



From Credible to Chosen

How credibility takes off, travels, and influences choice

You're very good at what you do. The people around you know your work and respect it. But someone who posts constantly on LinkedIn or TikTok may be getting more attention and opportunities.

The same thing happens to companies. Doing the best work doesn't guarantee being noticed or chosen. And as more information reaches people secondhand through reposts, reviews, commentary, and AI-generated summaries, it's several steps removed from the original source by the time it reaches the person making the decision.

Take B2B sales, for example. Buyers who once worked with a sales rep now evaluate purchases without ever speaking to one. In a Gartner survey, 67% preferred a rep-free experience and 45% reported using AI during a recent purchase.¹ The case for choosing a company increasingly has to come through in the content, third-party sources, and AI answers buyers find on their own.

This changes the credibility problem. It is no longer enough for the substance to exist only at the source. What makes an organization credible has to remain visible wherever and whenever people and systems come across it. This playbook shows how credibility travels from where it's established to the moments it needs to influence, and what must hold along the way.

The question is not just, "Are we credible?" It is, "Have we made what is actually credible about us able to travel and reach the people we want it to?"

A HYPOTHETICAL EXAMPLE

The company that appears overnight

Company A has spent years building a functioning retail data analysis product, testing its systems, documenting limitations, and securing customer data. Its strongest proof is real, but it remains in internal reports and inside the heads of people who rarely share publicly. When a potential customer asks an AI assistant which vendor to trust, **Company A** does not appear.

Meanwhile, **Company B**, a newer competitor with a less developed product but a far more visible online presence, launches. They appear at the top of AI search results. Its message travels easily with one bold promise repeated across every channel. That advantage may help **Company B** win business before **Company A** is ever found, despite **Company A** having done the more rigorous work.

This is more than a typical marketing or public relations problem. It's a structural credibility problem: whether the signals people encounter accurately reflect the substance that's really there. As signals become easier to create and multiply, it becomes harder to distinguish which ones reflect real substance and which only create the appearance of it.

Signals and substance don't always match. Signals can be stronger than the substance behind them, creating the appearance of credibility without the support. Or, real substance can stay too hidden, fragmented, or hard to interpret to reach the decision at all. At the extreme, the first becomes manufactured credibility and the second becomes unrealized value. In both cases, the relationship between substance and signals is broken.

SUBSTANCE	The people, expertise, products, intellectual property, evidence, safeguards, relationships, and results that genuinely exist within an organization.
SIGNALS	What people and systems encounter about an organization, including reviews, citations, recommendations, rankings, partner claims, creator posts, search results, and AI-generated summaries.
Structural Credibility	The design and architecture that make what is real and distinctive about an organization easier for people and AI systems to find, understand, and trace as it travels.

THREE WAYS SUBSTANCE AND SIGNALS CAN RELATE



What follows is about making sure real substance doesn't stay trapped where only a few people can see it.

01

When credibility *doesn't* leave the source

At the source, credibility rests on whether you know what you are doing, whether you have done it and can show the results, and whether you are what you say you are. But much of what makes a company credible may sit in internal reports and technical documents customers never see.

What reaches the customer is rarely the source itself. Instead, they find a distilled take via search, AI answers, and third-party sources. In research published by AirOps, an AI search visibility company, 85% of more than 21,000 brand mentions generated from commercial-intent queries came from third-party pages rather than brand-owned domains.²

It's not just a matter of distributing content more broadly. Most organizations have been doing that for years, particularly across social media. The harder problem is making what is credible and distinctive about an organization clear enough to be recognized outside its original context, especially as information is extracted, summarized, altered, and transmitted by people, platforms, and AI systems. Along the way, it can be distorted. By the time it reaches your intended audience, it can land context-free, simplified and sourceless.

TRUST AND VERIFICATION



60%+

of consumers across nine countries expressed **high trust in GenAI results**.

Boston Consulting Group, 2026³



30%

of answers from AI systems "in search mode" **gave users no source links to check**.

Strauss et al., Data & Policy, 2026⁴

The studies examine different contexts, but together they point to a practical problem. People may trust AI answers even when no links show where the information came from.

02

How credibility *travels*

Credibility takes off when what makes an organization valuable and distinctive remains recognizable outside the experiences it controls, rather than getting flattened or imitated. This information has to be expressed and structured clearly enough for people and systems to understand and use outside

the place where it was first shared. The five actions below help keep the connection between the substance and signals people and AI systems encounter.

■ ACTION 1

Make the source traceable →

Make it easy to determine where an important claim, result, qualification, relationship, or piece of expertise originated, even when it is repeated somewhere else. Clearly associate important information with the right person or organization and make the original source accessible. You cannot control whether every intermediary preserves the attribution, but you can make the origin easier to find.

