

Welcome to the latest edition of Living Ratings

This, the 26th edition of Living Ratings, is our first-ever analysis of the brand and digital intelligence of the UK's Top 20 professional services firms. It reveals an unprecedented yet not unexpected level of strong content, but a disappointing overall user experience hindered by unimaginative, if not dull, delivery by many.



Greg Hobden,
Client Strategy Director

Here are some key themes from our Living Ratings research

When our analysts undertake our months-long evaluation of the digital intelligence of a sector's leading firms, we focus on the expression of their brand and values as well as any evidence they're keeping pace with the rapidly evolving social media arena. Those who rise to the top of our rankings have demonstrated that they understand the significance of communicating their value and competitive differences to their audience.

'What' matters, but so does 'why'

In a highly competitive marketplace, it's good to see that many firms (65%) express their brand values on their websites, but only 30% differentiate themselves by stating a brand purpose.

Thought leadership – the right start

In an absence of brand purpose, the quality of thought leadership and opinion-based content becomes ever more important. There are great examples of interesting and compelling content published by professional services firms, and an impressive 70% of them enable their content to influence and be amplified further, with ease.

Social media – a surprising experience

Considering the degree that compliance, regulations, and an inherent culture of reticence has traditionally cautioned

communications among professional services firms, it is quite surprising – and refreshing – to see how strongly the top 20 engage in social media.

Scoring the content equation

When we evaluate brand and digital intelligence, we look for a balance of Engagement and Evidence – and within Evidence, there needs to be a dual delivery of valuable information and a client-first perspective. A clear content strategy is required to manage this. Our Ratings reveal that professional services firms excel at only half of this equation.

We believe that having an insights section should be a given, as should case studies. While the former can win points with your visitors, the latter is crucial to winning them over to be clients. As the professional services industry continues its rapid transformation from beyond auditing and accounting to so many fields of business consulting, it is adamant that its leading firms be on the vanguard of inspiring its clients and prospects with stories of what they do and why they matter. And to drive that opportunity even further, 'extended content' creates a forum for a firm to make a clear statement: this is an area of importance and impact, and one in which our expertise can help you. It is an opportunity for ownership – a direct means for touting both brand and digital intelligence.

Hot topics – but some lukewarm content

Today, all companies are acutely aware of the absolute focus on diversity and inclusion. Yet less than half of the professional services firms reviewed make use of their online presence to share the role that diversity plays (and should play) in recruitment, career development, and client relationship management. For a sector so committed to helping other firms solve challenges and take leadership positions, this is an area where improvement can and must be seized.

New technologies – new ways to engage

Despite recommending and promoting newer advanced technologies for their clients, professional services firms have proven slow, perhaps cautious, to adopt them for themselves. Only one-third of the firms evaluated offer any type of app (excluding event-specific apps), yet apps remain a leading tool to engage clients with easy access to information.

Likewise, the rapid transformation of the digital landscape has created amazing opportunities for both personalisation and voice activation. Very few of the top 20 professional services firms offer any type of personalisation on their websites. And despite the sector itself predicting that voice-driven search may reach 50% of the overall search category by year-end 2020, none of the firms reviewed has taken a lead by creating an opportunity with the likes of Amazon Echo or Google Home. And if you think it's a disconnect for the B2B space, just look at what J.P Morgan Asset Management and Putnam Investments are doing in the financial sector with these partners.

In summary, our Ratings indicate that the best in professional services are not yet great in brand and digital intelligence, and an opportunity awaits for those willing to take their own sage advice about transforming with the ever-evolving digital world.

About Ratings

Living Ratings benchmarks the brand and digital intelligence of the world's leading financial and professional services firms.

These studies provide our clients with evidence-based insight that continuously enhances their brands and digital presence and gives us unparalleled knowledge of our specialist sectors.

Recent studies include:



The brand and digital intelligence of the world's leading asset managers – 2019



The brand and digital intelligence of the world's leading law firms – 2019



The brand and digital intelligence of America's leading wealth managers – 2018

Bespoke digital diagnostics for professional services

In addition to our annual Ratings report, we also offer an in-depth diagnostic of your website and social media footprint, analysing your digital intelligence and comparing your firm against your closest competitors.

Our analysis is the logical first step on the journey to improve your brand and digital intelligence, empowering you with objective evidence and a clear strategy.

The objective of the diagnostic is:

Analysis

To analyse how your site performs against a set of proven benchmarks.

Re-alignment

To re-align your digital strategy to ensure that any future-generated content receives the maximum exposure with your target audience.

Connectivity

To connect your social media strategy with your content strategy.

Purpose

To ensure that your CMS platform is the right fit for your purposes and goals.

Implementation

To enable you to implement enhancements and corrections in line with best practice.

UX

To improve the user experience and information architecture of your website.

Understanding

To understand what is required to create a better digital experience for all your stakeholders – internal and external (and to gain a higher Ratings score in the next review).

About Living Group

At Living, we blend our deep sector knowledge, uncompromised thinking and award-winning creativity to help our clients in the financial, professional services and technology sectors create difference through branding expressions that engage, digital experiences that disrupt, and integrated advertising campaigns that drive results.



What defines us

Our specialists' deep understanding of our clients' sectors means we challenge thinking and perception, inspire excitement and ambition, and help to deliver rewarding outcomes. In a world that is always changing, content-rich and visually crowded, we empower our clients to communicate their difference and stay ahead.



Find out more at:

www.living-group.com

What we do

Engaging branding

Our creative teams in New York, London and Hong Kong deliver award-winning ideas with proven results, driving your business performance with strategic thinking, brand creation and enhancement and stand-out messaging. We fuse these key elements together to generate highly effective visual and verbal expressions of your firm.

Disruptive digital

Our digital team connects your brand and your audiences. Around the world. Around the clock. We build seamless brand experiences online, using bespoke information architecture, engaging design and cutting-edge technology across multiple devices and platforms.

Integrated campaigns

We can help transform your brand objectives into tangible business benefits – stimulating dialogue, lifting your profile, prompting consideration, and spurring action. We research, plan and execute advertising and social media campaigns worldwide, applying distinctive ideas and creative, backed by relevant analytics to measure your success.

