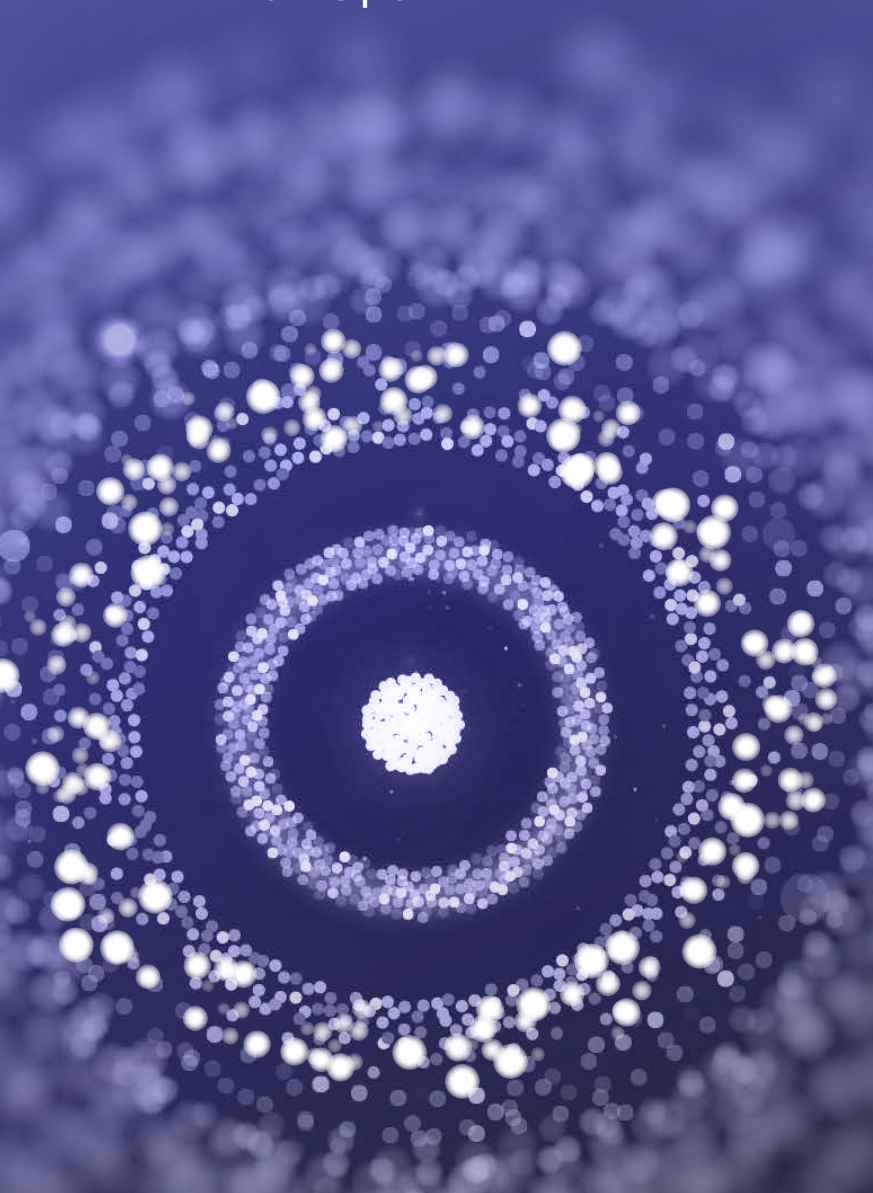


Quality Ratings of Thought Leadership for the Second Half of 2021

White Space





Contents

Introduction	3
Moving the needle	3
Trends over time: A mixed picture	4
Quality rankings for H2 2021	7
Firm-by-firm commentary	11
Methodology	25
Our definition of thought leadership	25
Formats	25
Sampling	26
Firms included	26
Our quality criteria	26
Meet the expert	27
Programme schedule for 2022	28
Our custom thought leadership work	29
About us	30



Introduction

Moving the needle

One of the many advantages of the fact that we've been looking at the thought leadership produced by consulting firms for so many years is that we can look at trends over time. There is some good news here—and inevitably some bad—when we examine how overall scores have evolved.

The good news is that lower scoring firms have made considerable strides in terms of improving the quality of their content. Whereas the second half of 2011 saw the lowest performing firm hit an average of a mere 6.55, in H2 2021 the average score for the firm in 20th place in our rankings was a much more respectable 8.52. Bear in mind that we recommend that any piece of thought leadership scoring less than 8.0 should not be published, and it's clear that we have indeed seen some stellar progress towards achieving solid quality standards in more recent years.

However, it's less good news at the top end of the rankings, which has seen top scores stay broadly stable over the years. What does this tell us? Perhaps that it's easier to tackle the big issues around quality than it is to push the needle from the good to the very good. But for most firms, the path towards improving quality is in plain view, in the shape of the top-scoring examples within their own catalogue.

