

White Space

Which firms' content has the greatest impact on buyers?

Client Perceptions of
Thought Leadership
for 2025



June 2025

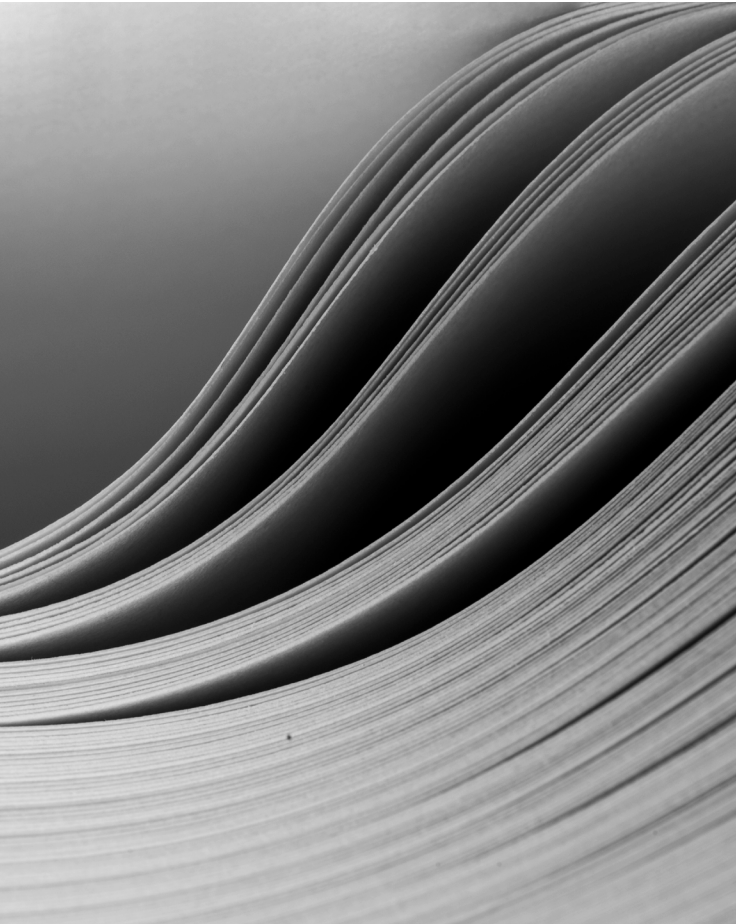
An introduction to our research

Thought leadership is still heralded as the most effectual way to position consulting and professional services, and firms continue to invest talent and money every year into its production and activation. The market for thought leadership has always been competitive and crowded—albeit an elite crowd—and it's characterised by continuous (often tech-fuelled) innovation. The rapid advance and deployment of GenAI may well shake up the players in the field. Whether that's for better or worse remains to be seen.

This is a rich world to research. 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 set the industry benchmark.

We know that the Source view matters, but we wanted to go further to build a more holistic picture of the quality and impact of thought leadership by exploring the perceptions of those who consume it. Based on our ability to run some of the largest scale surveys of buyers in the professional services world, we have, for the second year running, sought the diverse and dynamic views of over 3,800 executives on the thought leadership that professional services firms produce.

About our survey



We surveyed 3,868 senior buyers of consulting services in November and December 2024, 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 (1,238), their direct reports (1,024), heads of departments (941), or senior managers (665), 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.

At the centre of this report is a ranking of leading firms in relation to 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.

Is this report for you?

Available to subscribing firms, the insights in this report will have most value for teams creating or activating thought leadership. Whatever the shape of your team or size of your ambition, we encourage you to jump in to explore the thought leadership market through the eyes of your target audience.

We have carried out research and created this report for: Chief Marketing Officers, Brand and Marketing Leaders, Marketing and Campaign Managers and Executives, Heads of Insight, Heads of Research, Heads of Thought Leadership, Heads of Content or Content Marketing, Managing Editors, Content Writers, Researchers and Industry Analysts.

