

Report
June 2023

EXTRACT



CONTENT

Quality Ratings of
Thought Leadership for
the Second Half of 2022



Contents

Introduction

Impact across the buyer journey	4
The four quality pillars of the Source methodology	7
Trends over time	8

3

1

Quality rankings for H2 2022

Quality rankings list for H2 2022	14
Leading firms for each of the four criteria	15
Distribution of scores by firm	16
Average scores for past 12 reviews	17
Top 10 reports with pillar scores and total score	18

13

2

Firm-by-firm commentary

Accenture	20
Aon	21
Arthur D. Little	22
Bain & Company	23
Boston Consulting Group	24
Capgemini	25
Deloitte	26
EY	27
FTI Consulting	28
IBM	29
Infosys	30
Kearney	31
Korn Ferry	32
KPMG	33
McKinsey	34
Oliver Wyman	35
PwC	36
Roland Berger	37
WTW	38

19

3

About this report

Methodology	40
Our definition of thought leadership	40
Meet the experts	41
About us	42
Our custom thought leadership work	43

39

4

Impact across the buyer journey

In our last report, we highlighted the fact that consumption of thought leadership had significantly increased through the pandemic, due to a greater need for external insights in an uncertain environment, combined with greater opportunities to consume material due to more flexible working styles. But can we also conclude that this jump in usage creates a positive commercial impact for the publishing firms? Based on our December 2022 global study of more than 3,500 executives in major markets, the answer is a resounding yes.

Over 50% of the C-suite across all regions and industries reported that thought leadership has a significant impact on their decision making when purchasing professional services. Over 90% of the C-suite reported that it had at least some impact on their buying decisions. And only 3% of decision makers felt it had no impact.

Based on our data (Figure 2), it appears that this impact manifests at several stages of a buying journey, from helping buyers understand more about an issue, through to helping them make the case for prioritisation and investment, and later, when trying to detail the specifics of what a project may look like in practice. But it appears that the C-suite gets most value from thought leadership when shortlisting and selecting firms to work with.

One can assume that this is a predominantly positive effect, where compelling and insightful thought leadership powerfully positions a firm on a particular issue or topic. But we know from our wider research and interviews with senior executives that weak thought leadership from a firm, or even a complete absence from a particular topic space, can be detrimental to how firms fare at the shortlisting stage.

Figure 1

In the past 1-2 years, what impact has thought leadership had on C-suite decision making when purchasing consulting/advisory services?

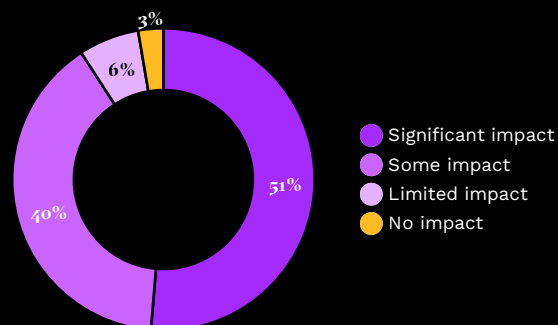
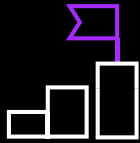


Figure 2

At which of these stages do C-suite individuals find thought leadership most valuable?



The four quality pillars of the Source methodology



Differentiation

Is this piece of thought leadership relevant to me right now?

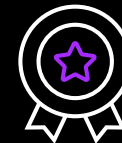
Does it tell me something useful that I didn't know already?



Appeal

Am I encouraged to read on?

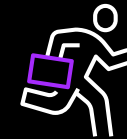
Is it easy and enjoyable to use?



Resilience

Can I trust what I am being told?

Do I know who is writing this and why I should believe them?



