



The  
People  
Space

Future Fit HR Fast

# WINNING CREDIBILITY WITH HR DIRECTORS IN THE AI ERA

The Essential Guide for HR  
Vendors & Service Providers

# WHY CREDIBILITY IS YOUR REAL COMPETITIVE EDGE

HR directors are one of the toughest audiences to reach. They receive 30–50 vendor emails a week, countless connection requests and, as one HRD told us:

*“The amount of hard sells at the moment to senior HR professionals is the highest I’ve ever seen. It’s frustrating and time consuming to filter out the noise to find vendors that can actually add value.”*

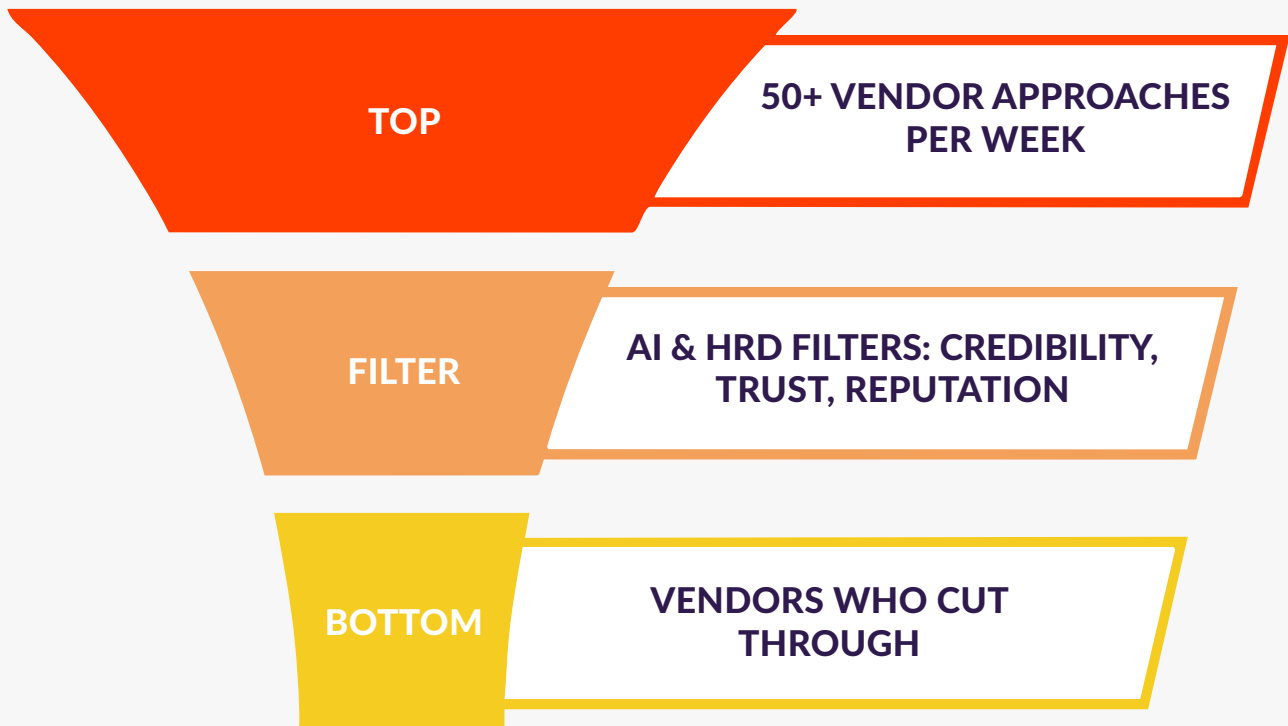
And now there’s another filter: **AI tools**. Generative AI platforms and analyst engines are surfacing **trusted editorial sources**, not marketing copy. That means what worked yesterday – keyword-heavy SEO, cold outreach, generic campaigns – is no longer enough.

The rules of engagement have shifted. **Credibility, trust and authenticity** are the currencies that count. And this is exactly where many HR vendors fall short.

## THIS GUIDE BRINGS TOGETHER:

- Exclusive survey insights from over 100 HR directors and chief people officers.
- The five classic mistakes vendors make when trying to sell into HR (and how to avoid them).
- Real voices from HR leaders themselves – what makes them pay attention and what makes them switch off.

Our goal is simple: to give you an **AI-proof credibility playbook** for building meaningful connections with HR decision-makers.



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# WHAT HR DIRECTORS ACTUALLY WANT FROM VENDORS

When we asked over 100 HR directors and chief people officers to rank the types of content and engagement they value most, one theme stood out: they are highly selective. With 30–50 vendor approaches a week, HRDs have little patience for formats that waste their time or feel like thinly disguised sales pitches.