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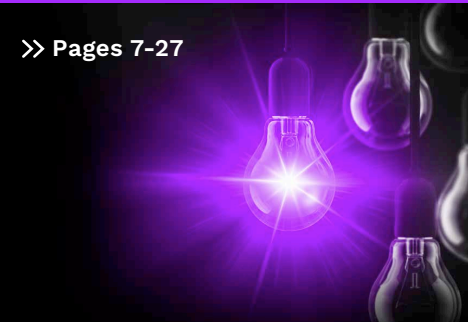


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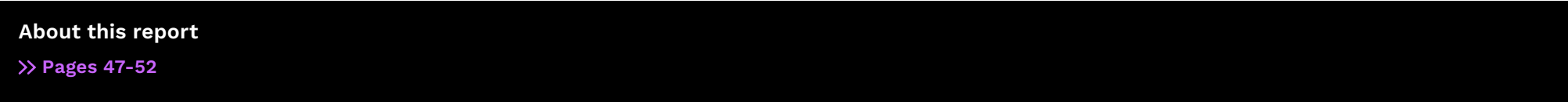
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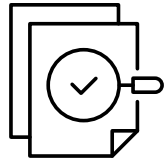
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What really matters

Four key messages6

Clients are consuming thought leadership more frequently



94%

of CxOs consume thought leadership “often” or “sometimes”

As the reality of an unreliable world settles in on business leaders, thought leadership is becoming an increasingly vital source of insight as executives seek to keep abreast of the latest market insights. The share of executives consuming thought leadership has grown since last year, with those consuming it “often” or “sometimes” up from 90% to 94%. Crucially, this boost is driven by the most enthusiastic consumers of thought leadership. The proportion engaging with it “often” climbed nine percentage points to reach 45% in 2025.

The brand halo is fading



3

The top three spots on our impact dimensions had great variability this year

Every year we ask clients which firm they perceive as having the best quality, most engaging, influential, trusted, and useful content. Last year the same firms largely occupied the top three spots across all dimensions. This year, however, there was greater variability in the rankings. The brand halo effect is potentially fading, and as a result, thought leadership teams need to double down to demonstrate their impact to clients through differentiated research techniques and truly valuable insights.

Thought leadership serves a practical purpose

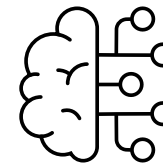


#1

The top actions after reading thought leadership are implementing recommendations and sharing with peers

This study mirrors what we observe in our wider research, that thought leadership helps executives to develop and refine their strategy. As such, actionability is a key pillar. This finding reinforces the need for strong practical insights, from credible data that can empower executives to make decisions with confidence to detailed recommendations and case studies that ease the path to action.

There is less scepticism about AI than you might expect



41%

of buyers agree that GenAI is a powerful way of bringing together expertise and ideas from diverse sources

Debate about the use of AI in content generation rages on. Can you really create strong thought leadership using AI? Its audience seems to think so. Respondents in our survey see AI as a tool that can amplify the research process, without replacing human expertise: Forty-one percent agree that it is a powerful tool for collating ideas from different sources. What's more, with technology being top of mind for many clients today, the transparent use of AI in content creation may give thought leadership teams an opportunity to demonstrate their firm's expertise in the area.

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Measuring impact

It's one thing to be a leading thinker, but delivering true impact in the market requires more than clever ideas. So, what does it mean to create thought leadership that really hits home? Our Source [Quality Ratings Report \(QRR\)](#) shows that quality is certainly one determinant of impact. However, our conversations with senior executives over the years on thought leadership reveal a common set of other determinants: engagement, influence, trust, and utility. These dimensions are closely related in the minds of buyers. For the purposes of this research, we defined them as follows:

1

High quality

A high calibre 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



Best practice spotlight

KPMG Global Tech Report 2024 – ‘Beyond the hype: Balancing speed, security and value’29

Best practice spotlight

KPMG

Global Tech Report 2024 – *Beyond the hype: Balancing speed, security, and value*



In the words of KPMG, “as tech innovation opens endless potential, tech leaders are afraid of falling behind. This can lead to the temptation to make hurried decisions, which may prove misguided, risky, and expensive.” In its [2024 Global Tech report](#), the firm describes the need for tech leaders to balance keeping up with applying a strategic approach to achieving genuine value from tech. To hammer home this message, KPMG states that it is essential to make evidence-based decisions, to deliver solutions that are resilient, and to scale new tools such as AI safely and responsibly. The research in this report was designed to understand how tech executives are achieving the right mix.

