

Building Trust Before the Sale: Using Research to Change the Conversation

A practical guide to building credibility before the first email, pitch, or proposal.



You Can't Sell Without Trust. But Trust Takes Time.

You know how powerful trust is.
It's the reason people refer you, hire you, and come back for more.
But how can you build it before you know who's watching?

Research shows that in B2B, decision-makers are 77% of the way through their research process before we're aware they're considering us.

Which means that we need to build trust BEFORE we have the chance to have a conversation.

Let's look at how audience-focused research helps you build trust *before* you sell — so the right people are already leaning in when they arrive.

The Trust Gap

We hear this a lot from the experts we work with:

- “We do great work, but it's hard for people to see that before we work together.”
- “We're getting leads, but we spend a lot of time overcoming their skepticism when we're discussing how we can help.”
- “We know we're worth the fees we charge, but we keep fielding questions about discounting our rates.”

It's not a sales problem. It's a *credibility* problem — and it's completely solvable.

Here are a few questions that can help illuminate what's going on:

- **When someone discovers you online, is there anything there that builds immediate trust besides the bio you wrote for yourself?**
- **Is your content focused on what your audience cares about, or what you offer?**
- **Do prospects ever say, “I hear you're the expert to talk to about this.”?**

If not, it could mean you're not doing enough to prove your expertise and your value upfront.

How Research Builds Trust Before the Sale

When you show up with data that reflects your audience's world, something shifts.
You're no longer just another expert trying to earn attention.
You're someone who *already understands* what they're going through.

Research-based content helps you:

- Share insights your audience hasn't seen anywhere else
- Address pain points, questions, and hesitations with clarity
- Show that you're paying attention to what matters to them
- Earn referrals and credibility from people you haven't even worked with yet

This kind of trust isn't built in a single post. But it does build over time — especially when it's grounded in something real.

A Real-World Example

Audience Audit

In 2024 I received an email from a very well-known agency advisor, asking me if I'd be willing to give a workshop at his annual event.

The funny thing was — I'd never had a conversation with him before this. I was aware of his expert reputation, his books, and the size of his audience. But this was literally the first contact we had ever had. I was thrilled to be invited, told him so, and had a great time attending and speaking at the event.

Within two months, I'd signed nearly \$100,000 worth of new business with event attendees. And since then, he's continued to refer new clients to Audience Audit. Every one of them has said to me, "He says you're the person to talk to about thought leadership research."

Our reputation wasn't created overnight, but after more than 15 years, I get many referrals from people I've never worked with (or even met).

That's what happens when your trusted reputation shows up *before* you do.

Check in: Is Your Content Building Trust?

Here's a starting point. Check all that apply:

- ☐ We've published insights that reflect what our audience is thinking or feeling
- ☐ Prospects have mentioned our content the first time they talk with us
- ☐ We've received referrals from people we haven't directly worked with
- ☐ Our insights have been quoted, reposted, or recommended
- ☐ We've been told, "I've heard you're the expert"

If you check 4 or 5 → You're building meaningful credibility beyond your immediate circle.
If you check 2 or 3 → You've got momentum, and sharpening your focus could amplify it.
If you check 0 or 1 → You've got valuable insight, but more of the right people need to see it.

Quick Start: Building Trust Now

You don't need a viral post. You need relevance and consistency.

Step 1: Choose a Real Pain Point

Pick one thing your best-fit clients have told you they're struggling with. Write it down in their language, not how you interpret it.

Step 2: Write a Useful, Honest Take

Why does this challenge matter? What do people often misunderstand about it? What's one thing that would turn their expectation of how to solve it on its head?

Step 3: Share Without Selling

Turn your perspective into a short post, blog, or video. Not CTA, no promo — just something genuinely helpful.

When you do that consistently, people start noticing. And they remember who helped first.

**At Audience Audit, we help experts understand their audience so clearly
that they build trust before they ever make a pitch.**

Audience research gives you the confidence to show up with real value right when they need it.

How Else Can We Help?

Let's talk about what original research could unlock for you.

Audience Audit® | Research for Relentlessly Helpful Experts.

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