CAMPAIGN SUPERNOVA

GO GLOBAL WITH A BIG BANG

HOW THE C-SUITE VIEW AND USE THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

grist

COLEMAN PARKES RESEARCH

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About the research

Independent market research agency Coleman Parkes Research undertook the research on behalf of Grist, conducting more than 525 interviews with senior decision-makers at large and enterprise organisations around the world. Interviewees were segmented by heads of legal, finance, tech, marketing and sales and risk. The interviews were carried out in June and July 2018.

1.1 Welcome

Planning global thought leadership programmes can be daunting. They need to engage individuals across multiple regions and there will no doubt be numerous internal stakeholders with different requirements, too. All of these competing needs must be balanced while ensuring the resulting thought leadership also fits the brand.

By their nature, these programmes are critically important marketing initiatives. They require significant investment, both in time and resource, and are highly visible. They simply have to work.

To help senior marketing and communications professionals maximise the return they get from their global thought leadership programmes, we surveyed more than 500 senior executives across the globe and compared the differences in how C-suite members in the US, Europe and Asia-Pacific view and use thought leadership.

There were some differences, of course, but we found more similarities than we initially thought. Senior executives across these regions often share similar requirements, both in what they want and how they want it.

We then followed up that research with deep-dive interviews with a select group of those marketing leaders charged with producing their firm's global thought leadership. And while each firm was slightly different in approach, there was much that was consistent – particularly the need to think globally and act regionally.

In this report, we share a number of lessons around project management, effective messaging and campaign execution and include case studies showing how four different firms approach their own global thought leadership programmes.

This is the third and last report in our current Value of B2B Thought Leadership series. We hope that you find this research valuable and we welcome your comments.

1.2 Methodology

Quantitative

WHO
525 senior decision-makers at large/enterprise organisations around the world

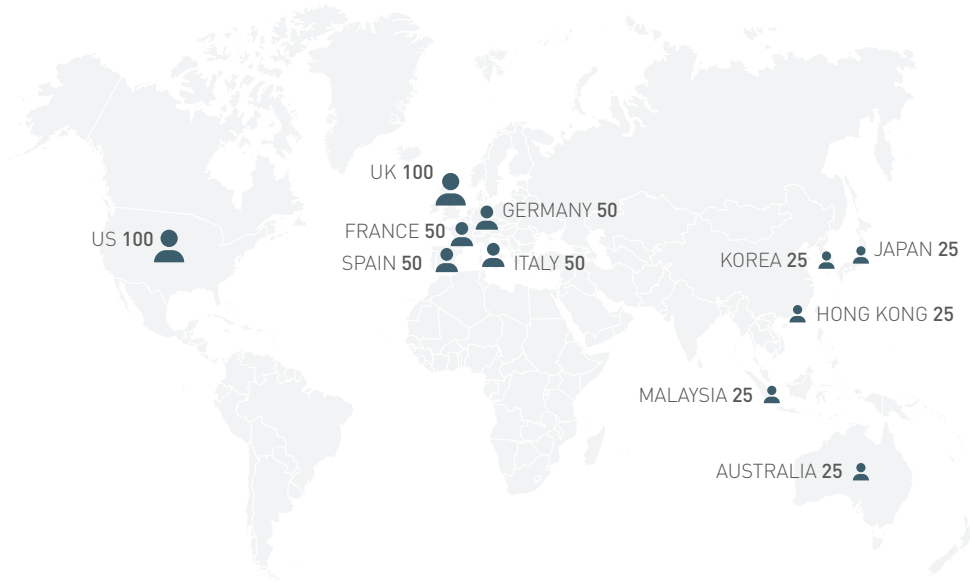
WHEN
June to July 2018

HOW
Online survey with some telephone interviews

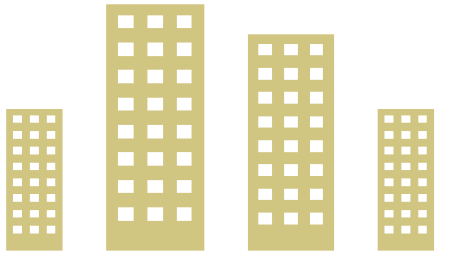
Qualitative

For this report, our quantitative research was followed by interviews with the following people:

- **Amy Greenshields**, Director, Integrated Communications, Global Advisory, KPMG
- **Julie Short**, Director, Market Influence and Knowledge Group, BearingPoint
- **Alex Bellinger**, Head of Brand and Sector Communications, CMS UK
- **Nicole Revers**, Global Marketing and OD Director, SI Partners



WHERE: RESPONDENT LOCATIONS



COMPANY SIZE (NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES)

