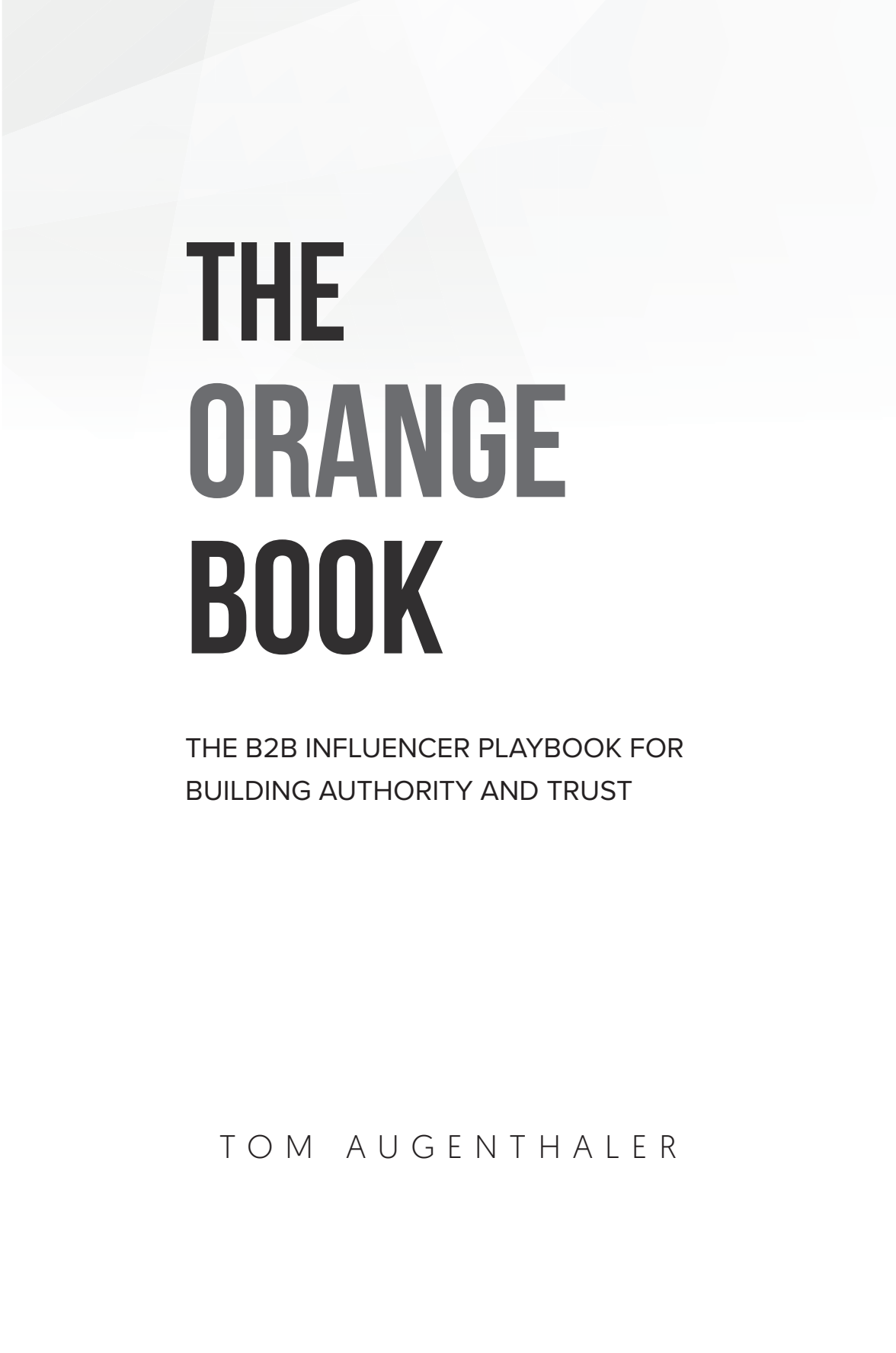


THE ORANGE BOOK

THE B2B INFLUENCER PLAYBOOK FOR
BUILDING AUTHORITY AND TRUST

TOM AUGENTHALER



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T O M A U G E N T H A L E R

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FOREWORD

The Briefing

Most of what you read about influencer marketing is written for brands: how they should find influencers, how they should measure campaigns, how they should spend their budgets.

This book isn't for them. It's for you.

I have a lot of respect for B2B influencers. I know how hard you work to build credibility, to show up with insight, and to stay relevant in a crowded market. But the landscape is shifting fast. AI is changing how buyers discover, learn, and make decisions. Trust in vendors is collapsing. And influencers like you are at the center of it all.

Most of you will step up. You'll protect your credibility. You'll build systems of trust. You'll run your influence like a business. And you'll become indispensable to brands and buyers alike.

The rest? They won't just fade into the noise. They'll miss deals, lose relevance, and get replaced.

This field manual exists so you don't get replaced. It's not theory. It's not fluff. It's the rules, signals, and strategies you'll need to survive and win in the next era of influence. It's based on stuff I see happening every day.

I respect the work you've already done. But things are about to get woolly out there. We have to be ready.

Use it. Live it. Protect your voice and your business.

Tom Augenthaler
551 Media LLC

PART I: THE SHIFT (CHAPT 1 - 2)

The Landscape Has Changed

The rules that used to define influence in B2B marketing no longer hold.

AI has rewritten how people search for insight, how they vet ideas, and how they decide who to trust. At the same time, trust itself is collapsing.

Edelman's 2025 Trust Barometer confirms what many of us already feel: belief in institutions is eroding across business, government, media, and NGOs. The cracks are especially deep in technology, where innovation now moves faster than accountability. Buyers and audiences no longer start from trust. They start from doubt.

For influencers, that is both threat and opportunity.

The threat is simple: your audience has options. They can bypass you in a click. AI can summarize your ideas faster than you can publish them. The audience's tolerance for fluff is gone.

The opportunity is harder, but more valuable. Audiences still crave credible insight, original perspective, and human voice. They want it from someone they trust.