Creating difference for our people and communities

We don't just make a difference for our clients. We also make a difference for the talented people on our teams and the communities where we work. We have an open and collaborative culture that gives our people room to thrive. We encourage passionate, free-thinking ideas that challenge the conventional and celebrate individualism and diversity.

Who, what, when and how we rated and how we classified each firm

Who we rated

December 2019 and January 2020, our analysts reviewed the brand and digital intelligence of the UK's top accountancy firms (source ©Accountancy Age Top 50+50 Accountancy Firms 2019). Firms listed in the table are ranked by total UK fee income for the last financial year – and is based on voluntary submission of data. Each firm was rated through the eyes of a business seeking advisory/consultancy services, against nearly 100 criteria covering engagement (functionality and social channels) and evidence (brand and content) across four categories.

How we calculate our scores

Each firm is allocated an overall percentage score. This is calculated by adding the scores for the individually weighted engagement and evidence criteria. We then use the separate engagement and evidence scores to classify each professional service with one of four definitions of their digital presence – Determined, Energetic, Focused or Lacklustre.

Sector averages are based on the full listing of the Top 20 firms. The ten firms with the highest scores are also reviewed with expanded case studies.



Website functionality



Website content



Social media presence



Social media content



The 2020 criteria

With each iteration of our report, we evolve our scoring methodology to be more demanding. The 2020 Professional Services Ratings features a detailed analysis of:

Engagement



High-quality search

We want it all and we want it now. Professional services firms should have quick intuitive search engines that serve up filtered results to help visitors find what they want easily.



IA and UX

Information architecture and user experiences are more important than ever to deliver your brand story and present relevant and engaging content.



SEO

Never has search engine optimisation (SEO) been so important – it can be the difference between prospective clients finding you – or not! We apply third-party SEO software to scan every website and assess whether best practice has been adopted.



Site speed

No one likes waiting for answers, so what does a slow web server say about your firm? We reward firms with fast sites and speedy search results.



Active social media channels

Firms adopting best practice, using a range of active social media channels and promoting content that is proprietary, can expect high scores. We also look positively on firms customizing the channels for their different audiences.

Evidence



Brand positioning

Professional services firms that are clear about who they are, what they do and why it matters to their target audiences on their home pages are rewarded. They do not assume that everyone knows them.



Visual language

Recognition is given to those firms that have a clear and consistent digital brand and use it to help their readers consume data.



Evidence of what you do

In a sector obsessed with facts, we reward professional services firms that provide compelling content that help their target audiences understand their skills and specialisms.



Data visualisation

Interactive tools liberate data from static pdfs, and provide users with an accessible, customized way to see trends and understand patterns in data.



Diversity

We reward professional services firms that recognise the important role diversity inclusion has to play across all stakeholder groups.

Defining brand and digital intelligence

Establishing a positive brand perception has never been more important. Often a client's first brand experience is a visit to a website, therefore the digital expression of brand intelligence is paramount in building the right kind of connection with a user.

Brand creation and curation

Creating a more influential digital experience requires careful attention to the way a brand behaves, speaks and presents itself visually. Cohesion and consistency are key in achieving this along with a mode of communicating that is distinctive and proprietary to that brand.

Many professional services firms have much to do to improve the digital deployment of their brands, particularly around visual identity and brand language. Indifference to making a brand work better often comes from a cynical perspective that rests in the complacency of a steady balance sheet. However, firms must deploy their brands intelligently, effectively and consistently, especially to engage with younger and more digitally savvy target audiences.

Clarity and articulation of who you are, what you do and why it matters to your audience form the foundation of creating significant difference for your brand in the professional services marketplace.

Expressing brand intelligence online can be done in a number of ways. Consistent and coherent brand language is essential and extends from a succinct and meaningful positioning statement that articulates the purpose of the brand and influences all subsequent content in the site. Brand values, supported by evidence in the broader content, deliver succinct points of reference to influence brand perception both internally and externally. A clear tone of voice throughout a digital experience serves to set governance to all written content, from case studies and commentaries through to diversity and sustainability pages.

A distinctive visual brand is a powerful tool for professional services firms to use in building brand recognition among tight competition. Having an engaging and proprietary visual identity is an effective way to capture and retain user attention. It can inspire more compelling content, such as video and animation, and protect brand consistency in the continued conversation in social media. Effective visual brand design is an essential part of the bigger brand picture that is all too often overlooked or underestimated by professional services firms. In a sector that is beset by safe colour palettes and arbitrary stock photos of modern city architecture, embracing a visual identity that makes a statement about who you are as a firm can be a huge advantage and pay dividends in user engagement.

Developing digital acumen

Equally important to brand is digital intelligence, and the thoughtful use of your firm's digital footprint will help amplify your brand.

In a sector where facts are essential, the leading firms use their websites to deliver to their target audiences issues-based insights, case studies, data visualisation tools, written with a singular client-first tone of voice and available in a variety of media, not just endless screens of text. However, these professional services firms are the few amongst the many, with most serving up bland cookie cutter and indistinguishable content that fails to engage or inspire.

When it comes to search, the best professional services firms serve up enriched and fast results that are filtered and make it easy for their users to find what they're looking for. The worst just provide lists, leaving the user to search again by scrolling through suggested answer after answer. What does this say about their firm or ability to counsel and lead others?

Website SEO is also one of the pillars of digital wisdom, with our leaders placing great emphasis on ensuring their content is not just tagged and described correctly, but written with search engines in mind – succinct, relevant and timely.

A clear content strategy sits at the heart of digital intelligence – using your website and social media channels, not as a dumping ground for every word created by the firm, but as carefully curated outlets with different content delivered to each targeted audience segment. Our advice? Do less but do it better. The mantra professional services firms should adopt is to fight the excess of clutter and noise.

Investment in brand and digital intelligence empowers firms to take the pole position in a bustling marketplace and opens up a more genuine dialogue with audiences, both incumbent and prospective.

A distinctive visual brand is a powerful tool for professional services firms to use in building brand recognition among tight competition.

Are you determined, focused, energetic or lacklustre?

