

Quality ratings of thought leadership for the second half of 2013

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This report is for firms that subscribe to White Space

Introduction

We've recently made a small change to our methodology for assessing the quality of a consulting firm's overall thought leadership output, dropping blogs from our analysis. It seemed increasingly unreasonable to suggest that clients held firms to the same standard with their blogs as they do with more traditional forms of thought leadership, and we didn't want to punish firms for their use of an important medium by including material which we consistently rated as relatively poor quality.

It's a small change and one which has generally had a very small impact: the vast majority of firms have seen their scores change very little as a result. Indeed, we'd be tempted not to make much of the change at all if it wasn't for one important exception: IBM.

IBM produces a very small amount of material relative to other firms and so the blogs it produces have weighed disproportionately heavily on its overall score. And so, without them, the firm tops our ranking for material published in the second half of 2013.

In truth, IBM was heading that way anyway. An unswerving focus on quality at the cost of volume has seen the former improve, not massively but markedly, in recent years, to a point where IBM was only very narrowly beaten to the top spot by BCG last time round. The cost to volume shouldn't be downplayed though – if there's any sense in using military analogies to describe the thought leadership market then IBM is being outgunned by virtually everyone at the moment, and that has the potential to hurt it. Nevertheless, with pieces like [Trusting the science that drives your business: A systematic approach to verify scientific claims](#) it's easy to see the benefits of a strategy we've been imploring many firms to consider employing for some time.

IBM's rise to the top is indicative of a continuing change to the order: its success knocks perennial high-performer BCG off the top spot and leaves us without a strategy firm as the leader for the first time in many years. It is a bit early to tell whether or not this has a broader symbolism with respect to the wider consulting market, but if the collective trajectory of strategy firms continues (or rather if they continue to allow themselves to be outdone by other types of firms) then it would become increasingly hard not to start talking about a serious threat to the jewel in their crown: their perceived intellectual supremacy.

Equally significant, especially within that context, is Deloitte's rise to second place, though perhaps the more important lesson to be learned here concerns the impact of a firm simply getting itself organised (in Deloitte's case through Deloitte University Press) around thought leadership. It's one of the reasons that strategy firms did so well for so long and it's creating clear daylight between Deloitte and the rest of the Big Four at the moment. Indeed, we suspect that's what accounts for the (very) early signs of improvement at PA Consulting recently. The firm may still languish near the bottom of our table, but it has managed to improve its score more than any firm other than IBM this time round, and, as our latest rankings confirm, a lot can change in a very short space of time.