Your job is to become that someone.

That is what this shift is really about, not content volume, not follower count, but trust transfer: moving credibility from you to the brands and ideas you represent without losing it in the process.

Let's start where the shift is clearest: the buyer journey itself.

Chapter 1

THE NEW BUYER JOURNEY

The B2B buyer did not evolve. They defected.

They have gone dark: stealthier, smarter, and far more selective. They do not fill out forms or wait to be nurtured. They self-educate privately and on their own terms. But they are not the only ones who have changed; the audiences you speak to have changed too.

Your followers, listeners, and readers are not passive consumers of content. They are operators in their own right: decision makers, advisors, and connectors. They build their own networks, trade insights in real time, and filter everything they see through one question: Can I trust this?

A CIO who once relied on vendor briefings now opens ChatGPT. Not because it is perfect, but because it is fast. It filters the noise. A procurement lead who once turned to

Gartner now gathers perspective in a private Slack group. A CMO who might have joined your webinar now listens to your podcast, studies your tone, and decides whether you actually understand their world.

AI now shapes how your audience discovers you. It decides whether your ideas surface or stay buried. Peers and private communities refine how people perceive you long before you enter the conversation. By the time someone interacts with your content, they already have an opinion about your credibility, earned or lost.

This is the influencer's new reality. You are not just competing for reach; you are competing for relevance inside invisible networks. AI determines what gets seen. People determine what gets believed. Your authority is shaped by algorithms and by the quiet conversations that happen when you are not in the room.

■ **The New Visibility Problem**

Most marketing systems were built for a public web: clicks, views, downloads, and engagement scores. Those metrics no longer tell the whole story.

Real decisions happen in private spaces such as closed communities, group chats, and DMs.

Some newer MarTech and AI tools can map these “dark” areas through sentiment analysis or network insights. But access does not equal influence. You may be able to see

a signal, yet you are not part of the conversation until your audience trusts you enough to bring you in.

Visibility means your audience can see you. Access means your audience trusts you enough to include you in their world: their conversations, their thinking, their decision-making. Influence begins there.

■ The Trust Gap

Buyers, audiences, and communities share one thing: very little tolerance for spin.

They do not reject marketing because they dislike it; they reject it because they have seen too much that overpromises and underdelivers.

Whitepapers still matter. In fact, they are quietly making a comeback. But readers expect depth, not decoration. They can recognize filler in a single paragraph. The same applies to your LinkedIn posts, your podcast, or your conference panel. Audiences listen for truth, not polish.

The data proves it. Only 29 percent of buyers say they trust vendor salespeople. By contrast, about 80 percent trust industry analysts, and roughly two-thirds trust business consultants. ([Forrester](#))

That is where real credibility lives: with independent experts, practitioners, and peers.

When your audience believes you, that belief transfers from you to the brands you represent. That is the essence of influence.

■ The Influence Opportunity

For influencers, this shift creates both risk and reward.

The risk: sound like everyone else, play it safe, or post AI-generated filler, and your audience will scroll past you.

The reward: share original insight, offer perspective grounded in experience, and you become the trusted filter people rely on to make sense of the noise.

Your audience does not follow you merely for information. They follow you because you help them learn and think. You turn complexity into clarity. You connect what is happening in the market with what it means for their business, their team, and their reputation.

The modern buying journey does not begin with a brand. It begins with you.

So when those conversations unfold in a boardroom, a Slack thread, or a private chat, ask yourself one question:

Are you the voice they are quoting or the noise they are ignoring?

Chapter 2

THE EROSION OF TRUST

Here is what nobody wants to admit: audiences do not start from trust anymore. They start from doubt.

They have been oversold, underdelivered, and disappointed too many times. Skepticism is no longer a red flag, but instead, it is self-defense.

Edelman's 2025 Trust Barometer makes it clear. Confidence in institutions continues to slide across nearly every market. In technology — the industry that promises progress — trust is eroding fastest. People believe innovation is moving faster than responsibility, and they are right to question who is steering it and why.

That collapse in confidence has changed the audience's default posture toward everything you say. Every post,

collaboration, and partnership now triggers the same silent test: Do I believe this?

■ **How It Shows Up**

A company publishes a case study and calls it a success story. The audience assumes it was edited until it glows.

A podcast guest shares a vision. If the host never challenges them, it sounds like advertising.

A webinar promises insight but turns into a sales pitch.

Even influencer content gets scrutinized. Audiences can tell when your voice is real and when it is sponsored. They do not need analytics to detect it; they feel it in your phrasing, your restraint, and the way you dodge or confront hard truths.

This is the new environment: attention is limited, skepticism is high, and audiences are quick to withdraw belief.

■ **The Trust Deficit**

When people cannot rely on institutions, they turn to individuals who have earned credibility through action.

They look for practitioners who share what actually happened — not the slide-deck version.

They listen to advisors who tell uncomfortable truths because integrity outlasts popularity.

They follow experts whose insights are backed by experience, not slogans.

That is the field you now play on. You are not competing with brands; you are competing with other trusted voices inside your audience's circle. If they believe someone else more than you, your reach does not matter.

■ The Fine Line

Here is the tension. The same brands that want your authenticity also want your approval. They will fund your work, but they prefer that you stay agreeable.

It is tempting to go along. A softer opinion keeps partnerships smooth. But every time you trade honesty for harmony, you dilute what made you valuable in the first place.

The influencers who last understand the balance. They challenge assumptions without hostility. They clarify instead of criticize. They ask questions that make both the brand and the audience think harder.

Authenticity is not rebellion; it is responsibility. It means being reliable in principle even when your tone changes or your paycheck depends on tact.

■ The Cost of Compromise

You cannot measure trust the way you measure clicks, yet its loss shows up fast. Comments stop. Invitations slow.

Engagement looks the same in numbers but feels hollow in conversation.

Once your credibility slips, no volume of content or sponsorship can replace it. Trust builds through consistent behavior and collapses through a single compromised choice.

