ALL THINGS TRUST / PLAYBOOK 01

# The Game Around the Game

> How clear signals help real value win when AI, search, influence, and lookalikes shape what people see first.

01 THE MOMENT

## When discovery needs *clearer signals*

The World Cup is underway, and discovery is part of the fun: the gatherings, the group chats, the limited-edition kits, the pop-up events, and the local guides you did not know you wanted until you saw them.

But when everything shows up at once, the fun can start to feel like work. Tickets, travel packages, resale listings, fan events, creator guides, brand campaigns, local offers, and unofficial promotions all compete for attention at the same time. A person trying to buy a ticket, find an event, choose a product, or understand who is actually connected to the tournament may run into the same problem again and again: too many things look plausible, and the work of deciding what is real shifts onto the person.

The problem is sharper now because convincing appearances are easier to produce. A recommendation can look independent when it is paid. A ticket offer can look official

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when it is fake. A synthetic video, review, image, or endorsement can look like proof before anyone knows where it came from.

### A SCENE FROM THE TOURNAMENT

*Imagine a parent trying to find a family-friendly place to watch a World Cup match near the stadium. They may search online, check maps, scroll social feeds, read reviews, scan local listings, and look for posts about places showing the match that also have food, space, and a reasonable environment for young kids. Some of what appears may be accurate, useful, and current. Some may be outdated, copied, paid for, poorly disclosed, or made to look more official than it is.*

This is why people turn to AI. They are not only looking for more information. They are looking for help deciding what to believe.

A McKinsey report published in October 2025 found that half of consumers were already using AI-powered search. Adobe later reported that traffic from AI sources to U.S. retail sites rose 393% year over year in the first quarter of 2026[1,2].

Sometimes this helps. AI can make a crowded decision easier. But it is still working from the information available to it, and that information is not neutral.

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**AI is not just summarizing an imperfect internet. It is summarizing an actively gamed one.**

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Misinformation, scams, exaggeration, paid influence, and misleading claims are not new. People have always had to decide what to believe in imperfect information environments. What is different now is the speed and volume of what surrounds them,

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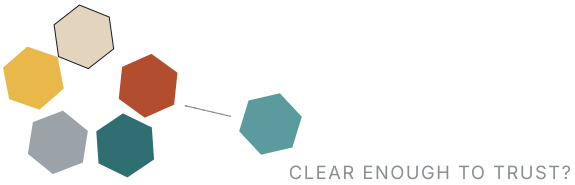
the realism of what can be produced, and the growing role of tools that interpret the public record before someone reaches the source.




When official information, creator content, affiliate pages, reviews, old listings, and copied claims appear around a brand or experience at the same time, it becomes harder for people and AI systems to tell what is current, supported, or real. AI may turn those sources into one confident answer without making the strength of each source easy to see. Sometimes that answer is useful. Sometimes it makes outdated information feel current, uncertain information sound settled, or paid and unsupported claims appear closer to fact.

The situation is bigger than soccer. The tournament is one visible example of a broader problem: official, paid, copied, outdated, and fraudulent information can sit side by side. The issue is not only whether information exists. It is whether the public record gives people and AI enough structure to tell what is real, current, official, paid, proven, or merely claimed.

The challenge this creates is not just for consumers. It is for any organization trying to be clearly understood in that environment.

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# Being visible is not *the same as being believed*

*A fictional worked example: Northline*

Consider Northline, a fictional but established sportswear company, known and trusted for more than twenty years. Around the 2026 World Cup, it launches a campaign called Every Street Has a Game, with player partnerships, limited-edition footwear, creator-led neighborhood guides, local fan events, and a commitment to refurbish community playing spaces in select host cities.

The campaign gets attention. People see the shoes, the creator videos, the event listings, the player content, and the community promises, and AI systems start including Northline in answers about which fan experiences are worth attending or which product drops are legitimate.

On the surface Northline looks successful. But the confusion does not come from any single source. It comes from the whole field at once.

### A SCENE FROM THE CAMPAIGN

*A fan looking for an authentic limited-edition kit sees official retailers, third-party marketplaces, creator drops, resale sites, and social posts, each convincing on its face. Some are real, some are copied, a lower-priced lookalike borrows the same street-football cues, and some are scams hoping to ride the buzz. The challenge is not finding options. It is knowing which one to trust.*

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The same flattening happens to everything Northline built. A player partnership can imply an official tournament relationship that does not exist. A community commitment can look completed when it is still underway. Paid creator content can read as independent. A real event can send people to the wrong place through an outdated listing. Affiliate repetition across Reddit threads and comparison articles can feel like proof. AI then summarizes all of it together into one confident answer that blurs what is official, sponsored, current, and supported.

Northline's problem is not that people have never heard of it, and not that one competitor is copying it. It is that even a known, legitimate brand can become hard to read when too many things around it look equally real. What Northline built is still there, just harder to recognize.

Seeing itself appear in AI answers, Northline might assume it needs more content, more mentions, or more citations. But being surfaced is not the same as being understood. SEO and GEO can help a brand appear in search results and AI-generated answers. They cannot, by themselves, make customers trust what they find, especially when official pages, affiliate content, resale listings, creator posts, and lookalike products appear side by side.

