



MCA outlook:

Thinking out loud

There is a new battlefield in the world of consultancy – thought leadership. **Fiona Czerniawska**, director of the think tank at the Management Consultancies Association, prepares for war

Looking to raise awareness? Why not knock out a couple of thousand words on your latest assignment, call it a white paper and send it your clients? Thought leadership has always been a no-brainer for consulting firms. But now this no-brainer has become precisely that: something with (almost) no brain in it. And that is not good enough any more.

Most thought leadership focuses on the same small number of topics, rather than picking up new and emerging ones. Even new topics can become crowded very quickly: five years ago, thought leadership on financial management and regulation was thin on the ground, but the amount of material on operational risk has doubled in the last year; that on financial management has gone up six-fold. Accenture and McKinsey are the most prolific firms on the thought leadership scale, significantly ahead of their nearest rivals IBM, PA Consulting and PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Five years ago consulting firms had a scattergun approach to thought leadership, firing off articles in all directions apparently without much of a plan. Most material was generic: designed to apply equally to every sector. Today, one of the ways consulting firms are trying to put space between themselves and their competitors is by tailoring their thinking towards the needs of specific sectors.

Of course, quantity is no guarantee of quality. Clients look for three things from thought leadership. They want something relevant to challenges they face, something

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new and different, and something that is supported by hard evidence – a single case study, recycling second-hand ideas is not enough. Bain is not only astute in the way it

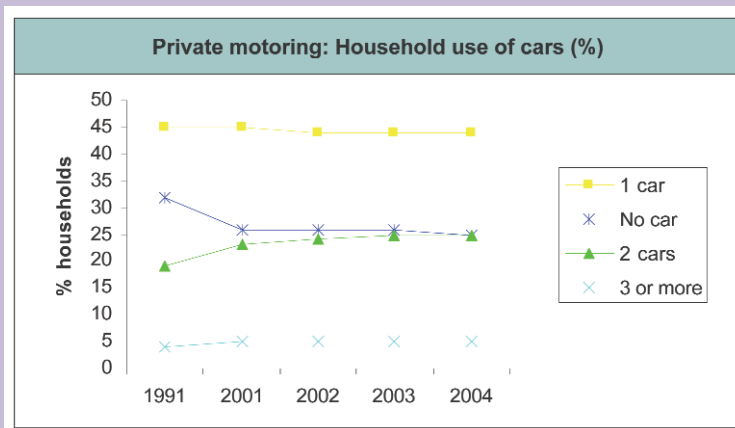
gets its thinking into newspapers and other media, but also has a knack of picking topical issues and making them appealing.

Booz Allen does not produce nearly as much material as its immediate rivals, but what it does generate is more distinctive, opinionated and interesting. In an environment where a single client case study is widely regarded as sufficient evidence that an idea or approach works, IBM and McKinsey lead the way in terms of the depth of their research.

So how does Capgemini's thought leadership stack up? Improving, but needs to be better. In terms of both quantity and quality, the firm is in the middle, alongside firms such as Mercer, Monitor, Deloitte and AT Kearney, ahead of the up-and-coming Indian firms but somewhat behind Accenture, McKinsey, PA Consulting and IBM. The important question is where does the firm want to be? **CR**

Vital statistics:

The two car household replaces the no car household



Source: TSGB 2006, Private motoring data tables