■ ACTION 2

Make it matter on arrival →

Make sure what is distinctive about the organization remains recognizable in what the audience or system ultimately sees. The same evidence does not carry equal weight for every audience or decision, and it may not be equally legible to every system. Ask what makes it relevant to this audience, in this context, and at this moment of choice.

■ ACTION 3

Keep the story consistent across surfaces →

Your website, partner pages, social channels, and AI answers do not need identical language. They do need to describe a recognizably consistent organization, offer, relationship, and reason to believe. Before deciding, customers often search, go to your site, and follow the sources behind an answer. When the surfaces are consistent, checking can reinforce credibility. When they conflict, the contradiction creates doubt. Research on conflicting platform ratings found that greater discrepancy reduced purchase intent.⁵

■ ACTION 4

Make the relationships clear →

When a third party carries your organization's credibility, or your organization carries theirs, make the type of the connection clear. Is the creator paid? Is the expert an adviser? Is the clinic owned by the platform? Is the award sponsored? Is the recommendation based on evidence, experience, affiliation, or popularity?

Make the evidence easy to find and carry forward →

Your strongest proof cannot help you if it is buried where no one looks. Make the support behind important claims easy to find and recover: independent validation, a clear explanation of how a result was reached, credentials, customer evidence, and clear source links.

When these five elements hold together, strong evidence becomes easier to find, understand, and describe accurately. It does not create demand by itself. It helps existing interest lead to a better-informed decision.

03

What it looks like *in practice*

WORKED EXAMPLE

Public sources only. No relationship with All Things Trust.

When the science travels with the story

Seed Health, consumer probiotics

Seed Health sells probiotic products in a category (gut health) where scientific claims can be difficult for consumers to evaluate and misinformation can travel easily. Its flagship product ranks among Amazon's top five probiotic supplements and became a top 10 product in Target's vitamins, minerals, and supplements category within three months of launch.⁷ Rather than rely only on typical influencer marketing, Seed built Seed University, an educational program for the creators and affiliates who talk about it with their own communities.⁶

Prospective partners complete a course covering bacteria, the microbiome, human biology, probiotic science, and FTC disclosure rules, then must pass a final exam before publishing sponsored content.

The science is the source, and creators are one of the signals carrying it. Seed's approach strengthens that handoff of that science to creators by requiring people representing the brand to understand the essential science and be open about the commercial relationship before they share it with their audiences.

This does not guarantee that every message will be accurate, or that this approach alone drove Seed's growth. This example shows how credibility can travel further when the people carrying it understand the science and are accountable for how they represent it.

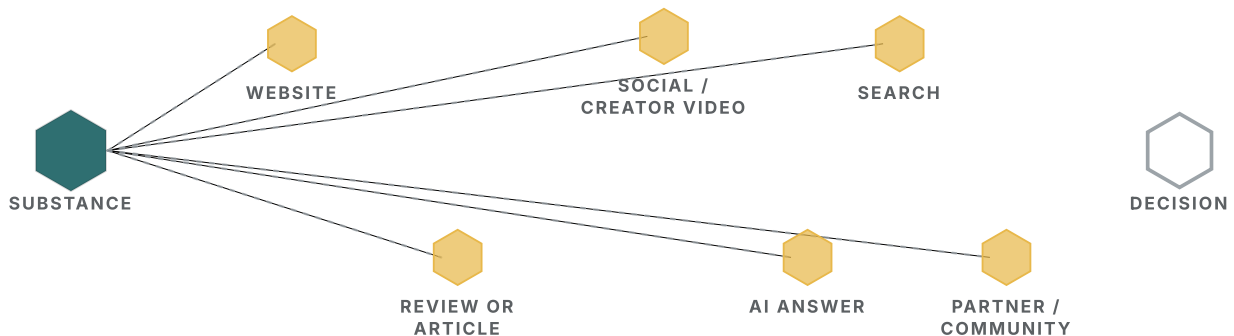
Plan the *flight path*

Start with the impact you want credibility to have. Name the purchase, booking, adoption, recommendation, partnership, investment, or other consequential choice it should influence.

Then ask what information or experiences must become accessible, clear, and verifiable for people and AI systems to evaluate choices with confidence.