## Preferred Formats: What Cuts Through

- **Roundtables & intimate peer events** – their number one choice. Senior HR leaders crave opportunities to debate live issues with peers in small, confidential settings.
- **Case studies** – practical, evidence-based examples of solutions that have worked in organisations like theirs.
- **Whitepapers & in-depth reports** – if they deliver genuine solutions to complex problems.
- **Webinars** – useful when selective, short, and interactive.

*“Most useful are whitepapers, case studies and digests which allow practical solutions to complex problems. Events/webinars are harder to fit into my diary. Generic blogs? Deleted.”* – HR director, professional services

## Newsletters and Blogs Are Still Vital – As Long As They Are Done Right

HRDs are sceptical of mass emails and vendor blogs when they feel like spin. But they will subscribe to and share those that:

- Come from **reputable sources** they already trust.
- Deliver **analysis and context** they can't get elsewhere.
- Respect their time with succinct, high-value takeaways.
- Offer **quotable insights** they can use in meetings or share with their teams.

In other words, newsletters and blogs aren't weak formats but **credibility tests**. Done poorly, they're ignored. Done well, they deliver trusted insight that helps leaders think differently.

## Event Expectations: Quality Over Quantity

HR directors stressed that events must be curated with purpose:

- Small and senior, not mass-market.
- Peer-led discussions on **emerging themes**.
- Clear value in exchange for their scarce time.
- *“When I want a product I like to self-explore – then I'll approach those I think are relevant.”* – HR director, digital

## Email and Lead Generation

Even though HRDs guard their data they are open to sharing contact details when the content is worth it. In fact, most said they were “likely” to provide their email for:

- Bespoke strategy/leadership insights from reputable sources.
- Sector-specific case studies and data.
- Updates on legal or regulatory changes.
- Insight into new topics.

*“I'm much more alive to scamming/phishing/deep fake content... I am unlikely to exchange my email unless I am certain of the validity behind the content.”*

– Chief people officer, global retail

This reinforces the same point: **the channel doesn't matter as much as the credibility behind it.**



# WHAT HR DIRECTORS ACTUALLY WANT FROM VENDORS

## PREFERRED FORMATS

ROUNDTABLES AND INTIMATE PEER EVENTS



CASE STUDIES



WEBINARS



WHITEPAPERS



NEWSLETTERS



BLOGS



# THE 5 CLASSIC MISTAKES VENDORS MAKE (AND HOW TO AVOID THEM)

Every HR director we spoke to emphasised the same point: **credibility is everything**. Yet too many vendors sabotage their chances before the conversation has even started. Our research identified five common mistakes and the practical fixes that can help you avoid them.

## Mistake

# 1

### Misidentifying the Decision-Maker

Vendors often assume the HR director holds the purse strings. In reality, many decisions involve CEOs, CFOs or CIOs, with the HRD as an influencer rather than the budget holder.

In our 2025 HR buyer survey the number of people involved in a buying decision ranged from one to over seven!

#### The fix:

- Map the buying committee, not just the HRD.
- Treat the HRD as a critical influencer: they can advocate for you internally but they need evidence and clarity to do so.
- Avoid assumption-based pitches – verify the decision-making process early.

## Mistake

# 2

### Overemphasis on Features, Not Solutions

Listing product features may impress your team but HR directors are left asking: *“So what? What does this actually do for me?”*

*“General blurb and unfounded, unevicenced claims of grandeur are the quickest way to turn me off. I want to see how it adds value.”* – HR director, infrastructure

#### The fix:

- Translate every feature into a clear business benefit (time saved, costs reduced, complexity removed).
- Back up claims with data, case studies, and peer examples.
- Avoid echoing the same benefits as competitors; differentiation comes from proof.

FEATURE-LED PITCH	SOLUTION-LED PITCH (WHAT HRDS WANT)
Our platform integrates payroll systems.	Cuts payroll admin time by 40%, freeing HR teams to focus on strategic work.
We offer AI-driven analytics dashboards.	Gives your HR team real-time insights on attrition risk so you can retain top talent before they leave.
Our tool automates compliance reporting.	Reduces regulatory reporting time from weeks to hours, lowering risk of fines and freeing up HR resource.
We run leadership development programmes.	Equips managers to reduce turnover by improving team engagement scores within six months.
We provide global HR advisory services.	Ensures your HR policies are legally compliant in 12 countries, minimising legal exposure and supporting global expansion.

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## Mistake

# 3

### Neglecting Brand Consistency and Awareness

Even the best product will be ignored if the brand behind it isn't recognised or trusted. HRDs consistently ranked **brand reputation and case studies** among the top factors influencing engagement.

*“Familiarity breeds content. I need to know you or know of you.”* – Chief people officer, retail

#### The fix:

- Build brand equity through consistent, credible presence rather than sporadic campaigns.
- Use authentic testimonials and peer endorsements; HRDs value references above claims.
- Position yourself as a trusted advisor through insights and thought leadership, not only as a seller.