16%

REVENUE OF $1BN +

2.1 Why do global leaders read thought leadership?

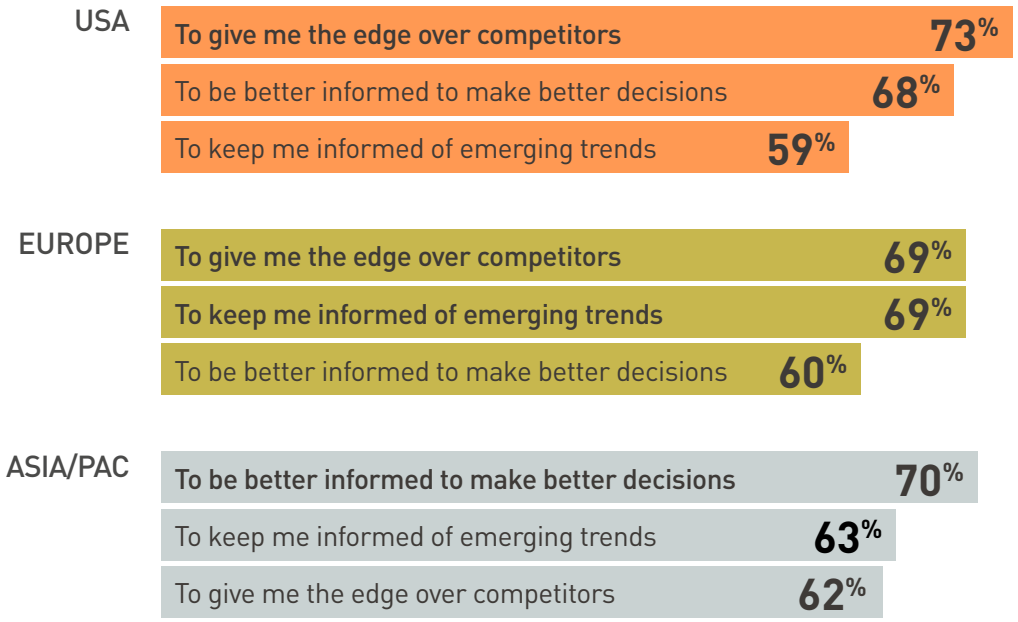
Across the globe, senior executives share the same reasons for reading thought leadership: they want to get an edge over competitors; to stay informed of emerging trends; and to be enabled to make better business decisions. All of these reflect the fundamental objective of content marketing, which is ultimately to be helpful to the target audience.

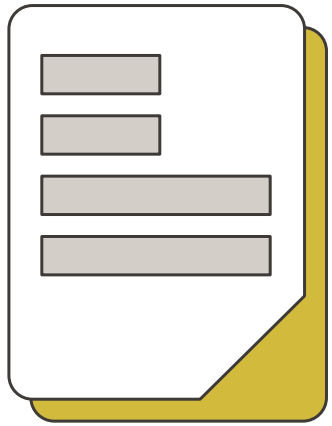
When you look at the regional results, there's not much difference in it. However, there can be slight nuances that are worth considering. For example, senior executives in the US have more commercial interests, looking for ways to get the edge over competitors (73%) and how they can become better informed to make better decisions (68%); emerging trends are far less important to them (59%).

However, when you want to speak to executives in the Asia-Pacific region, you'll need to be supporting their decision-making first and foremost (70%). That will impact the sort of content assets you should produce when speaking to that market.

There is clearly a lot of consideration that needs to go into finding the right topic but thought leadership can work across the globe – as long as the supporting assets are localised.

Q: What are the top three reasons you read thought leadership?





2.2 How they did it: KPMG

KPMG is a multinational professional services network and one of the Big Four accounting organisations.

KPMG is renowned for its quality thought leadership. Major member firms produce country-specific thought leadership initiatives with a focus largely on client engagement objectives while global campaigns like the annual CEO Outlook drive media coverage.

Research planning is kicked off with robust white space analysis, with the main external input into research coming from qualitative interviews. KPMG wants to not only understand the top risks faced by Chief Executives, but also what they are actually doing about them. Interviewees are global clients who have an interesting or unique perspective.

The campaign is a year-long initiative. Tailored campaigns complement the main report, picking up topics such as cyber to explore in greater depth.

The CEO Outlook campaign has huge visibility both internally and externally. While planning is done centrally to create a master narrative and suite of global assets, local offices get the campaign over the line, applying their local knowledge to tailor the story accordingly.

From an interview with Amy Greenshields, Director, Integrated Communications, Global Advisory, KPMG

2.3 Whose views do senior executives want to read about?

There are five clear groups of experts that senior executives across the world want to hear from, though the order and weighting given to each does vary depending on the region.

Everyone wants to hear from customers – particularly in the US (72%) – with peers second in the US and Asia-Pacific and third in Europe. Industry experts are next in line and are also clearly important. Thought leadership campaigns including the views of these groups are likely to be more effective than those that don't.