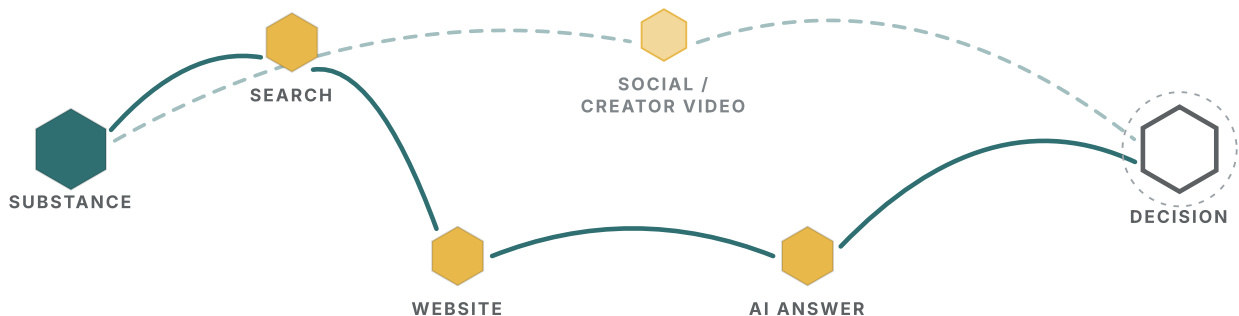
Map how the audience discovers, evaluates, and verifies its options. Then locate where your strongest credibility currently resides. It may sit in a silo with a founder, a customer community, or inside a report rather than being associated with the organization as a whole.

SPREADING EFFORT ACROSS PLATFORMS



Being present everywhere does not mean you influence the final decision.

A DELIBERATE FLIGHT PATH



Focus on the few places that shape the decision, and make sure the evidence survives each handoff.

Your credibility does not need to travel everywhere. A flight does not circle the world. It follows a deliberate route to the right destination. The goal is to reach the places that matter with enough substance intact to make a difference.

At each handoff, ask which distinctive elements need to remain clearly connected to your organization. Structural credibility helps keep those elements connected to the organization as it is described, summarized, and recommended by both people and AI systems.

Then examine what the resulting experience puts back into public view. Reviews, referrals, customer stories, and public evidence become source material for the next decision. What happens after the choice can strengthen or weaken the credibility that influences the next one.

This work usually becomes urgent at one of three moments:

Before a launch, when credibility needs to take off and become recognizable.

After a failure or contradiction, when the distance between claim and evidence needs to be repaired.

During growth, when credibility must travel across markets, partners, acquisitions, or AI systems without losing what made it credible.

In each case, it's the same question: where is credibility creating impact, and where is it being lost before it can influence a decision?

YOU MAY HAVE A STRUCTURAL CREDIBILITY PROBLEM WHEN

- You have strong proof, but customers and AI systems cannot easily find or interpret it.
- Your organization is described differently across search results, reviews, partner pages, websites, and AI answers.
- A credible founder, acquired company, or partner exists, but that credibility has not transferred to the wider brand.
- AI answers and third parties restate your claims without the data to support them.
- Reviews, endorsements, or AI-generated content are shaping perceptions without a clear way to tell what is legitimate.

Find where credibility *is being lost*

All Things Trust examines the full path between what is genuine about an organization and what people experience when it is time to choose. Many assessments focus on only one end of that path, either what an organization publishes or what appears about it. We examine both ends and what happens between them. The work shows where credibility currently lives, what helps it travel, and where it becomes hidden, weakened, or distorted along the way.

Where relevant, it also examines the competitive environment around the decision: which competitors' signals are traveling farther, what makes them easier to find and understand, and whether they shape the choice before stronger proof is considered.

The Trust Stack provides five dimensions for examining that path.

■ PROVENANCE

Can important information and evidence be traced to the right source, role, and authority?

■ RESONANCE

Does what people experience address what matters most to the decision they are making?

■ COHERENCE

Do the different places people engage with the organization tell a consistent story about who it is, what it offers, and what it stands behind?

■ TRANSPARENCY

Are relevant relationships, incentives, ownership, and sponsorships clear?

■ VERIFICATION

Can a person or AI system examine the evidence and support behind what they encounter, wherever it appears?

Together, these dimensions show whether credibility reaches the point of choice with its source, meaning, context, and evidence clear enough to understand and verify.

The result is not a general recommendation to communicate more. It is a diagnosis of where credibility is failing to take off, losing strength or accuracy as others carry it, or arriving without enough clarity and support to influence the decision. It then identifies what to strengthen first.

Most organizations manage the credibility they can see. Fewer manage the full path it travels, where it can quietly lose strength, accuracy, or influence. The opportunity is to design for credibility that travels, so what makes an organization distinctive and worthwhile can shape what people choose.

TRACE ONE CONSEQUENTIAL DECISION

Request a Trust Stack Diagnostic

If your organization has real expertise, evidence, or safeguards that are not influencing customer choice as they should, a Trust Stack diagnostic can trace one consequential path from source to decision and identify what should be strengthened first.

[**allthingstrust.com/contact**](https://allthingstrust.com/contact)

Or email hello@allthingstrust.com

From Credible to Chosen is part of All Things Trust's playbook series on how credibility shapes confidence, choice, action, and value in digital and AI-shaped experiences.

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