THE DECISION SEQUENCE

MARKETING BUILT AROUND HOW PEOPLE DECIDE

The wall of bios is working against you

How to introduce your team

How traditional formatting creates
credential fatigue for humans and cognitive overload for machines

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How to introduce your team

Introductions that don't create credential fatigue for humans and deter machines

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

A credential tells a buyer where a person has been. A sentence about what that person learned to see tells the buyer what she'd notice on their account. Publish the second one.

One is a claim the buyer has to accept. The other is something they can evaluate, and buyers evaluate a great deal faster than they accept.

The symptom

Twenty years of experience. Three degrees. A portfolio number with a B in it. A certification list that runs into a second column because the first one looked thin.

All of it's accurate. It took a week to assemble, most of that week spent chasing partners for a corrected graduation year. It sits at slide four, right after the firm overview, and in the years it's been in the deck it has never produced a question.

No skepticism. No challenge. Nothing at all. The buyer's eyes cross it the way they cross the safety card in the seat pocket, and the meeting continues.

We've built that slide. We've billed for the week it took.

Why it keeps happening

Credentials answer whether the firm is qualified to do the work. That question got settled before anyone booked the meeting. Nobody schedules an hour with a firm they believe is unqualified.

So the slide answers a question that closed a week ago, and it keeps getting built anyway.

Here's the reason. Qualification is the only thing about a firm that can be documented and approved. A degree gets verified. A certification has an issuing body behind it. A portfolio figure traces back to a system of record and survives the conversation with legal. Everything else the buyer is weighing lives somewhere no marketing department has ever gotten a signature.

Watch the other route fail once and you'll recognize it forever. A partner says something genuinely useful about how a certain kind of project goes wrong, it goes into review, and the specifics come out because the specifics were traceable to a client. What comes back is a sentence about a commitment to excellence, with a designation added at the end so it feels like it's carrying weight.

Which makes the credential the path of least resistance, and the bio slide the thing everyone in the approval chain could live with. Nobody chose it. It just kept clearing.

Every firm says it's a trusted advisor with decades of experience and a client-first approach. We've written a version of that line more times than we want to admit. It never once helped a buyer choose.

What the buyer is doing at the Credibility gate

Working out whether these people understand the problem well enough to be taken seriously. "Twenty-five years of experience" claims time, and buyers have met plenty of people carrying twenty-five years of the same year, repeated.

We've spent three decades watching selection committees decide who to trust with serious money, and the decision was rarely made during the delivery of a polished presentation. Trust was earned during the moments when the presentation broke.

There's a second reader now, and it never enters the room. Named, particular evidence tied to an identifiable professional is one of four signals a sorting model weighs when it decides which firms a buyer ever sees. "Twenty years of experience" compresses to nothing in a summary because there's nothing in it to compress. A sentence about what a person learned to spot survives the paraphrase, because it's specific and it's quotable. A firm that reads as generic to a human reads as nothing at all to a machine.

That's the part that compounds. Generic output trains the machines to see you as generic, and the team page nobody has touched since the last rebrand is doing that work every day, in conversations the firm will never hear about.

The correction

Every credential on that page was earned by doing something over and over until the person started seeing what other people miss. Expertise is pattern recognition built through repetition, and the reps are what produce it. The reps are also the part worth publishing.

The question is one line: what did this teach you to see?

Rewrite three bios against it. Start with the partners who sit in your first meetings, since that's where the mismatch costs the most. The degree becomes the analytical habit it left behind. The fifteen years become the specific configuration that makes this person uneasy about a project weeks before anyone else has flagged a problem.

Don't hand the assignment to the person being described. Almost nobody can put their own trained perception on paper. Given a blank page they'll produce a résumé. Interviewed for twenty minutes, the same partner will tell you exactly what makes them nervous walking into a kickoff meeting, in language a buyer could use.

Then the certification list. Cut it, or move it below the fold where somebody who needs to verify a license can still find it and nobody else has to walk past it on the way to the work. That list has always been for the firm.

Two constraints keep the exercise from turning into creative writing. Everything has to be true. And every line has to be specific enough to survive both a competitor pasting it onto their own team page and a machine reducing the whole page to a sentence. A line that survives the paste went back to being a credential in a longer coat.

Expect resistance from the people with the most to convert. Someone who spent eleven years earning a designation would rather see the designation than a sentence about what it trained them to notice. The instinct is human...and it's also why the page reads like everyone else's.

Before and after

Before. *Sarah managed a $2B project portfolio at Deloitte.*

After. *Sarah spent five years learning to spot the early warning signs of project failure that standard reports miss, the cultural red flags that show up months before a delivery date slips.*

The first is a fact about Deloitte's confidence, secondhand, from an institution the buyer isn't hiring. The second says what Sarah would notice on their account. Knowledge can describe the ceiling. Expertise knows what you see and feel when you're standing under it.

What backfires

Writing the sentence without the reps behind it. A claim about trained perception in a domain where nobody trained is worse than the credential it replaced, because the credential was at least verifiable. Expertise is what happens when the information runs out, and a buyer finds out where yours runs out in the first hard question.

Run this on your own material

Print your leadership page. Cover the names and the photographs, then try to match any bio back to any person. If the third paragraph could belong to any of four partners, that's a format the firm has been filling in for years.

Then ask a model to describe your firm's people the way a stranger with money would, and read the whole answer rather than the first sentence. What comes back is close to what a buyer gets handed before anybody at the firm knows they exist.

Twenty minutes, before the next proposal goes out. It will ruin the team page permanently, which is the point of running it.

Signals you've cleared it

Advance when buyers ask about a specific person by name before anyone has offered one. When somebody repeats a line from a bio back to you in a meeting where nobody from the firm brought it up. When the question moves from who's on the team to who would be on this.

Hold when the buyer keeps asking for more evidence that the work can be done. More credentials at that point deepen the hole, since qualification isn't the question still open. Hold too when the rewritten page still reads as interchangeable once the names are covered, and when the partner who sits in first meetings can describe what she sees out loud while nothing on the page says it.

Where this connects

Engagement Success in an AI World · When Everyone Stopped Reading, on why sounding like an expert got free while being one did not.

Research Library · Entry 18, expertise, pattern recognition and judgment (Chase and Simon, Ericsson, Kahneman and Klein).

Next move · Credibility clearing opens Proof. Go to *How to show expertise instead of claiming it*.