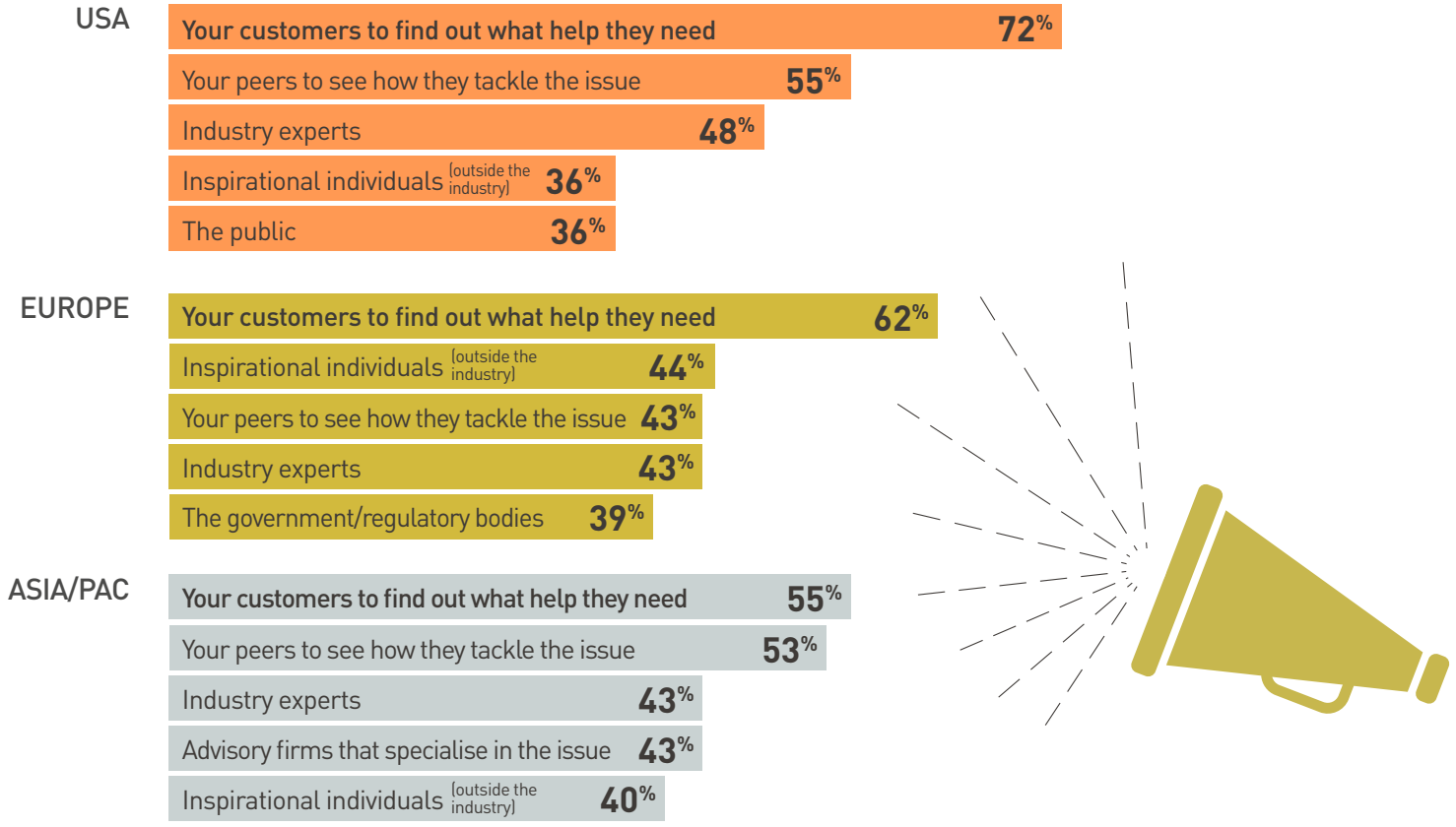
To give local activations of global campaigns an edge, it's worth looking at the differences highlighted in our survey data.

European business leaders are keen to hear from inspirational individuals outside the industry, perhaps reflecting the maturity of the thought leadership industry there and the need to include some different perspectives to achieve cut-through.

Meanwhile, in Asia-Pacific the views of advisory firms are more important, which means that robust thought leadership is likely to be even more effective in this region.

And there is no escaping regulation in Europe – the views of government and regulators are more desired (39%) than in any other region.

Q: Whose views do you most want to hear when reading thought leadership?



2.4 How they did it: BearingPoint

BearingPoint is a multinational management and technology consulting firm.

BearingPoint produces thought leadership around current trends that are constantly changing and evolving. We're currently focusing on: digitalisation, Ecosystem IQ and customer centricity in Retail 4.0. Trends in these areas can look very different between regions so their focus is more European than global. While the main output is typically pan-European, the firm pays close attention to localisation issues and often uses country-specific data to engage on a local level.

BearingPoint's ethos is that thought leadership needs to be daring – you need to take a stand. The data provides evidence, but you need to go beyond the data and draw conclusions as to what that data actually means for clients. This becomes the BearingPoint 'position', not just marketing but part of their internal view and how they differentiate the firm.

The market influence and knowledge group control thought leadership from a central point. In the past, surveys had been run by individual practices but often lacked a clear purpose or direction. Now, surveys are developed in partnership between the practice and the team, with a clearly defined central theme and then a survey run to prove or disprove the hypothesis.

Hypotheses are developed internally and then refined with external feedback: what has already been done? What is the difference? And how does that impact BearingPoint's clients?

Although each country office often wants to create its own reports, the team like to create as much as it can centrally to keep the quality high. Central assets produced include the report, infographics and social media posts. However, the message for each country is customised before it lands, often using specific in-country examples based on local client interviews.

From an interview with Julie Short, Director, Market Influence and Knowledge Group, BearingPoint

2.5 Which research method do senior executives prefer?

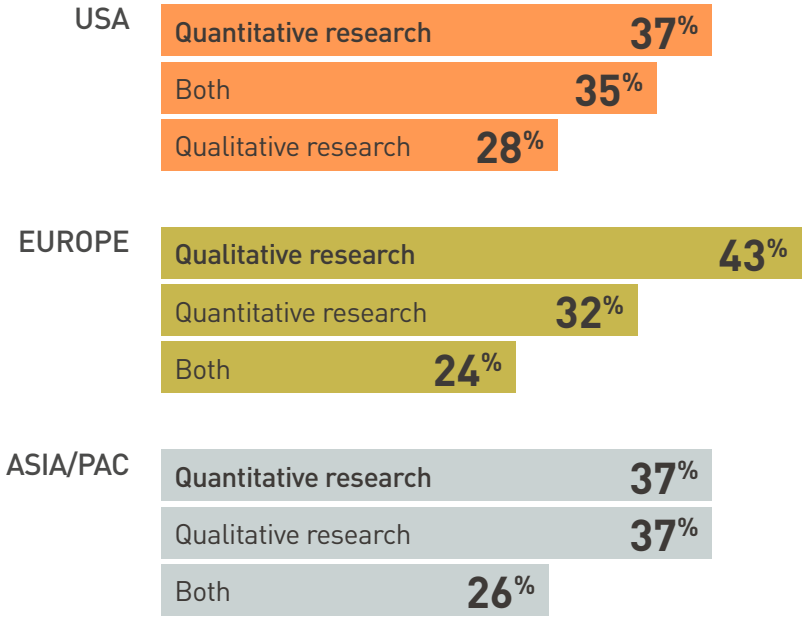
Most people associate thought leadership with a quantitative approach – surveys that provide hard data – but new insights can also be gained through one-on-one interviews.