This is an excellent example of high-quality thought leadership campaigning. From a Source standpoint, not only did the 2023 KPMG Tech report achieve the top score in our Quality Ratings review of 2023 TL (11.98), this 2024 report has been further strengthened by crystallising the authorship, grounding the evidence in real-world examples, and delivering truly actionable insight—so much so that the score awarded this time was 12.43.

Following our review, we were lucky enough to speak to the team at KPMG to lift the lid on the story behind the 2024 report, the evolution of the research over the last 15 years, and what is coming for the next edition.

	Scores 2023	Scores 2024
Differentiation	3.00	2.33
Appeal	3.40	3.60
Resilience	3.25	3.50
Prompting action	2.33	3.00
Total score	11.98	12.43

The inside story

A long history of strategic refinement and success

Since its inception 15 years ago, the KPMG Global Tech report has evolved not just in terms of its content, but in its strategic purpose. It changed most significantly in 2022, when the report was redesigned to take the pulse of digital transformation and define what digital leadership looked like in a post-pandemic world, building the firm's credibility in the enterprise tech space as a result. The target audience grew from merely the CIO to the full C-suite, as COVID, AI, ESG, and cyber threats drove more cross-functional dependencies.

The 2023 report looked at how organisations needed to recalibrate priorities amid budget pressure and ESG demands. The 2024 edition took this to the next level by providing actionable frameworks to scale technology safely, strategically, and cross-functionally that would position KPMG as a hands-on transformation adviser, not just a strategist.

Looking forward to 2025 and 2026, the firm has plans to use its research to help executives lead through disruption in an AI-accelerating world—an exciting time for the team behind the scenes!

Bringing together firm-wide expertise to have firm-wide impact

The collaboration ecosystem has expanded over time, bringing together an ever-broader group of KPMG technology, sector, and resilience stakeholders earlier in the process to ensure the research meets the needs and challenges of diverse audiences. In addition, close collaboration with the industry and sector marketing leads has been essential, so they can be fully invested in the overarching report messaging and are able to pull out what really matters for individual clients.

By expanding this pool of internal collaborators, the data and insights from the report are highly valued by sales teams across the KPMG network, who use them as a key tool in sales enablement to initiate conversations with clients and demonstrate the wealth of expertise KPMG has at its fingertips. This insights-driven approach has become a catalyst for broader client engagement, going beyond passive reading to actively support business development. As a result, the report is anticipated each year and continues to play a critical role in client-facing discussions.

AI seen as a time-saver in research and marketing

GenAI is used internally to test research hypotheses by assessing how well certain ideas or questions might resonate in the market. Internal KPMG chatbots help validate these ideas by comparing them to competitor material, which ensures perspectives are differentiated. The team describes that this acts as a "gut check" to ensure the content is relevant and impactful for clients and society.

Secondly, since the release of the 2024 report, AI has significantly improved the KPMG video creation process by automating elements like transitions, stock footage selection, and storyline development. This allows teams to focus on approving or tweaking content rather than building it from scratch. As a result, videos can be created more efficiently and later in the process, ultimately ensuring that they stay relevant throughout the ongoing report editing process.



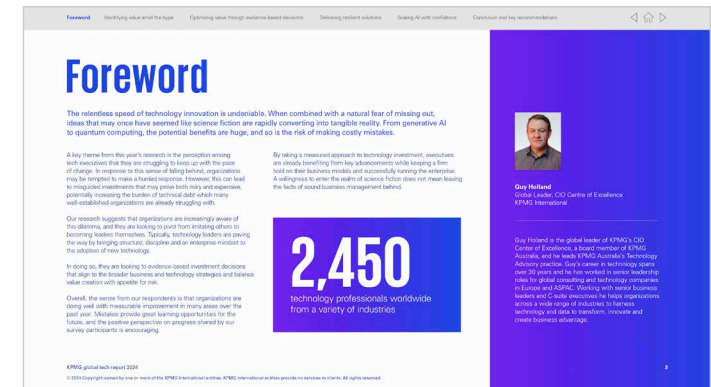
“Great reports are shaped at the start. The real work begins with aligning stakeholders, clarifying objectives, and investing in discovery and strategy sessions that surface key themes and shape early hypotheses. By taking the time to challenge assumptions and refine the focus upfront, you ensure the research isn't just a data collection exercise—it becomes a strategic tool with clear direction. When the front-end work is done right, the data has purpose, the narrative writes itself, and the report transitions from a project into a story that speaks to your audience's most pressing needs time and time again.”

