

EXTRACT

WHITE SPACE

THE INNOVATION CHALLENGE



**Why innovation in thought leadership is a
key ingredient for delivering client value**

Innovation in an unreliable world

NATASHA CAMBELL, SOURCE PRINCIPAL CONSULTANT'S
VIEW ON THOUGHT LEADERSHIP RIGHT NOW

In conversation with...

ACCENTURE, EY, IBM, AND PA CONSULTING

Innovation in Account- Based Marketing

BEV BURGESS, CO-FOUNDER AND
CHIEF EXECUTIVE, INFLEXION GROUP

A Source publication about thought leadership



Hello White Space subscriber

Continued global uncertainty and an increasingly competitive digital environment, fuelled by the rapid uptake of AI, make innovation in thought leadership more important than ever. Clients want deeper, faster, and more tangible insights that help them navigate the complex challenges they face. Leading firms are responding by treating insight creation as a product to heavily invest in and nurture, not merely a one-off publication.

And beyond that "product", they're looking across their thought leadership ecosystem for ways to continually tighten processes and embed a culture of innovation that enhances value throughout the content lifecycle. Ultimately, this helps them remain competitive in an ever-changing landscape.

In the second iteration of our annual Innovation report, we've looked at the factors driving the need for innovation, considered what these mean for thought leadership teams, and had the privilege of speaking to those at the forefront of change in the industry.

We hope you like reading these insights as much as we have enjoyed gathering them—and, most importantly, we hope they inspire you.

The creation and communication of original, forward-thinking ideas that challenge industry norms, introduce new frameworks or perspectives, and provide strategic value to clients and peers—positioning the individual or firm as a trusted authority and catalyst for change.

2025 Chat GPT definition of innovation in B2B thought leadership

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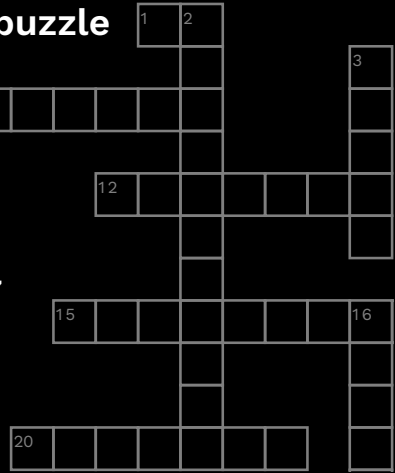
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Shining a spotlight on innovations in thought leadership formats

As all producers of thought leadership worth their salt know, in today’s highly saturated digital landscape, simply having valuable research and insight isn’t enough. How you, as research and marketing teams, present those insights and where you put them determines whether they’re seen by your desired target audience. Going beyond the traditional PDF and creating a mix of formats allows you to meet your audience where they are, keep them engaged, and demonstrate value. Innovating with content assets can help extend the life of your campaign, make your thought leadership stand out against your competition, and make it stand up with your audiences. While GenAI is already having an impact on the creation of long-form content by drawing on what’s already out there in the market, it cannot (yet) replicate video, audio, charts, and interactive content. Firms should play to their advantage here: Offering a diverse range of formats gives your audiences new, differentiated insight, rather than regurgitated, copycat content (the antithesis of quality thought leadership in our opinion).

For many years, Source has asked buyers about their preferences when it comes to format, and ultimately there really is no silver bullet. Different formats suit different audiences, messages, and channels. The most effective formats often blend different media and audience engagement strategies, for example, embedding interactive data visualisation into research reports, creating short-form video or podcast content that delivers high impact insight or provokes conversation among the target audience, or creating moments for real-time engagement through events or online webinars.

As a collective of thought leadership enthusiasts and dedicated thought leadership reviewers, we’ve gathered a selection of unique formats from across the professional services network. A small health warning: These haven’t been assessed in full against our thought leadership framework, and in most cases we haven’t dived into the full context or associated campaign. They are simply pieces that piqued our interest, and we wanted to share them in the hope that you’ll find inspiration for your own thought leadership work.

1

Transparent use of AI in image creation

IBM doesn’t just write about AI; they walk the talk. *The CMO revolution: 5 growth moves to win with AI* is a great example of GenAI enhancing a report and its design. Rather than just using case studies and data points, IBM has used the visuals in the report itself to showcase how designers can deploy GenAI to their advantage. The markers identifying the AI-generated images throughout illustrate how GenAI can be used for design in an ethical and transparent manner.