Your audience forgives mistakes but they do not forgive deceit.

■ **The Orange Book Lesson**

Credibility is capital. Guard it. Grow it. Spend it only where it compounds.

In a market overflowing with noise, trust has become the ultimate scarcity. The audience that believes you will carry your ideas farther than any algorithm ever will.

Lose that belief, and every other metric becomes meaningless.

PART 2:

WHAT'S WORKING WITH B2B INFLUENCERS (3-5)

The influencers who survive aren't the loudest. They're the smartest.

They've learned that volume doesn't equal influence. Noise gets attention. Insight keeps it.

What separates the signal from the static is simple: depth over breadth, voice over volume, ecosystems over ego.

The influencers commanding real attention and real budgets have figured out what many still miss. Buyers don't want more content. They want clarity. They want perspective. They want the truth from someone who's been there.

Jo Peterson doesn't chase every tech trend. She goes deep into cloud infrastructure because that's where her expertise lives. Tim Crawford keeps his podcast unsponsored because that's where his credibility lives. Sheri Hinish builds her

authority one supply chain insight at a time, always grounded in lived experience, not talking points.

They all understand the same thing. The game has changed.

Influence isn't about being everywhere. It's about being indispensable where you are.

It's about building a voice buyers trust and brands can't replicate.

This is what works. This is how you win.

Chapter 3

DEPTH WINS OVER BREADTH

In this space, one pattern repeats itself. The influencers who last are not the ones who try to say a little about everything. They are the ones who go deep, anchor themselves in real expertise, and share insights that cannot be copied or found in a quick search.

Depth builds credibility. Breadth builds noise.

Look at Jo Peterson. She is not just adding her voice to the cloud conversation; she is shaping it. Her background as an engineer gives her an edge that most commentators lack. When Jo talks about cloud infrastructure, she speaks from experience — from years of solving real technical problems, not from recycled vendor talking points. Her audience can feel that difference. It is why her voice cuts through the noise and carries weight in a crowded market.

The same dynamic plays out with Sheri Hinish in the supply chain world. That space is full of jargon and theory. Yet Sheri stands apart because she does not hover at the surface. She dives in. She translates complexity into clarity. She brings forward the lived experience that makes people stop scrolling and start listening. Her insight is earned, and because it is hers — because it cannot be faked — it resonates more deeply than the hundred other surface-level takes her audience sees each day.

The through line is simple: insight beats information.

Anyone can share information. What audiences crave are insights: interpretations that come only from experience. The influencers who rely on that experience carry an authority that no volume of generic content can match.

■ **The Trap of Shallow Activity**

Here is where many go wrong. They confuse activity with impact. They post because they think frequency will make up for lack of substance. They take sponsorships and conduct interviews without pressing for real answers. They stay polite, stay safe, and wonder why engagement fades.

But safe is bland. Bland gets ignored.

Once your audience stops paying attention, credibility starts slipping away. And when credibility goes, nothing else matters.

The influencers who stand apart are the ones who bring their own lens, even when it risks disagreement. They are not reckless; they are real. They say, “This is my take. This is what I have seen. Here is why it matters.”

Audiences reward that clarity. Brands might squirm, but the smart ones know that an independent voice carries more value than an echo.

■ **Depth Builds Consistency**

Depth is not a one-time act. You cannot earn trust with a single post or a viral episode. It takes consistency.

Jo does not share one smart idea about cloud and disappear. Sheri does not weigh in once a quarter and expect to be remembered. They show up repeatedly, across different moments and formats, always bringing depth, always bringing their particular value.

That consistency is what compounds. When your audience sees your name appear again and again, always attached to substance, you shift from being a voice they notice to a voice they rely on.

That is the leap from noise to influence.

■ **The Orange Book Lesson**

You do not need to be everywhere. You need to be credible where you are.

Depth creates gravity. Consistency builds momentum.

Together, they turn attention into trust and trust into influence.

Skip them, and you become just another post in the feed: forgettable, replaceable, gone in a scroll.

Don't let that be you.

Chapter 4

PURITY AND VOICE

Influence is built on trust, and trust is built on voice. The moment your audience thinks your voice is no longer yours, when it starts to sound scripted or bought, you lose the only thing that makes you valuable.

That is why the smartest influencers protect parts of their platform like sacred ground.

Tim Crawford is a prime example. He runs the *CIO In the Know* podcast, but you cannot buy your way onto it. There are no sponsorship slots, no backdoor deals, and no pay-to-play segments. His guests are CIOs, peers who are shaping technology strategy inside real organizations. They are invited because their perspectives matter, not because they paid to be there.

That purity keeps his platform clean, and it keeps his audience loyal. They know that when they listen, they are going to hear

from people who are in the trenches solving real problems, not delivering a sales pitch.

Sheri Hinish takes the same approach with her *Supply Chain Queen* podcast. No sponsorships. No compromises. Guests earn their seat; they do not pay for it. That choice gives her freedom, freedom to push, to challenge, and to be honest when the easy move would be to nod along. Her audience feels that freedom, and they trust her because of it.

The Line Between Transparency and Compromise

Publishing sponsored content does not automatically mean an influencer has sold out. Some run sponsored channels and still maintain integrity because they have made a deliberate choice about how to operate.

The difference is transparency. They stay open about what is paid and what is not. They choose partnerships they genuinely believe in. They protect their point of view.

Audiences can feel that distinction. It is not about whether money changes hands; it is about whether your voice still sounds like yours.

The Slide Into Noise

There is another side to this.

When every platform becomes a sponsorship vehicle, the quality declines fast. Dialogue turns into a parade of

executives reciting safe corporate talking points. Insight gets replaced by fluff dressed up as thought leadership.

The audience feels the change immediately. They tune out. Once trust erodes, it rarely returns.

■ What Purity Really Means

Purity does not mean you never take money. It means you draw a line.

You decide which parts of your platform are untouchable, the places where your independence will never be questioned. That might be your podcast. It might be your newsletter. It might be a recurring video series or a specific set of articles that always stay unsponsored.

