

A PR Playbook for Professional Services: *Rethinking Visibility in the AI Era*



For decades, professional services firms have competed on expertise.

The growth challenge has never been about simply doing good work. It has been about showing expertise in ways that earn credibility and trust. Thought leadership became the tool for building that credibility, and owned content took center stage.

But something fundamental is changing. Increasingly, customers are finding firms through answers generated by AI. These systems don't just index content. They interpret it, summarize it and recombine it.

Today, visibility operates differently. Now, to get its name in front of potential customers, a firm needs to navigate a new discipline: **generative engine optimization (GEO)**.

Put simply, GEO is about ensuring your expertise shows up in AI-generated answers—not just high up on a results page. The question is no longer whether your firm publishes insight. The question is whether the systems shaping buyer discovery recognize your insights as expertise in the first place.

In this new environment, authority still matters. In fact, it may matter more than ever before. However, there's a difference—while search engines rank content, AI systems determine which sources to trust.

For professional services firms, public relations has quietly become a key driver of visibility because it helps AI recognize who to trust. In many ways, this shift brings PR back to what it has always done best, now amplified by GEO.



What PR *Actually* Does

To understand why this shift matters, it helps to revisit the role PR has always played in building credibility. While content allows a firm to express its ideas, PR ensures those ideas are picked up beyond owned channels.

At its core, PR creates value in three ways:

- Validates expertise externally
- Expands reach beyond owned channels
- Reinforces trust

These outcomes are not achieved through isolated efforts. A successful PR program requires consistency, clear areas of expertise and alignment with broader marketing initiatives.

Each part reinforces the other. Without content, there is nothing to amplify. Without PR, ideas remain confined to owned channels. And without repetition, neither creates a lasting impact.

This idea becomes easier to understand when you step back and look at how credibility actually forms. Buyers rarely trust a company based solely on what it publishes about itself. Trust builds when that perspective shows up in places they already view as credible.

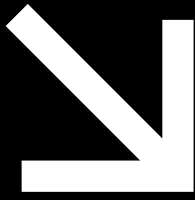
This idea is not new. It's exactly the point Al Ries and Laura Ries made in *The Fall of Advertising and the Rise of PR*. They argued that brands are not primarily built through advertising or self-published messaging, but through public relations. In other words, credibility comes from what others say about you, not what you say about yourself.

For marketers, this creates an important distinction. Publishing content is necessary, but alone it is not enough. A strong point of view only becomes valuable when it is recognized beyond your own channels.

Despite this, many firms continue to prioritize owned content. The result? A visibility model heavily weighted toward what brands publish, rather than how those ideas are validated in the market.

That approach worked in a world driven by search rankings. But as discovery shifts toward generative AI, it is forcing firms to revisit a simple idea: it's not just about what you publish. It's about whether your ideas spread.





Why PR Is Harder Than It Looks

PR may seem straightforward at first glance, but executing it well is another story. Success isn't just about sending out press releases—it depends on timing, positioning and relationships.

These elements are what make ideas actually stick. Good timing ensures your expertise enters conversations when people are paying attention. Smart positioning shapes how your insights are perceived. Strong relationships open doors to media.

Most firms struggle with the time piece of the PR equation. Subject matter experts often have limited time. Participation can be inconsistent. Processes are rarely standardized. Approvals can drag on forever.

These challenges matter because PR builds momentum over time. When consistency falters, recognition stalls. That's why firms that treat PR as an ad hoc activity—flipping on the switch only when there's an announcement—tend to struggle.

On the flip side, firms that invest in dedicated PR capabilities see that effort compound. Recognition grows, authority builds and its ideas start to carry more weight in the market. Which naturally begs the question: How can firms make PR both consistent and repeatable?

Turning PR Into *A System*

Most PR opportunities fall into a set of repeatable categories:

- Expert commentary
- Thought leadership
- Proprietary insight
- Company news

While news announcements often feel the most tangible and easy to control, focusing too heavily on them becomes limiting in the era of GEO.

Firms must shift from asking “*What can we announce?*” to “*Where can we contribute?*”

Consistently showing up with expert commentary, thought leadership and proprietary insights allows a firm to contribute its point of view to ongoing conversations. This focus on creating a durable media presence is becoming even more important as the way visibility is earned evolves.





The *New* Visibility Model

For many years, discovery followed a relatively stable pattern. Search engines indexed pages, buyers clicked through results and firms competed for position. Visibility was largely driven by SEO, brand awareness and referrals. Up to this point, PR has been “merely” a credibility driver.

Visibility is **moving from rankings to recognition.**

Generative AI does not prioritize a single top result. It looks across articles, research and commentary, then determines which sources appear credible enough to inform its response. In simple terms, it is no longer about being the most visible page. It is about being a trusted source.

