

CYBERSECURITY: A MISSED OPPORTUNITY FOR THOUGHT LEADERSHIP?

"We've seen a lot of growth globally around cybersecurity, and every client wants to talk about it."

"Cybersecurity and related services are a growth area. It's probably the one topic that gets you a meeting with an executive with just a day's notice."

"There's huge demand for risk and cybersecurity services. It's top of clients' minds."

At the end of 2015 we described cybersecurity as the next consulting blockbuster, and with good reason: Not only is it what consulting firms are lining up to position themselves around at the moment, it's what their clients want to talk about more than anything else, too. And every time there's another high-profile cybersecurity attack—like the recent one on TV5Monde in France—the issue only pushes itself higher up the corporate agenda.

So, given that it's a boom area for consulting firms and a hot topic for clients, it should be a topic on which we're seeing a flurry of high-quality and highly-differentiated thought leadership, right? Unfortunately not.

On the one hand, this being a key area of growth for many firms has clearly led to consulting firms reckoning that they need—in thought leadership parlance—"to get something out there". There's certainly plenty of firms publishing plenty of material. But what's out there is far from being as good as it could be, and that seems like a missed opportunity.

The cybersecurity thought leadership landscape is dominated by reports that set out a firm's own model for addressing the topic, introduced with facts designed to scare the reader into taking action. But with no evidence as to why the model in question is the right one, and most senior executives already sold on the idea that they need to do something, these publications run the risk of preaching to the converted and adding little in the way of fresh insight.

Our view is that if a firm wants to produce a piece of content explaining its approach to cybersecurity, then it should do just that: Make it easy to read, include case studies, and sell its services—but don't pretend it's thought leadership.

Also making a regular appearance are the "throw money at the problem" type of reports—as evidenced by large surveys and sponsorships. Of course using a survey to underpin a point of view can work well, but a report constructed around a survey seldom does. And sponsorship is also problematic because it carries with it the impression that the firm can't, or doesn't want to, speak to senior executives, or doesn't have useful data to share with potential clients.

And finally, even though some publications suggest that they incorporate research with senior executives, the voice of this target audience is conspicuous by its absence. It can, of course, be difficult to persuade people to associate themselves publicly with a topic like cybersecurity, because they're inclined to feel that doing so is an admission of a weakness they'd rather keep quiet, but surely there are some people out there willing to debate and discuss different approaches to the issue. After all, if some of the highest-profile attacks have served to demonstrate anything it's that nobody is immune. And in our experience these are the conversations that lead to fresh insights, content that engages the reader, and memorable stories.

All of this means that, despite obvious signs of significant investment in thought leadership related to cybersecurity, there's little to differentiate one firm from another at the moment. Similar statistics, similar frameworks, and similar recommendations mean it's often not obvious why a senior executive would want to have a conversation with one firm above its competitors. What's needed is a hook—an interesting angle from which to start an engaging discussion.

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We help our clients to: spot the topics that their clients will be interested in (but other firms aren't writing about); benchmark their own publications against those of their competitors; and identify opportunities to improve the quality of their thought leadership. We work closely with our clients to: build effective development processes; learn from channel mix; build capability; and ensure a consistent focus on investment returns.

We work wherever thought leadership is happening within our client firms. Our clients include partners and senior subject matter experts, global leaders of marketing and thought leadership, sector and service line heads, through to marketers and individual consultants focused on individual pieces of thought leadership.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss more about our thought leadership services with you.

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