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EXPERIENCE

Lessons from 20 Years in MarTech: What Actually Builds Authority

By Scott Tischler · July 28, 2026 · 8 min read

I have spent more than twenty years in marketing technology. I built and ran programs at American Express, MetLife, and UBS - large, regulated, reputation-obsessed institutions where a bad decision is expensive and a good one compounds quietly for years. Today I run Alrecommend.ai, working on how businesses show up in AI search. Across all of it, I have watched four platform shifts: search, social, mobile, and now AI.

Each shift arrived with the same promise - everything is different now - and the same crowd insisting the old rules were dead. They were wrong every time. The tactics changed constantly. The principles that actually build authority barely moved. This is what I have learned about the difference.

Authority is earned, never assigned

The first thing two decades teaches you is that **authority is a reputation you earn from others, not a label you assign to yourself**. At Amex, MetLife, and UBS, we could not simply declare that customers should trust us. We had to be trustworthy in ways third parties would verify and repeat.

This matters more now than ever, because AI systems work exactly this way. They do not care what your website says about you. They synthesize what the rest of the world says about you. The mechanism is new; the truth is ancient. **The market decides your authority, and your job is to give the market consistent evidence.**

Every credential I have - the executive study at Wharton, Harvard, Yale, and Oxford, teaching as an adjunct at Virginia Tech and the University of Phoenix - is only useful because it is externally verifiable. Self-description is marketing. External verification is authority. Learn the difference and you will make better decisions for the next decade.

What compounds versus what is noise

The most valuable skill I developed is telling the two apart. Early in my career I chased tactics. Now I recognize that most of what feels urgent is noise, and a small number of unglamorous things are what actually compound.

Compounds (build it)	Noise (resist it)
Consistent reputation over years	The platform trick of the month
Third-party citations and mentions	Vanity metrics with no business tie
Clear, repeated positioning	Constant rebranding and repositioning
Genuine expertise, demonstrated	Borrowed jargon and buzzwords
Relationships and trust	One-off viral spikes
Answering real customer questions	Chasing the algorithm's blind spots

The tell is simple. **Noise decays the moment the platform changes. Compounding assets carry across platforms.** A reputation built at Amex traveled with me. A clever hack tuned to one algorithm did not survive its next update. When you evaluate where to spend effort, ask one question: will this still be worth something after the next platform shift? If not, it is noise.

Consistency beats brilliance

If I had to name the single most underrated force in building authority, it is **consistency**. Not the best campaign. Not the most creative idea. The willingness to say the same true thing, clearly, for years, until the market internalizes it.

Regulated financial institutions taught me this because they had no choice. You cannot say one thing in an ad and another in a disclosure. The information had to be consistent everywhere, and that discipline turned out to be a moat. Consistency builds trust because it is legible - customers, journalists, and now AI models can all read a coherent story and repeat it accurately.

Inconsistency is the quiet killer of authority. When your name, your positioning, and your facts differ across platforms, you force everyone - humans and machines - to guess which version is true. And when they have to guess, they discount you. **Coherence is a competitive advantage precisely because so few businesses maintain it.**

Substance is the only durable SEO

I have watched an entire industry try to reverse-engineer algorithms for twenty years. Some of it worked briefly. Almost none of it worked durably. Every platform I have seen eventually optimizes

toward the same target: **surfacing genuinely useful, genuinely credible sources**. The shortcuts get trained out. The substance gets rewarded.

This is the most freeing lesson in the whole business, because it means you can stop guessing. You do not need to outsmart the model. You need to be the answer the model is trying to find. In practice that means:

- **Demonstrate real expertise** rather than claiming it.
- **Answer the actual questions** your customers ask, in plain language.
- **Earn credible external validation** - reviews, citations, mentions in sources that already carry weight.
- **Keep your facts consistent** everywhere they appear.

Every one of these worked in the search era, worked in the social era, and works in the AI era. That is not a coincidence. It is the whole point.

Trust is the asset that survives every shift

When I zoom all the way out, there is really one asset underneath everything else: **trust**. Search rewarded it, social amplified it, mobile made it portable, and AI now synthesizes it at scale. The delivery mechanism kept changing. The underlying currency never did.

Trust is expensive to build and cheap to lose, which is exactly why it compounds. It cannot be faked at scale for long, so the businesses that have it hold a position competitors cannot easily copy. In the AI era this advantage sharpens, because models are consensus machines - they surface what many credible sources agree on. A deep well of earned trust is the closest thing to a durable moat that modern marketing offers.

