



THE CHINA CONSULTING MARKET IN 2017

Including market sizing data, growth rates, current market trends, and forecasts

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

[Click here](#) to see our **executive summary pack, including key data**



- 2016 was a good year for management consultants, with the market growing over 10% to reach a total value of US\$4,522m. In fact the consulting market grew considerably faster than China's economy, thanks to multinational corporations (MNCs) increasing their investments in the country, government initiatives transforming the landscape for domestic players, and clients of all stripes reconsidering their business models in light of digital innovation and a slower-growing economy.
- The growth and professionalisation ambitions of China's state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and privately-owned enterprises (POEs) are opening up new opportunities for management consultants, who previously found little work among these client groups. The demand for a more domestically centred approach—and the local talent required to deliver it—can make these opportunities hard to realise, however, as can a lingering lack of maturity. It can also be difficult for consultants to convince their global stakeholders to make the investments necessary to address China's unique challenges.
- As consulting opportunities expand in mainland China, the Hong Kong market has lost much of its appeal, now seeming very small in comparison. Meanwhile, a new market is opening up in China's western provinces as MNCs and domestic companies alike seek expansion in first- and second-tier cities beyond the major cities in the east. But the need for a thoroughly local proposition—and the thoroughly local talent to support it—has left some firms doubting the value of establishing a western presence.
- 2016 saw even more clients move from talk to action where digitisation is concerned, with productivity improvements serving as a major driver of consulting work. Customer-facing initiatives are also a hot area, as are data & analytics services aimed at monetising the consumer information collected. Advanced technologies, including robotics and AI, are also gaining ground, especially in the manufacturing industry. The unique nature of China's digital landscape, which has evolved in virtual isolation from global trends, means particularly exciting opportunities for consultants but also means that experience gained in other markets may have limited value here.
- Looking at consulting market performance by industry, 2016 was a good year across the board. It was the smaller industries that grew the fastest, with healthcare, pharma & biotech, and retail all experiencing growth of around 20%, albeit from a relatively small base. Financial services, by far China's biggest consulting market, turned in a solid performance, with digitisation, growth, and regulation all driving demand. Manufacturing also did well thanks to modernisation and efficiency initiatives.
- The operational improvement service line, the largest by some distance, grew at an impressive rate in 2016 as clients took on reforms aimed at ensuring their continued success as economic growth slows. Technology services grew fastest, however, with the productivity agenda driving good volumes of work. Clients are putting a lot of focus on getting the basics right as they look to build an IT infrastructure that will support good business practices and help to control risk.
- Accounting firms (a group that includes the Big Four) continue to control the largest market share in China, as their strong brand, global credentials, ability to leverage their audit base, and end-to-end solution set all play well to domestic and multinational clients alike. Technology firms grew slightly faster, however, with the modernisation agenda and increasingly rapid moves to a digital model boosting demand for their core offerings.
- 2017 has so far been another good year for China's consultants, with strong growth expected at least through the end of 2018. Despite a slower-growing economy and growing international political and economic instability, pressure for clients to grow, modernise, and digitise shows no sign of abating and is expected to keep consultants busy for some time to come.

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METHODOLOGY

Definitions

Our definition of management consulting includes a broad range of business advisory services, but excludes: tax advisory; audit; the implementation of IT systems; the delivery of outsourced/offshored services; and HR compensation/benefits administration and technology. Where mergers and acquisitions work is concerned, consulting on deals is included (under strategy), but corporate finance fees on deals themselves are generally not included although it is not always straightforward to separate the two.

For more information about how we classify consulting services and industries, please see “Definitions of industries and services”.