Mistake  
4**Over-Relying on a Single Marketing Push**

Too many vendors bank on one-off launches – a big event, whitepaper or campaign – and then fade. HR directors told us they need multiple, connected touchpoints before engaging (*we explore this more in section 6*).

*“An attention-grabbing pitch is fine but if it’s not relevant to my priorities, I won’t engage. Follow-up has to be thoughtful, not intrusive.”* – HR director, healthcare

**The fix:**

- Think long-term: plan a series of connected touchpoints rather than one splash.
- Repurpose content across formats (reports → articles → social posts).
- Respect HRDs’ timelines; they’ll come back when ready if you’ve stayed visible.

Mistake  
5**Being Too Salesy**

Aggressive sales tactics are the number one frustration for HRDs. Cold invites, presumptive diary bookings or pushy follow-ups actively damage trust.

*“I’ve had vendors I’ve never heard of put meetings directly in my calendar. That’s not just irritating, it’s disrespectful.”* – HR director, hospitality

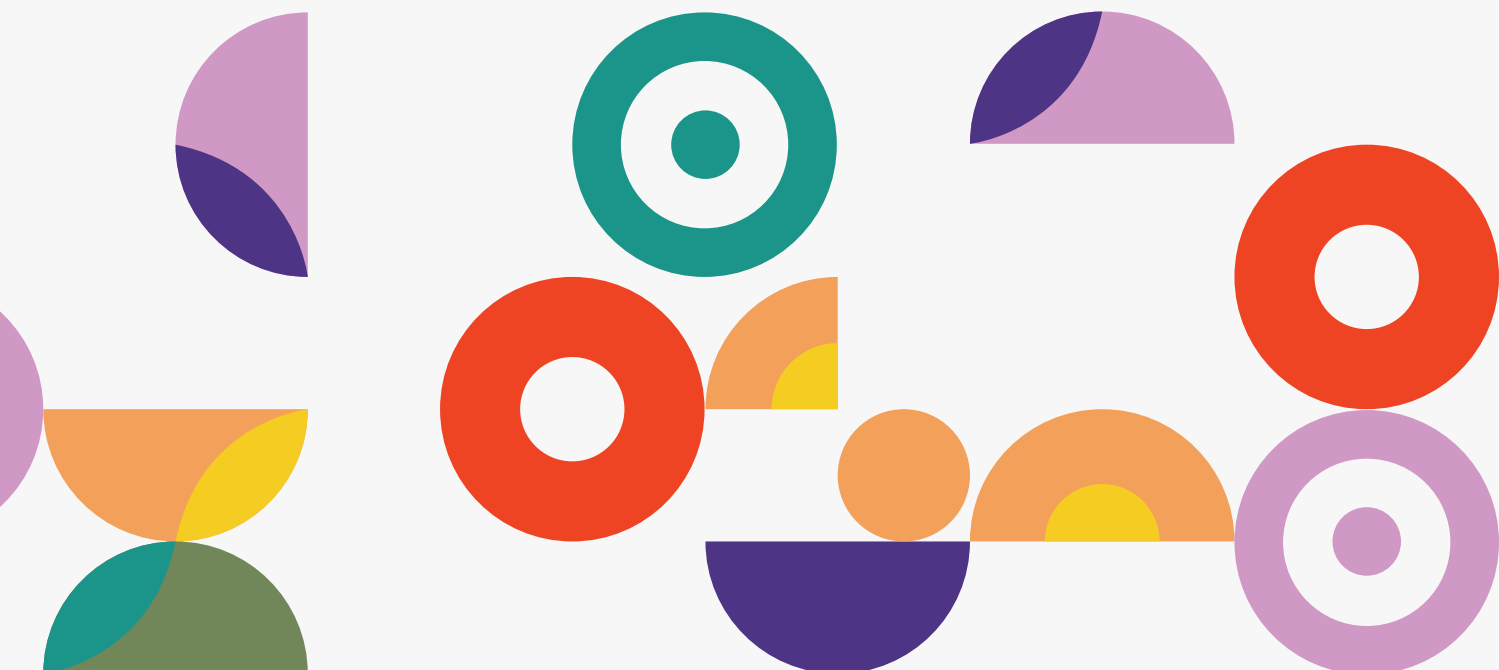
*“The hard sell is at the highest I’ve ever seen. It’s exhausting to filter out the noise.”* – Group CPO, global services

**The fix:**

- Shift from ‘sell’ to ‘serve’: lead with insight, not product.
- Personalise with relevance to their sector, role and current challenges.
- Adopt subtle, respectful persistence – be present, not pushy.

**THE BOTTOM LINE**

HR directors don’t want to be ‘sold to.’ They want credible partners who respect their time, understand their context and bring evidence of value. Avoiding these five mistakes won’t just help you cut through the noise but will position you where HR leaders, and increasingly the AI tools they rely on, are looking for answers.