Whatever it is, you protect it. That space becomes the anchor of your credibility. It is where your audience knows they will always get your unfiltered perspective.

Brands may not love it at first. They often prefer influencers who will sell every inch of airtime. But the brands that matter will respect you for holding the line. They know that an independent voice has more pull with buyers than a channel that feels transactional.

That independence also creates leverage. When your audience trusts you, your value rises. Brands pay more to work with influencers whose credibility is intact because they know that trust converts. Integrity is not just moral capital; it is financial capital too.

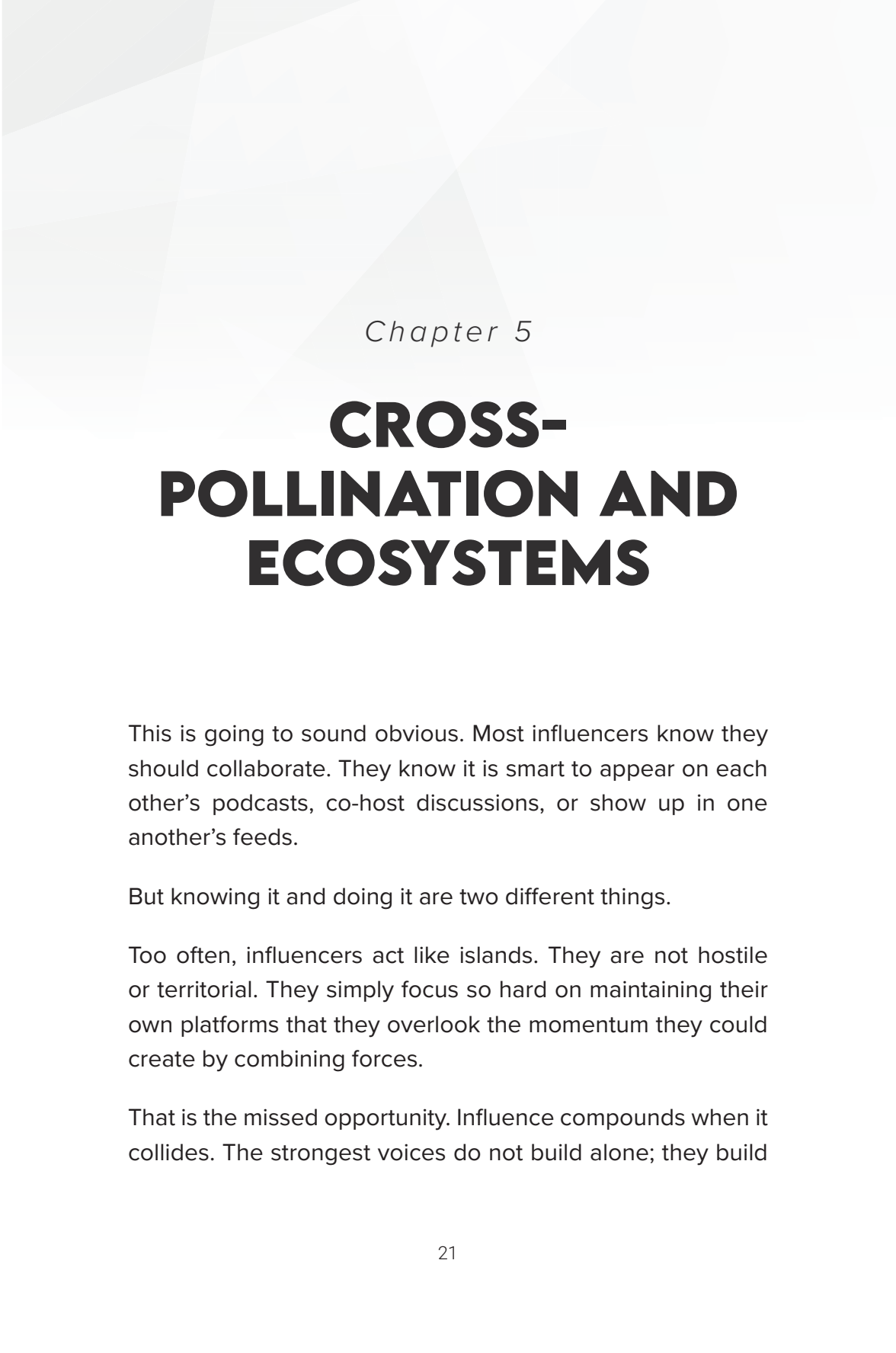
Hold your ground long enough, and you will build a reputation that outlasts any single deal.

■ **The Orange Book Lesson**

Not every dollar is worth taking.

Keep part of your platform pure, and you will always have a voice your audience trusts.

Sell everything, and you will sound like everyone else. When that happens, you will not be heard at all.



Chapter 5

CROSS- POLLINATION AND ECOSYSTEMS

This is going to sound obvious. Most influencers know they should collaborate. They know it is smart to appear on each other's podcasts, co-host discussions, or show up in one another's feeds.

But knowing it and doing it are two different things.

Too often, influencers act like islands. They are not hostile or territorial. They simply focus so hard on maintaining their own platforms that they overlook the momentum they could create by combining forces.

That is the missed opportunity. Influence compounds when it collides. The strongest voices do not build alone; they build

together. They cross-pollinate, they collaborate, and they create gravity.

■ When Voices Combine

Look at Maribel Lopez and Jo Peterson. They do more than publish side by side. They co-create. They have co-hosted podcasts, supported each other's work, and made it clear that they are allies in public. That is not just friendship; it is strategy.

Each expands the other's reach, and together they command more attention than either could alone.

Tim Crawford shows another version of the same dynamic. At events, he is not echoing a host company's talking points. He is sharing insight, spotlighting peers, and demonstrating the value of the network around him. That visibility proves he is not on the fringe of the conversation; he is in the middle of it.