Sources

Our report is based on two major sources of primary data:

Clients of consulting firms:

We interview senior end users of consulting in China to help us to build up a rich picture of how trends in the consulting market are playing out within clients' organisations. Our conversations focus on the following areas:

- **What's driving change in their organisation**

- **How they are using consultants**

- **Factors that affect the way clients work with consulting firms**

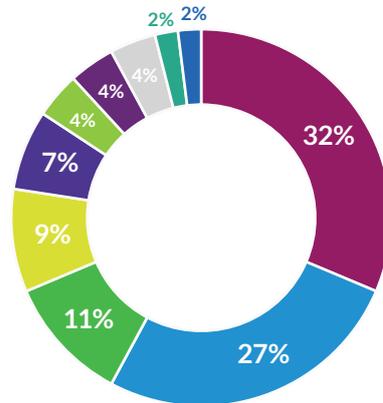
- **What they value the most—and least—about working with consultants**

We also carry out client surveys. We surveyed 56 senior clients of consulting firms in China. The majority (98%) work for private sector organisations, many of which are multinationals. The remaining 2% work in various public sector organisations. 98% work in organisations with revenues in excess of \$500m, and all have over 250 employees.

Our survey asks clients similar questions about how they buy consulting services. In particular, this report draws on how they expect their expenditure on consulting services to change over 2017 and into 2018, and what initiatives they'll be working on and how likely that is to drive consulting work. Their responses are just one of the factors that we take into account when forecasting future growth rates.

Figure 1

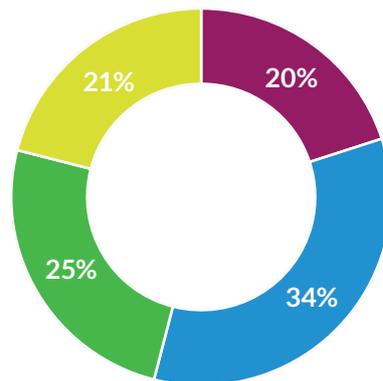
Survey respondents by industry



- Manufacturing
- Financial services
- Technology, media & telecoms
- Pharma & biotech
- Energy & resources
- Retail
- Services
- Other
- Healthcare
- Public sector

Figure 2

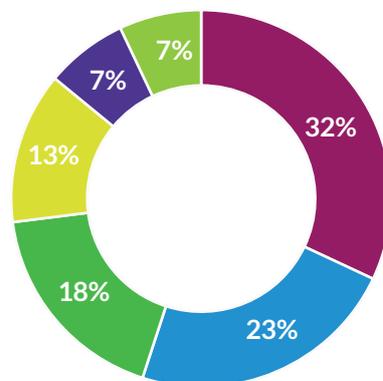
Respondents by organisation size



- 250-499 people
- 500-999 people
- 1,000-4,999 people
- 5,000+ people

Figure 3

Survey respondents by function



- IT
- Strategy
- General management
- Operations
- Finance & risk
- Human resources

Consulting firms:

The quantitative data contained in this report focuses on consulting done by mid- and large-sized consulting firms (those with more than 50 consultants) and typically includes work they have carried out for mid- and large-sized clients—what we at Source call “big consulting”. It therefore reflects the “addressable” market for the majority of mid- and large-sized consulting firms; we don’t try to track the long, thin tail of work done by very small firms for very small clients, nor the contractor market, as most readers of this report would not seek or be able to compete with this part of the market. Our analysts work out the addressable size of the market through desk research, identifying the number of firms that meet our criteria, and extrapolating from that to reach a figure for the market as a whole.

Using this definition, Source has built a bottom-up model of the global consulting market from the information we get from consulting firms and our own research, and we use it to size the industry and its growth rates. This is based on our global model which contains detailed data about almost 1,600 firms, plus higher level estimates about a further 400,000 firms, all with more than 50 consultants apiece, in addition to primary research carried out by Source analysts.

Please note that our 2015 baseline figures have changed a little since last year, as we have refined and implemented improvements to our research methods. We are happy to provide subscribers with a restated set of 2015 baseline figures should this be of interest.

We should emphasise that there are no standard sources of definitions of data within geographies let alone between them. We are, however, confident that the richness of our qualitative data, combined with Source’s unparalleled industry expertise, means that our analysis fairly and accurately reflects the state of the market.