Take Accenture's [Youthquake meets green economy](#), which scores highly across all criteria. It is very credible, combining primary research with modelling of data drawn from secondary sources to develop a unique perspective on the growth of green jobs in Asia Pac. It provides a masterclass in explaining some complex arguments in a succinct and engaging manner, and delivers a strong argument for action. Accenture can be proud of the fact that it tops our overall rankings in this review, but it would perform even better if all of its output hit the high bar represented by this report. And of course the same is true for other firms—looking at the best of what they do and applying those standards across the board would see global average score shoot up. It's something we'd really like to see happen.

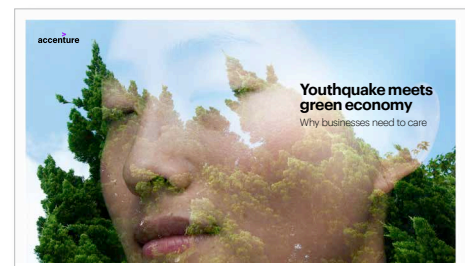
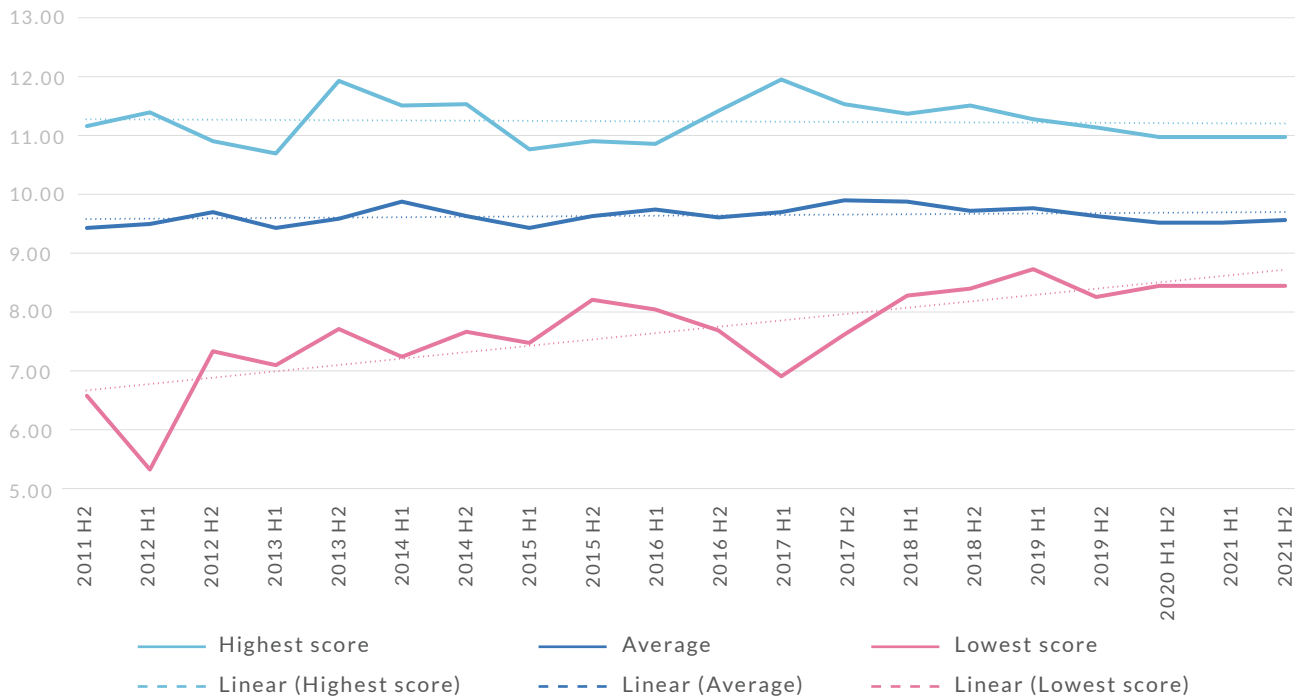




Figure 1

Thought leadership ratings from 2011 to 2021





Firm-by-firm commentary

We use the following terms throughout this commentary section:

- H2 2021: Our ranking of firms based on content published in the second half of 2021.
- H1 2021: Our ranking of firms based on content published in the first half of 2021.
- FY 2020: This ranking of firms based on content published in 2020.
- Differentiation, appeal, resilience, prompting action: the four criteria, under which sit a total of 15 questions, that make up our ratings methodology. Please see [our quality ratings methodology](#) for full details.
- 8.0: Pieces scoring below this benchmark may have a negative impact on the audience.
- 12.0: Pieces scoring above this benchmark are very high quality. We recommend this as a target for all content

