



The Rise of Trust-Based Marketing: Why Networks Now Matter More Than AI

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Network Campaign (Photo: LinkedIn)

New research reveals professionals rely on human networks for clarity as AI pressures mount; LinkedIn expands BrandLink to help brands meet buyers where trust lives.

In the face of growing AI disruption and digital noise, professionals are turning away from algorithms and search engines—and back to the people they trust. According to new global research released by LinkedIn, the #1 most trusted source for workplace insight is not artificial intelligence or online search, but professionals' own networks.

As AI continues to reshape how we work, more than half (51%) of professionals surveyed say learning about AI feels like “another job.” A significant number (33%) admit to feeling embarrassed about how little they understand it, and 35% report being nervous to discuss AI at work for fear of sounding uninformed. For Gen Z professionals, the pressure is even higher—nearly twice as likely as Gen X to exaggerate or lie about their AI skills.

This anxiety is driving professionals back to familiar ground. Nearly two-thirds (64%) say their colleagues help them make faster, more confident decisions, and 43% rank their professional network as their top source of advice at work—above search engines or AI tools.

“Despite the hype, professionals are telling us that trusted human connections are still what matter most when navigating change,” said Karin Kimbrough, LinkedIn’s Chief Economist.

The Rise of Trust-Based Marketing

The shift toward people-powered decision-making isn’t just changing how individuals learn—it’s reshaping how businesses sell. The research, which surveyed over 7,000 B2B marketers globally, found that 77% of marketing leaders believe buyers are vetting brands through their networks, not just through traditional company messaging.

This is particularly true among younger buyers. Millennials and Gen Z now make up 71% of B2B purchasing decisions, and 75% of 18–24-year-olds say there’s “no substitute” for the intuition and insights they get from trusted colleagues—even as AI becomes more advanced.

In response, marketers are doubling down on authenticity. A full 80% of those surveyed said they’re increasing investment in community-driven content, tapping employees, creators, and experts to build trust. The same percentage say trusted creators are “essential” to earning credibility with next-gen buyers.

LinkedIn Expands BrandLink to Meet Demand for Trusted Voices

To support this evolution in marketing, LinkedIn is expanding its BrandLink platform with a new content initiative: Shows by LinkedIn. These original, topic-focused video series will feature trusted industry voices and creators, helping brands reach audiences through relevant, human-centered storytelling.

The first four shows launching this season include:

Small Business Builders – Presented by AT&T Business

Founder’s Blueprint – Presented by IBM

AI in Action – Presented by SAP

The CEO Playbook – Presented by ServiceNow



Each show will deliver exclusive content designed to help professionals learn, grow, and engage with the issues they care about most—right in their LinkedIn feed.

LinkedIn is also expanding BrandLink’s global reach, partnering with respected publishers such as BBC Studios, TED, The Economist, Vox Media, and BNR.

A Call to Reconnect

The findings underscore a powerful reality: in a time of uncertainty and technological acceleration, professionals are seeking clarity not from code—but from community.

As Catherine Fisher, LinkedIn Career Expert, put it: “Your network isn’t just who you know. It’s your most valuable asset when navigating change.”

LinkedIn is inviting professionals to join the conversation on how to grow their confidence and career through meaningful connections—and to register for its upcoming AI in Work Day, where experts will offer insights and tools to help people adapt, learn, and lead in the AI-powered workplace.

About the Research

The findings are based on two global surveys conducted by Censuswide in July 2025, involving over 19,000 professionals and 7,000 B2B marketers across 15 countries. Additional data was sourced from LinkedIn platform conversations between July 2024 and June 2025.