For professional services firms, this shift represents both a challenge and an opportunity. Adapting to this environment requires rethinking how presence is built and sustained. At the same time, firms that establish authority early will shape how topics are understood and discussed. And as recognition builds across sources, visibility will compound.

How Trust Is *Actually Built*

While the technology may be new, the underlying mechanics of trust are not.

When a customer hires a professional service provider, they're not buying a product—they're purchasing judgment. More than in any other industry, the professional services buyer journey is centered around trust. And trust can't be built in isolation.

When a decision is being made, buyers rely on signals that others recognize a firm's expertise. Those signals take many forms:

- Media coverage
- Speaking engagements
- Published research
- Analyst recognition
- Recommendations from trusted sources

These signals function as social proof. They tell a buyer that a firm doesn't just talk the talk; they walk the walk. Now, instead of humans going through this thought process on their own, they're relying on AI to do the legwork and determine which voices appear credible within a given topic.

AI does this by looking for patterns across the internet.

- Who gets cited frequently?
- Which firms appear in authoritative publications?
- Which perspectives are referenced across multiple sources?

AI doesn't just find information. It decides who to trust. And when those patterns emerge consistently, authority becomes easier for a system to identify.

A Shift in *Competitive Advantage*

Historically, firms that invested heavily in content marketing could dominate visibility. Publishing frequently and optimizing for search was often enough to win.

Now, showing up where it matters requires a combination of owned and earned content. Firms that are recognized across credible sources are more likely to appear in AI-generated answers, while those relying solely on owned content may struggle to achieve the same visibility.

To build credibility at scale, firms must focus on creating three layers of visibility:

01 / Insight generation: producing distinctive expertise

02 / Content distribution: publishing that expertise through owned channels

03 / Authority amplification: ensuring your expertise shows up in credible third-party sources



PR sits squarely within the third layer. And in the generative search era, that layer is becoming increasingly important.



The Risk of Being *Overlooked*

As with any new opportunity, there are also new risks.

A firm may have deep expertise. It may consistently publish high-quality thought leadership on its blog. It may even rank high on traditional search engines. But if that expertise is not recognized beyond its website and social channels, it may be overlooked in AI results.

Consider two firms with similar capabilities:

One firm publishes extensively on its own website, but rarely appears outside of it.

The other also publishes content, but is also **regularly quoted** in reputable publications.

The expertise may be equal, but the second firm is much more likely to be found by buyers using generative AI. Better yet, it's more likely to be trusted. Why? Because its expertise is more visible and validated externally.

Over time, this creates an authority gap. And in a system driven by pattern recognition, that gap doesn't stay small. It compounds. Which makes it necessary to rethink how PR success is defined in the first place.





Rethinking *PR Success*

Navigating this shift requires firms to approach PR differently.

Traditionally, PR has been measured by activity. PR success was defined by the number of placements, media impressions and share of voice a company achieved each quarter.

But, in generative search, activity does not equal authority. A mention in a major publication is great, but an isolated win is much less impactful than building a consistent presence around key topics. To create true authority means:

- **Showing up repeatedly** in the conversations that matter.
- **Reinforcing consistent messages** across channels.
- **Positioning experts** as go-to voices.

So, as generative search reshapes discovery, marketing leaders may need to reconsider how they evaluate PR. Thinking beyond traditional vanity metrics can help PR efforts transform reach into recognition.

And that distinction matters, because in the context of generative AI, recognition drives visibility.

A Simple Way To *Align GEO And PR*

While a lot has changed since the introduction of generative AI, firms do not need to fully abandon existing strategies. But they do need to connect them more directly.

Firms can begin to connect PR and GEO through four simple steps:

01 Define your expertise: Identify the topics where your firm needs to be recognized as a trusted voice.

02 Create distinctive insight: Develop original perspectives, commentary or research.

03 Distribute across channels: Publish through owned platforms and amplify messages to credible third-party outlets.

04 Reinforce consistently: Repeat and refine your core ideas across multiple channels.

In simple terms:

Create → Place → Reinforce → Be Recognized



The *Opportunity* Ahead

Professional services firms have always competed on expertise. What is changing is how that expertise is seen.

Generative search has upended the old rules. Being visible is no longer just about appearing in search results—it's about earning authority across the web. Public relations is key to building that authority.

For marketing leaders, this means thinking bigger. Content is still critical. But real authority comes when that content is validated and amplified outside your own channels. In this new world, recognizable expertise wins.

Firms that get this right will ensure that their ideas show up in the conversations that matter.

Because in the end,
visibility is not just about
what you publish.
It's about who notices it.





About Scribewise

Scribewise helps professional services firms grow by combining thought leadership marketing, brand strategy and generative engine optimization (GEO). We work with expertise-driven businesses to create trust-based relationships with clients—and ensure that your expertise is discoverable by humans and AI assistants alike.

Learn more at www.scribewise.com