Will Bickford, Research Manager

[The CMO revolution: 5 growth moves to win with AI](#) | IBM



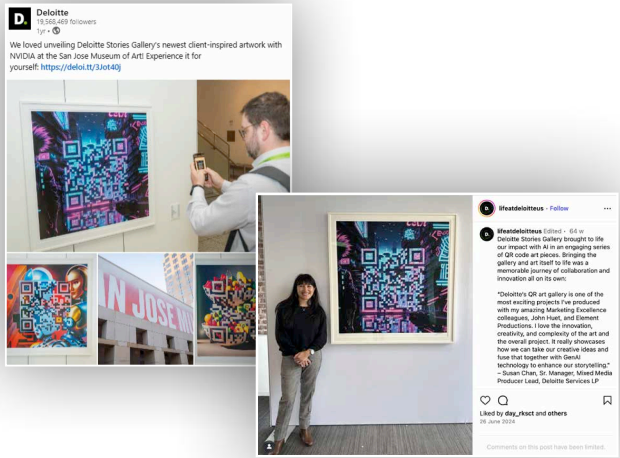
2

A novel way to showcase client case studies

In partnership with photographer John Huet, Deloitte launched its “*Stories Gallery*”, a series of pop-up art installations featuring scannable QR art that directs visitors to AI-driven client case studies. Not only is this a unique idea that looks great and offers that all-important opportunity to meet with clients and prospects face to face, it’s also a clever way to promote Deloitte’s credentials. Many firms find it a challenge to write client stories or are reluctant to share them, so I really admire this creativity from the Deloitte team.

Nicola Kostrzewski, Senior Consultant

[Stories Gallery](#) | Deloitte



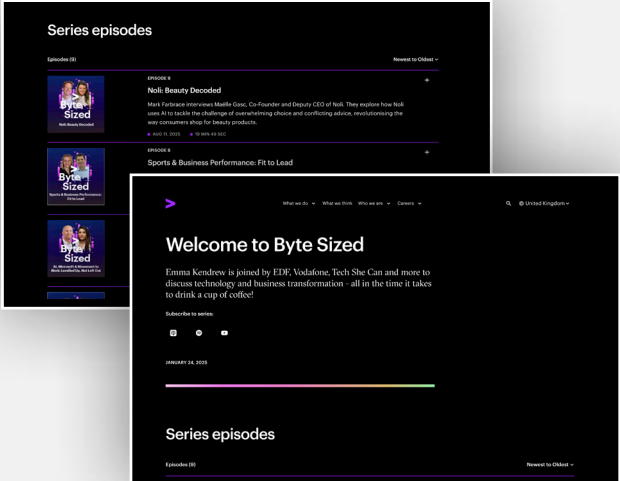
3

Fascinating podcast for the time-pressed listener

Accenture hosts “Byte Sized”, a 15-minute podcast series that discusses tech and business transformation and innovation with senior tech firm leaders, “all in the time it takes to drink a cup of coffee”. While the concept of a podcast series itself isn’t unique, I think this is a great mechanism for sharing Accenture’s own research insights while inspiring its C-suite target audience through the stories shared by guests. I recommend you put the kettle on and have a listen!

Nicola Kostrzewski, Senior Consultant

[Byte Sized podcast series](#) | Accenture



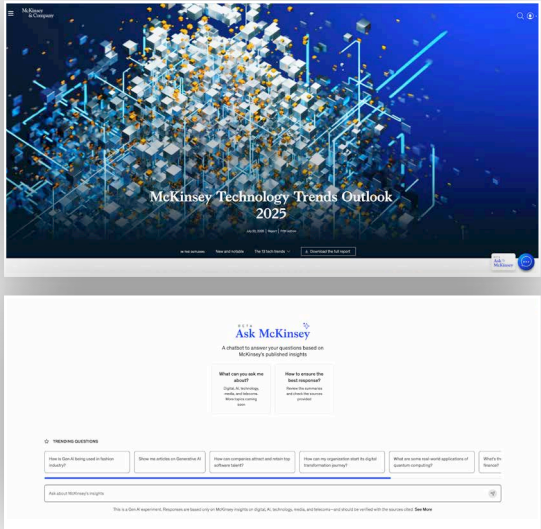
4

Enticing and engaging landing page execution [McKinsey Technology Trends Outlook 2025 | McKinsey](#)

This landing page has some appealing elements, with interactive graphics and a scroll-activated matrix revealing 13 tech trends, which you can then click on to explore the findings most relevant to you.