The principles, distilled

If you strip away the platforms and the tools and the acronyms, here is what twenty years actually taught me about building authority:

Earn it from others, do not assign it to yourself. External verification beats self-description every time.

Invest in what compounds, ignore what decays. Ask whether an asset survives the next platform shift before you spend on it.

Be consistent to the point of boredom. Coherence is rare, which is exactly why it is valuable.

Choose substance over hacks. The algorithm's goal and your customer's goal converge over time, so serve the customer.

Protect trust above all. It is the one asset that carries across every shift, and the hardest for anyone to take from you.

None of this is glamorous, and that is the point. The businesses I have watched build real, lasting authority did not do it with a clever trick. They did it by being genuinely credible, saying so consistently, and letting the evidence accumulate. The platforms will keep changing. If you build on these principles, you will be ready for whatever comes after AI, too.

Key takeaways

- ② Authority is a reputation you earn from others and that third parties verify - not a label you assign to yourself, which is why AI systems, like people, synthesize what the world says about you rather than what you say.
- ② The core skill is telling compounding assets from noise: reputation, citations, consistent positioning, and genuine expertise carry across platforms, while algorithm tricks and vanity metrics decay the moment the platform changes.
- ② Consistency beats brilliance - saying the same true thing clearly for years builds a legible, trusted story that humans and AI models can repeat accurately.
- ② Substance is the only durable SEO, because every platform eventually optimizes toward surfacing genuinely useful, credible sources, and the shortcuts get trained out.
- ② Trust is the one asset that survives every platform shift - search rewarded it, social amplified it, mobile made it portable, and AI now synthesizes it at scale.
- ② Before spending effort on any marketing asset, ask whether it will still be worth something after the next platform shift; if not, it is noise.

Frequently asked questions

What actually builds authority over the long term?

Authority is built by earning a verifiable reputation from credible third parties, staying consistent across every platform, and demonstrating genuine expertise over years. It cannot be self-assigned, because the market - and now AI systems - decide your authority based on external evidence, not your own claims about yourself.

How do you tell a compounding marketing investment from noise?

Ask one question: will this still be worth something after the next platform shift? Reputation, third-party citations, consistent positioning, and real expertise carry across platforms and compound. Algorithm tricks, vanity metrics, and one-off viral spikes decay the moment the platform changes, which makes them noise.

Why does consistency matter so much for authority?

Consistency makes your story legible, so customers, journalists, and AI models can all read a coherent narrative and repeat it accurately. When your name, positioning, and facts differ across platforms, you force everyone to guess which version is true - and when they have to guess, they discount you.

Do the old marketing fundamentals still apply in the AI era?

Yes, more than ever. AI systems are consensus machines that surface what credible sources agree on, which rewards exactly the fundamentals that always mattered - trust, reputation, clarity, and consistent information. The delivery mechanism changed; the underlying substance did not.

Is there a shortcut to ranking well in AI search?

No durable one. Every platform eventually optimizes toward surfacing genuinely useful and credible sources, so shortcuts get trained out over time. The reliable strategy is to be the answer the model is trying to find - demonstrate real expertise, answer real questions plainly, and earn credible external validation.

How did working in regulated finance shape your view of authority?

Regulated institutions cannot say one thing in an ad and another in a disclosure, so consistency is enforced everywhere. That discipline turned out to be a moat: coherent, verifiable information builds trust and is easy for others to repeat correctly. It taught me that consistency is a competitive advantage, not just a compliance chore.

What is the most underrated force in building authority?

Consistency - the willingness to say the same true thing, clearly, for years, until the market internalizes it. It beats brilliant one-off campaigns because coherence is rare and rare things are valuable. Few businesses maintain it, so the ones that do stand out to both customers and AI models.

What single asset matters most across platform shifts?

Trust. Search rewarded it, social amplified it, mobile made it portable, and AI now synthesizes it at scale. It is expensive to build and cheap to lose, which is exactly why it compounds and why it is the closest thing to a durable moat modern marketing offers.

About the author. Scott Tischler is the Founder & Chairman of Alrecommend.ai and a practitioner-authority on AI search and Answer Engine Optimization. With 20+ years in marketing technology — including American Express, MetLife, and UBS — and executive study at Wharton, Harvard, Yale, and Oxford, he helps businesses become the ones AI recommends.