All figures given in this report are in US dollars. For reference, Source is using the following exchange rates in our reports this year:

- **US dollar to British pound** **\$1 = £0.74**

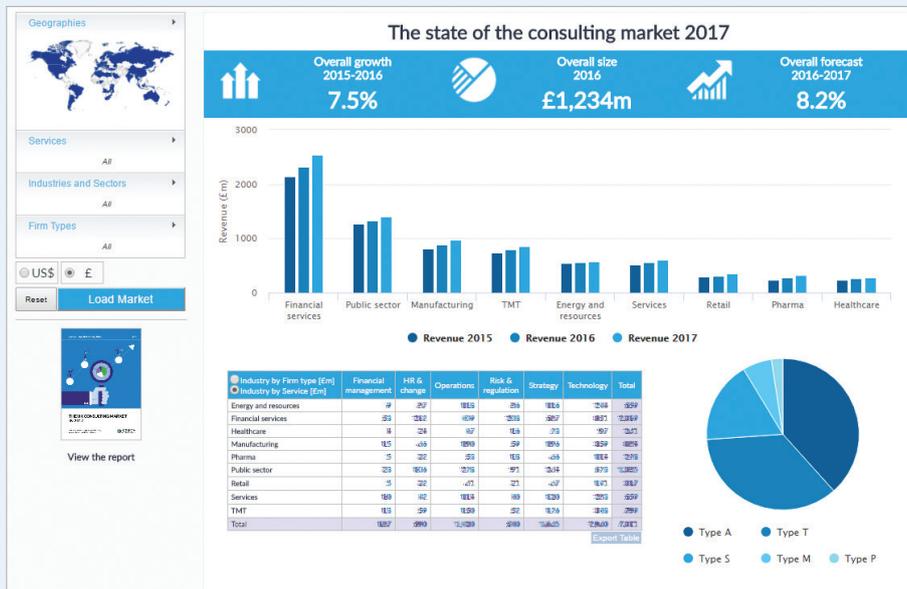
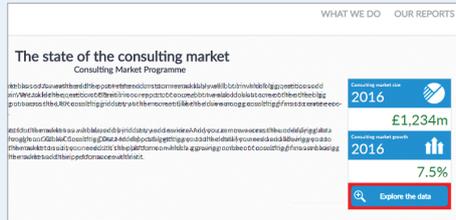
- **US dollar to euro** **\$1 = €0.90**

In addition to our quantitative research, we interviewed 19 very senior consultants (typically the most senior person in their country) from most of the leading consulting firms in the country and many smaller local specialists to understand more about how the consulting market is performing, and what the major trends, changes, and challenges are. Throughout the year Source analysts remain plugged into the global consulting market through our bespoke research and consulting projects, adding further depth to our understanding of the consulting industry.

EXPLORE THE DATA

All of the market size data in this report is available to explore online through our Global Consulting Data Model portal. You are able to interact with the data in more detail and create custom views of the market to suit your needs.

You can access the data via our reports page, as seen below:



Our Global Consulting Data Model is the biggest and most sophisticated model of the consulting industry available. It provides data on market size, growth rates, and forecasts across 29 sectors, six service lines, 84 countries, and five firm types. It's the platform on which a growing number of consulting firms are basing their understanding of the market and their performance within it.

Click [here](#) to access the data.

Definitions of industries and services

Industries



Energy & resources

Energy

Includes the exploration and production of energy, including oil, gas, coal, and renewables.

Utilities

Includes the delivery of electricity, gas, water, sanitation, and other related services.

Primary resources

Includes agriculture, chemicals and chemical products, commodities, forestry, fishing, metals, mining, and plastics.



Financial services

Banking

Includes retail banking, commercial banking, and lending.

Insurance

Includes general insurance (e.g., motor, home, pets, health—anything on an annual contract), life insurance, pension products, retirement planning.

Private equity

Includes both consulting work for private equity firms and consulting work with private equity portfolio businesses.

Capital markets

Includes investment banking, trading of stocks and financial products, corporate finance, and broking.

Investment and wealth management

Includes private banking, high net-worth banking, investment management, trust funds, the management of pension funds, and asset management.



Manufacturing

Aerospace

Includes space research and technology, the manufacture of aircraft, aircraft parts, rockets and other space equipment, and tanks and ammunition.

Automotive

Includes the manufacture of motor vehicles, industrial vehicles, and vehicle supplies and parts.

Construction

Includes surveying, architectural, and engineering services, heavy construction, house building, and the building of infrastructure.