Danielle Moriana, Global Technology & Transformation Marketing Lead

The Source view on the 2024 report

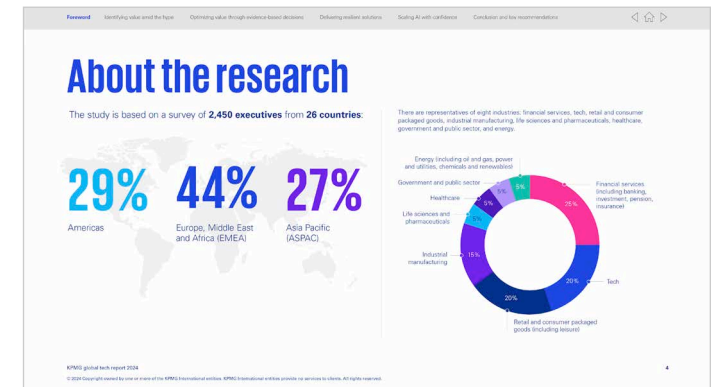
Strong message ownership and audience engagement in a crowded space

The landing page delivers a bold, concise introduction that establishes KPMG's perspective on the tech landscape, emphasising its unique value amid a crowded field of thought leadership. By directly targeting tech leaders and tapping into their fear of falling behind, both the landing page and the foreword address and engage the desired audience group, although the term "tech leaders" could be more specific. Overall, the opening messaging cements the relevance of the insights offered to its intended readers and helps differentiate KPMG's report from others.



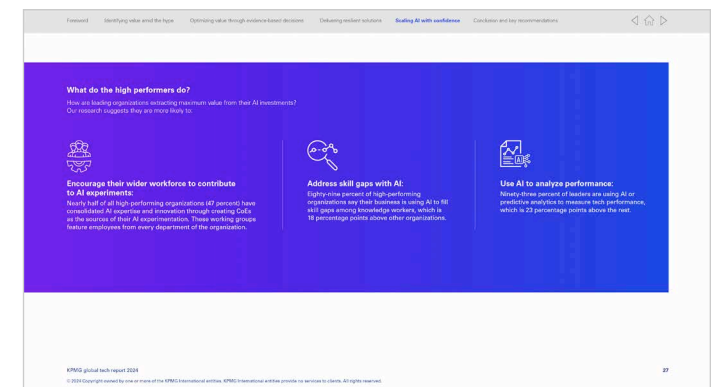
Visually engaging and enhanced with voices from the market

This is a visually strong and well-branded report from KPMG, featuring clean design, effective use of typography, imagery, data visualisations, and a well-structured navigational tool that helps aid the reader's experience. The landing page sets the tone with key themes and actionable tips. The content is well written, supported by market voices, insightful quotes, and relevant case studies.



Credible research and insights delivered with a comprehensive methodology

The methodology is well-designed, clearly outlining both survey respondents and qualitative interviewees, with engaging graphics enhancing clarity. The report draws insights from nearly 2,500 global tech professionals and five high-profile executives. Year-on-year comparisons, especially regarding top performers' behaviours, set it apart from other pieces of research. The foreword effectively positions KPMG's global tech leader as an expert in the field through a detailed biography. While no complex analysis techniques are used, the straightforward approach allows for clear comparisons and valuable insights across various tech sectors and performance levels.



Insights from high performers demonstrate the strategies for tech investment success

Each section of the report includes a summary entitled, "What do high performers do?" While not immediately actionable, this "high performers" lens is an effective way to link the research to real-world experiences and is likely to inspire those considering their own tech investment. Helpfully, the conclusion outlines KPMG's seven key strategies for deriving value from tech investment. Strong summaries and links to KPMG's related solutions and services, as well as further reading, enhance the report's value and provide a clear path for onward action from the reader.