I have seen this effect firsthand. When I worked with Amisha Gandhi, VP of Influencer Marketing at SAP Ariba, on their events, we built a studio right on the show floor. Influencers were not just interviewing executives. They were interviewing each other, riffing with partners, and sparking conversations that felt alive. We created the conditions for that to happen, and the payoff was enormous: high-quality, authentic content that carried momentum for weeks. It worked because it was not a single voice. It was a network in motion.

■ You Do Not Need Permission

Influencers do not need a brand to orchestrate collaboration. You can do it yourselves, at conferences, during meetups, or virtually. You do not need an invitation or a campaign brief. You need initiative.

Every time two credible voices share space, they multiply reach and reinforce trust. Collaboration turns audiences into ecosystems.

■ The Shift from SEO to GEO

Here is the new wrinkle that makes this even more urgent.

The search landscape is changing. The shift from SEO to GEO, from Search Engine Optimization to Generative Engine Optimization, means influence is measured differently. Buyers are no longer relying on Google alone. They are asking AI engines, and those engines surface answers based on authority signals, networked expertise, and cross-referenced credibility.

If your voice is not connected, if it does not appear inside a recognizable ecosystem of trusted experts, you risk being invisible in this new reality. In GEO, isolation equals irrelevance.

■ The Orange Book Lesson

Stop acting like an island.

The influencers who win will operate as part of ecosystems that amplify each other's credibility. They will build collective mass that bends attention their way.

In GEO, gravity wins.

PART 3:

WHERE BRANDS

MISS THE

MARK (6 - 7)

Brands keep making the same mistakes. And influencers keep letting them.

Here's the uncomfortable truth. Most sponsored content in B2B falls short. Not because influencers lack talent, and not because anyone's selling out, but because too many brands still bring a consumer mindset to a business problem. They think influence is about exposure, not credibility. They treat B2B influencers like ad placements, trying to control the message instead of co-creating insight.

That's billboard thinking. And it doesn't work here.

In consumer marketing, you can rent attention. In B2B, you have to earn trust. The audience is smaller, sharper, and far more discerning. They don't care how often your logo

appears. They care whether the ideas make them think differently.

The outcome isn't malicious, it's just misaligned. Campaigns end up too controlled, too deferential to the brand, and occasionally, too safe. When that happens, content loses its edge. The ideas flatten out. The spark that makes influence work disappears.

But it isn't just the brands' fault. Too many influencers haven't learned how to push back or how to educate clients on what real collaboration looks like. They take the brief as-is, deliver what's asked, and move on.

The best ones know better. They help shape the brief, not just follow it. They guide brands toward content with a point of view and conversations that actually say something worth listening to.

This is where most partnerships drift off course. And this is where the next evolution begins.

Chapter 6

PROMOTION AND PROFESSIONALISM

Here is what almost nobody talks about. Too many B2B influencers still run their work like hobbyists.

They produce good content, but then let it die on the vine. Or worse, they make it hard for brands to even work with them: vague statements of work, inflated or misaligned pricing, slow responses. That kind of sloppiness does not just kill momentum. It kills deals.

Decision-makers move fast. If you are slow, vague, or overpriced, someone else gets the call. And once that happens, you are forgotten.

■ The Myth of Organic Reach

Here is the truth. Organic reach is not dead, but it is changing.

AI is reshaping how platforms distribute content. Algorithms no longer just measure clicks and reactions; they interpret meaning, authority, and relevance. That shift changes how visibility is earned.

Organic reach never guaranteed exposure, but it helped. When platforms were less crowded and less driven by AI, consistency alone could get you seen. That is no longer enough.

If you are publishing content and expecting LinkedIn, YouTube, or any other platform to deliver reach on its own, you are relying on luck.

The game is hybrid now. Organic reach gives you the signal. Paid amplification gives it the push. Together, they create real momentum.

If you are not putting some budget behind your best content through amplification, retargeting, or boosting, you are leaving most of your potential impact untouched. Paid promotion does not replace organic distribution; it multiplies it.

Michael Krigsman understands this. That is one reason he is top-tier. He does not just produce insightful conversations with CXOs on *CXOTalk* podcast. He invests in getting that content seen.

He knows that organic reach alone will not sustain visibility, so he plays the game the way it is designed to be played. Then he goes further. He reports back to his clients with full transparency, showing hard data on how content performed not just at launch but months later.

That professionalism builds trust, and it builds repeat business. I know this because my clients have told me as much. They were impressed that Michael continued to promote his work long after publishing and that he shared the data openly. That is what accountability looks like.

■ **Networks Are Multipliers**

This is not just about money. It is also about networks.

Influencers need to drop the ego trip that says they can do everything solo. Promotion networks amplify reach faster and farther than any algorithm.

You should be part of circles where peers support each other's work, commenting, reposting, and sharing with substance. Not empty likes or emojis, but real engagement that adds context and credibility.

Done right, it creates a multiplier effect. Your peers help your content travel further, and you do the same for them. That is how modern influence compounds.

■ What Professionalism Looks Like

Here is what discipline in this business looks like:

- **Promote your content relentlessly.** Accept that paid amplification is part of the job.
- **Join or create promotion networks with peers** who will amplify your best work.
- **Make your business easy to work with.** Use itemized statements of work, clear pricing, and consistent communication.
- **Keep your pricing stable.** Do not change rates on the fly or alter sponsorship conditions midstream. Brands notice, and it erodes trust faster than anything else.
- **Respond within 24 hours.** Brands move fast. If you cannot keep up, they move on.
- **Track and report results.** Do not rely on surface-level engagement. Show real impact, with data whenever possible.

Professionalism is not a nice-to-have. It is what separates the part-time creators from the operators who keep getting hired.

The influencers who run their work like a business: predictable, transparent, and responsive, earn a different kind of trust. They are the ones brands come back to because working with them feels safe, competent, and repeatable.

■ The GEO Reality

With Generative Engine Optimization replacing traditional SEO, visibility is being rewritten.

Brands are watching outcomes more carefully. Budgets are tighter. Attention is more expensive. In this environment, great content without disciplined promotion is a waste of everyone's time.