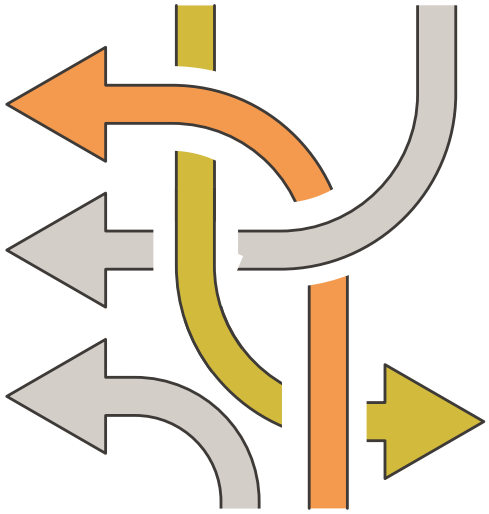
It's an eternal debate in the research world, so we asked senior executives which method they prefer. Turns out there's no simple answer – quantitative, qualitative and 'both' were desired across all regions. There are, however, some slight preferences if you dig into the data.

Senior executives in Europe slightly favour qualitative interviews over quantitative research (43% vs 32%), while senior executives in the US favour quantitative (37%) or a mix of both types (35%) over just qualitative (28%). In Asia-Pacific, they are split (37% vs 37%) between the two types of research.

The only way to please all parties therefore is to ensure that campaigns are built on both survey data and interviews. This blended technique can also aid the localisation of thought leadership. You can add to the regional flavour of your thought leadership by conducting interviews in each region and then digging deeper into any anomalies that come from the quantitative research.

Q: Most thought leadership mixes quantitative and qualitative research – which would you prefer?





2.6 What are the important attributes of survey respondents?

Perhaps unsurprisingly, job responsibility and job title are the most important attributes when surveying your clients' peers. But there are regional differences, which are important to keep in mind.

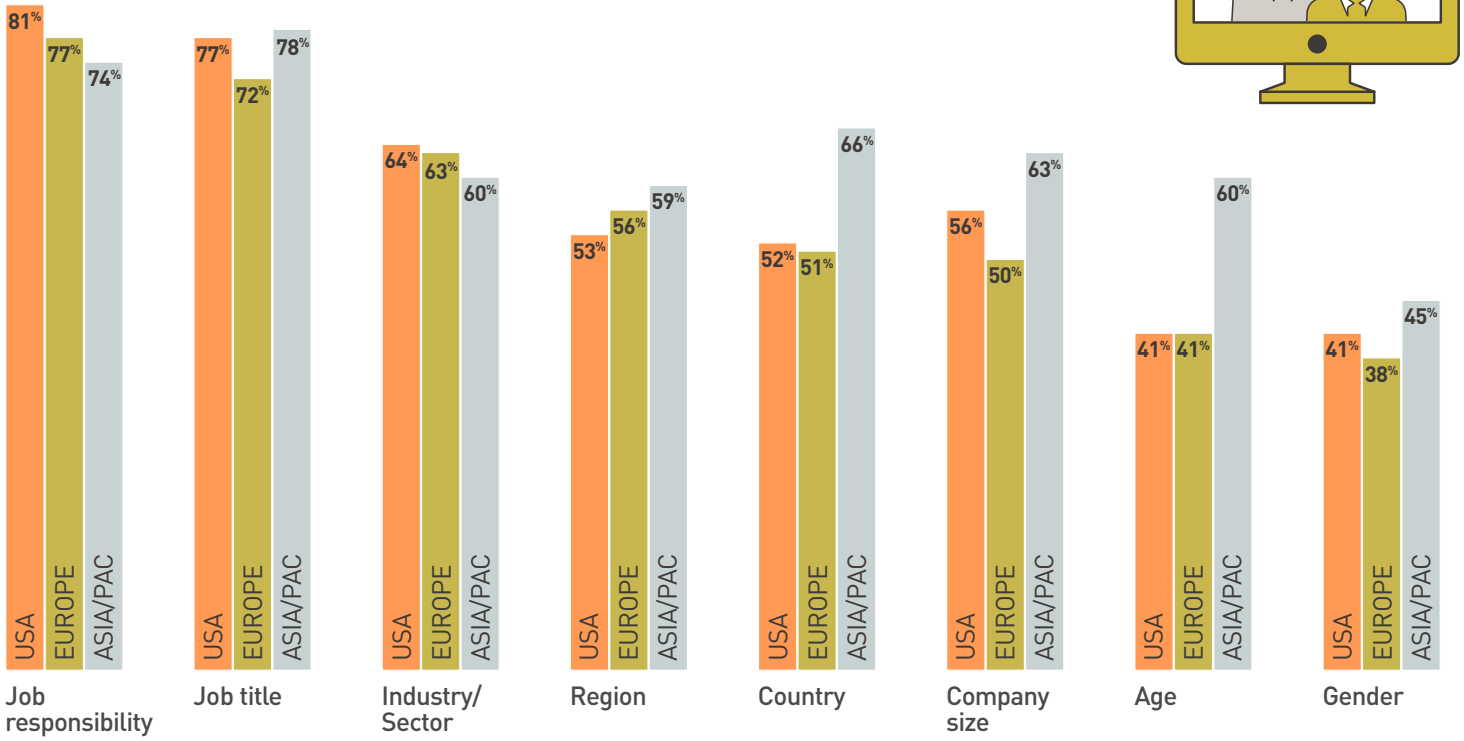
For example, Asia-Pacific is a vast and multifaceted region and the location of the client or expert you speak to matters. The region covers everything from the West (Australia, New Zealand) to the East (China) and everything in between (Singapore, Hong Kong and so on). Doing business in these regions is vastly different and your survey will need to reflect this.