That distinction matters because many people use AI search while still questioning the results. Gartner found that 53% of consumers distrust or lack confidence in the reliability and impartiality of AI search and summaries[3]. If customers cannot tell what is official, current, sponsored, or supported, visibility has not solved the problem. It has only moved the moment of doubt earlier.

More mentions will not fix this. More content can make the problem worse by creating more noise and more ambiguity. The credibility problem is whether what people and AI encounter is clear, current, supported, and harder to distort.

That means making clear what has been promised, what has been completed, what each relationship means, which offers are legitimate, which creators are paid, what events are current, and where the evidence lives. The goal is not to dial down visibility, but to make Northline's real contribution harder to distort.

The same problem applies well beyond Northline. A public figure can be misrepresented when old clips are treated as current evidence. A charity can be copied by a fake

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donation page. A health service can be confused with unreliable advice. Even when an organization is mentioned accurately, it can still fail to be clearly understood.

03 WHAT HAS TO CHANGE

## Clear signals make *confidence possible*

People should not have to dig through scattered pages, old listings, creator posts, vague claims, and third-party summaries to know whether an offer is official, a relationship is paid, an event is current, or a commitment is backed by evidence.

This is where credibility becomes practical. The work is to clarify what is being claimed, show who stands behind it, connect related information, disclose what matters, and make proof easier to verify. When that work is done well, people can understand what is real without having to work so hard. AI systems have stronger material to represent accurately. Genuine value becomes easier to recognize, believe, and choose.

04 THE DIAGNOSTIC METHOD

## How All Things Trust *examines credibility*

The Trust Stack is the method All Things Trust uses to examine whether the claims, relationships, public information, and experiences around an organization are clear, connected, and supported enough to hold up when people and AI compare, summarize,

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and decide. It breaks credibility into observable dimensions that can be assessed, compared, and strengthened.

| DIMENSION | WHAT IT EXAMINES | BUSINESS OUTCOME |
|---|---|---|
| **Provenance** | Whether claims, offers, partnerships, events, creator content, and endorsements can be traced to the right source, role, and authority. | Protects brand distinction by making clear what is official, what is affiliated, and what is not, so that what an organization builds gets the credit it deserves. |
| **Resonance** | Whether the organization's connection feels earned and useful in relation to the audience, context, culture, timing, or need. | Strengthens engagement, participation, and preference by making people feel understood, not just targeted commercially. |
| **Coherence** | Whether the story, details, timing, offers, and support paths stay consistent across channels, listings, events, reviews, and AI summaries. | Reinforces the brand narrative while reducing hesitation, drop-off, and complaints across the experience. |
| **Transparency** | Whether data use, incentives, user controls, and recourse paths are clear when people need them. | Reduces abandonment, complaints, and avoidable mistrust by making the conditions around an experience clear before people act. |
| **Verification** | Whether claims, affiliations, offers, outcomes, or promises are supported by evidence people can check. | Strengthens confidence, conversion, reputation, and participation by making proof easier to find and rely on. |

## One system, *two outcomes*

### FOR ORGANIZATIONS

**Differentiation and Discovery**
Make your value easier to find, understand, and distinguish from alternatives.

**Conversion + Revenue**
Increase purchase, renewal, and referral by reducing hesitation at key decision points.

**Risk Reduction**
Reduce avoidable doubt, complaints, competitive confusion, and reputational drag.

### FOR PEOPLE

**Increased Clarity**
People can understand who is behind an experience, what is being claimed, and what matters.

**Increased Confidence**
People have clearer reasons to believe, compare, continue, or disengage.

**Increased Agency**
People are better able to verify, decide, and act without relying on unclear, unsupported, or misleading signals.

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# Clear signals. *Better calls.*

For brand, customer experience, and AI leaders, the question is no longer only whether your organization is visible. It is whether what people and AI encounter is clear, current, supported, and easier to verify.

Find out where your credibility is strong, where it is vulnerable, and what needs to be clarified, connected, disclosed, or verified.

**Request a Trust Stack Diagnostic**

**allthingstrust.com/contact →**

Or email

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**The Game Around the Game** *is part of* **At the Moment of Trust**, *an All Things Trust playbook series on how credibility shapes confidence, choice, action, and value in digital and AI-shaped experiences.*

RELATED CONTENT

- The Trust Stack
- Visibility and credibility: why brands need both
- How to Show Up in AI Search Without Gaming It
- Brand credibility in the age of AI
- All credibility guides

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## SOURCES

1 McKinsey & Company. New Front Door to the Internet: Winning in the Age of AI Search. October 2025.

2 Adobe Analytics / Adobe Digital Insights. Quarterly AI Traffic Report. April 2026.

3 Gartner. Gartner Survey Finds 53% of Consumers Distrust AI-Powered Search Results. Gartner Newsroom, September 3, 2025. Based on a Gartner Consumer Community survey of 377 U.S. consumers conducted in June and July 2025.

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