

White Space

# Which firms' content has the greatest impact on buyers?

Client Perceptions of  
Thought Leadership

Feb 2024



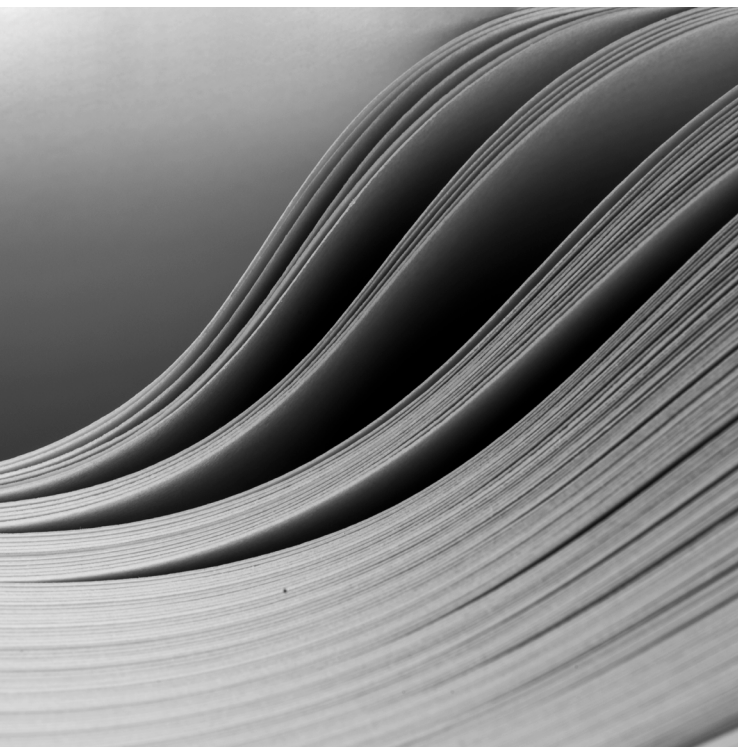
**Professional services firms invest millions of dollars every year in the production and activation of thought leadership, understanding that it's the most effective way to market professional services. The thought leadership space has become intensely competitive, with a mounting volume of material and ever-increasing levels of innovation, capability, and digital enablement.**

For over a decade, Source has provided an independent and objective assessment of the quality of thought leadership from the major professional services firms. Our methodology was built on deep client research, which informed the development of our four quality pillars: Differentiation, Appeal, Resilience, and Prompting action. These dimensions are as relevant today as they were a decade ago, and each year, our team of reviewers produces the *Quality Ratings Report (QRR)*, which continues to be the industry benchmark.

We know that the Source view matters, but we wanted to go further. Based on our ability to run some of the largest scale surveys of buyers in the professional services world, we have had access to the fascinating views of over 3,800 executives on the thought leadership that professional services firms produce. This has enabled us to build a more holistic picture of the quality and impact of thought leadership, providing you, as content creators, with invaluable insight with which to continually enhance what you do.



# About our survey



We surveyed 3,872 senior buyers of consulting services in November and December 2023, all of whom have personally taken decisions to bring in consultants and are regular buyers of consulting. The respondents are drawn from the C-suite (1,305), their direct reports (1,033), heads of departments (970), or senior managers (564), and are from a range of major markets (including the US, UK, Germany, France, GCC, Nordics, Australia, China, and Japan). Respondents represent a range of industries and functions.

The key finding of this report focuses on the ranking of leading firms against five impact descriptors (high quality, engaging, influential, trusted, and useful). To create this ranking, we asked respondents which firms they were aware of from a list of 15 leading firms globally. Of the firms they were aware of, respondents were asked to pick the firm they most associated with each descriptor.

For further information about our survey and methodology, please see the [methodology section](#) at the end of the report.

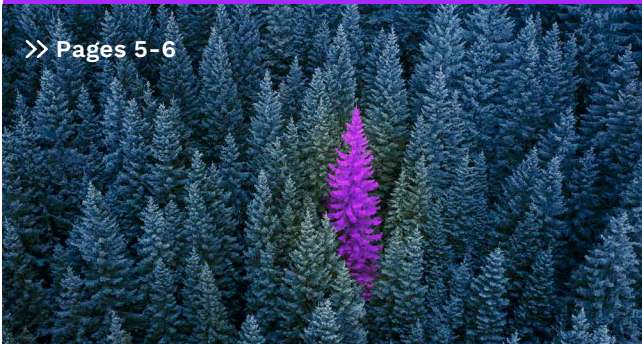
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## 3

### Individual firm profiles

An overview of perceptions for each firm in the study.