Consumer packaged goods

Includes the manufacture of clothes, foods, alcohol, tobacco, furniture, home furnishings, cleaning products, small arms, children's toys, and sports equipment.

Consumer and industrial electronics

Includes electrical components, household and industrial appliances, commercial and professional equipment.

Industrial products

Includes industrial machinery, steel and metal products, and plastic products.



Pharma & biotech

Includes research into and the production of drugs, biological products, medicinal chemicals, and life sciences.



Healthcare

Includes private and publicly-funded healthcare, hospitals, laboratories, and medical equipment.



Public sector

Government

Includes federal/national, state/regional, local government, emergency services, justice, social services, public transport, and conservation.

Education

Includes public and private schools, universities, and libraries.

Defence

Includes national security and consulting around defence issues.

Not for profit

Includes non-commercial research organisations, religious, political and professional membership organisations, trusts, labour unions, and business associations.



Retail

Includes the selling of clothes, food, consumer goods, and automobiles.



Services

Logistics

Includes warehousing, storage, packing and crating, and distribution including cargo, freight, and haulage.

Business services

Includes services relating to law, accountancy, IT maintenance, security systems, advertising, employment agencies, and vehicle leasing.

Leisure

Includes museums, art galleries, theatre, golf courses, hotels, hospitality, travel agencies, restaurants, and bars.

Real estate

Includes estate agencies and operators of residential and commercial buildings.

Transportation

Includes private and people-related transportation, including airlines, airport management, train operators, rail infrastructure management, water transportation, courier services, and private bus services.



Technology, media & telecoms

Telecoms

Includes telephone, mobile, digital, and other communication services.

High-tech

Includes IT related devices, computer and computer related devices, audio and video equipment, broadcasting and communication equipment.

Media

Includes radio, television, and digital broadcasting stations and services as well as printing and publishing of newspapers, periodicals, and books.

Services



Financial management

Includes finance function and budgeting/financial planning process.



Risk & regulatory

Includes responding to regulation, technology and security risk services, operational risk, financial risk, programme risk.



HR & change management

Includes HR strategy and effectiveness, benefits, compensation and pensions, change management, internal communications, organisational design and culture, stakeholder management, team effectiveness and collaboration, leadership and governance, performance management, talent management/training and development.



Operational improvement

Includes business continuity and recovery, knowledge management, Lean and Six Sigma, property and estate management, quality and performance management, supply chain management, cost-cutting, innovation, M&A integration, managing quality, post-M&A integration, process design and re-engineering, procurement/purchasing, research and development, benchmarking, distribution strategy, environmental, sustainability and CSR, and operational review.



Strategy

Includes business and financial modelling, corporate re-structuring, corporate recovery and turnaround, corporate strategy, market analysis and strategy, market research, policy formulation, strategic sourcing/offshoring strategy, due diligence and valuation, infrastructure/asset financing and management, PFI, mergers and acquisitions, customer service, new product development, branding, marketing and channel management, customer relationship management, pricing, sales force effectiveness, category management, sales and distribution planning.



Technology

Includes ERP consulting, IT training, application of new technology, hardware/software selection, IT design and build, IT strategy, planning and review, IT testing and integration, management information and business intelligence, requirements definition, web and internet consulting, project and programme management (e.g., where consulting firm has been engaged to run a specific project that it is otherwise not involved in).

CONTRIBUTORS

We are extremely grateful to all the people we spoke to for making this report possible. Below is a list of the individuals who have contributed from consulting firms (some consultants choose to remain anonymous).