However, I was most interested in the presence of the “Ask McKinsey” AI chatbot. Positioned as a sidebar, readers can get personalised answers to their most pressing questions, based on published McKinsey insights. While the chatbot currently only covers a selection of topic areas (it’s still in Beta), it demonstrates the firm’s commitment to experimenting with AI to find new ways to deliver knowledge and create more tailored content. It also offers the firm a new channel through which they can understand the top issues in clients’ minds.

Sophie Gunn, Senior Consultant



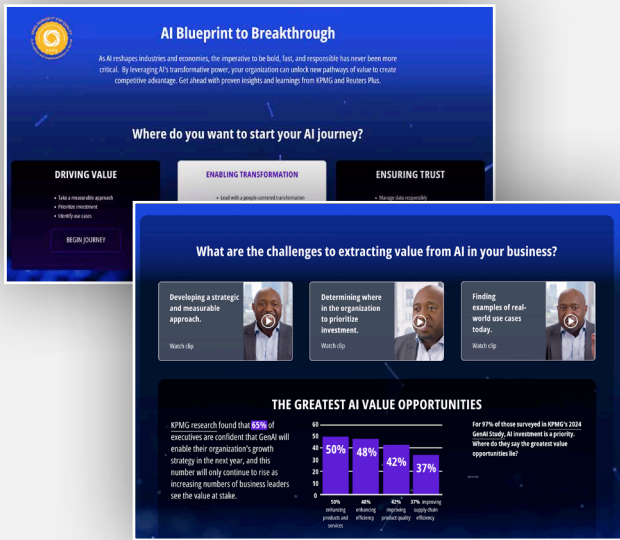
7

Clever media and content collaboration

This piece takes a very different approach to displaying insights. Created in partnership with Reuters Plus, this clean, scalable report combines visually striking data with accessible, bite-sized video summaries. The piece takes a unique approach by guiding the viewer’s eyes through synchronising narrative points that form a coherent overarching story and lead to KPMG’s services at the end of the page. It also provides a platform for the voice of KPMG experts to be brought to the fore. This is hosted on Reuters’ page as well and serves almost as an external landing page, which sets the piece apart.

Omaro Maseli, Senior Consultant

[AI Blueprint to Breakthrough](#) | KPMG



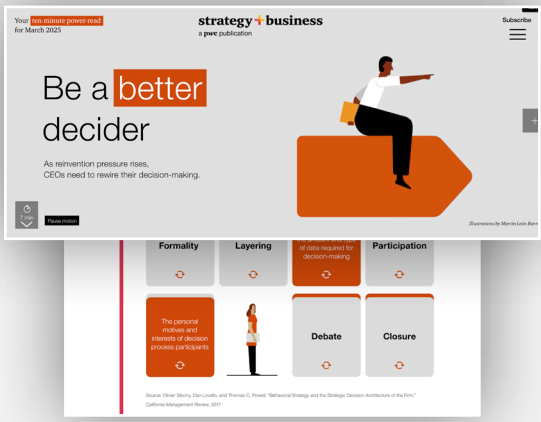
5

Engaging storytelling

This piece from PwC is novel in how it uses visual cues and animation to enhance readability. Minor steps such as providing an estimated reading time makes for a more guided experience. Furthermore, the animations used in this piece are not just used to highlight the data; they support the flow of the narrative, with each chapter triggering its own unique animation to draw the audience deeper into the story. This piece showcases PwC’s creative use of strong visual animations for storytelling.