Just as the cultures are very different, so too are the experiences of businesses – not just from a compliance and operations standpoint, but also from a business mindset and approach.

Asia-Pacific is also the only region that nominates the age of respondents as an important attribute (60%), which makes sense for cultures where experience and age are so highly respected.

The Asian experience illustrates the need to remember cultural differences, whether that's when you're designing the survey or analysing responses. While location of respondents may not be important to the end user, it might skew results, so careful analysis is needed.

Q: Regarding quantitative research, how important is it that the target respondent is like you in terms of the following attributes?



2.7 How they did it: CMS UK

CMS is a top ten global law firm.

CMS UK uses a framework called 'distributed thought leadership' to create its flagship content around key client sectors. Most of its key sectors, such as infrastructure, real estate and energy, are global and the thought leadership produced reflects this.

Each sector typically has an existing management team made up of partners in key jurisdictions to coordinate its global offering. Marketing keys into this to set up a small thought leadership steering committee to decide on topics, starting with the partners and then plugging in business development and client-facing teams.

The core team is kept tight for planning but a second, much wider group ensures a broader engagement at launch. The firm looks for business-critical topics that will be useful to clients, discussing potential themes internally and then testing them with a select group of clients. Once the topic has been agreed, CMS enlists the help of external agencies to develop and evolve its thinking, which sometimes moves significantly beyond the initial idea.

Typically, CMS will survey clients and prospects, sometimes clients' customers, but it also uses algorithms to mine existing data to find fresh angles. Qualitative interviews are used to add specific regional insight, with a package of assets created for local firms to help tailor distribution to its markets. Local marketing managers then use their knowledge of local clients and culture to tailor the campaign to ensure the best possible results in their market.

CMS always seeks ideas that are new and interesting, that can create unique headlines and fit with their business development objectives. The focus is to ensure the findings are appropriate, usable and practical in all regions.

From an interview with Alex Bellinger, Head of Brand and Sector Communications, CMS UK

2.8 Which formats do senior executives find most engaging?

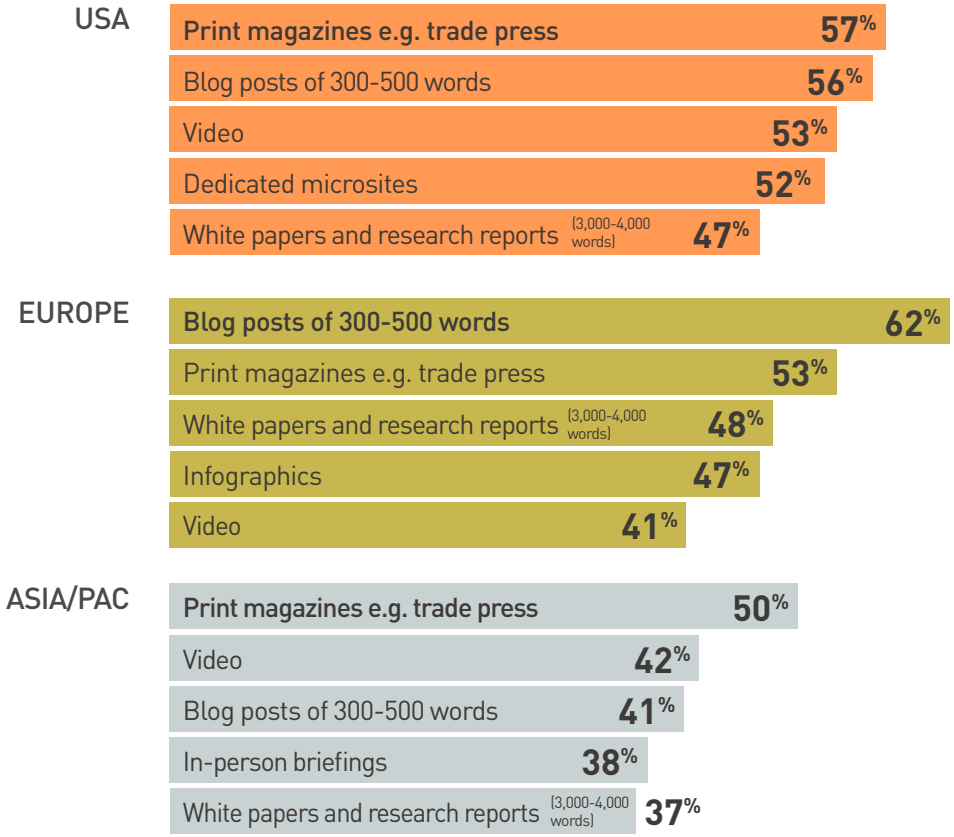
There are regional differences in the content formats that leaders prefer, though the main formats of choice across all locations are blogs and articles in the trade press. The former is the most favoured format in Europe (62%), while the US (57%) and Asia-Pacific (50%) prefer to read the trade press.