By analysing the individual engagement and evidence scores, we have categorised each of the leading firms' brand and digital intelligence into four areas.



Professional services ratings and rankings



● Energetic
 ● Determined
 ● Lacklustre
 ● Focused

Living Ratings ranking	Accountancy Age ranking	Firm name	Score / 855	%	Category
1	3	EY	713	83.39%	●
2	4	KPMG	679	79.42%	●
3	1	PwC	654	76.49%	●
4	2	Deloitte	619	72.40%	●
5	9	Mazars	591	69.12%	●
6	5	BDO	522	61.05%	●
7	20	Menzies	513	60.00%	●
8	7	RSM	479	56.02%	●
9	17	Moore Kingston Smith	476	55.67%	●
10	14	Crowe UK	464	54.27%	●
11	8	Smith & Williamson	463	54.15%	●
12	6	Grant Thornton UK	458	53.57%	●
13	12	Haines Watts	446	52.16%	●
14	19	UHY Hacker Young	420	49.12%	●
15	15	MHA MacIntyre Hudson	417	48.77%	●
16	13	Saffery Champness	376	43.98%	●
17	11	Moore UK	359	41.99%	●
18	18	FRP Advisory	353	41.29%	●
19	10	PKF UKI	307	35.91%	●
20	16	Begbies Traynor Group	292	34.15%	●

Engagement and evidence: the leaders

Determined professional services firms build experiences for their users

Professional services firms that take a determined approach to digital engagement have a relentless client focus. Their successful formula combines two key elements:

 <h3>Engagement</h3> <p>Determined professional services firms recognise the potential of useful digital functionality backed by a client-focused channel strategy. They can then create appealing and relevant content in a variety of media including graphics, audio, animation and video that captivates, informs and motivates the target audience.</p>	 <h3>Evidence</h3> <p>Determined professional services firms promote a clear purpose. They offer the user informative brand-driven messaging, relevant subject matter and the kind of insight that shows a deep understanding of client issues and interests. This demonstrates the ability to help clients succeed.</p>
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Engagement: our Top 5

	Firm name	Engagement score (%)
1	KPMG	73.25
2	Deloitte	73.13
3	EY	73.01
4	PwC	70.84
5	Moore Kingston Smith	67.71

Evidence: our Top 5

	Firm name	Evidence score (%)
1	EY	93.18
2	KPMG	85.23
3	PwC	81.82
4	Mazars	72.73
5	Deloitte	71.59

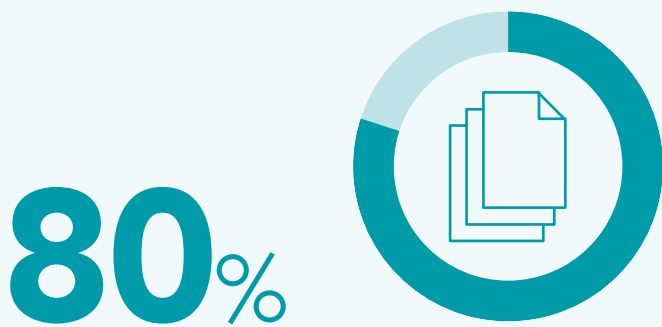
The numbers that define professional services firms: Engagement



of websites provide high quality search functionality.



of firms have an App.



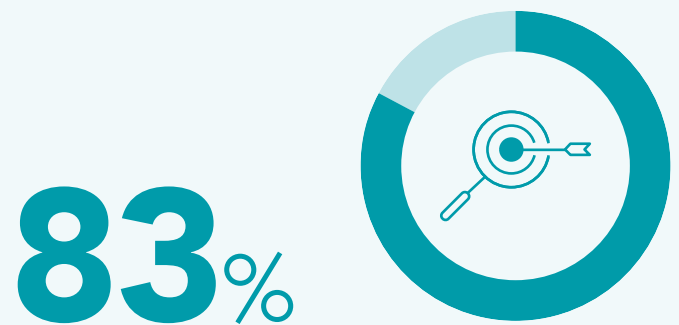
of websites provide related content.



of websites offer data visualisation.



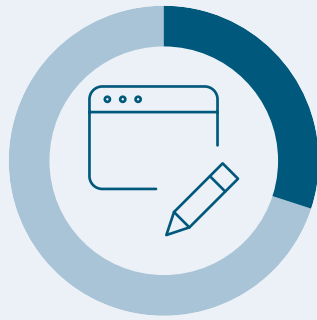
of websites have adopted voice activation.



is the average SEO score for websites.

The numbers that define professional services firms: Evidence

30%



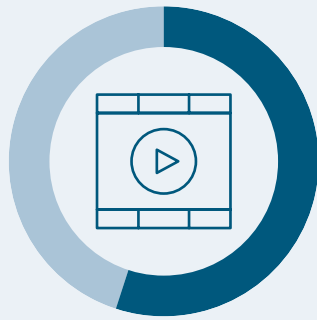
of websites feature case studies.

95%



of firms have a client-first approach to social media.

55%



make good use of video.

65%



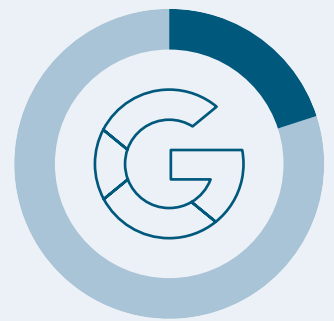
provide a poor website user experience.

80%



of firms lack a distinctive visual language.

20%



of firms have a well curated Google descriptor.

