

EXTRACT



What do the authors of the best thought leadership in the world have to say about why and how it's created?

*And what advice would they give everyone else?*

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# What do the authors of the best thought leadership in the world have to say about why and how it's created?

*And what advice would they give everyone else?*

We read a lot of thought leadership.

In fact since 2013 we've read well over 3000 pieces. And what we read, we rate. Our quality ratings – based on the pillars of appeal, differentiation, resilience and prompting action – are now used by most of the world's leading consulting firms to assess quality in their own material and to gauge how they're doing against their competitors in a very busy market.

Every quarter we provide links to the best material we've seen in a series of thought leadership digests. There are usually five or six of these, each containing somewhere between ten and 15 pieces, and they're aimed at people in specific business functions.

In the spring of 2014 we contacted the authors of the material we'd featured in our thought leadership digests to ask them to complete a survey about why and how thought leadership is created within their firm, and what advice they'd give other authors about creating the best quality, most effective, material.

Our respondents came from some of the world's leading consulting firms, including A.T. Kearney, Accenture, The Boston Consulting Group, Capgemini, Deloitte, IBM, Infosys, KPMG, PwC, and Strategy & (now part of PwC, formerly Booz & Co).

This report reveals what they told us.



### **Rachel Ainsworth, Head of Research at Source**

Rachel is Source's lead analyst for thought leadership: she spends more of her time than is good for her health reading the latest thought leadership being produced by the world's leading consulting firms and developed the detailed scoring matrix used by all of Source's analysts when assessing the quality of those firms' material. She's the author of our "Engagement" newsletter, which helps firms to understand how they can improve the effectiveness of their thought leadership and speaks regularly to international audiences on the same topic.

A former consultant herself (her career started at Gemini Consulting) Rachel has more than ten years' experience working on strategic and operational projects across sectors including financial services, life sciences, public sector, not-for-profit and manufacturing. She has an MBA from Stanford, an MA in Education and an MA in Counselling. None of which have stopped her from doing serious harm to herself (like, harm for which you need a helicopter) any time she goes near mud. You can ask her about that, or anything connected with this report, by contacting her at [rachel.ainsworth@sourceforconsulting.com](mailto:rachel.ainsworth@sourceforconsulting.com) or on +44 (0)7522 252350

### *Unimaginative topics:*

- *"Not having a great idea in the first place (always test the uniqueness of your proposition)."*
- *"Don't follow everyone else – be unique and build your own thought leadership brand."*

### *Other:*

- *"Sign-offs within the firm."*
- *"Lack of data (too much reliance on opinion and experience)."*
- *"Losing clarity in the narrative – say what you need to say and nothing else."*
- *"Local fiefdoms."*

## How we can help you

No one can afford to be complacent where the development and dissemination of thought leadership is concerned. We know that clients are taking it increasingly seriously when it comes to selecting consulting firms they want to work with and many think it's the most effective way consultants can market to them. But ploughing millions of dollars into thought leadership – as some firms are doing – isn't enough. For any firm – big or small – the key challenge is how to organise themselves and allocate their scarce resources so they can publish material to the highest standard on a consistent basis. With this in mind we run regular bespoke workshops for firms, aimed at helping the people involved in the thought leadership process (marketeers and consultants) identify and resolve the key internal barriers they face.

### Interested in the impact of thought leadership?

In August, we'll be publishing a new report analysing the impact thought leadership has from a client perspective. While consulting firms grapple with how to calculate the ROI of their output, clients are reading it, binning it – and occasionally buying consulting on the back of it.

Based on research with 200 senior executives in the US, we'll be answering burning questions including:

- What impact has thought leadership had on senior executives' perceptions of leading firms?
- Who do they think produces the best material?
- What specific pieces of thought leadership have been memorable? And why?
- What formats work best?

Please contact [sarah.burgess@sourceforconsulting.com](mailto:sarah.burgess@sourceforconsulting.com) if you would like to know more.

## About Source

Source Information Services Limited (Source) is a leading provider of information about the market for management consulting. Set up in 2007 with offices in London and Dubai, Source serves both consulting firms and their clients with expert analysis, research and reporting. We draw not only on our extensive in-house experience, but also on the breadth of our relationships with both suppliers and buyers. All of our work is underpinned by our core values of intelligence, integrity, efficiency and transparency.

Source was founded by Fiona Czerniawska and Joy Burnford. Fiona is one of the world's leading experts on the consulting industry. She has written [numerous books](#) on the industry including: *The Intelligent Client* and The Economist books, *Business Consulting: A Guide to How it Works and How to Make it Work* and *Buying Professional Services*.

For further information please visit [www.sourceforconsulting.com](http://www.sourceforconsulting.com)

## About White Space

Please see [www.sourceforconsulting.com/whitespace](http://www.sourceforconsulting.com/whitespace) for further information.

Thought leadership is one of the most important marketing tools for a consulting firm. Studies have shown that it plays a vital role, from helping clients decide whether an issue or opportunity is worth pursuing in the first instance, to deciding which firms should be shortlisted for work. The more senior a client is, the more likely they are to read this material. But the result is now a very crowded market. The first (printed) edition of White Space, based on the thought leadership published in 2002, listed just 636 publications. Today's online version links to more than 30,000 documents.

White Space was first developed ten years ago by Fiona Czerniawska, one of the world's leading commentators on the management consulting industry and co-founder of [Source](#). It's the only service of its type in the world, and almost all the major consulting firms subscribe to it. Every month we update its content by using proprietary search engines to identify new thought leadership from 30 leading consulting firms. This material is classified by topic (service), sector and geography, allowing users to browse broad swathes of material from different sources very efficiently.

Since 2007, White Space has also rated the quality of thought leadership. Our [methodology](#) was originally based on watching how clients read material. We wanted answers to questions such as: Why is some work discarded without a second glance? What attracts people's attention – and what holds it? How deep does the research have to be to confer credibility? When, and to what degree, is it appropriate to make a reference to a firm's consulting services? That gave us the criteria by which we now assess quality. Today, subscribers can access half-yearly ratings reports, reflecting activity over the previous six months, with which they can benchmark their material.

Thought leadership is constantly evolving, and so is White Space.



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