Will Bickford, Research Manager

[Be a better decider](#) | PwC



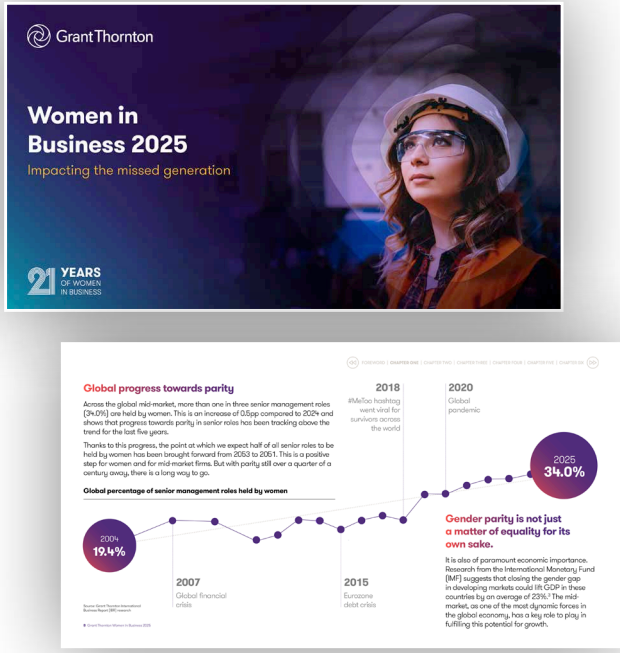
8

Neat brand execution and report design layout

Simplicity and clean design rule the day in Grant Thornton’s latest *Women in Business* report. The landscape, two-column layout and interactive contents make it easy for the digital reader to engage with the content without having to resize text or scroll back and forth within the report. The use of typography draws the audience’s attention to key insights, and thought has clearly been put into the design of charts (you’ll only find one bar chart in the entire report). A creative choice of stock images makes them feel “different”. The report works in harmony with the landing page, which is a scaled back version of the piece and serves well as a teaser to the full version. The only suggestion for improvement would be to bring more interactivity into the PDF format.

Natasha Cambell, Principal Consultant

[Women in Business 2025](#) | Grant Thornton



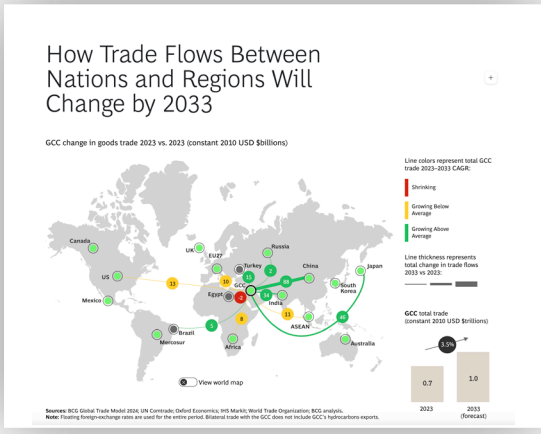
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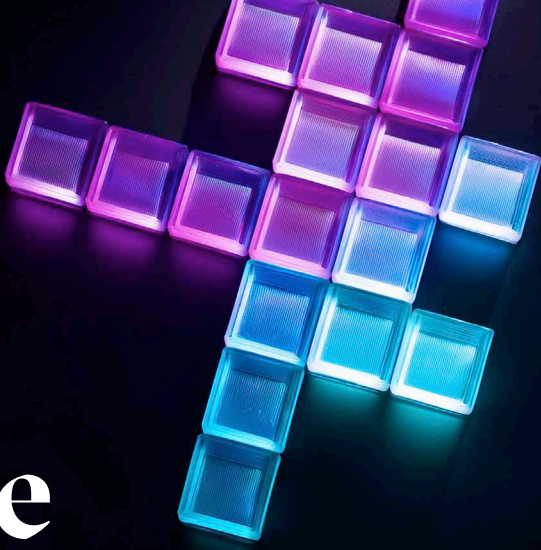
Immersive and personalised data explorer

What makes this Boston Consulting Group (BCG) piece stand out is how it brings the complexity of global trade flows to life through interactive data visualisation. Instead of presenting an overly crowded, static chart, the viewer can personalise the experience by selecting the trade flow that is most relevant to them. Other firms may want to take note of the flow chart’s sleek design, with its vibrant colour palette and easy-to-follow trade lines. This allows the piece to simplify complex insight while remaining engaging and personalised.

