

CLEARSOUND CONSULTING

The Authority Gap

8 Essentials to Grow Your Online Presence to Match Your Real-World Authority (Plus a Bonus)

Even when they hear about you from a friend, they *look you up first*.

The best businesses we work with have something in common. They're really good at what they do. And because they're good at it, that's where their time went: the work, the customers, the team. Building a brand and an online presence came second, if it came at all.

For years that was fine. A good reputation traveled on its own. But the information age changed how people decide. A referral still opens the door. What decides whether they walk through it is what they find when they search your name.

STEP ONE

They hear about you

A friend, a colleague, a rep, a post. Your reputation does its job.

STEP TWO

They look you up

Your website, Google, LinkedIn, reviews and now AI answers. You're not in the room.

Where most decide

STEP THREE

They reach out, or they don't

If what they find matches what they heard, they call. If not, they call someone easier to trust.

60%

of the buying process happens online before a buyer talks to anyone.

GLOBALSPEC, 2025

34%

of buyers contact a company only to ask about price.

GLOBALSPEC, 2025

4.7/10

is how much engineers trust AI answers. They still check the source.

TREW MARKETING AND GLOBALSPEC, 2026

> *Your work is real. The people who haven't worked with you yet just can't see it.*

That distance is the ***authority gap:*** what your customers already know about you on one side, and what a stranger can see online on the other. It's the most common problem we see, and the most fixable, because the proof already exists. It's in your projects, your files and your people's heads. This guide shows you how to bring it into the open.

WHAT SEARCH AND AI LOOK FOR

Real authority has four parts. Google calls it E-E-A-T.

Google ranks content with signals for ***Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness and Trust***. AI tools that answer questions lean on the same kinds of sources. And here's what we've learned building sites in the age of AI: you can't fake it. In 2025 Google told its quality reviewers to look for fake experts and made-up profiles. What wins is real work, real people and real numbers.

E
Experience
You've done it. First-hand stories of real work for real people.

E
Expertise
You know it. Your people explain how and why, in their own words.

A
Authority
Others say so. Reviews, mentions, awards and links from people who aren't you.

T
Trust
It all adds up. Google calls trust the most important part. The other three feed it.

Each of the essentials below builds one or more of these. Work through them in order, or start with the one where your gap is widest.

1	**Client Stories**	Have you done work like mine?	EXPERIENCE
2	**Real Numbers**	Can you prove it?	TRUST
3	**Expert Voices**	Who will I actually work with?	EXPERTISE
4	**Real Answers**	Will you answer my question before I call?	EXPERTISE
5	**Clear Voice**	Is this the same company everywhere?	TRUST
6	**Steady Cadence**	Are you still active?	TRUST
7	**Reputation**	What do other people say about you?	AUTHORITY
8	**Easy Next Step**	Can I start without picking up the phone?	TRUST
+	**Bonus: Recruiting**	Would someone great want to work here?	ALL FOUR

EXPERIENCE

1 Client Stories

"Have you done work like mine?"

WHY IT MATTERS

A list of services tells people what you offer. A client story lets them hear how you do what you do, for someone like them. It's the closest thing to a referral you can put on a page.

Stories also do something a services page can't: they're a signal to search engines and AI tools that you're real. Specific people, specific problems, specific results. That kind of detail is hard to make up, and Google and AI tools both reward it.

STORY SNAPSHOT · EXAMPLE

A regional manufacturer with three websites and no single message

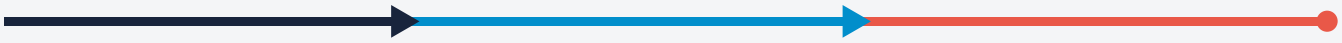
318%
more page-one rankings in year one

303%
more mentions in AI answers

"You listen and understand like nobody else."
– A consultant who worked alongside the team

A snapshot sits at the top of the story so a skimmer gets the point in five seconds. The full story follows below it.

HOW TO TELL IT: PROBLEM, SOLUTION, RESULT



Problem
What was really going on? Name it the way the client would, not the way a brochure would.

Solution
What did you do, and how? This is where your process and your people show up.

Result
What changed for them? Measured, dated and told in their words.

EVERY STORY NEEDS

- → **Quotes from real people.** A name and a role, not "a happy customer."
- → **At least two data points.** Time saved, costs cut, growth, response times. Numbers make it believable.
- → **A snapshot.** The problem, the result and the numbers in one glance.
- → **A date.** So readers know the work is current.

WHEN YOU CAN'T USE THE NAME

Some clients can't be named, often because of a confidentiality agreement or simple privacy. Tell the story anyway. Describe them by type ("a three - location healthcare practice," "a family - owned contractor"), keep the problem and result specific, and let the client approve every line.

WHERE TO GET STARTED

Pick one client you're proud of. Write one page: the problem, what you did, what changed, two numbers and one quote.

TRUST

2 Real Numbers

“Can you prove it?”

