THE DECISION SEQUENCE
MARKETING BUILT AROUND HOW PEOPLE DECIDE

Your credentials are showing too soon

Where to put your credentials

Why credentials above the fold spends a signal before anyone wants it

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Where to put your credentials

Why a credentials block above the fold delivers a signal before anyone wants it

Gates. Relevance: secondary. **Credibility: primary.** Proof: secondary. Safety: no. Access: no.

Awards, association logos and the years-in-business line belong after the reader has recognized their own situation. Authority deployed before relevance is established spends the signal on somebody who hasn't yet agreed there's a problem.

The symptom

Open your homepage and look at the first screen without scrolling.

The awards row. Six association marks. A client wall. A line about serving the region since 1994, set in the largest type on the page.

That's the most expensive real estate the firm owns, and it's been spent on material the visitor has no use for yet. Nobody arrives at a professional-services website looking for decoration. They arrive carrying something. A deadline that moved, a number nobody can explain, a board question due Thursday. The first screen tells them the firm is decorated. What they came to find out is whether anybody there has seen this before.

The credentials aren't wrong. Every one of them is true, earned, and worth having. They're sitting in the one position on the page where nobody has any reason to want them.

Why it keeps happening

Credential material is the easiest thing in the building to approve. Everyone in the firm already believes it, nobody has to defend it in a meeting, and no partner has ever objected to seeing the award they helped win displayed at the top of the page. It also feels like the strongest asset the firm has, so it gets the strongest position on the page. The question nobody asks in that meeting is what the block answers.

We've built the hero that opened with the logo wall, and then defended it, because everyone in the approval chain could point at something they were proud of. That's a real approval process working exactly as designed and producing a page that leads with the firm.

Here's the part that costs money. An impressive claim arriving before the buyer has any reason to care reads as a dare. Find the flaw. Find the gap. Find the reason this firm isn't what the page says it is. Skepticism is the default posture of anyone evaluating a provider, and an unearned superiority claim is what wakes it up. The information was fine. The position it occupied turned it into a skepticism trigger.

There's a machine version of the same failure. A hero built from awards gives a summarizing model nothing about what problem the firm solves, which is the only thing a buyer's query is ever about. A firm that reads as generic to a human reads as nothing at all to a machine.

What the buyer is doing at the Credibility gate

Working out whether these people understand the problem well enough to be taken seriously. That's the whole question at this gate, and an award answers a different one, asked by a different audience, at a different time.

The award was granted by a peer body, a publication, or a panel of other firms. Useful to the firm. Meaningful to the people who voted. Nearly silent on whether the firm has handled a situation shaped like the one the visitor is currently sitting in.

Credential material becomes useful at a specific moment: once the buyer has decided the firm might understand their problem and wants to know whether the firm can be taken seriously. That's a real moment, it arrives in most evaluations, and the credentials do genuine work when it comes. Before it, they're noise. Worse than noise, because they signal that the firm leads with itself, and the buyer has now learned something about how the engagement will go.

The market can't value what it can't see. What it needs to see first is the problem, described accurately enough that the reader recognizes it as theirs.

The correction

Move the block. That's the entire fix, and it takes an afternoon.

The homepage runs in this order: audience recognition, problem framing, why-now, position, method, credibility indicators, proof preview, next step. Credibility sits sixth of eight. It arrives after the reader has seen their situation described, understood why it's live now, learned where the firm stands and how the firm works. By then a credential answers a question the reader has developed.

So the awards block, the association logos and the years-in-business line go below the method section. The material stays on the site. It stops being the first thing anyone meets.

Keep the license and registration information findable, and treat it as a separate category from the awards. A buyer who needs to verify a license needs it fast, usually late, often under pressure from somebody else in their organization. Put it in the footer. Verification lives in the footer, and every buyer who has ever needed it already knows to look there. The hero is where persuasion happens, and a registration number persuades nobody.

Then run the same move through the deck, because the pitch deck almost always repeats the homepage mistake with worse consequences. The credentials slide comes after the problem framing and the approach, which means slide four is far too early for it. If the room is being shown the firm's history before the room has heard its own situation described back to it, the deck is doing what the homepage was doing, in front of people who can interrupt.

Number 09 in this library handles the wording of the credential copy itself, and what to cut. Everything here is position.

Before and after

Before. *Award-winning firm. Five consecutive years on the Best Places to Work list. Serving the region since 1994. Proud members of six professional associations.*

After. *Your bonding capacity stopped growing and nobody can tell you which number caused it. That's usually a reporting problem before it's a financial one.*

The awards didn't disappear. They now sit below the method section, where a reader who has just decided the firm might understand their problem finds out the firm is also taken seriously by everyone else.

What backfires

Deleting the credentials instead of moving them. Firms that overcorrect end up with a page that describes the problem well and offers no evidence anybody should be trusted with it, which stalls the same buyer two screens later. The awards were never the mistake.

Run this on your own material

Screenshot the first screen of your homepage. Cover everything below the fold.

Show it to somebody who fits the target buyer and hasn't heard the pitch. Ask them one question: what problem does this firm solve?

If they can only tell you the firm is decorated, well established, or highly regarded, the real estate is misallocated and you now have proof that didn't come from you.

Do the same with slide four of the deck. Same question, same test, and the answer usually arrives faster because a person looking at a slide will say what they see.

Signals you've cleared it

Advance when a stranger reading the first screen can describe the problem the firm solves in their own words. When inbound conversations open with the visitor describing their situation rather than asking what the firm does. When someone references the method section before mentioning the awards.

Hold when the partner group's objection to moving the block is that the awards were expensive, hard-won, or important to a referral source. All true, and none of it is the buyer's question at this gate. Hold too when the page has been reordered but the problem framing is generic enough to fit any firm in the category, because you've moved the credentials for nothing.

Where this connects

Engagement Success in an AI World · When Everyone Stopped Reading, on where trust gets decided.

Research Library · Entry 08, authority and social proof.

Next move · Go to *How to introduce your team*, which is what belongs there instead.