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SECTOR BENCHMARK REPORT · HR CONSULTANCY · 2026

How ten HR consultancies present themselves, and what it is costing them.

We scored the public proposition of ten UK HR consultancies against the same two frameworks. The average was 24.3 out of 60, and no firm scored above 35. The position the market leaves open needs clarity, not scale.

Produced by
Tom Wood, Addoli Ltd

Framework
The Proposition Architect

Edition
May 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Every firm sits in the bottom 60 per cent.

THE SHORT ANSWER

Most UK HR consultancies describe their services rather than their buyer's problem, and show credentials rather than outcomes. Across ten firms the average proposition score was 24.3 out of 60, and no firm scored above 35. The weakest foundation is public proof, averaging 1.6 out of 5. A firm does not need to be bigger, cheaper or more experienced to stand out in this market. It needs to be clearer.

10
UK HR consultancies assessed

24.3 / 60
Average combined score

0
Firms scoring above 35

9 / 10
Caught in the Mirror Trap

This report benchmarks the proposition of 10 UK HR consultancies against two frameworks: the 5S Proposition Score, which measures what a firm says (out of 25), and the Commercial Architecture Score, which measures how it sells (out of 35). The combined maximum is 60.

Four failure patterns drive almost all of the underperformance. The two most common, The Mirror Trap and The Trophy Cabinet, each appear in 9 of the 10 firms. The weakest of the seven commercial layers is The Public Proof, at an average of 1.6 out of 5.

The implication is simple. A firm that fixes these problems in its own proposition does not need to be dramatically better at delivery to win. It needs to be easier to find, more specific and more believable.

HOW TO READ THE SCORES

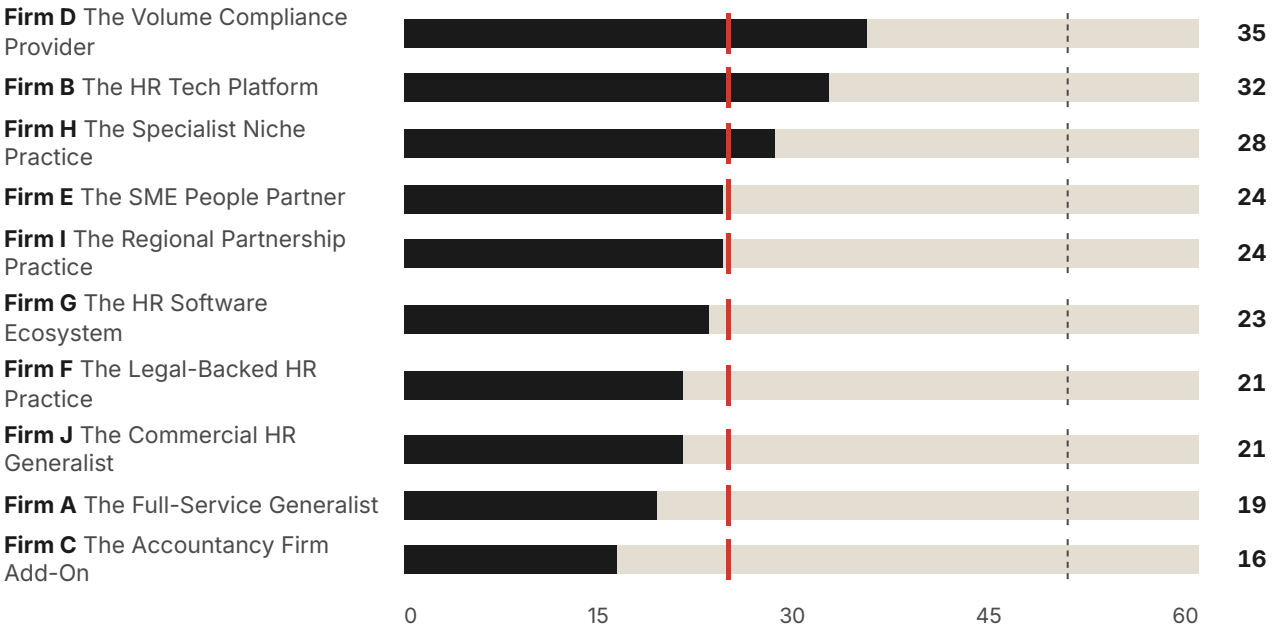
Scores are based on publicly available homepage and service page content, read as a cold prospect would experience it. Firms are anonymised and referred to by letter and archetype. Scores describe the proposition, not the quality of each firm's work.