Will Bickford, Research Manager

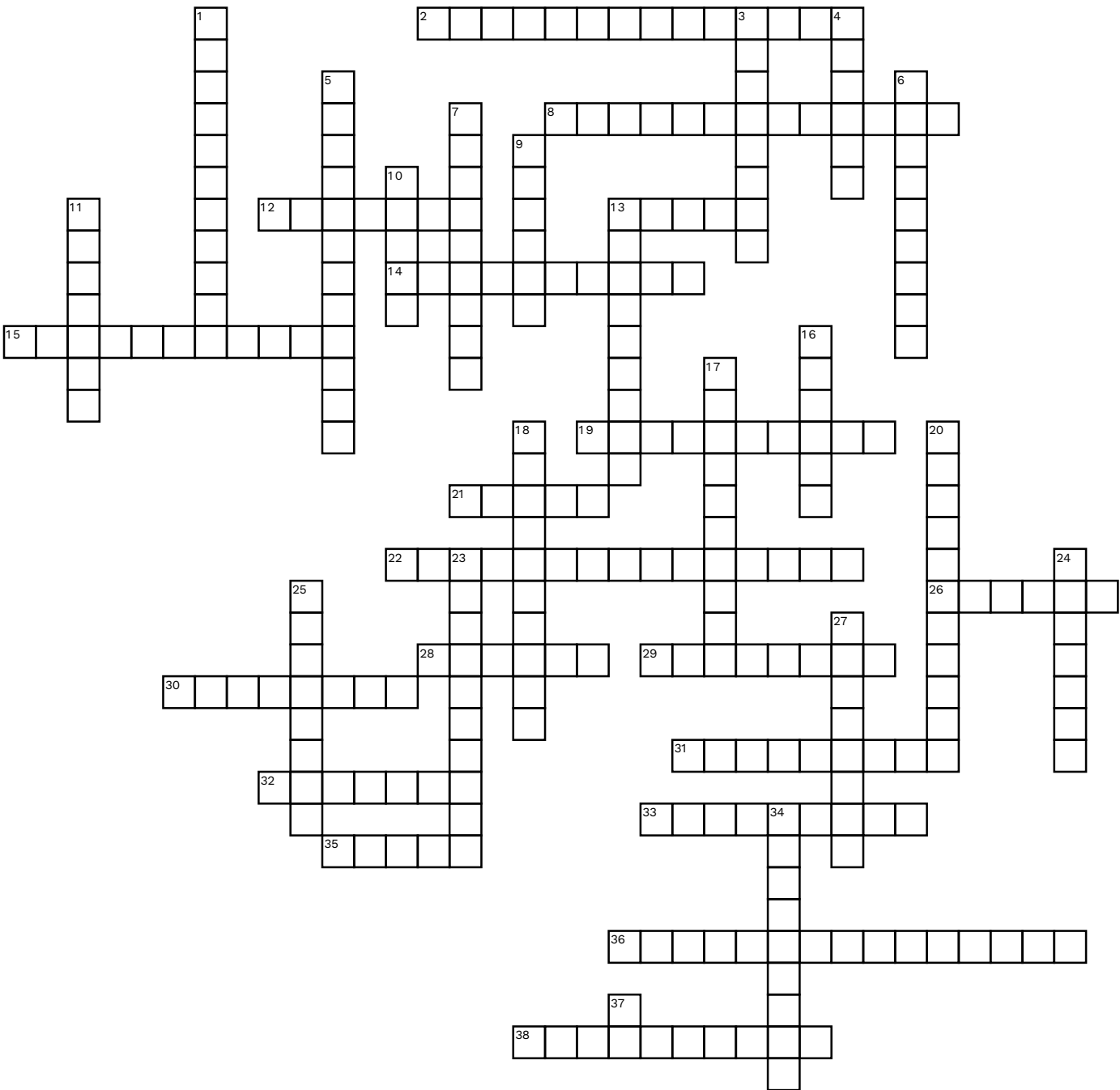
[Great Powers, Geopolitics, and Global Trade](#) | BCG





Our thought leadership puzzle

By Alice Moore, a crossword constructor, author, and top-ranked problem solver.



If you’ve enjoyed completing this crossword and would like to know what the correct answers are, please send it to marketing@sourceglobalresearch.com. Good luck!

Across

- 2. AI outputs that can be useful as a strategic foresight tool because they think outside of human constraints.
- 8. Giving your content a paid marketing boost.
- 12. PDFs, podcasts, and posts are all different_____.
- 13. A test flight for a new idea.
- 14. Training your people to use new tools and apply human discernment to AI outputs.
- 15. Gauging success with data and KPIs.
- 19. The central theme of this report, involving new ideas and approaches.
- 21. The sheer volume of content in the marketplace that makes cut-through a challenge.
- 22. What true thought leadership needs to achieve to stand out in a crowded market.
- 26. A Source quality pillar that measures how engaging and enjoyable a piece of content is.
- 28. The desired effect or outcome of thought leadership on its audience and business objectives.
- 29. An essential loop for assessing your process and improving the end product.
- 30. A coordinated thought leadership push.
- 31. A key quality of content that resonates deeply with a specific audience.
- 32. Like building blocks for content.
- 33. Deep specialised knowledge, particularly in a sector, that thought leadership aims to demonstrate to clients.
- 35. A campaign’s strategic objectives.
- 36. Tailoring content to individual preferences and specific target audiences for greater impact.
- 38. A Source quality pillar, assessing if content is credible and robustly researched.

