

# Quality ratings of thought leadership for the second half of 2012

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## The gathering storm

As the air of competition stills at the top, pressure builds.

Although there has been quite a lot of movement in the middle and lower echelons of our half-yearly thought leadership rankings, the position of the top five has remained unchanged and the battle for supremacy in thought leadership appears to have paused. The respite – we predict – will be temporary: the gap between the top firms and those beneath them is closing and somebody's going to have to make a big move if it's not going to be closed completely. There are two factors at work here. First, while not wanting to detract from the excellent material the top five firms are capable of publishing, all have seen a slight decrease in their score. There are different reasons behind this (which we touch on in the following pages), but some common issues also emerge. One is consistency: material which should never have seen the light of day is still getting published, perhaps because the quality control processes firms have in place (and many firms still have a very decentralised approach to the production of thought leadership) aren't adequate. Another is that it is hard to score well across all four of our criteria. We often, for example, come across well-researched articles which score badly on 'appeal' because the authors haven't been able to stand back from their material to draw out memorable conclusions.

This inevitably leads to a discussion about whether it's desirable, or even possible, to do well on all four of our criteria in the same piece of thought leadership. Haven't we, we're sometimes asked, created a barrier which is just too high to jump? Is there an impenetrable glass ceiling to quality? The reasons why consulting firms produce thought leadership vary: some may be seeking to influence governments, while others want to sell services; some may be trying to build an overall brand, others more specific propositions. In some contexts 'appeal' might appear to be the most important criteria, but in others it might seem to be 'resilience'. For that reason we're publishing here, for the first time, tables which list the top ten firms for each of our criteria – and they make interesting reading.

However, we also think that readers, even if they could recognise the different motivations a firm may have (and they usually can't), wouldn't be interested; they're simply looking for material which answers their questions in an efficient, trust-worthy and ideally enjoyable way. Intention is not an excuse to produce thought leadership which falls short of any of our criteria and it is possible to produce material which is strong across all the four dimensions we measure. The firm that does that, and does it consistently across all of its thought leadership, will shatter the glass ceiling which appears to be in place today.

But the second reason the gap between the top firms and the next group has narrowed is that a number of firms which have historically been in the middle of our list (or even further down) have moved up, in some cases substantially. Accenture has done this before, only to drop back down again in our next report. Deloitte's jump from 12th to 8th is more impressive because it reverses the gentle downward trajectory the firm has been on for the last few years. The newly-launched Deloitte University Press partly accounts for this: creating a new, sharper window on its thinking has helped raise the bar in quality too. Aon Hewitt has made even greater progress, up from 21st position to 11th as a result of focusing its efforts on topics where it has something intelligent and interesting to say.

If the current trends continue, the rankings in our next half-year report could look very different.

Please note that:

- The list of firms we rate varies slightly from report to report. Where a firm hasn't produced a significant volume of material in a traditional format (see below) or we have had problems accessing it, we exclude them from the following tables.
- Only thought leadership in traditional formats (books, articles, reports, etc) and their electronic variants has been rated here.
- Long-standing readers of this report will also notice that we've changed one aspect of our 'ratings' terminology. In the past we've talked about 'appropriate commercialisation' – the extent to which a firm finds the right balance between not mentioning its services at all and making a hard sales pitch – which acknowledges the fact that thought leadership, unlike academic research, has commercial goals, however oblique or low-key they may be. We've now changed this to 'Prompting action' which captures our belief that thought leadership should be designed to have an impact while acknowledging the fact that some material is less obviously and directly 'commercial' in the sense of driving sales.