4

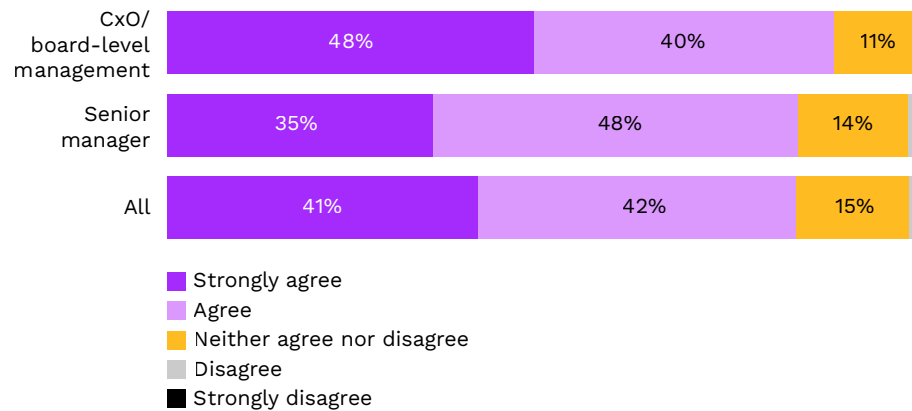


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Capgemini	36	Oliver Wyman	43
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EY	38	PwC (including Strategy&)	45
IBM	39	Roland Berger	46

Accenture

Percentage of clients that agree or disagree with the statement “Accenture’s a leading intellectual authority on the issues that matter to the organisation”, by seniority



Rankings against impact descriptors*

2024 ranking out of 15 firms, 2025 ranking out of 14 firms, 1 being most positive



Top three topics Accenture is considered a leading thinker / authority in**

1 Adapting our workforce to new challenges and technology

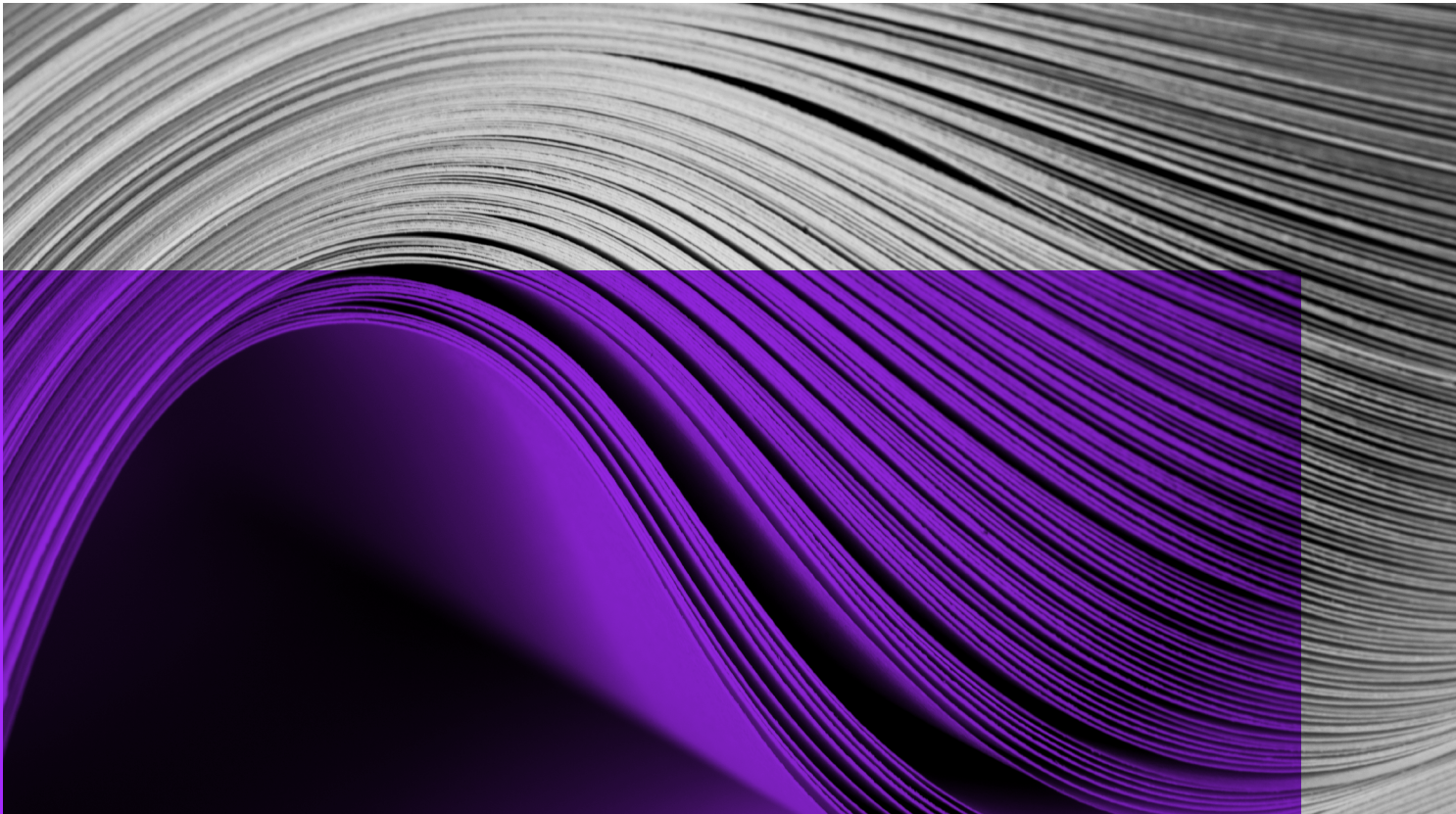
2 Taking advantage of big data and/or emerging technology