01 · SCORE SUMMARY

Ten firms, one ceiling.

Each firm is scored on what it says (the 5S Proposition Score, out of 25) and how it sells it (the Commercial Architecture Score, out of 35). Scores are based on publicly available homepage and service page content, assessed as a cold prospect would experience it.

Combined score out of 60, highest first



Firm	Archetype	5S / 25	CA / 35	Total / 60	Verdict
A	The Full-Service Generalist	8	11	**19**	Fragile
B	The HR Tech Platform	14	18	**32**	Functioning
C	The Accountancy Firm Add-On	7	9	**16**	Fragile
D	The Volume Compliance Provider	15	20	**35**	Functioning
E	The SME People Partner	11	13	**24**	Developing
F	The Legal-Backed HR Practice	9	12	**21**	Fragile
G	The HR Software Ecosystem	10	13	**23**	Developing
H	The Specialist Niche Practice	12	16	**28**	Developing
I	The Regional Partnership Practice	10	14	**24**	Developing
J	The Commercial HR Generalist	9	12	**21**	Fragile
Market average		**10.5**	**13.8**	**24.3**	

02 · MARKET-WIDE FINDINGS

Two patterns appear in nine firms out of ten.

Four named failure patterns explain most proposition underperformance in consulting markets. This is how often each appears across the 10 firms.

Failure pattern	Firms	Share	What it does
The Mirror Trap	9 of 10	90%	Buyers cannot recognise themselves, so price becomes the default filter.
The Trophy Cabinet	9 of 10	90%	Proof exists but creates no belief. Logos without outcomes.
The Comparison Trap	8 of 10	80%	No differentiation forces a race to the bottom on price.
The Wrong Invite	5 of 10	50%	Broad positioning attracts the wrong buyers and repels the right ones.

01 The Mirror Trap 9 of 10 firms · 90%

Buyers cannot recognise themselves, so price becomes the default filter.

The proposition reflects the seller's capabilities rather than the buyer's situation. Nine of the ten firms opened their homepage with what they do rather than the buyer's problem. Buyers who already know they need HR support can navigate a capability list. Buyers who are not yet decided leave. The Mirror Trap removes the best prospects before they make contact.

02 The Trophy Cabinet 9 of 10 firms · 90%

Proof exists but creates no belief. Logos without outcomes.

Proof is displayed but not narrated: logos, years of experience, client counts, and testimonials about service quality rather than business outcomes. "We have worked with 350 clients" produces no picture of what changed. "A manufacturing firm reduced unplanned leave by 34% within four months" does. One is a credential. The other is a case.

02 · MARKET-WIDE FINDINGS, CONTINUED

Why the patterns persist, and what they cost.

03 The Comparison Trap 8 of 10 firms · 80%

No differentiation forces a race to the bottom on price.

Eight firms gave no credible differentiator: no named method, no sector specialism, no proof of outcomes and no entry point a competitor could not copy. It is especially expensive in HR consultancy, where services look interchangeable and buyers carry strong price anchors from previous providers.

04 The Wrong Invite 5 of 10 firms · 50%

Broad positioning attracts the wrong buyers and repels the right ones.

Five firms positioned themselves for "businesses of all sizes" or "SMEs and large organisations". That is not inclusive. It is structurally ineffective. Marketing spend spreads across the whole market, producing weak resonance everywhere rather than strong recognition in one segment.

