



# QUALITY RATINGS OF THOUGHT LEADERSHIP FOR THE SECOND HALF OF 2017

*Analysis of thought leadership and ranking of leading  
consulting firms based on our established methodology*

## Three quick wins

There are also lessons to be learnt from looking at the differences between firms. Analysing the gaps between firms' average scores for each of our fifteen questions, highlights specific areas where the better firms are getting ahead of the rest. Some of these gaps—such as challenging the target audience—cannot be quickly addressed. However, three of the gaps represent quick wins for firms looking to boost the power of their content.

Quick win	Gap between best firm's average score, and average for all pieces reviewed	Our view
Ensure that your approach to generating insights and recommendations is credible and clearly explained	0.87	Not every report can be based on extensive research analysis. But every report should explain what underpins the insights and recommendations presented. Based on experience with twelve different clients over the past two years? We'll say so.
Make it clear who is delivering these views and why their experience makes them a credible expert	1.07	Gone are the days when a big brand name meant instant trust. To many in your audience, the experience of your individual experts is incredibly important. Make sure you bring these people to the fore and make them a compelling source of insights.
Provide information, relevant to the specific topic, about what the firm does	1.29	This is the most controversial element of our methodology: A number of firms remain steadfast in the view that to include even a hint about relevant experience would undermine thought leadership. We—and the clients we speak to—disagree. No one wants a blatant sales pitch masquerading as thought leadership. But almost everyone understands why this content is being created. And, if you've done a good job, many readers and viewers are keen to know more about why you're worth speaking to. We see some sophisticated approaches that work well, including subtle references in the main report and informative descriptions of authors. As a minimum, add a few sentences at the very end about what you have done in the past.

# METHODOLOGY

There is one question we get asked more than any other: How do you define thought leadership? This is the definition we use in selecting material to be added to our White Space database, which in turn provides the list we choose from for our ratings:

**We include material that is intended to say something new about business, technology, or the economy and is positioned by the firm as such (e.g., as thought leadership, insight, or research).**

**We do not include material that:**

- is primarily and obviously designed to sell a particular consulting service or solution or is clearly straightforward marketing material;
- describes a single case study, except in cases where a firm is doing so to illustrate a broader point it is making about a subject;
- outlines the results of a survey with minimal analysis; or
- provides factual operational guidance on legislative or accounting changes.

However, what seems perfectly clear on paper can at times be less clear when applied in practice. The first challenging boundary to manage is material around guidance on legislative or accounting changes. On this one, we do our utmost to separate factual guidance (which shouldn't be included) from material that brings the firm's experience and perspective to add value to the reader (and so should be added to our list).

A second challenge is generated by firms themselves when they decree some material to be "thought leadership" and other material (although it fits our criteria) as "something other than thought leadership". In order to be fair to all firms, we take the intelligent reader's perspective: If they would view this in the same light as other "thought leadership", then we do, too.

The third and final area we often find ourselves debating is around material produced in conjunction with outside bodies. On this one, if the intelligent reader would assume the consulting firm is the key driving force behind the piece, then we do, too, and we add it to the list.

## Formats

We include material that the reader would perceive as thought leadership—this may be a traditional PDF, an online report, or material presented through an interactive site. In order to compare like with like, we exclude blogs and blog-like material as well as standalone videos.

Where content is presented in multiple ways, we always aim to score the optimum format or mix of formats.

## Sampling

We review a random sample of each consulting firm's thought leadership based on a minimum of 20% of output or 10 pieces, whichever is the greater. For those firms producing more than 150 pieces of thought leadership in the six-month period, we cap our reviews at 30.

## Firms included

The primary driver for inclusion in our list is size of firm. However, some large firms produce little thought leadership and some smaller firms produce a significant amount of high-quality content. The former we exclude from our process (although we keep a close eye on output), and the latter we consider including if we see a persistent commitment to thought leadership.

The following firms have appeared in our rankings at some point but have been previously excluded and not reinstated due to a scarcity of relevant content: Aon Hewitt (last appeared 2016 H1), Booz Allen (2015 H2), CSC (2015 H1), Infosys (2016 H2), and Mercer (2015 H2).

Korn Ferry Hay Group and PA Consulting are not included in this review due to a scarcity of relevant content, but we expect the firms to reappear. BearingPoint published less than ten significant pieces but more than five. We have therefore reviewed this content but not included the firm in the main table.

FTI Consulting and North Highland appeared in our ratings for the first time in 2016 H2; Grant Thornton for the first time in 2017 H1. Cognizant appears for the first time in 2017 H2.

Please do let us know of any firms, that we are not analysing, that you believe merit inclusion.

## Our quality criteria

Our criteria are based on research with senior executives in large organisations and assess the factors that drive individuals to pick up a piece of content; 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.

Each piece is rated individually against a series of fifteen questions. For each criteria, the piece of content receives a score between 1 and 5; this generates a total score for each piece of between 4 and 20.

Full details, including information about how each question is scored, can be found on White Space: [Our quality ratings methodology](#).

## Would you like to explore the findings of this report in more detail?

We can help you consider what our findings mean specifically for your firm. We run webinars and small group discussions based on in-depth analysis of our quality ratings and our knowledge and experience of thought leadership. Questions we often help our clients answer include:

- Are we maximising returns on our thought leadership investment?
- Where are the biggest opportunities for increasing the impact of our thought leadership?
- What can we learn from the best—and the worst—of our content?
- What can we learn from our competitors' content?
- Where and how can we innovate effectively?
- What do the results suggest about our ways of working on thought leadership?

## Can we help you assess the quality of individual publications?

Underpinned by our quality criteria and benchmarking data, we provide feedback on individual pieces of content. This can be carried out pre-publication, in which case we will also make suggestions about what can be improved before your deadline. Clients use our post-publication feedback to train creators of thought leadership, to identify opportunities, and to track progress.

To find out more, or simply to request a quote, please contact [nicola.brooks@sourceglobalresearch.com](mailto:nicola.brooks@sourceglobalresearch.com).

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