3 Improving productivity and efficiency

* Respondents were given a list of all the firms they said they were aware of, and asked to select the single firm they thought best matched each descriptor. To highlight the differences between firms, we've created a ranking. However, the differences between the top firms are relatively small.

** Respondents were given a list of topics, and asked which firms they consider the authority on each topic.

5

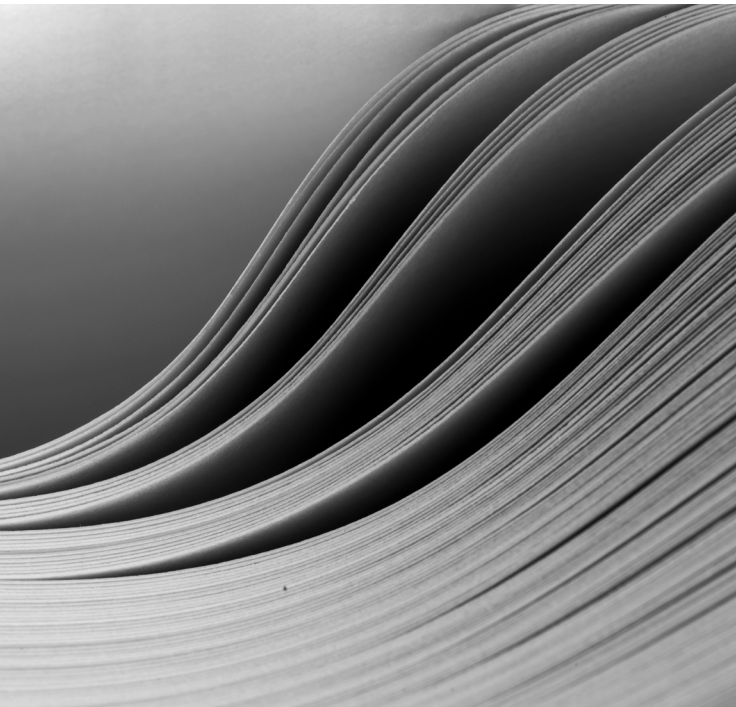


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Methodology

We surveyed 3,868 senior buyers of consulting services in November and December 2024, all of whom have personally taken decisions to bring in consultants and are regular buyers of consulting. We collected data in all markets for firms, with the exception of PA Consulting, for which we covered the UK and US only, as well as Roland Berger, for which we excluded Australia.



Impact descriptors

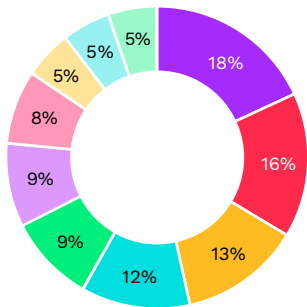
To create a ranking of firms for each of the impact descriptors (high quality, engaging, influential, trusted, and useful), we first asked respondents which firms they were aware of from a list of 15 leading firms globally. Of the firms they were aware of, respondents were then asked to pick the one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

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 that respondents were asked about were assigned randomly.