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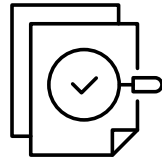




# What really matters

Four key messages ..... 6

This report explores our detailed data about buyers' preferences and perceptions of professional services firms' thought leadership. To help you understand what really matters from the wealth of information, we have pulled out four key messages.



**90%**

of CxOs consume thought leadership "often" or "sometimes"



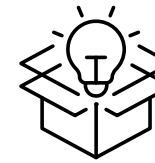
**3**

firms are consistently leading the pack



**69%**

of buyers said they could not recall a specific piece of stand-out thought leadership they had read in the last 12 months



**41%**

of CxOs said they implemented the recommendations from a piece of memorable thought leadership

2



# The client view

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# Which firms have the greatest impact?

The *Source Quality Ratings Report (QRR)* shows that quality is certainly one determinant of impact. Our conversations with senior executives over the years on thought leadership reveal a common set of other determinants: engagement, influence, trust, and utility. We anticipated that these dimensions would be closely related in the minds of buyers, and this proved to be the case.

1

## High quality

A high caliber of content that stands out as best practice across many dimensions. It's highly targeted and differentiated, it is appealing, it is backed by evidence, prompts action, and makes a case for change.



2

## Engaging

An attractive execution of the brand that aligns with the messages being laid out within and helps keep the reader's interest throughout.



3

## Influential

A purposeful and thought-provoking argument or set of arguments, delivered in an authoritative tone which makes a case for change or promotes action within its target audience.



4

## Trusted

Reliable content that has well-reasoned arguments backed up with evidence.



5

## Useful

Content that acts as a guide or reference point for the reader to help them solve their challenges or aid thinking, as well as prompting action.