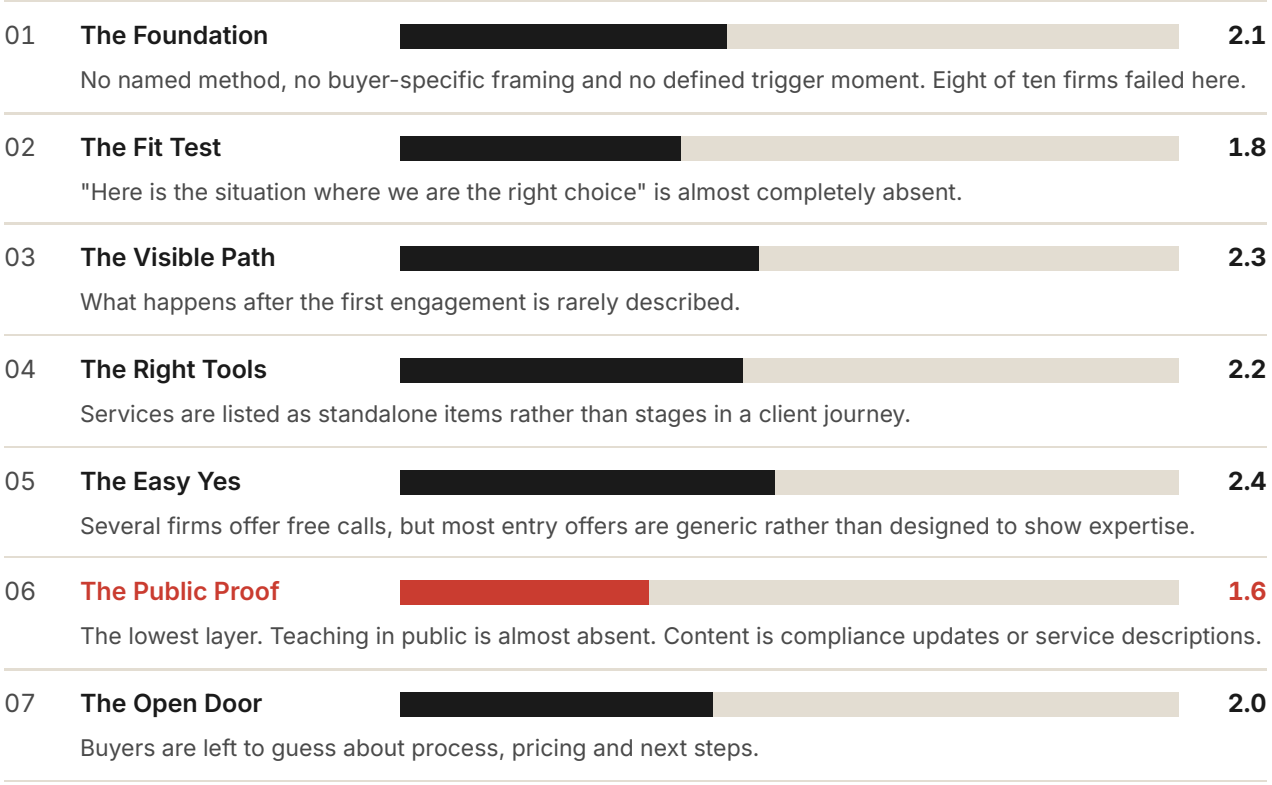
The firm that solves these problems in its own proposition does not need to be dramatically better at delivery to win.

03 · COMMERCIAL ARCHITECTURE

Public proof is the weakest foundation in the market.

The Commercial Architecture Score assesses seven layers. Under the Solid Foundation Rule, the lowest layer limits everything built above it. Several firms have content programmes, testimonial collections and pricing pages built on a foundation that cannot hold them.

