The management consultancy *playbook*

How a boutique consultancy gets named when buyers ask ChatGPT

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The big firms win the broad questions, but most buyers ask narrow ones. Boutique consultancies get named by ChatGPT when they describe the specific problems, sectors and outcomes they handle in plain words. Publish anonymised case studies with a clear output and timescale, give partners visible profiles, get named in deal announcements, and back it up with MCA membership, your framework lot and your clients' sector press.

For founders and managing partners of UK management consultancies who want to be named for the problems they solve best.

Consulting is still sold on reputation and relationships. But buyers now use ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Copilot, Google's AI answers and Perplexity to build the long list and to sense-check a recommendation. The list forms early. 6sense's 2025 Buyer Experience Report, a survey of more than 4,000 B2B buyers, found buying groups had ranked their preferred vendors before first contact in 94% of cases, and bought from that first choice 77% of the time.

For example, the operations chief at a food manufacturer asks which consultancies help UK food manufacturers reduce waste. He gets three large firms and two specialists. Your partners ran food factories for twenty years, and you are not mentioned. When the assistant has little to say about you, you start behind, or not at all.

94%

of buying groups had ranked their preferred vendors before first contact

6SENSE, 2025 BUYER EXPERIENCE REPORT (NOVEMBER 2025)

77%

of the time they bought from that first choice

6SENSE, 2025 BUYER EXPERIENCE REPORT (NOVEMBER 2025)

84%

of the links AI tools cited were earned media, against 0.3% for paid content

MUCK RACK, WHAT IS AI READING? (MAY 2026)

The questions that decide *who gets the call.*

Chief executives, operations and finance directors and private equity operating partners describe a problem, a sector and sometimes a constraint.

BUYER ASKS
Which consultancies help mid-sized UK manufacturers improve operational efficiency?

BUYER ASKS
Should we use a big four firm or a boutique for a finance transformation?

BUYER ASKS
Which consultancies do private equity firms use for value creation in the UK lower mid-market?

BUYER ASKS
Should I hire a consultancy or an interim manager for an operations turnaround?

BUYER ASKS
Which consultancies are on the government framework for NHS work?

BUYER ASKS
Which consultancies specialise in procurement for housing associations?

BUYER ASKS
Which consultancies help UK food manufacturers improve OEE and reduce waste?

TRY THIS
Ask five of these in ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, Copilot and Perplexity, each in a fresh chat. Note who is named, and who is named instead of you. Answers vary from run to run, so only count a result that repeats.

How the assistants choose

01
A specific match
Pages that name the problem, the sector, the size of client and the outcome, in the buyer's words. 'Transformation partner for ambitious organisations' gives the assistant nothing to match.

02
Proof of work
Case studies, even anonymised ones, that show the situation, the approach and what changed, with an output and a timescale.

03
Credible people
Partners with visible industry experience, qualifications and published thinking. Buyers hire people, and the answer about the partner coming to pitch depends on that person's public record.

04
Independent confirmation
Trade body membership, framework places, press coverage and sponsor mentions that agree with your own description of the firm.

05
A method in plain words
An assistant will not match a trademarked model to a buyer's question. Say how you diagnose, what you measure and how you make improvements stick.

The sources assistants *trust in your field.*

An assistant rarely names a firm on its own website's word. It looks for the same facts in places that have checked you independently. These are the ones that matter most for management consultancies.