Dedicated microsites, white papers, infographics and in-person briefings make up the remainder of the top formats, with video in the top three in the US and Asia-Pacific but not yet in Europe.

This points to a need for an integrated communications strategy encompassing long-form and short-form content, PR and events. This approach can be particularly powerful when producing, say, a series of blogs built from the long-form report or video of a roundtable event hosted to discuss the findings.

Each of these approaches should be used to further the debate, bringing something new to the table rather than simply repeating previous findings in a new format. So blogs created from the research can include new interviews, videos of the research events, vox-pops and so on. Use the research findings to spark topics to dig further into and create new assets.

Q: Which content formats do you find most engaging when reading thought leadership?



2.9 What sources do global leaders turn to for thought leadership?

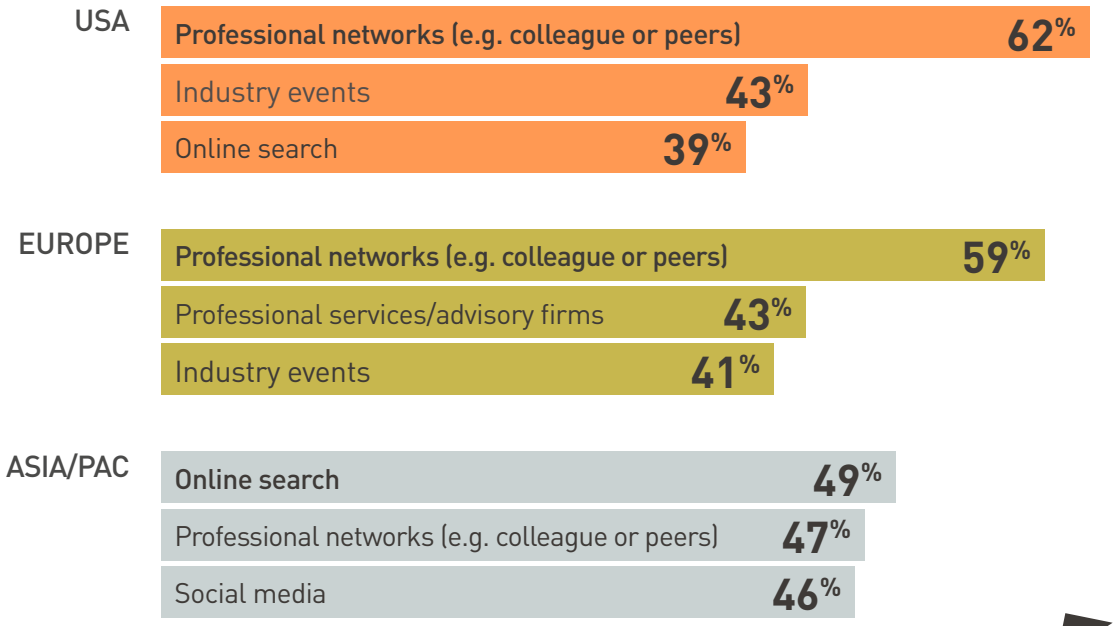
The sources senior executives turn to for information differ again between regions but executives everywhere will turn to their professional networks as a starting point to find thought leadership.

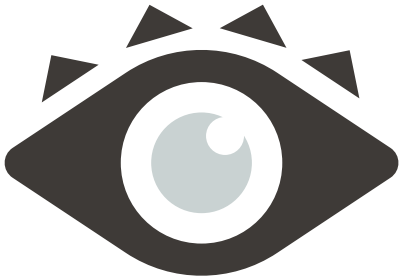
Asia-Pacific rates online search (49%) and social media (46%) as top sources, while fewer senior executives turn to advisory firms and professional services in the US than their European counterparts.

To get attention in both the US and Europe, try an event – though that might not work in Asia, where just 33% of senior executives look to in-person events for thought leadership.

The information contained in this report should help you to learn more about your audience and create personas for each region, further tailoring your campaign planning.

Q: From which of the following sources are you most likely to seek out thought leadership material?