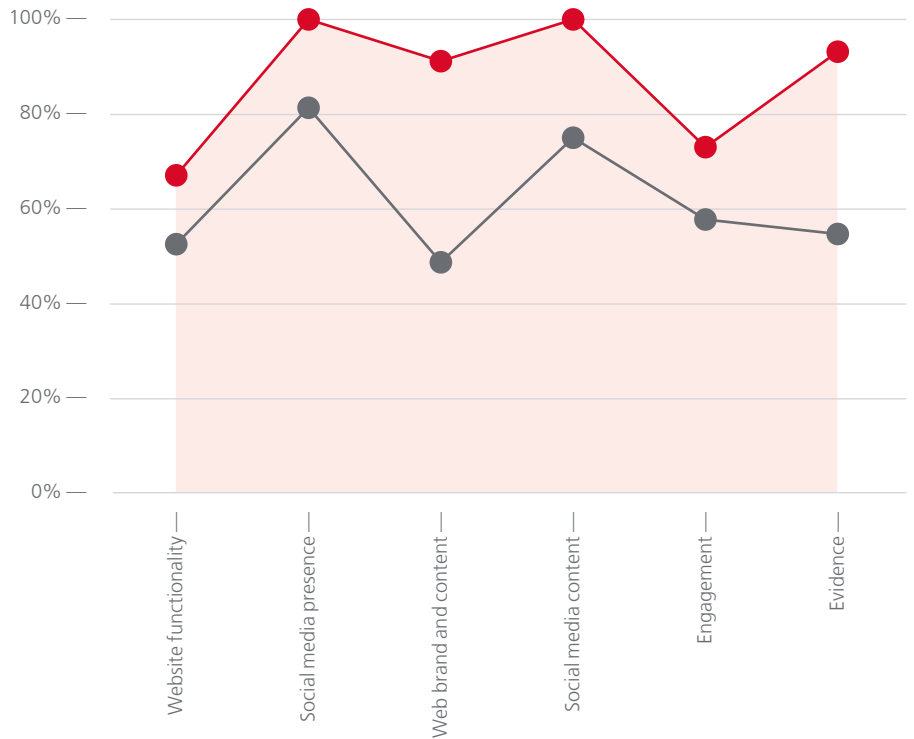


ey.com/uk/en/home



- EY
- Sector average

Classification:
▶ Determined



Key features

- ▶ **Compelling visual brand and tone of voice**
- ▶ **Exemplary social media content**
- ▶ **Powerful data visualisation tools**
- ▶ **Clear content strategy**
- ▶ **Case studies**

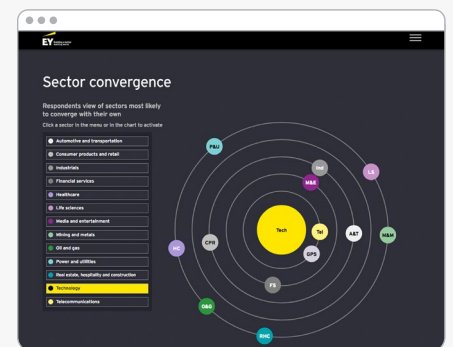
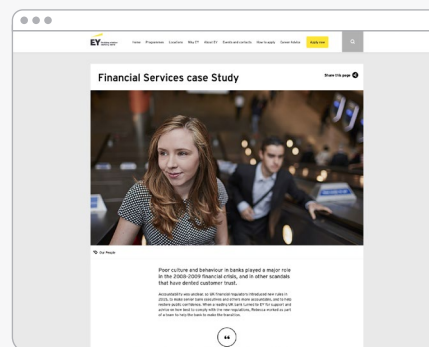
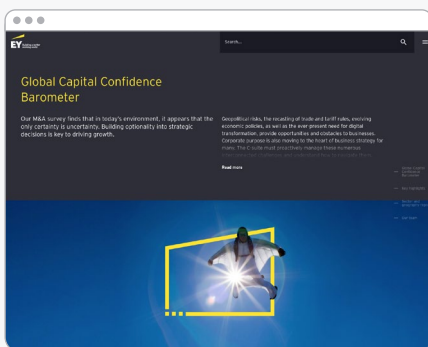
EY really shows its colours in the digital space. The firm has clearly invested in a mobile-first digital experience that is highly conscious of the user journey. The website search functionality offering is outstanding: its predictive functionality is followed swiftly by smart filtered results. And even before a key is tapped, recent and trending searches offer avenues of related content exploration.

Strategically, EY excels when it comes to content curation, ensuring that users are snared by captivating headline messaging on the home page, then guided through a

more detailed yet easily digestible viewing of the targeted content. Thereafter, data visualisation punctuates the narrative, allowing the more compelling insights of the storytelling to considerably and frequently come to life in more dynamic animated expressions.

We see a seamless alignment between EY's shift to be a more digitally native brand and the kind of content it delivers. The visual language further supports this focus by clearly guiding users to relevant content areas.

Images © EY



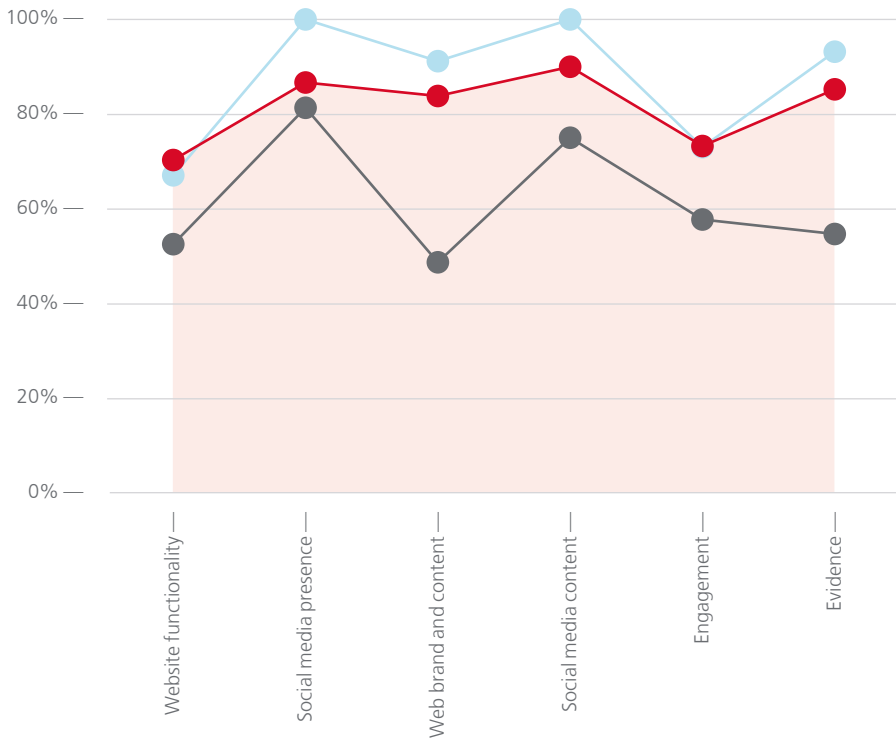
2 KPMG

home.kpmg/uk/en/home.html



- KPMG
- Sector average
- Sector leader

Classification:
▶ Determined



Key features

- ▶ Brand values upfront
- ▶ Advanced search functionality
- ▶ Engaging data visualisation
- ▶ Impactful use of different content types
- ▶ Clear content strategy