SOURCE	WHY IT COUNTS	WHAT TO DO
Management Consultancies Association	The MCA says member firms meet stringent entry criteria and are audited periodically, and it publishes a member directory.	Join if you sell to large companies or the public sector, and consider the MCA Awards if you have a strong entry.
MCF4 (RM6309)	The government's management consultancy framework runs from 29 July 2025 to 28 July 2027 with ten lots, and buyers ask which firms are on it.	State your lot and end date on the matching service page.
Financial Times UK leading management consultants	It is compiled with Statista from surveys of consultants and clients, so a place on it is someone else vouching for you.	Build the client relationships that get you recommended, because there is no form to fill in.
Consultancy.uk and Source Global Research	A firm profile and news coverage in the consulting press is independent evidence of what you do.	Keep a current firm profile and offer news and comment.
Deal announcements and deal press	Advisers are often named in deal press releases and in titles such as Real Deals and Insider Media.	Ask sponsors to name you, and keep your own dated list of the deals you advised on.
Your clients' sector press	For a specialist, a column in the food manufacturing, housing or healthcare trade press is worth more than any consulting publication.	Offer partners' comment and columns to the titles your buyers read.
Clutch	For digital and technology consultancies, its reviews carry the client's sector and project size.	Ask clients to review you there if you do digital or technology work.

Common mistakes

Positioning that could describe anyone

'We partner with ambitious organisations to deliver sustainable transformation' could describe a thousand firms. Narrowing the description does not narrow the business, because you can still take other work.

Publishing nothing because clients are confidential

Many clients who will not be named agree to a detailed anonymous write-up. Where they will not, publish aggregated lessons, such as what a dozen integrations taught you.

Case studies with no output or timescale

'Significant improvement' gives an assistant nothing to quote. 'Changeover time roughly halved on the main line' does, and so does saying how long it took.

Expecting awards to do the work alone

Awards and rankings help as independent confirmation, but on their own they will not get you named for a specific problem. They work alongside clear service pages, case studies and credible partners.

Ten questions. *Be honest.*

01	Does your homepage lead with your strongest two or three combinations of problem and sector?	☐ Yes	☐ No
02	Does each of those offers have its own section covering the problem, typical client, approach, outcomes, people and case studies?	☐ Yes	☐ No
03	Is your method explained in plain words, rather than only as a named or trademarked model?	☐ Yes	☐ No
04	Do you have anonymised case studies that state the output and the timescale?	☐ Yes	☐ No
05	Do your case studies say what the client's own team could do afterwards without you?	☐ Yes	☐ No
06	Do you ask for publication permission at the start of every engagement?	☐ Yes	☐ No
07	Does every partner have a plain-text profile with prior roles, sectors, qualifications and published work?	☐ Yes	☐ No
08	Have you collected every deal announcement that names you, and asked sponsors to name you on their sites?	☐ Yes	☐ No
09	Can a buyer confirm your standing independently, through MCA membership, Chartered Management Consultant status or a place on a public framework such as MCF4?	☐ Yes	☐ No
10	Do you track a fixed list of buyer questions, including the 'big four or boutique' question for your sector?	☐ Yes	☐ No

Fewer than seven yeses means buyers asking an assistant which consultancy to hire are probably being given other firms' names.

What to do this month, *and next.*

This month

01 Agree the three combinations of problem and sector where you are strongest, and rewrite the homepage to lead with them.

02 Rewrite one service section in full: the problem, the typical client, your method in plain words, the outcomes, the people and two case studies.

03 Upgrade partner profiles with prior roles, sectors, qualifications and published work, in plain text rather than PDF CVs.

04 Collect every deal announcement that names you, and ask sponsors to name you on their sites.

05 Agree a case study routine: ask for publication permission at the start of every engagement and write up one completed project a month.

06 Write down 20 to 50 buyer questions and run them in clean sessions several times a month.

The next ninety days

01 Rewrite your second and third service sections in the same way, each with its own case studies.

02 Ask each partner for a short monthly piece on the problems they see, published on your site and on LinkedIn.

03 Write case studies for private equity sponsors covering the investment thesis, the hundred-day plan and what changed by exit, anonymised where needed.

04 Publish a plain page on when a consultancy fits and when an interim manager fits, if you offer both.

05 Pitch columns and comment to your clients' sector press, and keep your firm name and partner names consistent everywhere you appear.

How to tell it is working

- Your firm named on more of your fixed buyer questions, counting a win only when it repeats.
- New prospects telling you how they came to you, asked on every first call.
- Who is named instead of you, and in Perplexity, which lists its sources, what evidence each named boutique had.
- Invitations to tender from sectors you have written about.

