

# Inside PA: How their *Brand Impact Index* has sparked a cultural shift



At PA Consulting, a recent two-year journey developing the [Brand Impact Index \(BII\)](#) has not only produced a valuable research asset but has also been the catalyst for a significant cultural transformation within the organisation. This initiative, which began as a more focused project with external research support, has evolved into a fully integrated, multi-team effort that is redefining how the firm approaches thought leadership and client engagement. Nicola chatted to **Tom Bovingdon, Head of Thought Leadership at PA**, who shared this behind-the-scenes story to demonstrate how the firm has dialled up a collaborative, data-driven, and forward-thinking mindset—and most importantly, how they have derived benefit from it.



## New people and more ideas ignited innovation

The *BII* started as “an ambitious idea born from a new wave of partners eager to work with marketing to make their mark on the business,” as described by Tom. The goal was to create a tool for client conversations, particularly for growing the business in the US consumer and manufacturing sectors. Although not the primary goal, the brand index was also seen as having a strong “PR-ability factor”.

The first year of the study involved surveying 7,000 nationally representative US consumers to gauge sentiment about brands contributing to a “positive human future”—aligning to PA’s own internal brand mission. The research successfully validated the hypothesis that consumers were seeking brands that make the world a better place, creating an index of the top performing US brands.

It was a solid start that generated greater awareness of PA in the consumer and manufacturing sectors and opened doors for sales from the get-go. But the firm’s marketing team sensed that something was missing.

## The evolution from year one to year two

The transition from the first to the second year of the *BII* marked a profound shift in both methodology and internal culture. As Tom described, “It felt like the big opportunity for the second year was to add insight from brand executives”. So, the team made the decision to supplement the consumer research with the perspective of 360 executive leaders. This new data layer was intended to answer a crucial “so what” question: What are brands doing in response to this wave of consumer demands?

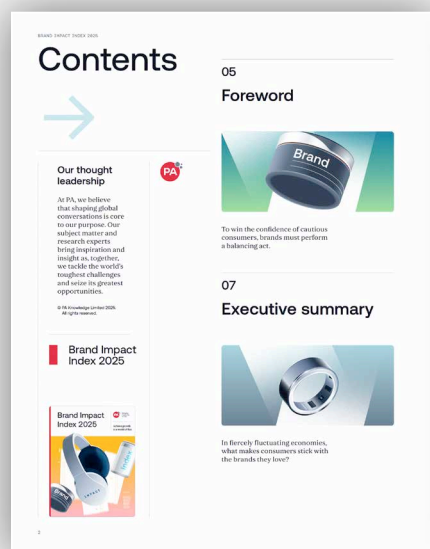
This decision to integrate the brand leader perspective created a richer study and allowed PA to analyse the friction and similarities between consumer expectations and brand actions. But with a richer study came increased complexity. Tom even said that the research agency involved in the project said that it was one of the most complex undertakings they had ever managed!

Tom describes how the *BII* campaign has led to a major change in PA’s thought leadership and marketing operational model. For example, in the first year, the team worked closely with an external provider to analyse the findings. Yet, in the second year, there was a strong desire from within PA for internal teams—including their own analysts, researchers, and economics and investment teams, who deliver these types of analyses for clients—to be more deeply involved. This internal buy-in was a “testament to the success of the first year, with people across

the business coming forward to contribute”. This collaborative approach, involving “different crack squads of analysts” working on various aspects of the data between PA’s consulting and marketing experts led to much deeper and more rigorous analysis.

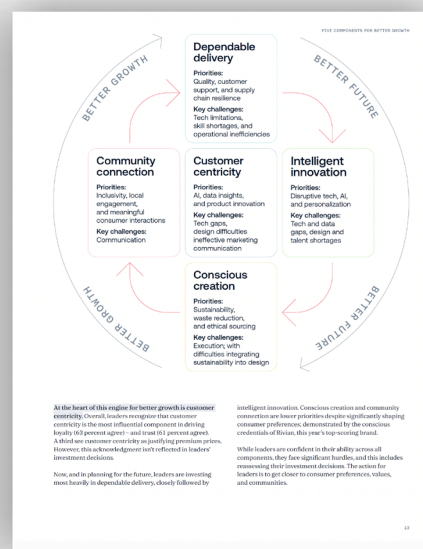
While the increased complexity and dual-analysis layer impacted go-to-market timescales, it did result in a wealth of new data points and insights. This new, richer dataset allowed PA to move “beyond a single, static report and instead deploy new findings at different times throughout the campaign”. This phased approach helped sustain campaign momentum in a “healthy way”, a significant departure from the traditional “one-and-done” model of thought leadership.