Influencers who treat their work like a business, who invest, measure, and operate with intent, will dominate the next wave of influence.

■ The Orange Book Lesson

Organic reach is a spark. Amplification is the fire.

Stop waiting for algorithms to notice you.

Promote with intent. Back your best work with budget.

Build alliances that move your content further.

Engage with peers who add substance, not noise.

Operate like a professional. Be easy to hire, fast to respond, and clear about your value.

Attention follows structure, not luck.

Visibility favors momentum, not hope.

Professionals stay visible. Amateurs fade away.

Chapter 7

GUARDRAILS FOR AI

AI is not coming. It is already here.

The pace of change is dizzying. Buyers are using tools like ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, and Perplexity to compress their research, test ideas, and narrow their focus long before they ever engage with a vendor.

For influencers, that is both a weapon and a warning.

AI can help you structure content, outline ideas, and accelerate production. Used well, it sharpens your workflow and helps you scale your ideas faster. But if you hand the mic to the machine and stop injecting your voice, your scars, and your lived experience, you lose the only thing that makes you valuable.

Buyers can spot AI-generated fluff instantly. And the GEO engines, the same systems indexing authority for generative search, will stop rewarding it too.

■ The Guardrails

If you are going to use AI, and you should, treat it like a co-pilot, not the driver.

Here is how to do that:

- **Scaffold, do not outsource.** Let AI help you frame ideas, but make the substance yours.
- **Edit with precision.** Your voice, your cadence, your edge, they have to cut through.
- **Inject lived experience.** Machines can mimic tone, but they cannot replicate your perspective from the trenches. That is your unfair advantage.
- **Stay consistent.** GEO favors persistence. Episodic series, repeatable formats, and reinforced messages carry more weight than one-offs.

AI gives you leverage, but without human texture, your influence flattens.

■ SEO vs. GEO in Real Time

This shift is not theoretical. It is happening right now.

On *DM Radio*, [Eric Kavanagh](#) [hosted a show](#) with Amisha Gandhi and me on how to get noticed by ChatGPT. The premise was simple: the foundation of SEO, built over the last two decades, is collapsing. Give the show a listen.

Buyers are not typing keywords into Google anymore. They are asking AI engines direct questions. And those engines

are not surfacing the highest bidder. They are surfacing authority.

Eric saw it firsthand. A previous guest who barely registered in ChatGPT before the show (and should have) became recognized as a credible authority afterward.

Why? Because the long-form interview was transcribed, turned into a podcast, clipped for social, and reinforced across LinkedIn. GEO engines triangulated those signals, the voice, the transcript, the backlinks, the community conversation, and started ranking that individual higher in AI-driven queries.

That is the game now. SEO was about keywords and hacks. GEO is about consistency and credibility.

AI engines are mapping reputation the way Google once mapped hyperlinks. They are looking for trust signals across formats: video, transcripts, articles, and community interactions. If you are not feeding them that consistent signal, you will not appear when it matters.

■ The Coming Storm

In two years, AI-generated video and synthetic influencers will be indistinguishable from reality.

Avatars will look human and voices will sound natural. Content will be written, recorded, and rendered by AI engines in minutes. Brands will use them at scale because they are fast, cheap, and frictionless.

What this means for trust is uncertain. It could erode it further, or it could simply shift where audiences place it, from institutions and brands to verified individuals and authentic communities. This means you.

What is certain is that there will be more content than ever before. The flood is coming. Every feed, search result, and recommendation engine will overflow with machine-made material.

In that world, signal and individuality become everything.

Audiences will not remember who posted first. They will remember who sounded real. The influencers who stand out will be the ones whose ideas carry a distinct fingerprint, shaped by experience, conviction, and a recognizable voice.

Authenticity and perspective will not just be advantages. They will be survival traits. When everything looks real, what matters most is what feels real to your audience.

■ The Orange Book Lesson

AI is not your savior. It is your accelerator, your leverage.

It gives you speed, not soul. If you let it write for you, you become generic. If you use it to amplify your perspective, you become unignorable.

And here is the turning point: in the GEO era, you are not just influencing your audience and buyers. You contribute to the training the machines that buyers rely on to make decisions.

That is the new leverage. That is the new visibility.

But it only works if you stay disciplined, consistent, and unapologetically credible.

That is your moat. That is how you stay ahead ... for now.

PART 4:

BUILDING THE

SYSTEM (8-9)

Influence isn't art. It's architecture.

You can have the sharpest insights in the world, but if you're sloppy in execution, you'll never build lasting authority. The influencers who endure aren't just talented creators. They're disciplined operators who treat influence like the business it is.

They show up with consistency. They price with intent. They make it easy for brands to work with them and impossible for audiences to ignore. They promote strategically and measure what actually matters.

Most importantly, they play the long game. They understand that authority compounds only when it's protected, invested in, and sharpened through discipline.

This isn't about catching lightning with a viral post. It's about building a system that works on purpose, one that turns

insight into process, credibility into capital, and consistency into momentum.

This is your blueprint.

Chapter 8

THE NON-NEGOTIABLES

Every influencer wants to be seen as a trusted authority. But many never get there.

They treat influence like a side hustle instead of a serious business. They post when they feel like it. They price without understanding their clients. They make brands work too hard to hire them. That is not strategy. That is amateur hour.

I've spent the last 15 years working with B2B influencers, building programs, and watching what works, and what absolutely doesn't. These lessons weren't picked up from a blog post or a conference panel. They were earned the hard way, in the field, working alongside people who got it right and plenty who didn't.

What I'm sharing here are the hard-won truths from that experience, the stuff I wish every professional influencer

understood from day one. If you get this right, you'll build not just a following, but a career.

If you want long-term authority and long-term revenue, you need rules. Non-negotiables.

The ones who get this right build momentum.

The ones who don't watch opportunity pass them by. Don't let this pass you by.

■ 1. Credibility Is the Product

Your credibility is your currency. It is what brands are really buying when they hire you.