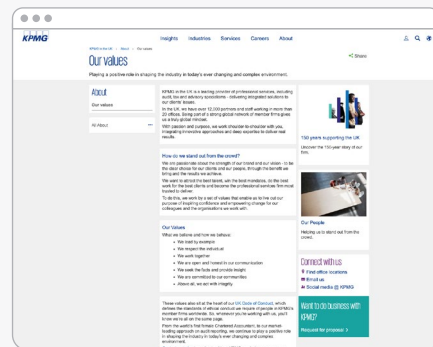
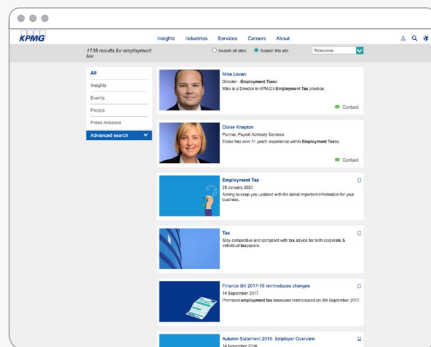
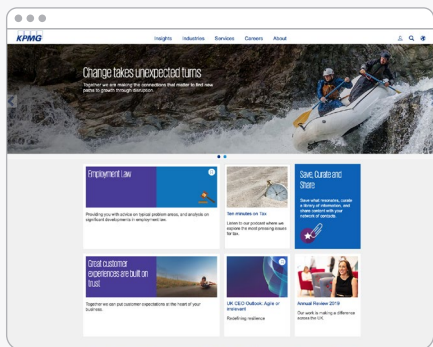
KPMG is another major player that have realised the importance of content strategy and the difference it makes to the user journey. The home page immediately presents topical, audience-centric insight. There's a 'top' segment that curates hot topic content. KPMG also augment their storytelling by leveraging more engaging content types, such as animation, video and animated dynamic infographics – with each execution. Always expressed consistently in the brand's visual identity.

Personalisation of content on registering would offer a distinct competitive advantage for KPMG and a useful benefit to those

who engage more frequently with the KPMG website. Simply sign up and receive relevant sharable content relevant to you that you can also save to your own library.

Graduate content is a great example of KPMG pushing the user experience into a more progressive territory. The variety of content delivered inspires interaction throughout the scroll. KPMG's visual language dispels any preconception of a stuffy financial institution and brings the interface to life. Key facts and digestible information work in unison with video and proprietary infographics to convey an inviting and forward looking image of the firm.

Images © KPMG



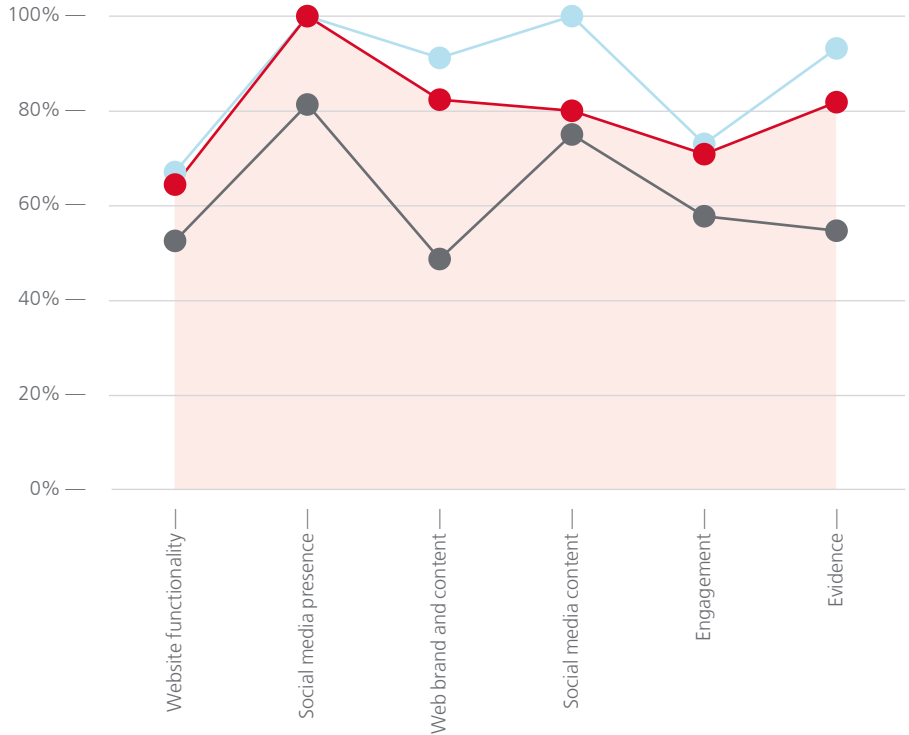


pwc.co.uk/services/consulting.html



- PwC
- Sector average
- Sector leader

Classification:
▶ Determined



Key features

- ▶ Expression of brand values
- ▶ Plethora of insights
- ▶ Informative data visualisation tools
- ▶ Clear social media strategy
- ▶ Client App