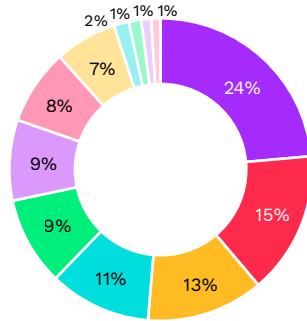
Respondents were asked how often they consume the three firms' thought leadership. They were then asked to rate each firm's thought leadership against different quality dimensions (differentiated, appealing, evidence-based, and action-oriented). The findings for each firm can be found in the firm-by-firm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

Overall respondents by...

Region²

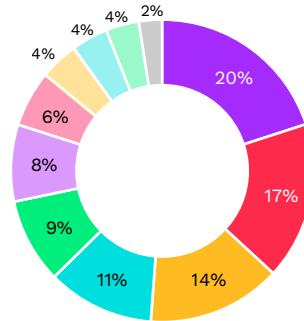
US
 UK
 Germany
 France
 GCC
 Nordics
 Rest of the world
 Australia
 China
 Japan

Sector



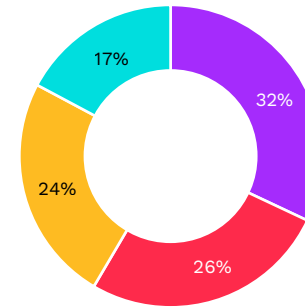
Manufacturing
 Financial services
 Services
 High-tech/technology
 Retail
 Energy & resources
 Public sector
 TMT
 Pharma & life sciences
 Investment & wealth management
 Public healthcare
 Private healthcare

Function



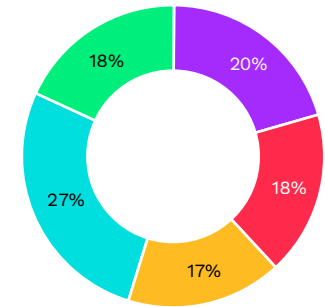
IT
 Operations
 Strategy
 General management
 Finance
 Sales & marketing
 Human resources
 Risk/compliance
 Procurement
 Legal
 Tax

Seniority



CxO/board-level management
 Direct report into CxO/board-level management
 Head of department
 Senior manager

Headcount



20,000+ people
 10,000-19,999 people
 5,000-9,999 people
 1,000-4,999 people
 500-999 people

² Rest of the 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.

* The data in this report is rounded to the nearest whole number or stated decimal place. As a result, totals may display small discrepancies.

Meet the experts


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.

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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.

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Omaro Maseli

Omaro is a Senior Consultant at Source with extensive experience shaping thought leadership on topics at the intersection of customer, business, and technology trends. Her expertise lies in her ability to turn market signals into strategic insights for business leaders across different industries.

She has written and advised on a range of business journal articles featured in the likes of Harvard Business Review.

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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 2025

2025		Market Trends Reports	Market Trends Briefings	Client Perceptions Studies	Emerging Trends Programme	White Space Reports	White Space Insights
Q1	January	Forecasts for 2025 UK US GCC France		UK US GCC France			Featured thought leadership (monthly) Quarterly webinar series
	February				Pricing: Expectations vs. Reality		
	March					Quality Ratings Report (QRR)	
Q2	April	Nordics DACH Australia East Asia South East Asia Africa	India South America	Germany Australia China Japan Retail Energy & Resources Financial Services Technology, Media & Telecoms	What's next for people, HR & change consulting?		Featured thought leadership (monthly) Quarterly webinar series
	May						
	June				Client attitudes to AI and barriers to implementation today	Client Perceptions of Thought Leadership	
Q3	July	Energy & Resources Financial Services Technology, Media & Telecoms Sustainability	Healthcare & Pharma	Risk Tax			Featured thought leadership (monthly) Quarterly webinar series
	August				ET4		
	September					Thought Leadership Innovation	
Q4	October	Tax Risk Technology Planning for Growth in 2026	Public Sector	Audit Technology	ET5		Featured thought leadership (monthly) Quarterly webinar series
	November						
	December				ET6	Hot Topic Report	