WHY IT MATTERS

“High quality,” “fast turnaround” and “best in class” mean nothing until they come with a number. Every business says them. Numbers are what let a buyer believe you, compare you and defend their choice to their boss.

This matters most in B2B, where the person choosing you has to justify it to someone else. It also matters to AI tools, which pull specific, verifiable facts into their answers far more often than adjectives.

CAPABILITIES SHEET

Service area	**60 miles of Grove City**
Typical response	**Within 1 business day**
Projects completed	**[Number]**
Years in business	**[Number]**
Certifications	**[Name] · Renewed [Year]**
Client Retention	**[Percent]**

An example. The point is specific, dated facts a buyer can check.

HOW TO CHANGE

- **Put data in your client stories.** At least two measurable results per story.
- **Publish specs.** Capacities, sizes, service areas, response times, certifications with their dates.
- **Make spec sheets easy to use.** A downloadable sheet is good. An interactive one buyers can filter is better.
- **Borrow authority.** Quote stats and research from respected industry sources and cite them.
- **Keep it verifiable.** Every number should trace back to something you could show if asked.

WHAT BUYERS WANT MOST

56%

of hardware buyers rank datasheets as the content they want most. 40% of all buyers do.

GlobalSpec, 2024

WHERE TO GET STARTED

Write down the five numbers your best salesperson uses to win a deal. Put them on your homepage and your main service page this month.

EXPERTISE

3 Expert Voices

"Who will I actually work with?"

WHY IT MATTERS

One of the biggest shifts in digital marketing right now is the move from company authority to personal authority. People trust people more than logos. They follow the engineer who explains things clearly, the owner who shares what she's learned and the project lead whose posts show up in their feed. Search engines and AI tools are moving the same way, looking for named people with real experience behind the content.

That changes how you introduce your team. For years, the company had a positioning statement and the team page had headshots. Now each key person needs something like a positioning statement of their own: what they know, what they've done and who they help.

THE OLD WAY · COMPANY ONLY

"We're a full-service provider committed to quality and customer satisfaction."

Jane Smith
Project Manager

THE NEW WAY · PEOPLE WITH A POINT OF VIEW

"Jane has led 140 projects in occupied buildings. She's the person to ask how to keep working while the work gets done."

Jane Smith
Project Manager · Writes about scheduling around live operations

A POSITIONING STATEMENT FOR EACH PERSON

[Name] helps ***[who they serve]*** with the ***[problem they solve]***, drawing on ***[experience you can measure]***. Ask them about ***[the topic they love]***.

HOW TO CHANGE

- Pick two or three people who customers already ask for by name.
- Write a short positioning statement for each, then use it everywhere: bio, LinkedIn, byline, email signature.
- Give each person one topic to own, and let them teach it in articles, short videos or quotes.
- Put their names on the work. A byline is a signal of real expertise.

IT DOESN'T TAKE A WRITER

Most experts don't like writing, and they don't have to. A twenty - minute conversation can become an article they approve. Their knowledge, their voice, your help getting it on the page.

WHERE TO GET STARTED

Write a positioning statement for one person this week. Update their bio and LinkedIn headline to match.

EXPERTISE

4 Real Answers

"Will you answer my question before I call?"

WHY IT MATTERS

People and AI tools are asking the same questions. If your website doesn't answer them, something else will. Sometimes it's a competitor. Sometimes it's an AI tool guessing. AI answers are only as good as the sources they can find, and when the source is missing, they fill the gap with something that sounds right and isn't. The best defense against AI getting you wrong is answering the question yourself, clearly, on your own site.

Clear answers also save your sales team time. When lead times, pricing ranges and process are already explained, the calls you get are from people who are ready.

THE OLD WAY

Buy the keyword

Pick a phrase, repeat it on the page, buy ads against it and hope it ranks.

best contractor near me | quality service | affordable

THE NEW WAY

Answer the real questions

Start with what customers ask your team every week, and answer it plainly.

- How long does a typical project take from first call to finish?
- What drives the price up or down?
- What do you need from us to get started?

IS GOOGLE'S "HELPFUL CONTENT" STILL RELEVANT?

Yes, and more than ever. Google's helpful content system became part of its core ranking in March 2024, so it now runs all the time instead of in separate updates. Google's guidance is still to create "helpful, reliable, people-first content," and in October 2026 it updated that guidance to say the main content of a page is one of the most critical factors in judging quality.

HOW TO CHANGE

- Does it answer the question fully, so they don't have to search again?
- Does it show first-hand experience?
- Is it clear who wrote it, and why they know?
- Would you be glad to send it to a customer?

GOOGLE'S QUESTIONS, IN PLAIN WORDS

- Collect the questions your sales and service team hear every week.
- Answer each one: a short answer first, then a longer one for people who want detail.
- Put answers where the question comes up, not only on one FAQ page.

WHERE TO GET STARTED

Ask your team for their ten most common questions. Answer each one in two sentences and publish them this month.