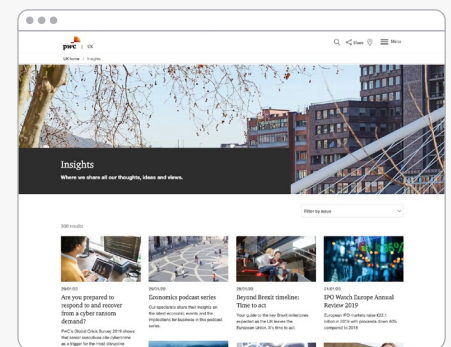
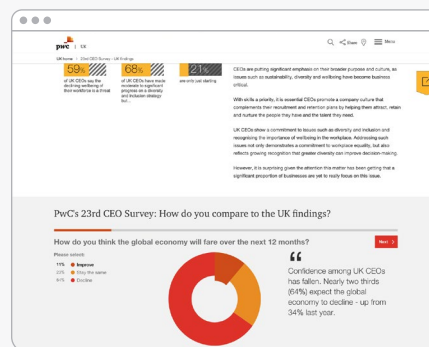
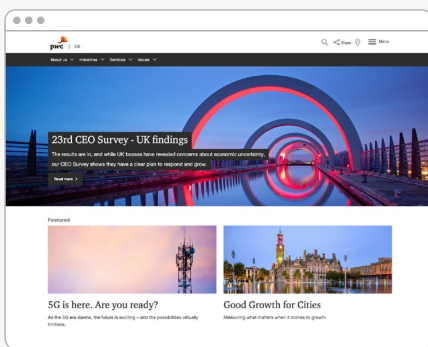
PwC's content strategy really is evident as curation and execution offers smart integration, targeting and navigation. The home page is rich with opinion insight, supported by subject matter filters to make the visitor's journey to relevant content to that matters swifter. Sector expertise is bolstered with solid research, delivered in engaging and easily digestible ways.

PwC use glance banners to highlight key facts and figures; editorial content is wisely segmented into bite-sized portions with animated features; and in-page navigation to manage the volume of content in a way that gives the user agency over what they consume.

The digital journey is fluid on PwC.co.uk with users always being served related and extended content to maintain interest. Infographics and data visualisation plays a key part in the PwC narrative, which is brought to life through a distinct visual language.

There is a robust and client-friendly use of video on the site, with users given a duration time stated up front and the option to view transcript. This user-focused mindset is the real overall strength behind PwC's website, demonstrating that they understand the importance of the quality of its audience's digital experience.

Images © PwC



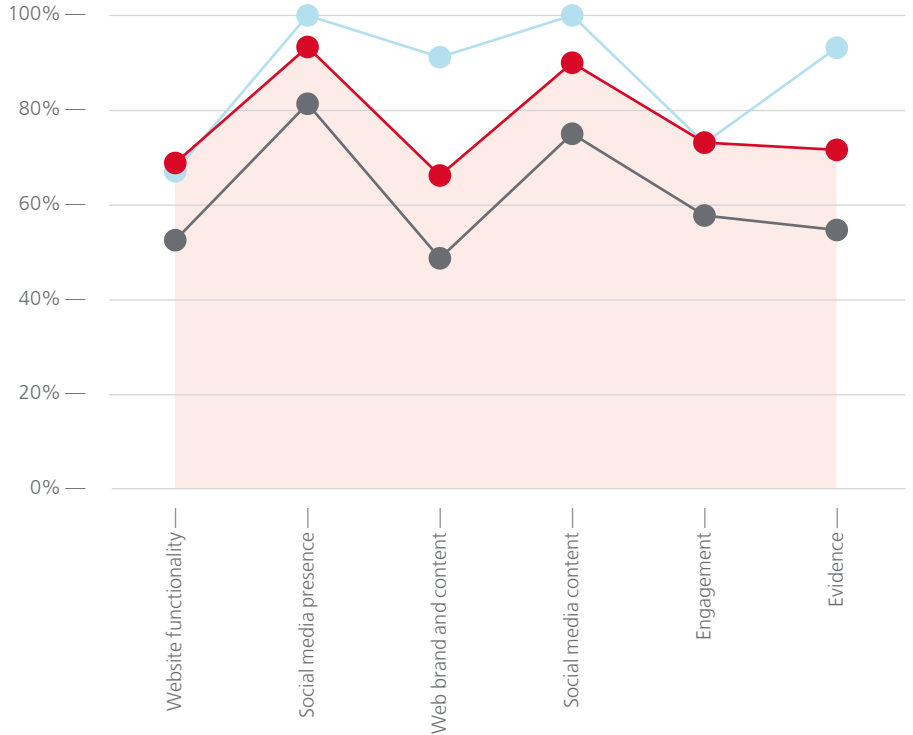
4 Deloitte

deloitte.com/uk/en.html



- Deloitte
- Sector average
- Sector leader

Classification:
▶ Determined



Key features

- ▶ **Distinct brand identity**
- ▶ **Clear content strategy**
- ▶ **Client App**

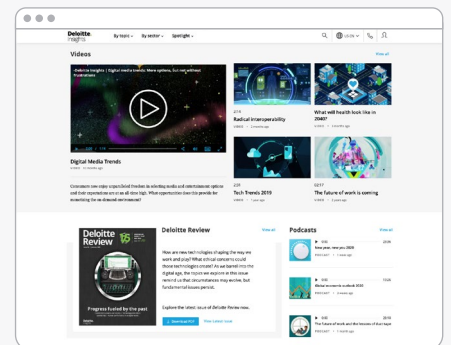
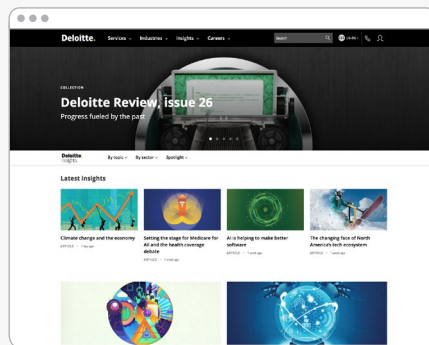
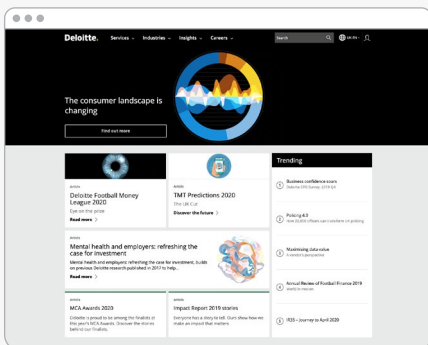
Deloitte has definitely embraced the importance of curating content for client consumption. On the home page the user is immediately presented with a tapestry of topical insights with a ‘trending’ content module to serve up the most popular headlines. This astute content strategy is further enhanced through the mega menu design, which allows users to hone in on relevant content with highlights featured prominently and inbuilt filtering expediting clicks.