Prompting Action

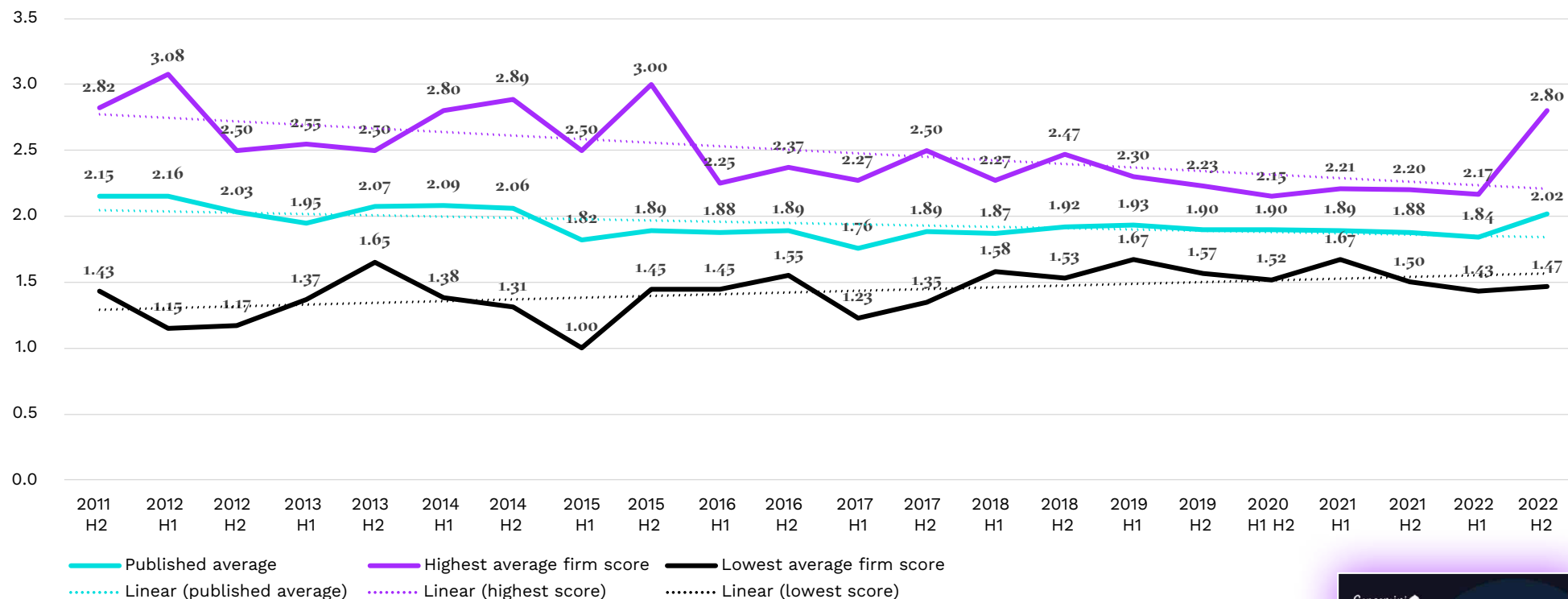
Do I have a clear sense of what I ought to do now?

Will a conversation with this firm be useful to me?

[For more information about our quality ratings methodology >>](#)

Figure 6

Prompting action ratings from 2011 to H2 2022



In our moderation sessions, the Source review team observed that the total portfolio of materials felt more actionable in this sample, and this is reflected in an overall average prompting action score above 2.0 for the first time since 2014. More consistent provision of recommendations, better connectivity to services and propositions, and stronger and more persuasive cases for action made the difference. Adjustments to our scoring methodology to better reflect content on report landing pages also had a positive impact on scoring overall. Capgemini is once again the stand-out firm, hitting 2.80, the highest score in this dimension since 2015. Reviewing the depth and specificity of recommendations in reports such as [Circular Economy for a Sustainable Future](#) gives a good indication of why this is the case.



Quality rankings for H2 2022



Firm-by-firm commentary

We use the following terms throughout this commentary section:

- **2022 H2:** Our ranking of firms based on content published in the second half of 2022.
- **2022 H1:** Our ranking of firms based on content published in the first half of 2022.
- **Differentiation, Appeal, Resilience, Prompting Action:** the four criteria, under which sit a total of 15 questions, that make up our ratings methodology. Please see page 7 for more information and 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 20
Aon	page 21
Arthur D. Little	page 22
Bain & Company	page 23
BCG	page 24
Capgemini	page 25
Deloitte	page 26
EY	page 27
FTI Consulting	page 28
IBM	page 29
Infosys	page 30
Kearney	page 31
Korn Ferry	page 32
KPMG	page 33
McKinsey	page 34
Oliver Wyman	page 35
PwC	page 36
Roland Berger	page 37
WTW	page 38



About this report



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
- 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. To ensure that we look at substantive material, our focus is on work 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.

Rating

To enhance robustness, we assign two reviewers to each firm (an A reviewer and a B reviewer). A further review is undertaken of a sub-set of the scored sample by a C reviewer. For additional quality control, we then undertake a moderation process per firm, and a moderation process overall between firms.

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), Grant Thornton (H1 2022), TCS (H1 2022) and PA Consulting (H2 2018).

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.

The data in all charts has been rounded to the nearest whole number or decimal place, as appropriate. This may result in some totals that do not equal 100% and other minor discrepancies.

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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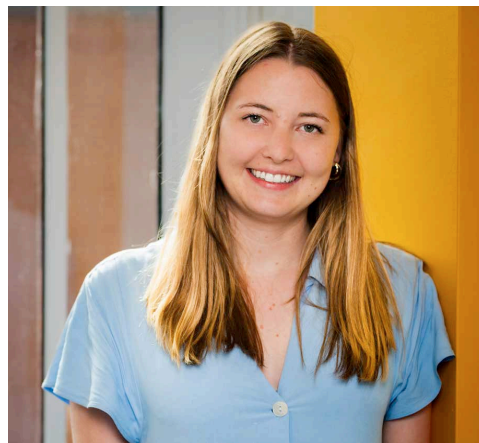


Sophie Gunn

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.

William Bickford

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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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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.

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?”.