Market average by layer, out of 5



THE SOLID FOUNDATION RULE

Your lowest layer is your only priority, whatever your total. Until the foundation is rebuilt around a specific buyer, a specific problem and a named method, everything above it works harder than it should. In this market, the binding constraint is The Public Proof.

04 · WHAT THIS MEANS TO YOUR BUYER

What it looks like from the buyer's chair.

Consider the managing director of a 60-person professional services firm. Her business has grown faster than its people infrastructure. She has three underperforming managers, a bullying complaint she is handling without proper process, and a board conversation about culture coming up next quarter. She types "HR consultancy" into Google.

She lands on eight websites. Seven show her a service menu. None says anything that sounds like her situation. One has a page called "HR for growing professional services firms", but it leads to a contact form. She decides on Google reviews, proximity and quoted rate.

Seven show her a service menu. None says anything that sounds like her situation.

The firm that described her exact situation, named the three problems she is carrying and offered a 90-minute diagnostic to prioritise them would have won her business before she spoke to anyone else. None of the ten firms studied occupies that position.

The commercial opportunity for a well-positioned firm is significant precisely because the competition is so weak at the proposition layer. A firm with a clear, specific, buyer-led proposition would stand out without needing to be larger, cheaper or fundamentally different in how it delivers.

THE TEST FOR YOUR OWN HOMEPAGE

Would this buyer recognise her situation in your first screen? Would she know what to do next without filling in a contact form?

05 · INDIVIDUAL FIRM DIAGNOSTICS

Ten firms, ten untaken positions.

FIRM A

The Full-Service Generalist

19 / 60
5S 8 / 25 · CA 11 / 35
Fragile

Wins happen despite the proposition, not because of it.

THE CORE COMMERCIAL PROBLEM

The proposition is entirely capability-led. A buyer lands and sees a three-column service menu. There is no statement of who this is for, what problem it solves, or what changes because of working with them.

WHAT WE FOUND

- **The Mirror Trap.** The service menu leads with categories rather than buyer problems.
- **The Comparison Trap.** No differentiator is stated anywhere on the homepage.
- **The Trophy Cabinet.** Case studies are buried, with no outcomes quoted above the fold.
- **Layer 1 weak.** The headline describes the seller, not the buyer's situation.

THE UNTAKEN POSITION

Growing SMEs who have outgrown ad hoc HR and need their first structured people function. Lead with the trigger moment: "Your headcount just crossed 50. HR is now a risk, not just admin."

FIRM B

The HR Tech Platform

32 / 60
5S 14 / 25 · CA 18 / 35
Functioning

The proposition is built for acquisition, not for converting consultancy buyers.

THE CORE COMMERCIAL PROBLEM

This is a technology business that also sells HR advice, and the two propositions are in tension. A buyer looking for strategic HR counsel is likely to rule themselves out, because the site signals "HR admin tool", not "trusted adviser".

WHAT WE FOUND

- **The Mirror Trap.** The homepage targets businesses of all sizes across all sectors.
- **The Comparison Trap.** Positioned against HR software platforms, not consultancy.
- **Layer 5.** Strong for software, but it drives sign-ups, not consultancy engagements.
- **Layer 6.** Content volume is high, but educational depth is thin.

THE UNTAKEN POSITION

Separate the advisory brand from the software brand. Own "ERA 2025 readiness" with a named diagnostic and a clear path to resolution. The compliance change cycle is a rare moment of forced urgency.

05 · INDIVIDUAL FIRM DIAGNOSTICS, CONTINUED

FIRM C

The Accountancy Firm Add-On

16 / 60

5S 7 / 25 · CA 9 / 35

Fragile

HR is a listed service, not a positioned offer.

THE CORE COMMERCIAL PROBLEM

HR appears as one line in a long service menu, treated the same as payroll, forensic accounting and sustainability consulting. The page reads as a placeholder rather than a proposition.