Deloitte’s user experience is refreshingly intuitive. Navigation is clear and accessible, while related content extends the journey. Insight landing pages are led by trending

articles with a convenient filter above. Article pages themselves have a diverse range of content types to support each story. Audio commentary, callouts, infographics and video all help guide users through the narrative, while simultaneously making it more engaging.

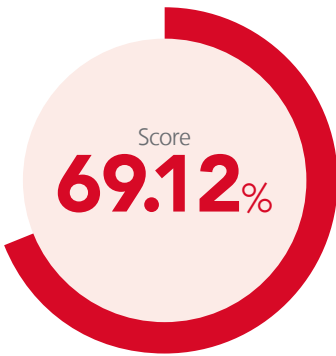
The visual language used in the Deloitte website is a great example of how a distinct brand identity can help create a more interesting digital experience. The use of proprietary illustrations and conceptual imagery brings the content to life, enhances the user experience and ultimately shows that Deloitte is invested in its identity.

Images © Deloitte



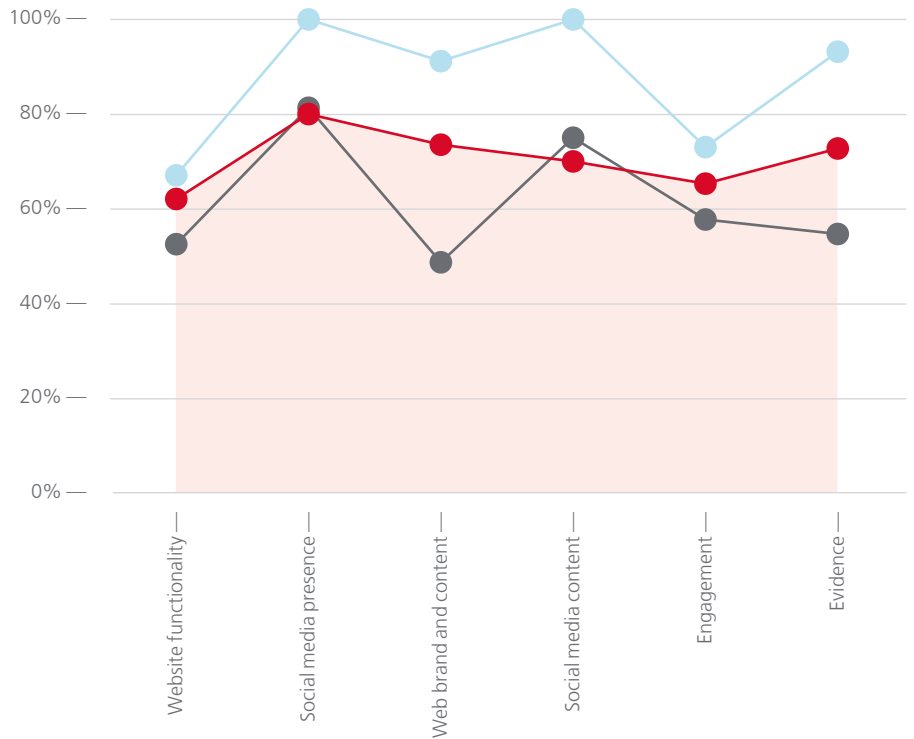
5 Mazars

www.mazars.co.uk



- Mazars
- Sector average
- Sector leader

Classification:
▶ Determined



Key features

- ▶ **Persona-led experience**
- ▶ **Excellent careers pages**
- ▶ **Compelling insights**

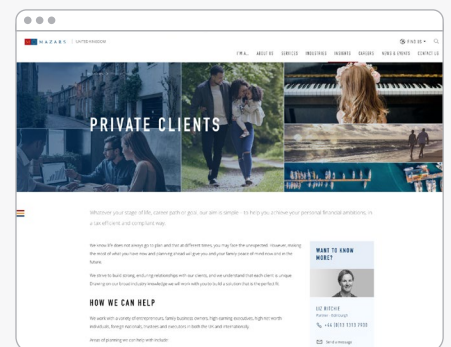
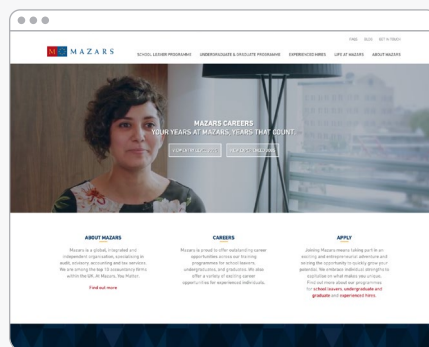
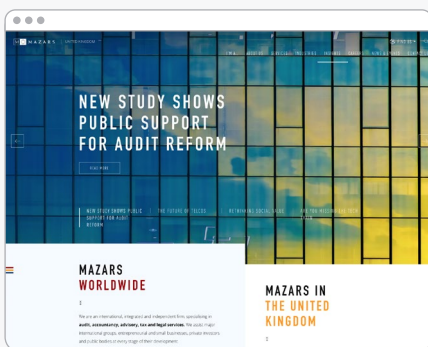
Mazars' use of a persona-led experience is really encouraging. The foresight to create a digital experience crafted to meet the interests and expectations of specific users speaks volumes about Mazars as a firm and a digital entity.

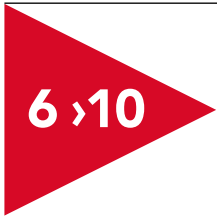
It is refreshing to see a brand proposition up front on a home page and even more interesting to see how messaging morphs in context and tone of voice to address particular audience types. This approach is not only client-first from a user perspective, but also from a language point of view. 'How

can we help' immediately sets the stage for a reassuring interaction, which is further supported by related people profiles and related content to continue the journey.