Professionalism matters, sure, but that's just the entry fee. What keeps you in the room is your perspective. The way you see the world. The experience you bring from actually doing the work.

When a buyer quotes your post in a meeting or a CMO mentions your name in a planning session, that's your stock price going up. That's proof that your credibility carries weight beyond the algorithm.

You don't rent that kind of trust. You earn it. You protect it. You invest it wisely.

■ 2. Price With Alignment

Smart pricing isn't about charging more. It's about charging right.

If your systems and processes are built for enterprise, don't pitch startups like they have Fortune 100 budgets. If you work mostly with SaaS firms trying to scale, price for their speed and constraints, not corporate comfort.

Price for the clients you actually want. Align your offers with their world, their speed, their budget cycles, and their expectations.

Enterprises pay for stability. Startups pay for agility. Know which game you're playing.

Pricing clarity signals confidence. Confusion signals risk.

■ 3. Define Your Boundaries

Every influencer who lasts draws a line somewhere.

You need to know what you'll say yes to, and what you'll never attach your name to. Keep parts of your platform clean. If you start mixing every brand message with your own, your voice loses power.

This is where many consumer influencers go wrong. They chase every sponsorship that lands in their inbox, flooding their feeds with ads that blur their identity. The result? Their audience tunes out, and their credibility evaporates. In B2B, that kind of erosion happens slower, but it's just as deadly.

If a brand's expectations threaten your independence, walk away. Fast. Short-term cash never beats long-term credibility.

Once you sell your trust, you'll spend years trying to buy it back.

■ **4. Operationalize Authority**

Authority isn't just about being smart. It's about being consistent and reliable.

Have systems that make your expertise repeatable: a research process, a content rhythm, metrics you can report on.

When brands know exactly what working with you looks like, you stop being a risk. You become a safe, strategic choice, and that's when they come back. Repeat business isn't luck; it's the reward for being predictable in the best possible way.

Pros don't wing it. They build frameworks that scale.

■ **5. Build a Feedback Loop**

Real influence has receipts.

Ask your clients what moved the needle. Did your work drive engagement? Change perception? Help open doors?

Touch base after every campaign. Find out what actually worked. Learn where your content showed up in conversations or sales cycles. Then use those insights to tell better stories, not hypotheticals, but evidence.

Even if you can't share specific metrics or client names, build your own case studies. Talk about what kind of content performed best, what formats landed, and what surprised people. It shows brands you're not just creating content, you're analyzing impact.

Capture what you learn and use it to refine your offers and prove ROI the next time. The influencers who track their results and turn them into stories build more credibility with every campaign.

Data doesn't replace your voice. It amplifies it.

■ **The Orange Book Lesson**

Influence runs on credibility.

You want to be respected, remembered, and paid? Guard your credibility first. Then run your work like a business.

Build systems that make your expertise scalable. Price with alignment. Protect your independence.

The amateurs chase attention. The professionals compound trust.

And in this business, trust pays dividends.

Chapter 9

THE LONG GAME

Anyone can grab a sponsorship check. Anyone can crank out content for a quarter.

But the people who matter, the CIOs, CMOs, VPs, practitioners, and decision-makers, aren't impressed by one-hit wonders. They're watching who's still standing when the buzz dies down, who's still trusted after the algorithm changes, who's evolved while others burned out.

The truth is simple: long-term authority beats short-term dollars.

But it isn't just about showing up. It's about adapting while staying authentic. Platforms shift. Tech resets the rules. What keeps you in the game is how fast you evolve without losing your core voice.

1. Passion Sparks. Discipline Endures. Adaptation Sustains.

Passion is what gets you started. It's that first rush of energy when you discover your topic and see traction. But passion alone is short-lived. Everyone's passionate when their post goes viral. The test comes when the feed goes quiet.

Discipline keeps you steady. It is recording a solo episode when your guest cancels. It's rewriting a post that flopped. It's showing up anyway.

But the influencers who endure do one thing more: they adapt.

They read signals. They study how audiences shift, how formats evolve, and how new tools like AI reshape distribution. Passion lights the fuse. Discipline keeps it burning. Adaptation keeps it from going out.

Passion gets you noticed. Discipline earns respect. Adaptation ensures survival.

2. Consistency Builds Memory. Evolution Builds Legacy.

Audiences don't remember one-offs; they remember patterns. The voices that stand out are the ones that show up week after week, year after year, with something that actually moves the conversation forward.

And in B2B, that consistency isn't optional. It's essential. The buying cycle is longer, often stretching over weeks or months, with multiple stakeholders weighing in.

Your audience might not act after one post, podcast, or video. But if they see you show up consistently across that entire journey, you stay in their minds. You become the voice they associate with clarity and credibility when it's finally time to make a move.

That's because the B2B journey isn't a straight line. It's a process of discernment. People move through stages: awareness, consideration, evaluation, and decision. They're filtering noise, testing ideas, and validating information long before they engage directly with a brand. Your consistency ensures you're there at each step, offering insight when they're exploring, credibility when they're comparing, and confidence when they're ready to act.

That's why one-hit wonders don't survive here. The timeline of trust is slower, but it's deeper.

Evan Kirstel didn't become a trusted authority through bursts of effort. He built a rhythm, steady posting, video commentary, live sessions, and collaborations, that trained his audience to expect substance. Over the years, he's evolved his style and focus as platforms and technologies shifted, but his consistency has never wavered. He's proof that credibility compounds when you keep showing up with something worth saying.

Consistency builds memory. Evolution builds legacy. If you're not growing, your audience outgrows you.

■ **3. Build an Adaptive Content Ecosystem**

Influence doesn't live on one channel anymore. It's an ecosystem that breathes when done right. Podcast, newsletter, LinkedIn, YouTube, and roundtables, each one feeds the others.

Your podcast fuels your posts. Your posts feed your newsletter. Your newsletter drives conversations that turn into speaking invites. Every piece reinforces the others. That's how you build presence, not noise.