Specifically, one key differentiator in this campaign is its ability to deliver informed, actionable insights tailored to individual clients. The PA team repeatedly translates the data into bespoke brand-specific versions, allowing clients to benchmark themselves directly against competitors. “This level of insight is something they consistently tell us they rarely receive elsewhere”, adds Tom. One client workshop led to the account lead saying, “The research absolutely nailed it. The client saw tremendous relevance in the findings and how we customised the message to fit their challenges and opportunities for growth”.



### Top 25 brands

Ranking	Brand	Category
1	Rixian	Transportation and mobility
2	Samsung	Consumer electronics
3	Little Spoon	Baby food
4	SoudCycle	Sports and fitness
5	Google	Technology
6	Mercedes-Benz	Transportation and mobility
7	Urban Remedy	Beverages
8	SmartSweets	Food
9	Sony	Consumer electronics
10	Oura	Consumer electronics
11	The Honest Company	Beauty and personal care
12	BHW	Transportation and mobility
13	Zilber	Home and living
14	NFL	Sports and fitness
15	Band-Aid	Personal care
16	Healthfront	Financial services
17	Bottemant	Financial services
18	Gebeze	Baby food
19	Daan	Home and living
20	Tonal	Sports and fitness
21	Orangetheory Fitness	Sports and fitness
22	Apple	Consumer electronics
23	Vuori	Fashion and apparel
24	Honeyy	Food
25	CrossFit	Sports and fitness



## The role of AI in innovation and the cultural shift at PA

A key driver of this cultural change and innovation has been the cautious yet increasingly strategic integration of AI into the research process. While AI was not a major component of the first year of the *BII*, it played a crucial role in the data analysis and other areas in the second year. Tom referenced that AI was used to refine question sets, making them more applicable across various brand categories and sub-sectors. “It helped the team ‘wargame’ different scenarios, predicting potential outputs from question changes and allowing them to fine-tune their approach before deployment”.

Crucially, the team’s approach was a prime example of human-AI collaboration. The vast, raw datasets were first processed by human analysts—both internal and external—to identify initial hunches and potential areas of interest. Only then, with a more precise and defined prompt, would they feed the data into AI tools for further exploration and deeper cuts. This method ensured that the analysis was human-led and that the team maintained a clear, logical understanding of how they arrived at their findings, which was essential for maintaining both internal and external trust in the data.

The work on the *BII* has demonstrated what AI can do for the business when guided by human expertise and has inspired change. So much so that PA’s CMO, Jo Scarlett, has a big ambition to become an “AI-first thought leadership function”.

As the campaign programme enters its third year, the aim is to further embrace personalisation for PA’s US clients, leveraging AI to generate client-focused reports faster, with deeper, more relevant insights.

---

## Tangible results and outlook

The second year of the *BII* has yielded impressive results that highlight the success of these innovations. Tom shared that the report exceeded first-year downloads by 50% in the initial months, and internal metrics also showed a similar uplift in people accessing the report to share with clients. Most importantly, the campaign has already generated a strong pipeline of sales opportunities. It has quadrupled sales pipeline expectations, with an ROI of over 9,000%, driven by a multi-channel strategy that combined data-led insight, targeted outreach, and agile optimisation.

Beyond the numbers, the index has also led to new and innovative content assets. PA is now taking qualitative interviews with brand leaders and turning them into social media audio snippets, which

is a new approach for the marketing team. They’ve also found success with social media carousels and are pushing data visualisation to a new level with future thought leadership projects. These assets resonate powerfully with internal staff, who are using them to populate client decks.

According to Tom, the success of the *BII* has not only created a valuable, repeatable asset that is building a “marker point” in the annual calendar but has also fostered a new culture of collaboration and open-mindedness within PA Consulting. The firm has moved from a siloed approach to one where marketing, analysts, and other teams work together, learn from each other and embrace a mindset of continuous improvement. This collaborative ecosystem, built on trust and a shared vision, is

allowing PA to constantly learn, refine, and improve its thought leadership, ensuring that each subsequent iteration is richer and more impactful than the last. Take, for instance, how the team boosted post-launch report downloads by 50% after analysing the data to refine the audience and message specifics. All of this means that the *BII* is no longer just a report; it is a blueprint for the future of thought leadership at PA Consulting.

The last word, suitably, belongs to PA’s CEO Christian Norris, who commented on the *BII*’s strong analysis and hooks for great client conversations. In Norris’ words, “It looks and feels like a premium consumer brand advert, from a strategic consulting firm and we are very proud”.

# In brief: The Source view on PA's Brand Impact Index

As part of our annual [Quality Ratings Review](#) process, we've used our bespoke methodology to score both of PA's BII reports. Unsurprisingly, the 2025 index received a higher score overall and across all four dimensions of quality. Here is a summary of the reviewers' observations, which demonstrate how the internal collaboration has resulted in a far stronger piece of thought leadership that delivers greater value and insight to its desired audience.