Figure 1

Quality rankings for the second half of 2013

 Areas of particular strength

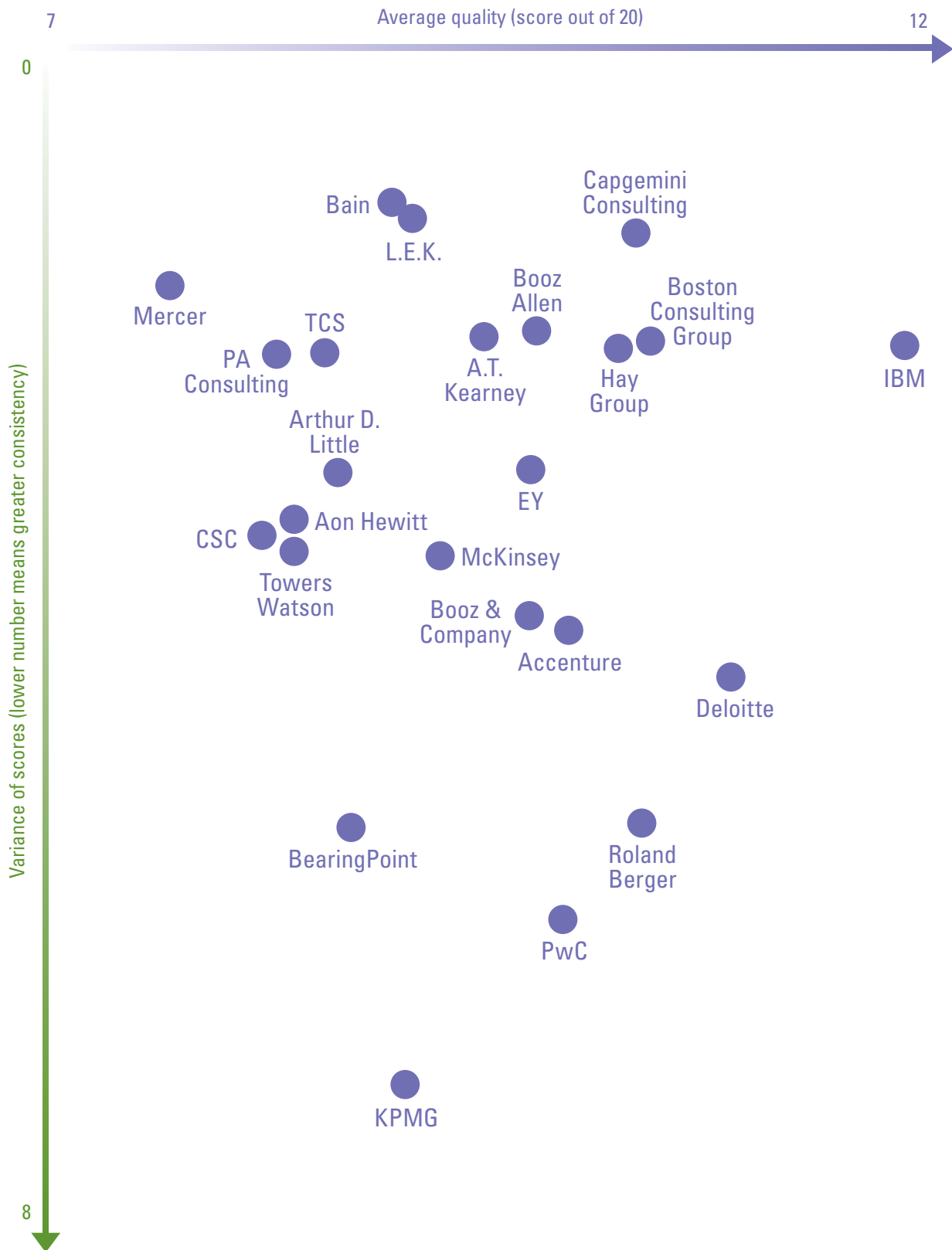
 Areas of particular weakness

		Differentiation	Appeal	Resilience	Prompting action	Total
1	IBM	3.30	2.95	3.22	2.50	11.97
2	Deloitte	3.32	2.91	2.60	2.16	10.98
3	BCG	3.23	2.72	2.39	2.13	10.48
4	Roland Berger	3.23	3.00	2.17	2.05	10.45
5	Capgemini Consulting	2.91	2.64	2.55	2.32	10.41
6	Hay Group	2.83	2.73	2.25	2.50	10.31
7	Accenture	2.90	2.72	2.06	2.35	10.02
8	PwC	2.96	2.71	2.02	2.30	9.99
9	Booz Allen	3.13	2.40	1.90	2.40	9.83
10	EY	2.97	2.39	2.09	2.36	9.81
11	Booz & Company	3.00	2.85	2.15	1.80	9.80
Average (all reports reviewed)		2.92	2.50	2.07	2.08	9.57
12	A.T. Kearney	3.04	2.54	2.11	1.83	9.52
13	McKinsey	3.00	2.70	1.82	1.73	9.26
14	L.E.K.	3.13	2.60	1.43	1.90	9.07
15	KPMG	2.56	2.27	2.27	1.95	9.04
16	Bain	2.79	2.52	1.98	1.73	9.02
17	BearingPoint*	2.90	2.29	1.77	1.75	8.71
18	Arthur D. Little	2.76	1.89	1.79	2.27	8.70
19	TCS	2.52	2.08	1.78	2.22	8.60
20	Aon Hewitt	2.67	1.98	1.95	1.85	8.44
21	Towers Watson	2.74	2.13	1.58	1.97	8.42
22	PA Consulting	2.78	2.46	1.42	1.67	8.32
23	CSC	2.47	2.25	1.88	1.65	8.25
24	Mercer	2.67	1.75	1.63	1.65	7.70

*BearingPoint's material has been included in our analysis for the first time, so the ranking of firms below it will have been affected by its inclusion.

Figure 2

Quality and consistency (of quality) in firms' thought leadership





Thought leadership has come to dominate the marketing activities of consulting firms, and with good cause: our research with clients finds consistent evidence that good thought leadership matters to them, too. It helps them to do their job, to identify where world-class capability exists in consulting firms, and even to shortlist firms for projects.

But it's also important to see thought leadership within the context of a wider content strategy. Content strategy recognises that you've got to understand the opportunities and threats presented by the channels through which thought leadership is now promoted, distributed, and even created, in the first place. But it also acknowledges that there are other types of content, and even that some of it isn't yours. Understanding how you connect all those components matters now more than it ever did.

Here's an overview of how we can help...



Subscription products

WHITE SPACE

White Space – the standard by which the world's leading consulting firms assess and benchmark quality in thought leadership – is a vital resource for anyone who writes, researches or manages thought leadership within consulting firms. It offers the following:

- **Access to our searchable database of more than 30,000 pieces of thought leadership from 30 of the world's leading management consulting firms**
- **Two half-yearly quality ratings reports, which rank firms based on their recent output and provide commentary on each firm's material**
- **Quarterly thought leadership digests, in which we select the best new thought leadership for a range of business functions.**



Custom research

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP REVIEWS

White Space provides useful insights into where a firm is strong and weak in its thought leadership, but for many firms it acts as the starting point for a more in-depth analysis of their material. Our thought leadership reviews assess quality in a sample of material, which can be random (as it is for our White Space quality ratings reports) or can be determined by you in order to target a particular time-frame or topic. We'll provide detailed analysis about what you're doing well and where you need to improve, and show you the breakdown of our scores for individual pieces of thought leadership. We're also able to show you how your material compares against that of your competitors, and to provide a critique on your – and your competitors' – use of different channels for promoting and distributing thought leadership.



Consulting

STRATEGY BRIEFINGS AND CAPABILITY DEVELOPMENT

Our work here is varied, but most typically involves:

- **Helping firms to develop thought leadership strategy**
- **Helping firms with the effective positioning of individual pieces of thought leadership**
- **Providing regular briefing and seminars on trends in thought leadership**
- **Helping firms to develop capability for creating high-quality thought leadership (across a firm, or in a team or an individual)**
- **Helping firms to develop a wider, connected, content strategy**

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