WHAT WE FOUND

- **The Mirror Trap.** The HR page opens with a list of sub-services rather than a buyer problem.
- **The Comparison Trap.** Listed alongside more than 20 other services with no distinct positioning.
- **The Trophy Cabinet.** No case studies, outcomes or proof referenced.
- **Layer 1 critical failure.** No method, no named audience and no must-fix issue.

THE UNTAKEN POSITION

Lead with the point where finance and people meet: the commercial cost of poor people decisions in owner-managed businesses. "People decisions are now your biggest cost and your biggest risk" is immediately credible from an accountancy brand.

FIRM D

The Volume Compliance Provider

35 / 60

5S 15 / 25 · CA 20 / 35

Functioning

Margin is structural, not earned through differentiation.

THE CORE COMMERCIAL PROBLEM

The proposition is built for volume and retention, not strategic conversion. It works at scale because the brand is well known. The "award-winning" framing does nothing for a cold prospect deciding whether to engage.

WHAT WE FOUND

- **The Comparison Trap.** "Award-winning" and logo strips are the main trust signals.
- **The Trophy Cabinet.** Client logos are displayed, but no story is told about outcomes.
- **The Mirror Trap.** The headline describes the firm, not the buyer's situation.
- **Layer 6 partial.** Content works as compliance updates, not as a demonstration of expertise.

THE UNTAKEN POSITION

The Employment Rights Act 2025 is a live trigger this firm should own. "The ERA 2025 Readiness Assessment": a named, productised diagnostic that gives owners a clear picture of their exposure and a prioritised action plan.

05 · INDIVIDUAL FIRM DIAGNOSTICS, CONTINUED

FIRM E

The SME People Partner

24 / 60
5S 11 / 25 · CA 13 / 35
Developing

The energy is there, but the proposition is generic.

THE CORE COMMERCIAL PROBLEM

The energy and personality are clear. But the commercial architecture does not convert buyers who are not already looking for HR help. The proposition is built for the already convinced, not the not yet decided.

WHAT WE FOUND

- **The Mirror Trap.** "Solve 100% of your people problems" is aspirational but vague.
- **The Wrong Invite.** "Small businesses and large organisations" is everyone.
- **Layer 5 strong.** A free HR strategy call and WhatsApp access, but they lead to a generic offer.
- **The Trophy Cabinet.** Testimonials exist but carry no measured outcomes.

THE UNTAKEN POSITION

Own a specific growth moment. Not "all HR problems" but "the HR crisis that happens when a business hits 25 people". That inflection point is real, predictable and high in anxiety.

FIRM F

The Legal-Backed HR Practice

21 / 60
5S 9 / 25 · CA 12 / 35
Fragile

The proposition is credentials first, not problem first.

THE CORE COMMERCIAL PROBLEM

The legal integration is a genuine differentiator: HR advice backed by employment law expertise is a credible claim. But it is buried in the body copy rather than leading the proposition.

WHAT WE FOUND

- **The Mirror Trap.** Opens with team composition rather than the buyer's situation.
- **The Trophy Cabinet.** Testimonials are numerous but generic, with no measurable outcomes.
- **Layer 1.** No named method, no defined audience and no trigger moment.
- **Layer 3.** No client journey is described after the first engagement.

THE UNTAKEN POSITION

"HR decisions without legal exposure." For SME owners who have been burnt by advice that turned into a tribunal claim, this is a genuinely different promise. Lead with the legal integration as a story about removing risk, not as a credentials badge.

05 · INDIVIDUAL FIRM DIAGNOSTICS, CONTINUED

FIRM G

The HR Software Ecosystem

23 / 60
5S 10 / 25 · CA 13 / 35
Developing

The consulting proposition is submerged inside a product catalogue.

THE CORE COMMERCIAL PROBLEM

The HR consulting proposition is structurally invisible. A buyer with a real HR transformation challenge would find the software, see no advisory clarity, and leave. The firm is losing its highest-margin work to its own navigation.