AI has changed discovery again. GEO engines, recommendation models, and smart feeds surface content that signals authority across platforms. The more interconnected your ecosystem, the stronger your signal.

■ **4. Play for Impact, Not Just Income**

Chasing sponsorships can keep you busy. Playing for impact builds a reputation that lasts through market shifts.

Jim Harris is a perfect example. His monetization isn't tied to campaigns. It's tied to outcomes. Speaking, executive workshops, and thought leadership. He helps leaders navigate disruption, and that impact keeps him relevant no matter how the economy turns.

If your income depends solely on brand deals, you're on borrowed time. Impact gives you staying power. When budgets tighten, audiences still look to trusted guides for clarity. Be one of them.

■ 5. Guard and Evolve Your Voice

Your voice is your moat. Not your LinkedIn following. Not your podcast feed. Those can be copied, bought, or disrupted. But your voice, how you think, interpret, and communicate, is the one thing no one can replicate.

And soon, AI will mimic tone, cadence, even style. Synthetic influencers will look and sound indistinguishable from real ones. But they won't have what you have: trust, context, and lived experience.

Guard that. Keep it visible in your work. Edit ruthlessly so your perspective stays sharp. Update your thinking as the world changes. Your audience follows your evolution, not your perfection.

Your voice is compounding interest. Protect it, refine it, reinvest it.

■ The Orange Book Lesson

Influence isn't built in a quarter. It's built across cycles, platform shifts, tech revolutions, and market turns.

Passion may start the fire, but discipline and adaptation keep it burning.

The B2B journey takes time. Audiences don't remember who was trending last year. They remember who kept showing up with clarity and conviction when the noise got loud.

If you treat influence like a career, you'll outlast the algorithms.

If you treat it like a side hustle, you'll vanish with the trend.

PART 5:

THE FUTURE (10)

The game is changing faster than most influencers realize.

While you've been optimizing for LinkedIn algorithms, buyers have moved to ChatGPT. While you've been chasing SEO, the world has shifted to GEO. While you've been building solo, the smart money is on ecosystems.

The future belongs to influencers who understand that AI isn't the enemy—it's the accelerant. The ones who know that collaboration beats competition. The ones who realize that in a world flooded with generated content, authentic voice becomes the scarcest resource.

Eric Kavanagh is already there along with **Michael Krigsman**, **Adrian Brady-Cesana**, **Stacy Sherman**, **Casey Cheshire** and more. The **DataVengers** get it (more on them in the next chapter). The question is: will you?

The shift is here. The opportunity is real. But only if you're willing to evolve.

Chapter 10

THE FUTURE OF INFLUENCE

Influencers like you already know you need to use AI. Most of you are doing it. The real question isn't whether you'll use it, but how you'll use it without diluting your credibility.

The smart ones have already figured it out. AI isn't the destination. It's the scaffolding. The real value is still your lived experience, your opinions, and your discipline to persevere when everyone else is chasing shortcuts.

■ 1. GEO Is the New Gravity

In the GEO era, your credibility doesn't just shape your audience; it also shapes your brand. It shapes the machines your audience uses to make decisions. Tools like ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Gemini constantly scrape the internet for authority signals.

When your voice is consistent, trusted, and visible in the right places, those engines recognize it. They surface your insights at the exact moment your audience is deciding whom to trust. That's leverage no ad budget can buy.

A clear example is Eric Kavanagh's DM Radio. One guest wasn't even on ChatGPT's radar at first, but after appearing on the show, which lives on as a podcast, a YouTube channel, and searchable transcripts, the algorithms began surfacing that guest as an authority. The credibility and reach of Eric's platform did the heavy lifting. That is GEO in action, and it is rewriting how influence works.

■ 2. Collective Influence Is the New Accelerator

Collaboration is the next evolution.

Groups like the Datavengers, which includes Scott Taylor, show what happens when influencers stop acting like islands. It is a small collective, but you don't need a dozen people to make this work. Two or three aligned voices can create momentum that no single feed can match.

You don't have to be in the same room. If one of you is at an event, the others can amplify remotely, clipping, sharing, and adding commentary in real time. That is how digital gravity builds, through coordinated credibility, not just reach.

I watched this dynamic play out at SAP Ariba events. We built a studio on the show floor and brought in influencers like Kevin Benedict, Dion Hinchcliffe, Tamara McCleary, Maribel Lopez, and Michael Krigsman to name just a few. Some

interviewed executives. Others interviewed each other. We kept the content alive, publishing on LinkedIn in real time, then amplifying it for weeks. That mix of collaboration and distribution created waves of human, high-trust content that outperformed any corporate campaign. It wasn't brand-speak. It was trust transfer in motion.

■ **3. Small Teams. Big Signals.**

You don't need a broadcast studio or corporate budget to pull this off.

Find a quiet corner at an event. Record conversations with peers. Trade interviews. Capture moments and push them live while the energy is still fresh. When you collaborate like this, your content hits more feeds and gets cross-referenced in GEO engines.

That means your credibility compounds digitally as well as socially. Collectives, whether big like the DataVengers or small groups of professionals backing each other up, will become the new nodes of authority in generative search.

Influence today isn't about standing apart. It's about building connected credibility that humans and machines both recognize as real.

■ **4. The Fork in the Road**

So where does this leave you? You have two paths.

Keep doing what you've always done, post occasionally, rely on organic reach, and hope the algorithm remembers your name. Or lean into what's next: disciplined publishing, peer collaboration, strategic amplification, and a plan for visibility in AI generative engines.

The future belongs to influencers who treat GEO as seriously as SEO once was, and who understand that while AI is the accelerant, discipline and voice remain the moat.

■ The Orange Book Lesson

AI won't replace you. It will expose you.

It will surface who is consistent, credible, and connected, and who is faking it.

The future of influence doesn't belong to those who shout the loudest. It belongs to those who build networks of trust, stay visible through change, and teach the machines what real authority sounds like.

Play this right, and you won't just keep up with the future. You'll help define it.