**Figure 1**

Quality rankings for the second half of 2012

Rank	Firm	Differentiation	Appeal	Resilience	Prompting action	Total
1	BCG	3.50	3.08	2.05	2.27	10.90
2	Booz & Company	3.29	2.74	2.54	2.23	10.79
3	IBM	3.10	2.88	2.57	2.08	10.62
4	Roland Berger	3.11	2.69	2.24	2.38	10.41
5	PwC	2.94	3.07	2.05	2.18	10.23
6	Bain & Co	3.15	2.95	1.97	2.14	10.21
7	Accenture	2.98	2.70	2.04	2.46	10.18
8	Deloitte	3.13	2.96	1.94	2.08	10.10
9	E&Y	2.88	2.57	2.31	2.34	10.09
10	Hay Group	3.19	2.86	1.74	2.21	10.00
11	Aon Hewitt	2.89	2.50	1.86	2.50	9.75
	Average	3.00	2.60	2.10	2.10	9.70
12	KPMG	2.90	2.57	2.15	1.99	9.61
13	McKinsey & Co	2.94	2.90	2.08	1.56	9.49
14	Towers Watson	3.03	2.31	2.14	1.96	9.44
15	Capgemini	2.79	2.41	2.29	1.88	9.36
16	AT Kearney	2.90	2.56	1.92	1.80	9.18
17	Monitor	3.11	1.75	1.94	2.33	9.14
18	Arthur D. Little	3.33	2.15	1.50	1.80	8.78
19	L.E.K.	2.67	2.31	1.63	2.06	8.67
20	CSC	2.93	2.18	1.67	1.80	8.58
21	TCS	2.41	2.22	1.74	2.17	8.54
22	Booz Allen Hamilton	3.33	1.67	1.61	1.17	7.78
23	Mercer	2.07	1.83	1.54	2.00	7.44
24	PA Consulting	2.33	2.00	1.34	1.64	7.32

**Figure 2**

Comparing ranks and scores in the second half of 2012 with those in the first half of 2012

Firm	Score out of 20 in the first half of 2012	Rank in the first half of 2012	Score out of 20 in the second half of 2012	Rank in the second half of 2012	Change in score since first half 2012
Accenture	9.50	9	10.18	7	7%
Aon Hewitt	7.64	21	9.75	11	28%
Arthur D. Little	8.87	16	8.78	18	-1%
AT Kearney	8.99	15	9.18	16	2%
Bain & Co	9.97	7	10.21	6	2%
BCG	11.41	1	10.90	1	-4%
Booz & Company	11.17	2	10.79	2	-3%
Booz Allen Hamilton	5.28	24	7.78	22	47%
Capgemini	8.15	18	9.36	15	15%
CSC	7.67	20	8.58	20	12%
Deloitte	9.30	12	10.10	8	9%
E&Y	9.49	10	10.09	9	6%
Hay Group	10.23	6	10.00	10	-2%
IBM	11.13	3	10.62	3	-5%
KPMG	9.76	8	9.61	12	-2%
L.E.K.	7.50	22	8.67	19	16%
McKinsey & Co	9.18	13	9.49	13	3%
Mercer	8.27	17	7.44	23	-10%
Monitor	9.42	11	9.14	17	-3%
PA Consulting	7.40	23	7.32	24	-1%
PwC	10.63	5	10.23	5	-4%
Roland Berger	10.91	4	10.41	4	-5%
TCS	7.99	19	8.54	21	7%
Towers Watson	9.08	14	9.44	14	4%

**Figure 3**

Variance of firms' scores to the average in the second half of 2012

	Differentiation	Appeal	Resilience	Prompting action	Total
Accenture	1%	4%	-1%	17%	5%
Aon Hewitt	-2%	-4%	-9%	19%	0%
Arthur D. Little	13%	-17%	-27%	-14%	-10%
AT Kearney	-2%	-1%	-7%	-14%	-5%
Bain & Co	7%	14%	-4%	2%	5%
BCG	19%	19%	0%	8%	12%
Booz & Company	11%	6%	23%	6%	11%
Booz Allen Hamilton	13%	-36%	-22%	-45%	-20%
Capgemini	-5%	-7%	12%	-11%	-4%
CSC	-1%	-16%	-19%	-14%	-12%
Deloitte	6%	14%	-6%	-1%	4%
E&Y	-2%	-1%	12%	11%	4%
Hay Group	8%	10%	-15%	5%	3%
IBM	5%	11%	25%	-1%	9%
KPMG	-2%	-1%	5%	-6%	-1%
L.E.K.	-10%	-11%	-21%	-2%	-11%
McKinsey & Co	0%	12%	1%	-26%	-2%
Mercer	-30%	-29%	-25%	-5%	-23%
Monitor	5%	-33%	-5%	11%	-6%
PA Consulting	-21%	-23%	-35%	-22%	-25%
PwC	0%	18%	0%	4%	5%
Roland Berger	5%	4%	9%	13%	7%
TCS	-18%	-14%	-15%	3%	-12%
Towers Watson	3%	-11%	4%	-7%	-3%

