

April 2020

Quality Ratings of Thought Leadership for the Second Half of 2019

White Space





The worst is getting better, but the best is going nowhere

Every year we conduct a global survey of clients (senior end-users of consulting services) in which we ask them what they think about individual consulting firms. Analysis of their responses to two of the big questions—one about quality of work, the other about value delivered—has revealed the emergence of a clear trend: The worst-performing firms have been upping their game, while the best-performing firms have, broadly speaking, been holding steady.

The result is that the difference between the best and worst, in respect of both quality and value, has narrowed significantly. Clients just don't see as much difference between firms as they used to. The good news where quality is concerned is that scores are coalescing at an impressively high level: Most firms are thought to be good at what they do. By contrast, where value is concerned the coalescence is happening at a much lower level. There's not much to choose between firms, but a lot to be desired.

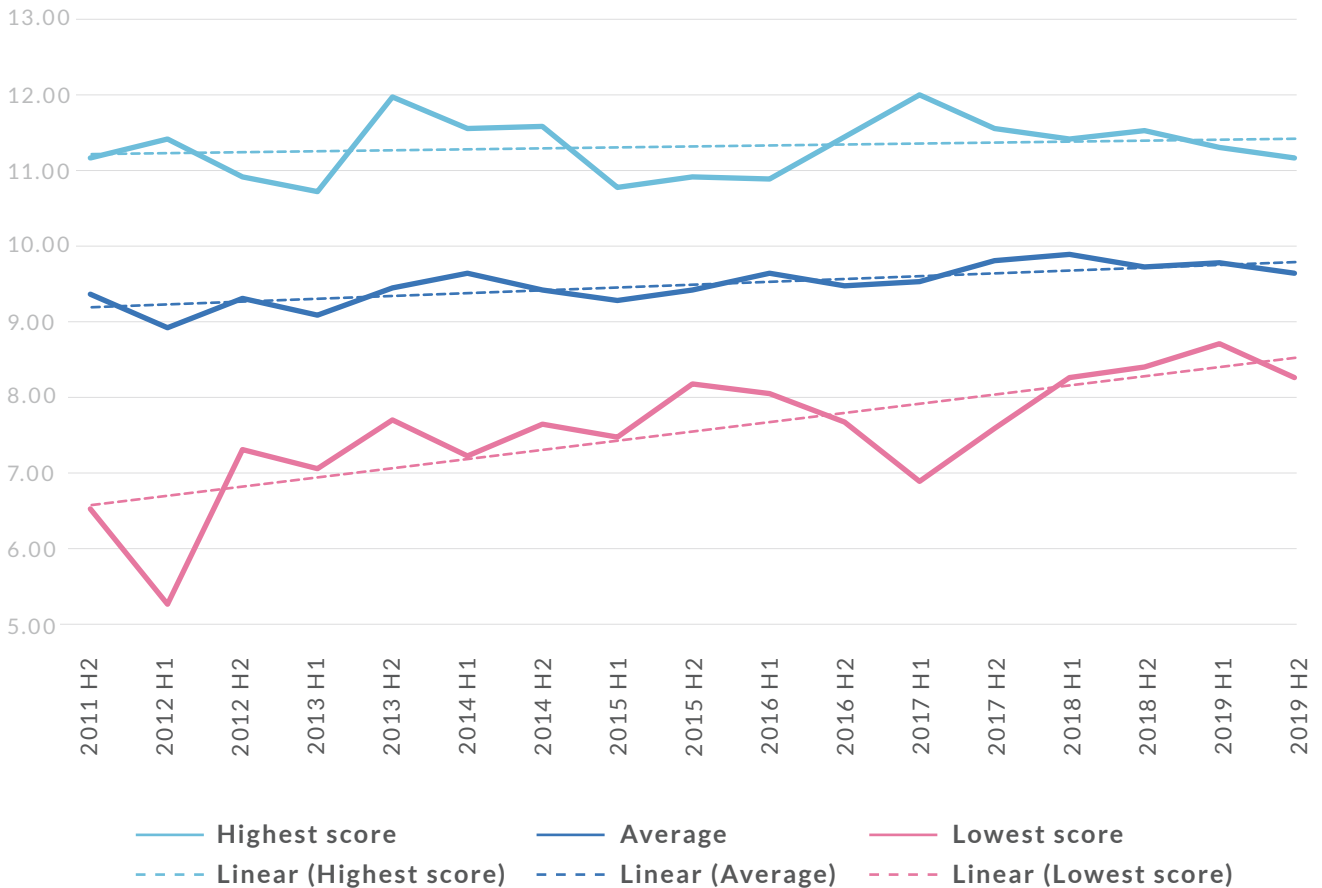
The same applies to thought leadership: The good news is that the average score awarded to a piece of thought leadership from the worst-performing firm has risen impressively, from 6.55 (out of 20) in the second half of 2011 to 8.26 in the second half of 2019. Bearing in mind that we consider any piece of thought leadership scoring less than 8.0 as unfit for publication, that means even the worst-performing firm is more likely to be publishing material that helps its brand, than it is to be harming itself.

If only the news was that good at the top: In 2011 the average piece of thought leadership from the top-performing firm was scoring 11.16. Eight years later it's scoring 11.15. So, while clients are less likely than they were to encounter a really bad piece, they're no more likely to find something that's really good.



Figure 1

Thought leadership ratings from 2011 to 2019



Depressing though that is, we shouldn't overlook the important strides that have been made to address the thought leadership industry's *bête noire*: consistency. A growing focus on the processes, governance, and organisational structures surrounding thought leadership, alongside a push to embed a common understanding of what good quality looks like across an entire firm, are clearly having an impact. Seen through the rear-view mirror, the 2010s look like a decade of professionalisation where thought leadership is concerned.

But, perhaps spurred on by the gathering fear of reputational damage, they also look like a decade of risk avoidance. And if we're to avoid stagnation then the 2020s surely need to be the decade in which firms find a way to maintain all the good work they've done, and then use that as a platform to start doing something exceptional. Bluntly, it's time for someone to stand up and be counted. Where thought leadership is concerned, it's time for someone to lead.

Against that backdrop, three things stand out from our review of thought leadership published in the second half of 2019:



Programme schedule for 2020

Reports 2020	Market Data & Analysis	Client & Brand Insights	Emerging Trends
January	Forecasts for 2020		
February	UK	UK	
March	GCC Benelux Nordics	GCC Nordics	The Future of Account Management
April	Southern Europe DACH France	Germany	
May	US Eastern Europe & Russia Global Tax Advisory	US France	
June	Canada South America	Financial Services Technology, Media & Telecoms	Sustainable Futures: Building Resilient Businesses
July	Mexico Australia Global Risk Services	Energy & Resources Healthcare	
August	India China Africa	Perceptions of Audit Firms Perceptions of Tax Firms	
September	Energy & Resources Planning for Growth in 2021	Perceptions of Risk Firms	Sustainable Futures: A Climate Transformed
October	Financial Services South East Asia Japan		
November	Healthcare Technology, Media & Telecoms		The Consultant of Tomorrow
December			

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- Acquisition strategy
- Proposition strategy and development
- Brand and client sentiment analysis
- Thought leadership and content strategy, development, and review

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