – updated monthly and containing thought leadership produced by the world's leading 30 consulting firms, this easy-to-search database allows you to quickly see what others are writing on the topic you are interested in.
- Hypothesis and approach review – show us your proposal and we will tell you what it would take to differentiate your thought leadership from that of your competitors, as well as providing suggestions about your research approach.

For service-line and sector leads, we offer:

- Analysis of your thought leadership content and distribution versus that of your competitors – and recommendations about how to take the lead.
- Insights into topic areas – where should you focus, what should you avoid.
- Training on how to use our quality criteria to improve your own thought leadership.
- Webinars and in-person presentations, using our own material and/or bespoke analysis, to help you drive change.

For global and country heads of thought leadership, we offer:

- Our bi-annual quality ratings report – enabling you to benchmark progress against your competitors.
- Bespoke analysis of your firm's thought leadership – allowing you to spot areas of best practice and opportunities for improvement.
- Webinars and in-person presentations, using our own material and/or bespoke analysis, to help you drive change.

18 King William Street • London • EC4N 7BP
Tel: +44 (0)203 700 5461

PO Box 340505 • Dubai • United Arab Emirates
Tel: +971 (0)52 989 5224

Email: info@sourceforconsulting.com

www.**source**for**consulting**.com