Name	Job title	Firm
Christine Ahn	National Managing Director, Deloitte China	Deloitte
Gary Anderson	Managing Director	Protiviti
Julien Bourdiniere	APAC CEO	Capgemini Consulting
Fan Chen	Managing Director China	Simon-Kucher & Partners
Thomas Chu	Regional Managing Director	RGP
Doreen Deng	Managing Director, Resources	Accenture
Daniel DiFilippo	Market Leader for China and Hong Kong	PwC
Yvon Donval	General Manager	BearingPoint
Zennon Kapron	Founder/Director	Kapronasia
Vincent Kasbi	Head of Asia	Sia Partners
David Krucik	Managing partner, UK office	OC&C Strategy
Tao Lin	Partner—China	goetzpartners
Karl-Wang Liping	Country Manager—China	EFESO
Reynold Liu	Head of Management Consulting, China	KPMG
Jacky Qian	Vice President	Right Management
Peter Reynolds	Partner, Finance & Risk—Greater China	Oliver Wyman
Stefan Schaible	CEO Germany & Central Europe	Roland Berger Strategy Consultants
Henry Sheng	Vice President	Korn Ferry Hay Group
Cecilia Zhang	Managing Partner	EY

CONSULTING MARKET PROGRAMME

- A series of detailed reports that contain the most accurate view available about the consulting market in an extensive list of countries and regions. These explore key themes, provide market sizing data, growth forecasts, and deep analysis, all backed up by extensive quantitative and qualitative research amongst consulting firms and clients.
- As well as our country reports, we also produce a global view of four different industries. These reports contain industry analysis, market sizing data, and growth forecasts at a global level, as well as breakdowns by sub-sector, service, and geography.

STRATEGIC PLANNING PROGRAMME

- A series of reports that take a detailed look at the big trends in the global consulting industry, interpreting them in terms of what they mean for consulting firms and who is best placed to exploit them.

CLIENT PERCEPTION PROGRAMME

- A series of reports based on our huge client survey, that reveal what clients think about the leading consulting firms in a number of regions and industries. We rank the leading consulting firms in terms of clients' perceptions of things like quality and value.
- As part of this programme, we also publish brand perception summaries. These give an in-depth and unique view of the world's leading consulting firms. Available on request.

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UK, EUROPE, AND US

Alice Noyelle

+44 (0)20 3795 2662

alice.noyelle@sourceglobalresearch.com

MIDDLE EAST

Jodi Davies

+971 52 989 5224

jodi.davies@sourceglobalresearch.com

Or simply visit our website, have a more in-depth look at what we do, and drop us a question at:

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2017	CONSULTING MARKET PROGRAMME	STRATEGIC PLANNING PROGRAMME	CLIENT PERCEPTION PROGRAMME	WHITE SPACE
January				Hot topics in thought leadership
February	UK	Forecasts for 2017	GCC	Quality ratings of thought leadership for the second half of 2016
March	France GCC	Mega trend #1: Digital transformation	US UK	Analysis of recent thought leadership
April	Benelux Nordics		Energy & Resources	
May	US Canada	Mega trend #2: Cognitive computing, robotics, AI	Nordics Financial Services	Analysis of recent thought leadership
June	DACH Eastern Europe Russia		Trends in procurement	
July	Italy Spain Australia	Mega trend #3: Assets and productisation		Maximising the impact of thought leadership
August	India		Healthcare TMT Germany	
September	Africa Brazil Energy & Resources	Planning for growth in 2018	France	Quality ratings of thought leadership for the first half of 2017
October	Financial Services China Healthcare			
November	TMT	Mega trend #4: Brand and business models		

About Source

Source Global Research is a leading provider of information about the market for management consulting. Set up in 2007 with offices in London and Dubai, Source serves both consulting firms and their clients with expert analysis, research, and reporting. We draw not only on our extensive in-house experience but also on the breadth of our relationships with both suppliers and buyers. All of our work is underpinned by our core values of intelligence, integrity, efficiency, and transparency.

Source was founded by Fiona Czerniawska and Joy Burnford. Fiona is one of the world's leading experts on the consulting industry. She has written [numerous books](#) on the industry including [The Intelligent Client](#) and *The Economist* books [Business Consulting: A Guide to How it Works and How to Make it Work](#) and [Buying Professional Services](#).

For further information please visit www.sourceglobalresearch.com

UK AND EUROPE

Source Information Services Ltd

📍 20 St Dunstons Hill • London • EC3R 8HL

☎ +44 (0)20 3795 2668

MIDDLE EAST

📍 PO Box 340505 • Dubai • United Arab Emirates

☎ +971 (0)52 989 5224

✉ info@sourceglobalresearch.com

🌐 www.sourceglobalresearch.com

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