Mazars certainly opens the conversation boldly in its careers pages. This is an immersive section of the site, leveraging solid storytelling to a great extent. Video content dominates the pages supported by testimonials and quotes. Individual careers stories take users into a deeper dive on the Mazars experience.

Images © Mazars





6 BDO
bdo.co.uk/en-gb/home



Classification:
▶ Focused

Key features

- ▶ Social media strategy in place
- ▶ Brand consistency across digital footprint
- ▶ Strong firm culture

7 Menzies
menzies.co.uk/



Classification:
▶ Focused

Key features

- ▶ Voice activated search
- ▶ Good use of video
- ▶ Client-centric Google descriptor

8 RSM
rsmuk.com



Classification:
▶ Focused

Key features

- ▶ Engaging biographies
- ▶ Distinctive brand
- ▶ Video client testimonials

9 Moore Kingston Smith
mooreks.co.uk



Classification:
▶ Focused

Key features

- ▶ Persona led experience
- ▶ Clear navigation sitewide
- ▶ Client App

10 Crowe UK
crowe.com/uk/croweuk



Classification:
▶ Focused

Key features

- ▶ Above average SEO score
- ▶ Well curated social media content
- ▶ Evidence of client case studies

Want to know how your firm has scored across each of our key criteria?

Please get in touch to arrange a meeting.

Opportunities to lead

Perhaps the two most disappointing revelations of our Ratings are the overall sector scores and the clustering of the competition. Yet both can be taken as springboards of optimism.

The status and reputations of these Top 20 firms far outshine the indictment of their individual ratings – 6 of them scored less than 50%. So we know that there are powerful brands ready to fulfill their promise with improved digital commitment. And while very little separates the firms outside the Top 5 (there's less than 15% difference between numbers 10 and 20), the opportunity is just begging for someone to step up, step out and leap ahead! Whether it's complacency or inertia or some other corporate malaise, the time is now to engage – and win. And here is where you begin:

1

The basics

There are too many firms simply neglecting the 'behind the scenes' housekeeping, it's worth reminding that best practice for your digital presence should be adopted – and enforced – across the board. SEO and speed, your Google descriptor, and SSL certificates all play a vital role in having a credible, reliable digital footprint. Don't let visitors down before you've had the chance to engage them.

2

Tone of voice

Tone of voice plays a critical role in effective engagement and could be the difference between success and prospects looking elsewhere. The word 'we' is massively overused by many of the firms reviewed – while 'you' is rarely found. This screams of a lack of empathy and understanding. By adopting a client-centric tone – which confirms you're listening – you get to display your personality, confidence, pride, and accessibility – traits that audiences can easily relate and respond to.

3

Distinctive visual language

Gone are the days when professional services brands could get away with nondescript corporate blue and grey identities patched together with budget stock photography and Times New Roman. As we're all well aware, snoozing leads to losing and with audiences being more discerning of the brands they align themselves with, professional services brands need to stand up and be counted. Invest in design that truly reflects the your difference, create a written voice that resonates with audiences wants and needs and bring your content to life through rich media that compels interaction, sharing and endorsement. We all know what motivates us to align with product brands so why should it be any different with professional services?



4

Prioritised and discoverable content

Partner-led firms often dampen search performance by constructing their content and messaging around personal priorities or ill-informed assumptions about what their audiences will want to read, listen to or watch. Successful engagement relies on content based on what visitors are searching for (use your analytics!), and the information that is going to help them. Search filters, navigation, related content and the topics themselves should all be influenced by stakeholder data.

5

Credentials as evidence

Providing proof points of how a firm has effected change is distinctly lacking in the professional services sector, with only 30% firms evidencing how they are helping firms to adapt and succeed, through descriptive case studies. Clients and prospects – as well as potential new hires – are looking for robust reassurance as to what you stand for, where they should place their trust, and why you matter.

6

Accountability & trust

There is an expectation that corporate diversity, sustainability and transparency will be high on the agenda for all professional services firms. It's not enough for you to simply state the challenges and opportunities around these issues; the proof of your brand is in the actions you take. And to truly develop trust and engage your audience, you should offer real people fronting your position and activities on such issues.

Gone are the days when professional services brands could get away with nondescript corporate blue and grey identities.

Conclusion

Overall the leaders in our Ratings research are investing in a cohesive digital strategy and are clearly focusing on the audience and not just on themselves. But there is more to achieve.

It is reassuring to see that more and more marketers are rethinking the dated view that positive corporate performance negates the need for broader quality communications.

That said, we firmly believe that the intensely competitive marketplace makes it more important than ever for professional services firms to clearly express points of difference via their brand positioning and values. We found the vital 'who they are', 'what they do' and 'why it matters' content either missing or hidden away.

Overall there isn't enough emphasis on clearly differentiating brand values. Corporate social responsibility sections or career sites are popular areas to house this content – it's almost as if they are being regarded as 'tick list' items that young hires are interested in, rather than carefully considered business drivers.

Thought leadership

Thought leadership can be used to define and express what separates one professional services firm from another. The best of the sector are producing effective content, seamlessly delivered to explain the issues whilst expressing the difference and value they bring. But the worst are merely publishing dry responses to global, regulatory, economic, or legislative issues.

Engagement

Any professional services firm that fails to express what makes it a valuable partner via its thought leadership content has lost the opportunity to engage its target audience. Strategic case studies are important and effective opportunities to build a brand's reputation among clients, prospects and influencers, but the absence of them on the vast majority of firms' sites is a concern. Conversely, the sector can take pride in its use of social media, with largely excellent content and storytelling.

What does success look like?

With many professional services firms failing in critical brand and digital intelligence areas, their B2B c-suite audience is left wanting for basic elements, such as helpful search functions, useful online tools and apps, and sign-ups for extended or personalised content. The Top 10 in this year's Ratings research have succeeded in most of the above areas. Those less highly placed have much still to achieve to convince and compel their target audience to engage with them.



Get in touch

What's your score?

Would you like a more detailed analysis of your firm? Do you believe you could benefit from a new brand and website, relevant content or a more effective social media strategy? If so, we'd love to hear from you.



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