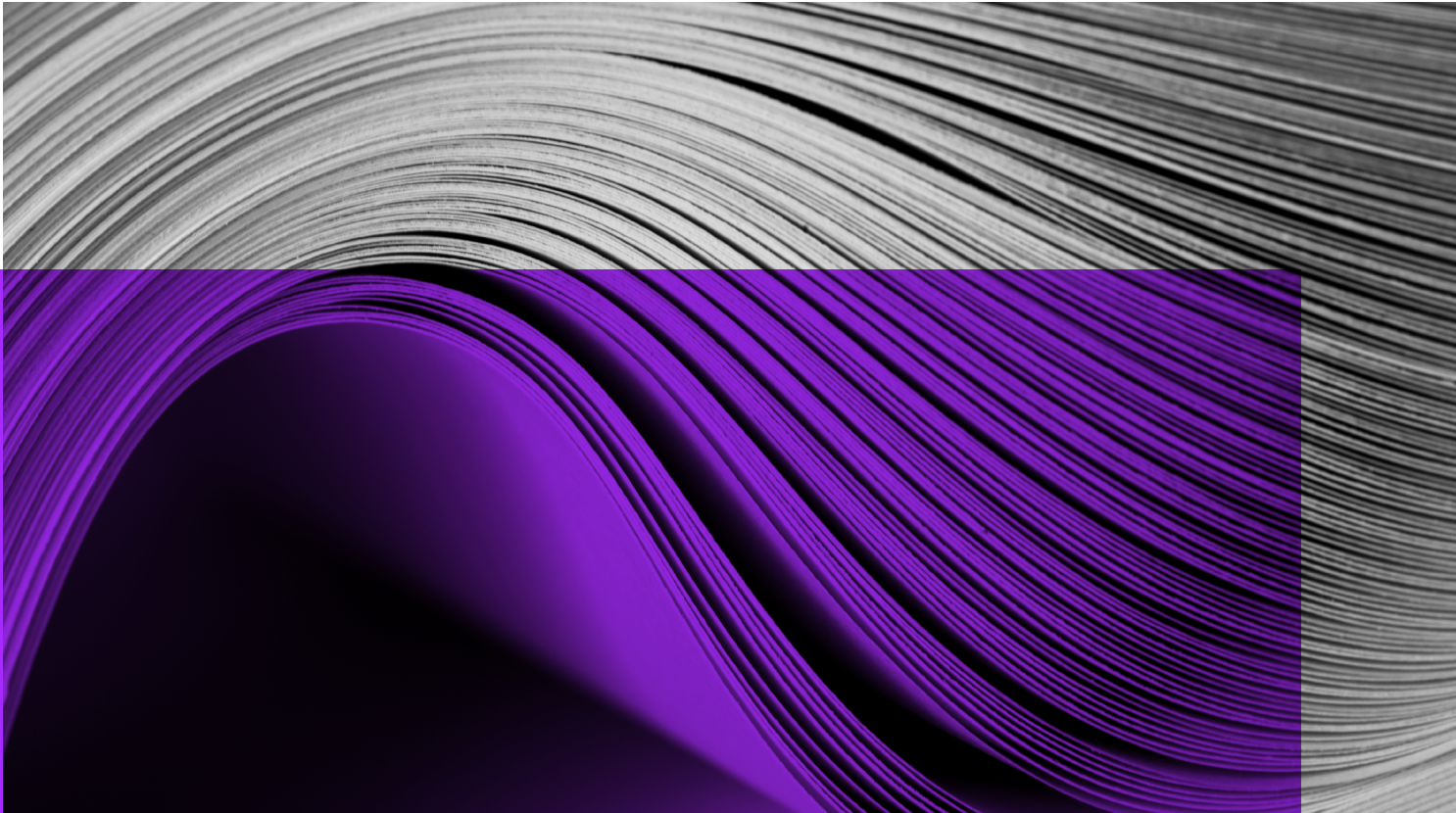


3



Accenture .....	30	Kearney .....	38
Bain & Company .....	31	KPMG .....	39
Boston Consulting Group .....	32	McKinsey & Company .....	40
Capgemini .....	33	Oliver Wyman .....	41
Deloitte .....	34	PA Consulting .....	42
EY .....	35	PwC (including Strategy&) .....	43
IBM .....	36	Roland Berger .....	44
Infosys .....	37		

4

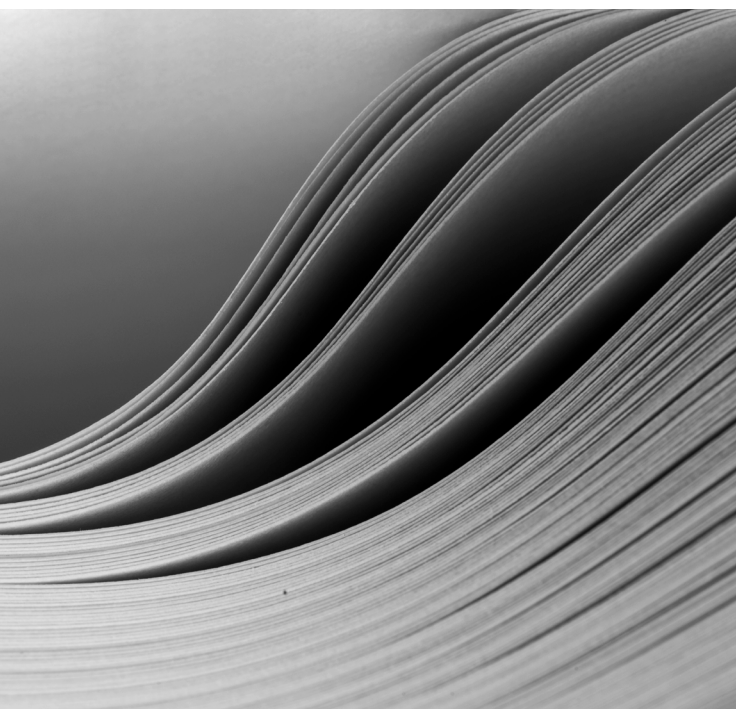


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# Methodology

We surveyed 3,872 senior buyers of consulting services from November to December 2023, all of whom have personally taken decisions to bring in consultants and are regular buyers of consulting.