Down

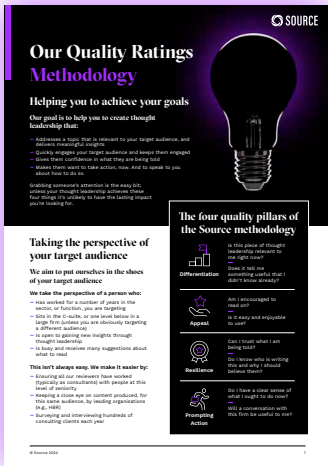
- 1. To gather ideas from a large group, perhaps utilising AI and chat platforms.
- 3. The original ideas and fresh perspectives that form the core of thought leadership.
- 4. A specific industry or market focus, critical for relevant and differentiated thought leadership.
- 5. Getting the word out, with a plan.
- 6. A type of strategic planning that AI is transforming by allowing for quicker synthesis of inputs and creation of a larger number of scenarios.
- 7. A collaborative network of business partners, crucial for modern innovation strategies.
- 9. Today, firms have moved beyond publishing once and are publishing content over time, instead—Previously, they relied on a _____ report.
- 10. The ultimate worth or benefit created for a client.
- 11. An audio or video-based conversational format.
- 13. A specific client challenge that a focused, concrete innovation should zero in on.
- 16. The desired next step from a reader after consuming your work.
- 17. The model needed to promote creativity while avoiding a “written-by-committee” tone.
- 18. The uncrowded area in the market your firm can analyse to find new opportunities.
- 20. Content that invites a click or response.
- 23. Novel intellectual structures or concepts offered by leading thought leaders.
- 24. The marketing technology stack that enables firms to show its connection to revenue in a tangible, data-led way.
- 25. The initial stage of content creation where ideas are generated, often using AI.
- 27. A newer type of account-based marketing that focuses on a single important issue a client needs help with.
- 34. The quality of an idea that strikes a chord with its intended audience.
- 37. The emerging technology transforming thought leadership from ideation to content creation.

About the research

To help shape and inform our insights, we have conducted quantitative and qualitative research among buyers of consulting services and those responsible for managing and executing thought leadership programmes within professional services and consulting firms.

We reference the following Source surveys:

- Client Perception Study (CPS) 2025:** 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 (1,305), 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. This data was the backbone to our [Client Perceptions of Thought Leadership](#) report, published in June 2025.
- Quarterly Client Survey report:** Every quarter we take a pulse of the market, surveying buyers of consulting about a number of pressing issues. This report pulls upon the results of our Q3 2025 (200 respondents) survey. The respondents are all C-suite and direct reports into the C-suite, from a range of major markets (US, UK, France, Germany, GCC and Australia) and drawn from a representative range of industries and functions.
- Quality Ratings of Thought Leadership for 2024 report:** In March 2025 we launched our annual Quality Ratings report which reviewed over 450 pieces of thought leadership that was published in 2024 by 20 of the top content producing firms. The full methodology is available within the report, and more information about our [Quality Ratings Methodology](#) is available on our website.



Contributors

With thanks, we interviewed senior leaders from Accenture, EY, IBM, PA and Inflexion:

Name	Job title	Organisation	Connect
Cindy Anderson	CMO, Global Lead, Thought Leadership Engagement & Eminence	IBM Institute for Business Value	
Tom Bovingdon	Head of Thought Leadership	PA Consulting	
Bev Burgess	Co-Founder and Chief Executive	Inflexion Group	
Fiona Czerniawska	CEO	Source Global Research	
Kate Mackie	Partner and Global Marketing Lead	EY	
Anthony Marshall	Global Leader	IBM Institute for Business Value	
Michael Moore	Principal Director	Accenture	

Acknowledgements

- Our excellent wordsmithing team, Alice Moore, Hannah Walker, and Violetta Rybczynska (and a special mention to Alice who lovingly crafted this year’s crossword)
- Our wonderful thought leadership reviewers who helped gather innovative examples
- The lady behind all things design and creative, Kirsten Buckle

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 thought leadership strategy campaigns, Natasha brings a broad perspective, leadership expertise, and a hands-on approach to her work with clients.

Natasha Cambell

✉ Email Natasha

 Connect on LinkedIn




Nicola Kostrzewska

Nicola joined the Marketing Advisory team at Source as a Senior Thought Leadership Consultant. She 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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 Connect on LinkedIn



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.

Omaro Maseli

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 Connect on LinkedIn



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?”.

Publication schedule for 2025

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