WHAT WE FOUND

- **The Wrong Invite.** HR consulting is one line in a long menu across several sectors.
- **The Mirror Trap.** The HR consulting page describes delivery coverage, not buyer outcomes.
- **The Comparison Trap.** Positioned against HR software, not advisory providers.
- **Layer 5.** No entry diagnostic or assessment. The only call to action is to contact sales.

THE UNTAKEN POSITION

"HR transformation for mid-market organisations moving off legacy systems." Name the pain of the transition and offer a structured readiness assessment, which would convert at a far higher value than a software subscription.

FIRM H

The Specialist Niche Practice

28 / 60
5S 12 / 25 · CA 16 / 35
Developing

The niche is defined, but the proposition is not fully built around it.

THE CORE COMMERCIAL PROBLEM

This firm has a genuine sector specialism in primary care and NHS general practice. However, the main homepage undermines it by claiming broad, generic expertise. A buyer from general practice would not recognise themselves.

WHAT WE FOUND

- **The Mirror Trap.** The homepage uses generic language that could apply to any HR firm.
- **The Trophy Cabinet.** "350 clients" and "17 years' experience" without narrated proof.
- **Layer 1 partial.** The sector page is well targeted, but the homepage dilutes the specialism.
- **Layer 6 weak.** No content demonstrates expertise beyond service descriptions.

THE UNTAKEN POSITION

"The only HR consultancy built specifically for NHS primary care." A credible claim that would remove the Comparison Trap entirely. Buyers in that sector would select themselves and arrive pre-qualified.

05 · INDIVIDUAL FIRM DIAGNOSTICS, CONTINUED

FIRM I

The Regional Partnership Practice

24 / 60
5S 10 / 25 · CA 14 / 35
Developing

The legal integration is real, but the proposition does not lead with it.

THE CORE COMMERCIAL PROBLEM

The legal partnership is a structural advantage that is heavily under-used. It appears in the About section, not in the headline promise. Buyers have no reason to choose this firm over cheaper alternatives.

WHAT WE FOUND

- **The Mirror Trap.** Led by a service list, with no must-fix issue stated.
- **The Comparison Trap.** No clear differentiator, which forces a price comparison with local alternatives.
- **The Trophy Cabinet.** Testimonials are plentiful but thin on outcomes.
- **Layer 1 failure.** "Extension to your business" is a delivery model, not a proposition.

THE UNTAKEN POSITION

"HR advice that never creates a legal liability." The combination of HR consultancy and employment law access should lead. "The Employment Risk Audit" would command a meaningful price premium.

FIRM J

The Commercial HR Generalist

21 / 60
5S 9 / 25 · CA 12 / 35
Fragile

Commercially minded language is present, but not turned into proof or method.

THE CORE COMMERCIAL PROBLEM

The "commercially minded" positioning is genuinely distinctive. But it is asserted rather than demonstrated. There is no named method, no case evidence, and no statement of what commercial HR produces in measurable terms.

WHAT WE FOUND

- **The Mirror Trap.** "Experienced and commercially minded" describes self-image, not the buyer's situation.
- **The Trophy Cabinet.** "75 years' combined experience" and a review badge, without outcomes.
- **Layer 1.** "Helping businesses realise their potential" is aspiration without specifics.
- **Layer 5.** A free HR audit is visible but described generically, with no stated output.

THE UNTAKEN POSITION

"HR that pays for itself." This firm already uses commercial language. "The HR ROI Audit", identifying the revenue and margin impact of people decisions, would be categorically different from every other HR consultancy's free audit.

06 · THE UNTAKEN POSITION

What good looks like in HR consultancies.

No single firm in this study occupies the full commercial architecture the market is leaving open. The untaken position has four characteristics that none of these firms shows in combination.

01

A specific buyer in a specific situation

Not "businesses of all sizes", but a firm at a specific inflection point: crossing 30 employees, a leadership failure, a change programme, ERA 2025 exposure. Specificity does not shrink the market. It raises conversion and average deal value.