Accenture	page 12 >>
Arthur D. Little	page 12 >>
Bain & Company	page 13 >>
Boston Consulting Group	page 14 >>
Capgemini	page 14 >>
Cognizant	page 15 >>
Deloitte	page 16 >>
EY	page 16 >>
FTI Consulting	page 17 >>
IBM	page 17 >>
Infosys	page 18 >>
Kearney	page 19 >>
Korn Ferry	page 19 >>
KPMG	page 20 >>
McKinsey	page 21 >>
Oliver Wyman	page 21 >>
PwC	page 22 >>
Roland Berger	page 23 >>
TCS	page 23 >>
Willis Towers Watson	page 24 >>



Methodology

Our definition of thought leadership

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., 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. In order to ensure that we look at substantive material, our focus is on material that exceeds 2,500 words in length.

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 the 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 (last appeared H1 2021), BearingPoint (last appeared 2018 H1), Booz Allen (2015 H2), DXC Technology (FY 2020), L.E.K. (H2 2019), Grant Thornton (FY 2020), Mercer (2015 H2), North Highland (FY 2020), and PA Consulting (H2 2018).

After a period of absence, we welcome TCS back in the rankings.

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

Our quality criteria

Our criteria are based on primary research with senior executives in large organisations that assesses the factors that drive individuals to pick up a piece of content; to read past the first paragraph and beyond; to have confidence in the value of what they have read; and to take action based on what they have absorbed.

Each piece is rated individually against a series of 15 questions. For each criterion, 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 [here](#).



Meet our expert

Zoë Stumpf

Zoë is Head of Thought Leadership at Source. She works with professional services firms to help them improve the quality and impact of their thought leadership. She has recently written a number of reports looking at how professional services firms can maximise the value of their thought leadership investment, as well as our Quality Ratings report, which contains our rankings of the thought leadership produced by consulting firms. Zoë regularly leads projects that provide a qualitative overview of thought leadership portfolios and conducts research into client views of professional services thought leadership. Zoë has many years' experience with Source, following more than 12 years working as a management consultant in a variety of roles. Zoë has also worked as an independent marketing consultant.

Zoë Stumpf

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About us

We analyse and examine how change drives the way organisations use professional services, and the implications that might have for professional services firms.

Derived from data, years of experience, and sophisticated proprietary research, we use our team's extensive knowledge of the industry to provide actionable and clear conclusions on the best course of action for professional services firms around the world. Our insights not only provide interesting reading, but they have underpinned some of the biggest strategic investment decisions made by firms around the world.

So, how can we help you?

For more information about any of these, or our other work, please visit our website, or get in touch.

How we can help you _____

Alongside off-the-shelf reports on the professional services industry, we also provide custom advice and research-led consulting services to the world's biggest and most successful professional services firms, helping them identify the best areas for investment and plan their strategic responses.

Professional services firms are investing increasing amounts of time and money into their thought leadership and content marketing strategies, and done well, clients tell us it's the best way a firm can market its services to them. However, far too much thought leadership isn't done well, and as a result, may even harm a firm's chances of success.

We can help by:

- Speaking to and surveying senior buyers of professional services to understand what they want to know more about, and what they expect from thought leadership and other forms of content;
- Bringing our extensive knowledge of the industry to bear on your thought leadership challenges;
- Conducting reviews of a sample of your content against our tried-and-tested methodology, and providing overarching feedback with suggestions for improvement;
- Reviewing thought leadership campaigns and providing actionable recommendations on how to improve the campaign;
- Helping you to find the white space in a crowded competitive landscape by assessing what your competitors are doing in a certain space.

Our goal is to ensure that you get the maximum possible return from your investment in thought leadership and content marketing. In everything we do, we ask "How could this be even more helpful to your target audience in building awareness, understanding, and trust?".

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Programme schedule for 2022

Reports 2022		Market Trends Programme	Client Perception Studies	Emerging Trends Programme
Q1	January	Forecasts for 2022 UK GCC India France	UK US	
	February		Germany Financial Services	
	March		GCC France Healthcare & Pharma	Pricing: Your Biggest Barrier to Change?
Q2	April	Nordics US DACH Australia China South East Asia Sustainability	Nordics Energy & Resources Technology, Media & Telecoms	
	May		China Japan	Next-generation Multidisciplinary Working
	June			
Q3	July	Tax South America Japan Africa Financial Services Energy & Resources		
	August		Risk Tax	Innovation: What do Clients Really Want?
	September		Audit	
Q4	October	Risk Consumer Products & Retail Healthcare & Pharma Planning for Growth in 2023		The New Consulting Value Chain
	November			
	December			

Please note that with the purchase of all Market Trends reports in 2022, you will also gain access to a monthly video summary on the global market.

White Space

A powerful research tool that allows subscribers to keep up to date with the latest content being produced and maximise their return on investment. A series of reports that analyse the quality and effectiveness of thought leadership are published throughout the year.