	2024	2025
Differentiation	2.00	2.67
Appeal	2.80	3.20
Resilience	2.75	3.50
Prompting action	1.67	2.33
<b>Total score</b>	<b>9.22</b>	<b>11.70</b>

## Deeper research and greater audience specificity increased differentiation

The 2024 BII was a little ambiguous in its audience targeting because the US market focus was underemphasised, and the "impact index" concept struggled to differentiate itself from similar studies.

However, the 2025 report is far better differentiated. It now clearly outlines its US market focus and targets "consumer products leaders". The key distinction lies in its unique, quantified brand performance analysis with specific rankings, highlighting the gap between consumer expectations and business priorities. This deeper research and distinct analytical approach make the 2025 iteration genuinely new and innovative compared to competitors' more generic offerings.



## Stronger brand execution and hooky introduction increased appeal

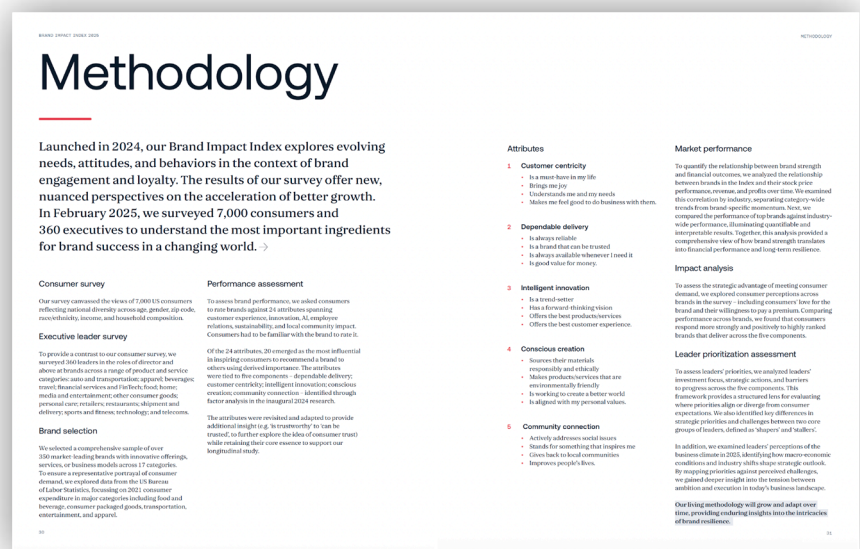
In 2024, reviewers suggested the report suffered from a departure from the usual PA brand style visually, and the lack of a hyperlinked contents page or a navigational tool made the 40-page report hard to follow. They did, however, comment on the excellent use of brand stories, consumer quotes, and an informal style.

The 2025 report landing page effectively hooks readers with key statistics and prominent downloads, although this could achieve even greater impact with the use of some upfront promotion of rankings, online interactivity, or video content. The PDF itself is a clean execution of standard PA branding, and the contents page is well-presented, logical, and hyperlinked, which significantly improve navigability. The report is well-written once again and is supported by strong case studies, but it could benefit from more direct quotes from the research or internal PA voices beyond the foreword.

## Greater clarity of authorship and impressive research strengthened resilience

The 2024 *B/I* faced criticism for unclear authorship and a methodology that, despite a consumer survey of 7,000 respondents, lacked demographic detail and used quantitative data lightly.

By 2025, the rigour of the research has vastly improved. While author clarity is still a little unclear, the methodology is highly detailed, outlining analysis and brand attributes. The impressive scope now includes 360 industry leaders and secondary data, though the addition of demographic breakdown would enhance it further. Critically, the report showcases excellent analysis, new frameworks, and an internally developed index, signifying a much more advanced and innovative approach to presenting findings.



## Stronger recommendations backed up by case studies aided prompting action

The 2024 Brand Index used engaging questions at section end but the conclusion failed to provide concrete answers and needed more evidence-based guidance on what consumer brands should do, which therefore left readers without clear next steps. Additionally, the report offered only a boilerplate practice description, which didn't really showcase PA's specific expertise in consumer branding.

However, the 2025 report provides more action suggestions throughout, along with examples of "what shapers are doing". It also includes case studies linked to action points, which provide useful real-world ideas for the audience. That said, greater audience targeting would improve this further.

# 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?”.

© Source 2025

Source Information Services Ltd and its agents have used their best efforts in collecting the information published in this report. Source Information Services Ltd does not assume, and hereby disclaims, any liability for any loss or damage caused by errors or omissions in this report, whether such errors or omissions result from negligence, accident, or other causes.