## Impact descriptors

To create a ranking of firms for each of the impact descriptors (high quality, engaging, influential, trusted, and useful), we first asked respondents which firms they were aware of from a list of 15 leading firms globally. Of the firms they were aware of, respondents were then asked to pick the one firm they most associated with each descriptor.

## Frequency of consumption and positive views of the quality of firm's thought leadership

Respondents were asked to respond to a series of further questions about three of the firms they said they were aware of. The three firms respondents were asked about were assigned randomly.

Respondents were asked how often they consume the three firms' thought leadership. They were then asked to rate each firm's thought leadership against different quality dimensions (differentiated, appealing, evidence-based, and action-oriented). The findings for each firm can be found in the firm-by-firm profiles.

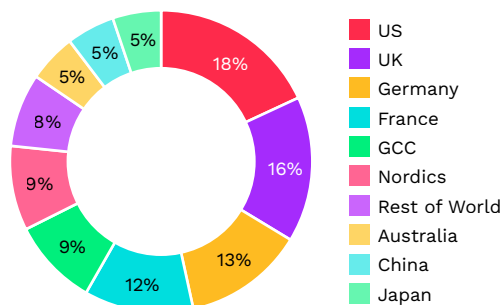
## Memorability and actionability

All respondents were asked whether they could recall a specific piece of thought leadership that really stood out to them. For those that answered "yes", we asked the respondent to provide us with an approximate title of that piece and the name of the organisation that produced that piece. They were asked as open-ended questions, and we codified the answers into sensible groupings, using analyst time.

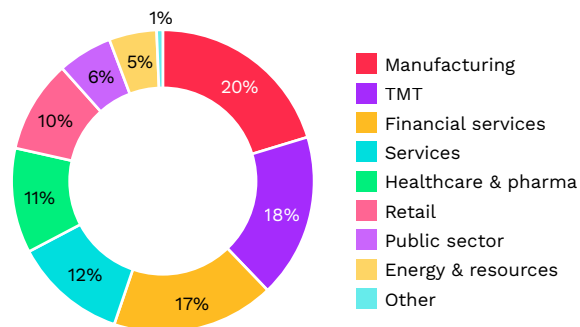
All questions on actionability were asked specifically about the actions respondents took as a result of reading that particularly memorable piece of thought leadership.