02

A named, repeatable method

Not "bespoke solutions tailored to your needs", but a named method with visible steps, defined outputs and measurable outcomes. A named method signals the firm has done this before. Its absence signals the opposite.

03

Narrated proof, not displayed credentials

Before and after: what the situation was, what changed, and what the client could then do. One well-narrated case study is worth twenty client logos.

04

An entry point that demonstrates expertise

Not a contact form or a free call with no defined output, but a diagnostic or assessment with a clear deliverable. The best entry offers leave the buyer better informed whether they go ahead or not.

A firm does not need to be bigger, cheaper or more experienced to claim the open position. It needs to be clearer. In this market, clarity is the scarcest resource.

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE

Two ways to use this report.

This benchmark is read by two kinds of people: the firms in markets like this one, and the businesses choosing between them. There is a next step for each.

IF YOU RUN A FIRM LIKE THESE

Find out where your own proposition sits.

Start with the free score: the same two frameworks, twelve questions, an instant result with a named failure pattern and a priority fix sequence.

If you want an outside read, the Reviewed Diagnostic is Tom reading your website the way these firms were read, then writing up the score, the pattern, a proposition blueprint and the fix sequence, with a 45-minute call. £495 + VAT, delivered in three working days.

Get your free score · thepropositionarchitect.com/reviewed-diagnostic

IF YOU ARE CHOOSING A FIRM LIKE THESE

Run a selection that finds the substance behind the shop window.

Tom has spent twenty years inside founder-led service firms. He can help you agree what you need, find the firms that fit and run a fair selection. This report shows how much of a firm sits beyond its homepage. Provider selection is built to find it.

01
Review
What you actually need, what you have now and what has to change.

02
Brief
A written brief or RFP and scoring criteria, agreed before anyone pitches.

03
Shortlist and panel
A researched shortlist, structured interviews and a scoring panel.

04
Select and contract
A recommendation you can defend, with the engagement terms checked before you sign.

thepropositionarchitect.com/provider-selection

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Method, citation and the frameworks behind the scores.

Method

Ten UK HR consultancies were assessed in May 2026. Each firm's homepage and service pages were read as a cold prospect would experience them, then scored against the 5S Proposition Score (25 points) and the Commercial Architecture Score (35 points, seven layers of 5). Firms are anonymised and referenced by letter only. Scores reflect public-facing material, not the quality of the firms' work, and this is not a definitive audit of any firm's commercial capability.

The frameworks

The 5S Proposition Score tests whether a proposition is Specific, Standout, Substantive, Signature and Shareable. The Commercial Architecture Score tests seven layers in sequence, from the Foundation to the Open Door. Both are proprietary diagnostic frameworks developed by Addoli to assess and improve the commercial performance of founder-led and growth-stage consulting businesses.

Cite this report

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Read it online

The full report, including an interactive version of every chart, is free to read at thepropositionarchitect.com/hr-consultancy-benchmark/. No email needed.

About Addoli

Addoli works with founder-led B2B businesses that have reached the point where growth slows, not because the founder lacks capability, but because the business lacks the commercial systems it needs to scale. Tom Wood is a Fractional Commercial Director. For eight years he was CEO of a compliance and training consultancy and, with his team, helped sell it and then merged it with its biggest competitor, before founding Addoli.

FIND OUT WHERE YOUR PROPOSITION SITS

How does your firm compare with these ten?

Take the free Proposition Architect score. Twelve questions, five minutes, an instant result with a named failure pattern and a priority fix sequence.

Get your free score at diagnostics.addoli.com

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Addoli (Welsh): to worship, to revere. Your business should be adored.

Assessments are based on publicly visible homepage and service page content only, evaluated as a cold prospect would experience them. Firms have been anonymised. This report is not a definitive audit of any firm's commercial capability.
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