<b>23 Mercer</b>	Mercer continues to be a prolific publisher of thought leadership. There are occasional glimpses here of what the firm is surely capable of: <a href="#">Deal Making Is Back. Is HR ready?</a> provides a more practical take on the subject than most and <a href="#">CEO Succession Planning That Works</a> brings some welcome evidence to an area where gut instinct still dominates. But much else disappoints, as the simplistic <a href="#">Responsible Investment – Not A Religious Experience</a> and poorly-presented <a href="#">No Easy Way Out: CPAs vs. Open Market Options</a> both illustrate. Mercer would do well to look to the changes being made by other HR firms and re-think its thought leadership strategy before the gap between its position and that of its competitors becomes insurmountably great.
<b>24 PA Consulting Group</b>	PA Consulting is another prolific producer of thought leadership, but a preference for very short articles, published either as web pages or in third-party media, means the firm tends to come fairly well down our rankings. The result – as this <a href="#">article on electric vehicles</a> illustrates – is that interesting observations are crammed into a fairly small space and provide little opportunity for the firm to demonstrate its knowledge and credentials. The firm is often better on technology-related issues – <a href="#">Mobile business: the smart technology driving innovation in leading companies</a> is a good example. The problem perhaps is that the firm is not clear where thought leadership stops and sales effort starts: some of its material ( <a href="#">Trust in the age of information security</a> is one of many such examples) presents itself as the former but morphs into the latter – something clients reading it might well resent.

## A note on our methodology

Potential clients are inundated with information and analysis from every direction. Unquestionably, the vast majority is binned or deleted instantly. Our methodology is based on research with senior executives and assesses the factors that drive a member of your target audience to pick up a piece of material, to read past the first paragraph and beyond, to have confidence in what they have read and to take action based on what they have absorbed.

We take a random sample of each consulting firm's thought leadership (a minimum of 15% and a greater proportion in many cases) and score individual articles against four criteria:

- **Differentiation** – will the potential reader pick up and begin to read this piece of thought-leadership? Sadly, many potential clients complain that, despite its pretensions, most material produced by consulting firms is indistinguishable from that produced by their competitors and that most thought 'leading' is in fact thought 'following'. We ask whether a piece of thought leadership is timely, whether it is different to what others are doing (either because of the topic or angle taken) and question whether it is revelatory.
- **Appeal** – does the writing style and presentation encourage the reader to keep on reading past the introduction and beyond? With so many options available to today's reader, many readers will not make it past the first paragraph if these issues are not addressed. We ask whether the introduction captures the reader's attention and compels them to continue, whether the report looks good and if the writing style and structure make it easy to read. And finally, we consider whether the report does anything to make the material stick in the reader's mind.
- **Resilience** – will the reader feel confident in what they are being told? Whether a client buys into the idea a consulting firm is trying to put across depends on the evidence. We explore the robustness of each report including the use of primary and secondary research (both quantitative and qualitative), the quality of analysis and description of methodology, and the use of credible internal experts.
- **Prompting action** – will the reader do something because they have read this report? Good thought leadership takes the reader beyond the 'that's interesting' stage – it gives them the tools and inspiration to identify issues in their own organisation or to begin to address a pressing concern. We ask whether the next steps for the reader are clear. We also check that the material isn't a poorly disguised sales pitch which would undermine its credibility and chances of prompting action.

These attributes are scored 1–5, where one is the lowest rating and five is the highest. For more details on the exact criteria used, please [click here](#).

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