## Overall respondents by...

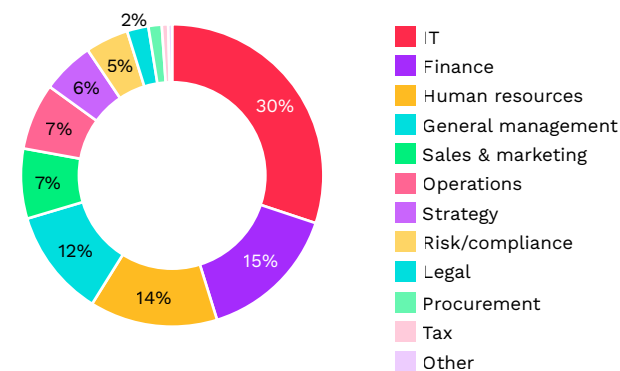
Region<sup>3</sup>



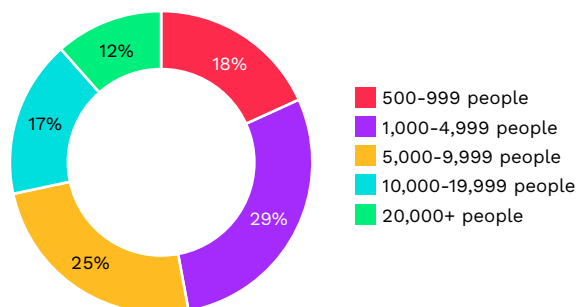
Sector



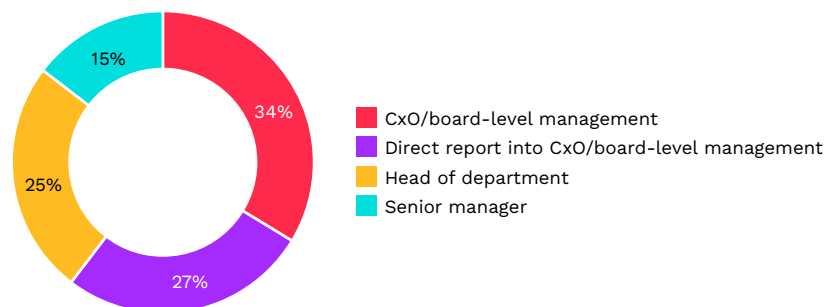
Function



Headcount



Seniority



<sup>3</sup> Rest of World includes respondents from Italy, Spain, Singapore, Switzerland, Brazil, Hong Kong, South Africa, Argentina, Egypt, Nigeria, Austria, Indonesia, Kenya and Malaysia. The sample sizes for these countries are too small to display individually when comparing regional views, however respondents are included in all the overall findings.



# Meet the experts

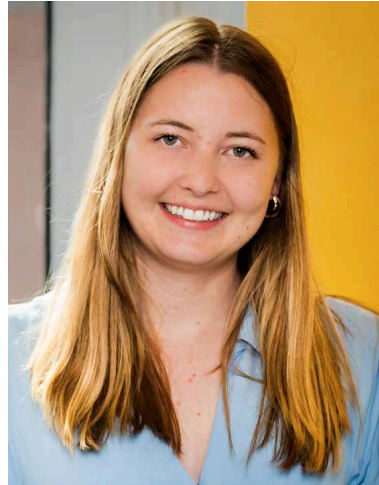
## Sophie Gunn

Sophie is a Senior Consultant in our Client and Brand Insights team. As well as authoring some of our Market Trends reports and Client Perception Studies, Sophie works across many of our 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.

Prior to joining Source, Sophie spent over two years working as a Research Analyst at a boutique management consultancy.

### Sophie Gunn

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## Natasha Cambell

Natasha is a Principal Thought Leadership Consultant in Source's Marketing Advisory team and is deeply passionate about content and actionable insights. In her role, she works with clients to help them shape and execute impactful thought leadership and content strategy. Day to day, Natasha works on thought leadership ratings and reviews, authors reports, and leads on bespoke client projects.

With over 15 years of experience driving and delivering global, regional, and sector-focused thought leadership strategy and flagship campaigns within the Big Four, Natasha brings a broad perspective, leadership expertise, and a hands-on approach to her work with clients.

### Natasha Cambell

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## Paul English

Paul is Strategy Director at Source, working with clients on projects to inform marketing, brand, and content strategy. 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.

Paul has also received distinctions and performance prizes from The University of Oxford (Strategy & Innovation) and the Chartered Institute of Marketing.

### Paul English

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## Nicola Kostrzewska

Nicola joined the Marketing Advisory team at Source as a Senior Thought Leadership Consultant. After working in a variety of broad marketing roles, Nicola found a passion for content marketing and has been designing, writing and activating thought leadership campaigns in the professional services industry for over 10 years.

Her role at Source combines this experience with her desire to provide practical advice to others and involves thought leadership ratings and reviews, writing insight reports and bespoke projects that inform client content strategies.

### Nicola Kostrzewska

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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?”

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# Publication schedule for 2024

2024		Market Trends Reports	Market Trends Briefings	Client Perception Studies	Emerging Trends Programme	White Space Reports	White Space Insights
Q1	January	Forecasts for 2024 UK GCC France	India				Featured thought leadership (monthly) Quarterly webinar series
	February				ET1 Ecosystems	Client Perceptions of Thought Leadership	
	March			UK US Germany			
Q2	April	Nordics US DACH Australia East Asia South East Asia		Financial Services GCC France			Featured thought leadership (monthly) Quarterly webinar series
	May			Retail Australia Energy & Resources			
	June			Technology, Media & Telecoms China Japan	ET2 Go-to-Market Strategy	The Source Quality Ratings Report (QRR)	
Q3	July	Africa Energy & Resources Financial Services Technology, Media & Telecoms Sustainability	South America Healthcare & Pharma		ET3		Featured thought leadership (monthly) Quarterly webinar series
	August						
	September			Risk Tax	ET4	The Thought Leadership Innovation Report	
Q4	October	Tax Risk Technology Planning for Growth in 2025		Audit Technology		Hot Topic Report	Featured thought leadership (monthly) Quarterly webinar series Source Thought Leadership Awards (virtual)
	November				ET5		
	December				ET6		