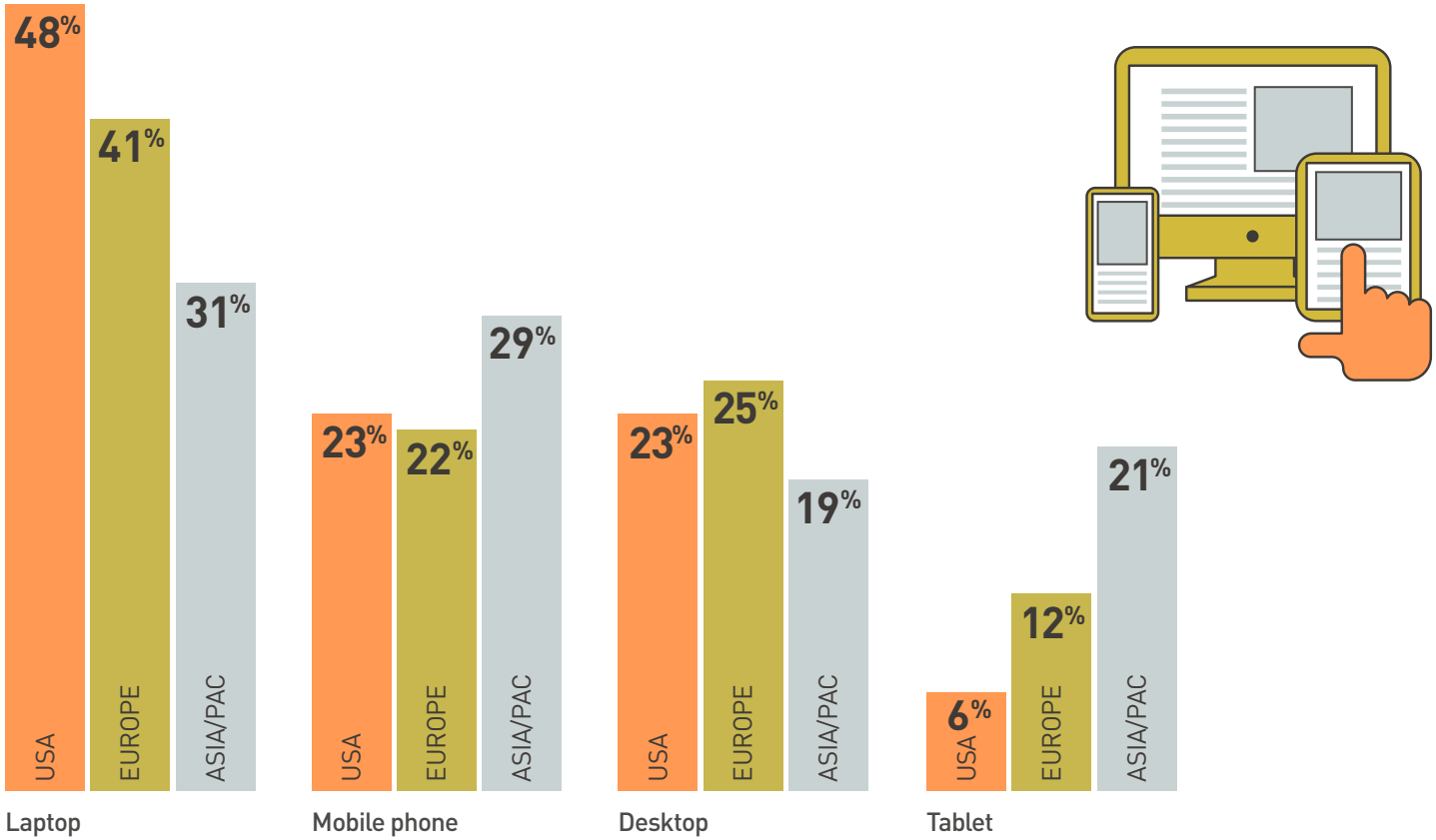
2.10 What devices are leaders using to read thought leadership?

It has been well documented that the growth of laptops has outpaced desktops and our research findings confirm that more thought leadership is read on laptops than any other device, no matter where the individual is located.

The US, in fact, overwhelmingly favours laptops (48%), though in Asia-Pacific the laptop (31%) is almost equal to the mobile phone (29%) and tablet (21%), which should be kept in mind when it comes to how you present your thought leadership and the formats you choose.

With smaller screens growing in terms of preferences, consider how to make the most of your survey data. Whereas a PDF white paper might work on a laptop or desktop screen, a mobile phone or tablet will benefit more from infographics, videos and interactive ebooks. How can you raise the bar in terms of presentation and innovation when planning your campaign?

Q: On what device do you typically read thought leadership?



2.11 How they did it: SI Partners

SI Partners is a global M&A advisor and growth consultancy that works with mid-market creative, communications, media, consultancy and technology businesses.

The challenges leaders of creative and technology businesses face in building, scaling and potentially exiting profitable businesses are shared the world over. So for SI Partners, one single global thought leadership initiative discussing the challenges to growth was a natural fit for the audience.

Seeking to provide sharp insight routed in research and data, SI Partners ensures thought leadership produced under its brand features a combination of data-led evidence layered with its own expert opinion and analysis.

Planning thought leadership projects sits with the marketing team, who develop the idea and then socialise and test it with the rest of the business. Engaging the wider business in the creation of thought leadership harnesses the deep sector expertise present in the business to provide the most relevant and sage interpretation of the data for readers. It's a matter of bringing in the right brains at the right time to give the project the best possible start.

Once the thought leadership is crafted, the marketing team ensures wider buy-in to the project by running an internal education programme, helping the firm understand the tools created and how to use them, enabling maximum return from the investment in marketing assets.

Planning for the last thought leadership campaign, the Path to Growth Survey, included content assets for five geographic regions from the outset. There was one global programme, with five different regional reports created based on specific data cuts, highlighting the nuances for businesses operating in these geographic markets. As a small team with a global remit, SI Partners' marketing department understands the importance of sweating the assets. Regional campaigns featured a tailored report, event, inbound assets, emails and more.

