

Report
November '22

EXTRACT



CONTENT

Quality Ratings of
Thought Leadership for
the First Half of 2022



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Introduction

Greater need, greater opportunity

It may feel like a long time since the COVID lockdowns of 2020 and the sudden pivot to working from home, but research that Source has carried out with clients confirms a lasting impact on the importance of thought leadership. A survey we conducted in December 2021 of more than 3,500 executives in major consulting markets pointed to thought leadership consumption becoming a daily habit for almost a third of the people we surveyed (Figure 1). Members of the C-Suite are even more likely to engage with thought leadership with impressive regularity: 87% of this group consumes thought leadership several times a week or more.

Figure 1

How frequently do you read, watch, or listen to thought leadership produced by professional services firms?

	CEO or other CXO/board level	Direct reports into CXO/board	Head of department	Manager	Senior manager	Average
Daily	38%	28%	20%	23%	27%	30%
Several times a week	49%	52%	55%	54%	54%	52%
Several times a month	11%	18%	22%	15%	17%	16%
Hardly ever/not at all	2%	2%	3%	8%	2%	2%

In our wider research and conversations with senior executives, clients have typically explained increases in the frequency of consumption as a function of two things: greater need and greater opportunity for consumption. Greater need, in that the levels of change, disruption, and business opportunities are seen to have accelerated and, as a consequence, more people are leaning into thought leadership as a key source of information and guidance, more often. Greater opportunity for consumption, in that new working patterns are creating more flexibility and pockets of time where thought leadership can be consumed.

This sense of greater need plays out when we ask senior executives why they look to thought leadership (Figure 2). In these turbulent times, the role that thought leadership plays in preparing a business for change is the top reason cited by executives, with a need to understand the impact of technology change coming a close second. For the C-suite, while the need for answers to the technology question is also top of mind, so too is helping them to decide which consulting firm to work with. This result alone must surely help to justify the considerable investment that consulting firms make in their thought leadership and related content.

Firm-by-firm commentary

We use the following terms throughout this commentary section:

- **2022 H1:** Our ranking of firms based on content published in the first half of 2022.
- **2021 H2:** Our ranking of firms based on content published in the second half of 2021.
- **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.

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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., 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 bear in order 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 excluded and not reinstated due to a scarcity of relevant content: BearingPoint (last appeared 2018 H1), Booz Allen (2015 H2), Cognizant (2021 H2), DXC Technology (FY 2020), L.E.K. (H2 2019), Mercer (2015 H2), North Highland (FY 2020), and PA Consulting (H2 2018).

After a period of absence, we welcome Aon (last appeared H1 2021) and Grant Thornton (FY 2020), back into 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 the experts

Paul English

Paul is Director of Marketing Advisory at Source. He works with professional services firms on projects to inform marketing and brand strategy, and advises clients on how to maximise the quality and impact of their thought leadership. With 20 years of experience as a marketing leader within professional services firms, combined with experience on the ground in over 30 countries in global leadership roles, Paul brings a real-world perspective and pragmatic insights that lead to actionable recommendations.

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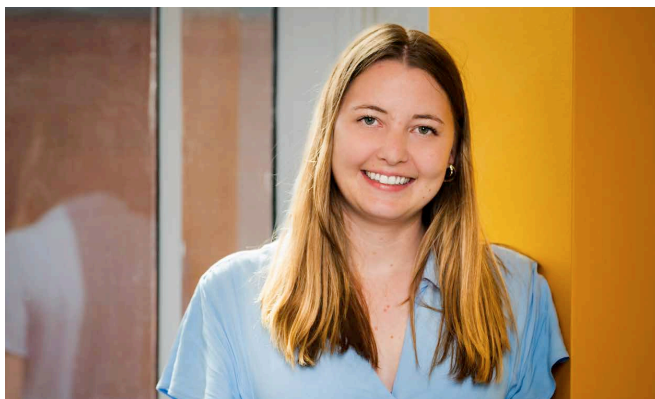


Sophie Gunn

Sophie is a Senior Consultant in Source's Client and Brand Insights team. As well as authoring Market Trends reports and Client Perception Studies, Sophie works across many bespoke pieces of work. This includes carrying out thought leadership ratings and reviews, brand benchmarking exercises, message testing projects, and analysing the results of client surveys and interviews to provide firms with the answers to their most pressing questions. Sophie is regularly part of our voice of the customer research, digging into client views of professional services firms' thought leadership.

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James Foden

James works across various Source products as a Product Manager, working with the development team to build products that create value, not just to us, but to our clients, too. He leads Source's White Space platform—our index of the thought leadership output of the top professional services firms—and is responsible for a wealth of data that equips clients with the information they need to differentiate their content.

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William Bickford

William is a key part of Source's research team. He is an experienced researcher and assists all teams across the business. Some of the bespoke projects that his research contributes to include competitor profiles, thematic analysis, and M&A scans. He is also part of the rating team for the Quality Ratings Report, which includes helping with the maintenance of our proprietary database, White Space.

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About us

**We help professional services firms
understand what really matters when
facing decisions of vital importance.**

The best decisions are based on evidence, objectivity, and a willingness to change. That's why, at Source, we tell you what you need to hear, rather than what you want to hear.

We draw upon our deep roots within the professional services sector to provide firms with a clear picture of their clients' worlds. Through comprehensive research and meticulous analysis, we pinpoint what truly matters and deliver actionable insights that help firms map out the right way forward.

We believe in thriving individually and succeeding together. And we would love to help your firm crack its latest conundrum.

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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	Nordics Energy & Resources Technology, Media & Telecoms	
	May		China Japan	
	June			Agility and Multidisciplinary Working
Q3	July	Tax South America Japan Africa Financial Services Sustainability Energy & Resources		
	August		Risk Tax	
	September		Audit	Managed Services: Delivering on the Promise
Q4	October	Risk Consumer Products & Retail Healthcare & Pharma Planning for Growth in 2023		
	November			Delivering Value Through Innovation
	December			Relationships in a Hybrid World

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.

Our custom thought leadership work

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?”.