TRUST · CLARITY FIRST

5 Clear Voice

“Is this the same company everywhere?”

Clarity comes first. When your website, LinkedIn page and Google profile each tell a different story, buyers aren’t sure which one to believe, and search engines aren’t either. Saying the same clear thing everywhere tells both that you know who you are.

WEBSITE	LINKEDIN	GOOGLE PROFILE
“Full-service solutions for all your needs”	“Industry leader since 1985”	Old category, old hours, no description
WEBSITE	**LINKEDIN**	**GOOGLE PROFILE**
“We help [who] [do what], so they can [result]”	Same line, same services, same people	Same line, right category, current photos

HOW TO CHANGE

- Write one sentence for who you serve and what changes for them.
- Use it on your homepage, LinkedIn, Google profile and email signatures.
- Match names, services, hours and contact details everywhere.

WHERE TO GET STARTED

Open your website, LinkedIn and Google profile side by side. Fix anything that doesn’t match.

TRUST · CONSISTENCY SECOND

6 Steady Cadence

“Are you still active?”

Once you’re clear, be consistent. A news page that stops two years ago makes people wonder if anyone is still there. A steady rhythm of helpful content says you’re current, and recency matters to people and search engines alike: fresh, useful content tells both that you’re still doing the work.



Every two weeks: steady beats busy

8 posts · 16 weeks



Four posts in a burst, then silence

What most companies do

HOW TO CHANGE

- Pick one main channel and a rhythm you can keep for a year.
- Make every post helpful: a story, an answer, a number or a person.
- Name one owner, and plan the next eight dates.

WHERE TO GET STARTED

One post every two weeks beats ten in a month. Put the next eight dates on the calendar today.

AUTHORITY

7 Reputation

"What do other people say about you?"

What you say about yourself is a claim. What customers say is evidence. Reviews boost everything else in this guide: they back up your stories, confirm your numbers and give search engines third-party proof that you are who you say you are.

ASK	RESPOND	SHOW	SPREAD
At the moment they thank you, make it one click	Reply to every review, good or hard	Put reviews on your site, next to the work	Google first, and then platforms your buyers use

HOW TO CHANGE

- Build the ask into the way you already work, so it happens every time.
- Match reviews to pages: the right words next to the right service.
- Keep your Google profile current, then add the review sites your industry trusts.

WHERE TO GET STARTED
Ask your three happiest customers for a Google review this month, and reply to every one.

TRUST

8 Easy Next Step

"Can I start without picking up the phone?"

People who do most of their homework online want to take the next step online too. A phone number or a general contact form makes them wait, and some won't. Give them a real action that fits how your business works.

THE MINIMUM
A general contact form
Better than nothing, but it leaves people guessing what happens next.

B2B
An online quote request
Accepts drawings and files, asks the right questions, says when you'll reply.

SERVICE BUSINESS
Book an appointment
Let them pick a time that works, right from the page.

HOW TO CHANGE

- Give every key page one clear next step.
- Say how fast you'll respond, and who will respond.
- Follow up like a person, not an autoresponder.

WHERE TO GET STARTED
Replace "Contact Us" on your main service page with the action that fits: a quote request or a booking link.

ALL FOUR

+ Recruiting BONUS

> *"Would someone great want to work here?"*

Your online presence doesn't just win customers. It hires. The people you most want to hire check the same places your customers do, and they decide just as fast. In many industries, finding good people is now harder than finding good customers.

1.9M
manufacturing jobs could go unfilled between 2024 and 2033.
Deloitte and The Manufacturing Institute, 2024

1 clinic
closed by one healthcare practice we know, for lack of staff. Not lack of patients.

$250K+
a year in revenue can ride on a single unfilled clinician seat at a practice like that.

Customers notice too. A company that can staff the work can deliver it.

HOW TO CHANGE

- Show the place, the people and the training, not just a list of openings.
- Let employees say in their own words why they stay.
- Show the path: where someone starts and where they can grow.

WHERE TO GET STARTED
Put three real photos and one employee's own words on your careers page, right next to the open roles.

WHAT A CAREERS PAGE THAT HIRES LOOKS LIKE

THE PLACE
Real photos of the work
The shop, the trucks, the clinic, the team at lunch. Not stock.

THE PEOPLE
Their words, not yours
One or two employees on why they came and why they stay.

THE PATH
Where you can grow
Training, mentors and what the next role looks like.

THE STEP
Apply in minutes
A short form on a phone, and a real person who replies.

CLOSE YOUR AUTHORITY GAP

Great at what you do?
Let's make sure the right people can see it.

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Sources: GlobalSpec, Smart Marketing for Engineers (2025). TREW Marketing and GlobalSpec, State of Marketing to Engineers (2026). Google Search Central, Creating Helpful, Reliable, People-First Content (updated October 2026). Deloitte and The Manufacturing Institute (2024). Client examples are anonymized.