From an interview with Nicole Revers, Global Marketing and OD Director, SI Partners

2.12 If thought leadership hits the mark, what action follows?

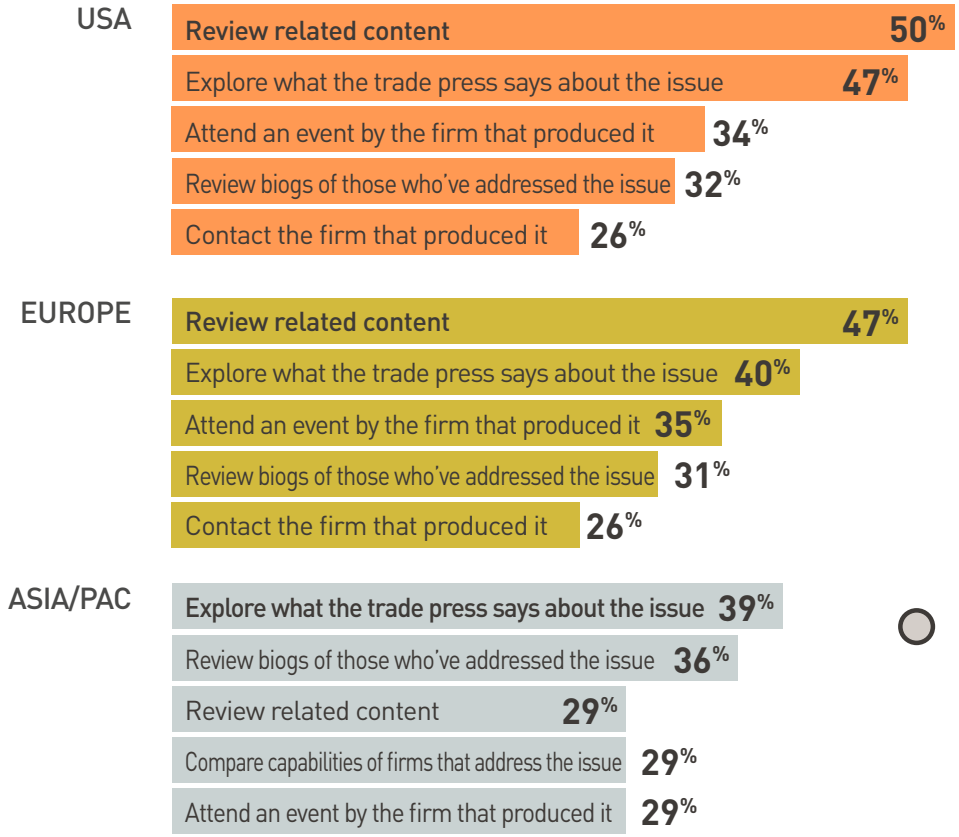
It can be hard to cut through the noise, especially when content marketing is not genuine thought leadership. But when thought leadership hits the mark by being original, authoritative and insightful, what action do leaders take next?

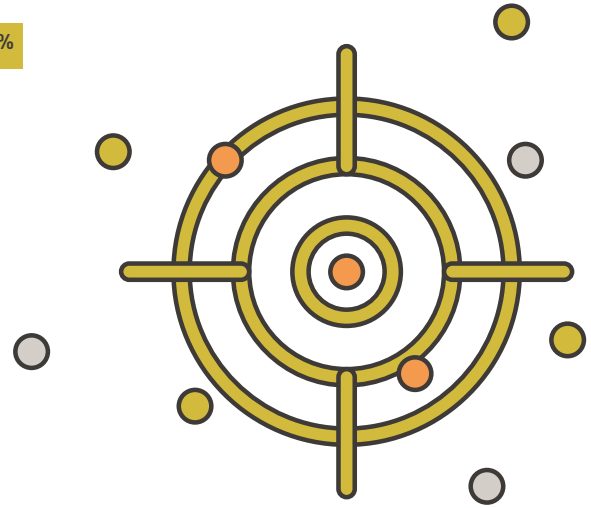
Our survey shows respondents across the globe typically take two courses of action: they review related articles, which is particularly important to those in the US (50%) and Europe (47%) and they explore what the trade press says about the problem or opportunity, which comes first for those in Asia-Pacific (39%).

The first of those courses shows just how important it is to have an entire campaign full of related content assets in different formats. It's not enough to just produce a report and leave it at that. Your thought leadership should evolve, with the dialogue continued via short-form content, PR and events.

After all, you will have used a vast amount of resources and spent a lot of time on your thought leadership programme – you should squeeze everything you can from it.

Q: What action would you typically take when thought leadership hits the mark?





3.1 Key takeaways

1. **Mirror the organisation**. Think carefully about your structure and culture when planning global thought leadership. Your campaign must fit both if it is to be a success.

2. **Be bold.** Plan your campaign around a central global theme and collectively agree the key message from the outset. It's not possible to include the needs of everyone so don't try.

3. **Think global, but act local**. Create individual personas for each region the content will be distributed in, or provide the base data for local marketing personnel to tailor content according to their region's needs.

4. **Project manage tightly**. Keep your core team light during planning and creation, then share more widely to bolster engagement when launching the content.

3.2 About us

Grist has a strategic partnership with independent market research firm Coleman Parkes Research to deliver survey-driven thought leadership for clients in the B2B sector. We believe data is imperative to thought leadership if you want the reader to take action.

Grist
At Grist, we create content with purpose. We are a strategic B2B thought leadership agency with the editorial heritage of The Economist and Financial Times in our DNA and a clear vision of the digital future.

As B2B specialists, we not only understand your needs but also those of your clients. We understand how to produce and promote engaging content across all channels – content that helps your clients do their jobs; content that underscores your value to them; and content that influences the decision-making process. It's what we call the content marketing sweet spot.

We are also a results-driven business partner. That means we'll work with you to track return on investment, always aiming to exceed your marketing goals through the delivery of quality content.

Coleman Parkes Research
Coleman Parkes Research is a full-service market research company that specialises in researching global markets for IT/technology and professional services players.

Since it was founded in 2000, Coleman Parkes Research has conducted thousands of global research projects for major multinational corporate brands around the world.

Some of the many global successes to date include the annual World Quality Report for Capgemini, the HP New Style of IT Survey and the PwC Risk Maturity Index.

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