Straight answers.

Can a small consultancy be named ahead of the big firms?

For narrow questions, yes. The big firms dominate broad questions because so much is written about them. Most buyers ask about a specific problem in a specific sector, and there a boutique that documents that combination clearly can be the better match. The assistant is looking for the closest match, not the biggest name.

What is a typical day rate for a boutique management consultancy in the UK?

We do not quote market rates here, because they vary widely by seniority, sector and how the work is scoped. Buyers do ask assistants what consultants cost, so explain how you price: fixed fee or time-based, how you scope the work and what pushes the cost up or down. Some firms give indicative ranges for typical projects.

Is MCA membership worth it for a small consultancy?

It depends on who you sell to. Membership means passing the MCA's entry criteria and periodic audit and committing to its Consulting Excellence standards, and there is an SME Group for smaller firms. For a boutique selling to large companies or the public sector, that independent check is evidence an assistant can find. For a sector specialist, the sector's own trade body may matter more.

Will publishing our method let competitors copy it?

Rarely in any way that matters. Competitors cannot copy your partners' experience, your client relationships or your judgement in the room. A clear explanation reassures buyers that there is a method, and it gives assistants something specific to quote when they answer the 'how should we' questions buyers ask.

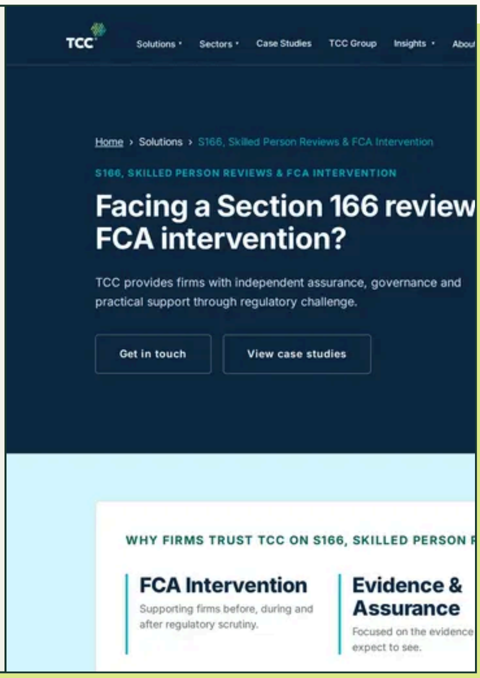
TCC Group is an advisory and consultancy group for regulated financial services firms, and its gap was the one this playbook describes: rated highly where AI knew it, passed over on its specialist questions.

1 week

to a plan TCC's own team built the new site from

PROBLEM	AI rated TCC highly where it knew it, but on Consumer Duty and Section 166 it named other firms.
WHAT WE DID	A one-week Paid Discovery: 36 recorded AI answers, 624 pages reviewed and a blueprint for the new site.
RESULT	TCC's own team built the new tcc.group to the plan.

READ THE CASE STUDY ↗



The full guides, *free and dated.*

- Why does ChatGPT name the big firms and not our consultancy? ↗
- Will ChatGPT and Google quote content written with AI or for SEO? ↗
- What makes ChatGPT treat our content as expert rather than marketing? ↗
- Does ChatGPT trust press coverage more than our website or our ads? ↗
- How do we find out whether ChatGPT is recommending our firm? ↗
- How can a private equity firm tell whether ChatGPT recommends its portfolio companies? ↗

SOURCES

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Muck Rack, What is AI reading? (May 2026)
Government Commercial Agency, Management Consultancy Framework Four (MCF4) (September 2026)
Management Consultancies Association, Membership (September 2026)
Chartered Management Institute, Chartered Management Consultant (September 2026)

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Ross built and ran a subscription business for twenty-one years, bootstrapped. He wrote Subscribe and Conquer and established the Fortitude Foundation.

Want to know where you stand?

A free Growth Review is thirty minutes with a founder. We check what Google and the AI assistants say about your firm and two competitors, and send three fixes in writing.

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