# VOICES FROM THE FIELD: WHAT HR DIRECTORS REALLY WANT

Through our survey and interviews HR leaders, both in-role and those now working as consultants, were strikingly consistent about what makes vendor approaches land and what makes them fail.

Here are the strongest themes, in their own words.

## 1. Credibility and Authenticity

*“Be authentic. People will trust you if you’re authentic, and they will definitely hire you.”* – Julia Tybura, former HRD turned consultant

*“Authenticity and centre the conversation around the unique challenges I face.”* – HR director

*“Stop pressure selling.”* – Survey respondent

**What this tells us:** HRDs won’t even consider vendors they don’t trust. Authenticity and credibility are the price of entry: leaders want vendors who are transparent, real and validated by peers or external sources, not those who rely on inflated claims or high-pressure tactics.

## 2. Consistency Across Touchpoints

*“Vendors often assume one big launch will speed the sales cycle but HR directors need multiple touchpoints before they engage.”* – Survey finding

*“Targeting and intelligent marketing across different platforms including in-person events is key.”* – Survey respondent

**What this tells us:** HRDs rarely act after a single campaign. They expect consistent, relevant engagement over time, across multiple credible channels. Vendors who fade after a splash launch or rely on one format are quickly forgotten.

## 3. Clarity on Outcomes and Differentiation

*“General blurb and unfounded, unevidenced claims of grandeur are the quickest way to turn me off. I want to see how they can add value.”* – HR director, infrastructure

*“Be clear about what makes you stand out.”* – Survey respondent

*“Transparent pricing.”* – Survey respondent

**What this tells us:** HRDs want clarity. They need to know exactly what will change in their organisation, how it’s different from other options and what it costs. Features, jargon or vague promises aren’t enough – they want outcomes they can measure and explain internally.

## 4. Understanding and Personalisation

*“Making an effort to find out more about what I and the company do!”* – Survey respondent

*“Understand my objectives. Do your research. We’re not generic. We’re not buying what you think we need, but what we actually need – and that’s always contextual.”* – Survey respondent

*“Listen and understand your customer. Do not sell one size fits all.”* – Survey respondent

**What this tells us:** HRDs are tired of generic approaches. They want vendors who take time to understand their business, listen first and tailor the first interaction to their actual context and needs. Personalisation is now the baseline for getting a hearing.



# THE AI ERA: HOW HR DIRECTORS FILTER VENDORS NOW

HR directors have always been selective but now they are no longer the only filter vendors must pass through. Increasingly, AI-powered platforms like ChatGPT, Perplexity and Google's SGE are shaping what HRDs see first. Instead of browsing pages of search results, leaders are presented with curated answers – answers drawn overwhelmingly from credible editorial and PR sources, not ads or keyword-chasing content.

If your content isn't credible enough to be cited you risk invisibility – to both humans and machines.

## AI Is Reinforcing HRDs' Natural Filters

The qualities HR directors already demand – evidence, trust, authenticity – are mirrored in how AI systems are trained to rank and cite sources. In other words, AI is amplifying the same credibility test HRDs have always applied.

### A recent analysis found:

- **96% of citations in AI-generated results come from editorial and PR content, not paid content** (*Muck Rack*).
- Keyword stuffing and traffic-chasing tactics are ignored.
- Credible, expert-led insights are prioritised.

## HR Directors Are Already AI-Aware

While curious about AI's potential, HRDs are wary of content that feels formulaic or machine-written. They are already on high alert for inauthenticity:

*"Anything pushy, or where it is presumed they know me and/or what I am thinking! And anything that is obviously AI-heavy... I like a human touch."* – HR director, retail

This doesn't mean AI is dismissed outright. Many HRDs are experimenting with it themselves. But it does mean they are more sensitive than ever to whether a vendor's voice feels genuinely expert and human, or automated and generic.

## The Four AI-Era Filters

The four things HR directors told us they want are exactly what AI systems reward:

- **Credibility** – cited sources, recognised brands, trusted voices.
- **Consistency** – content that appears regularly across multiple credible channels.
- **Clarity** – structured insights that answer specific, real questions.
- **Authenticity** – signals of human expertise: case studies, quotes, identifiable authors.

Meeting these filters means your voice surfaces in HR conversations and in the AI-generated answers HRDs are beginning to rely on.

## What This Means for Vendors

The age of 'spray and pray' marketing is over. Vendors who want to reach HRDs need to create content that:

- Can be **cited by people and machines**.
- Adds value immediately, not after three sales calls.
- Builds a **track record of trust**, so when HRDs ask "who's shaping the future of work?" your voice belongs in the answer.

### OLD MARKETING MODEL VS NEW TRUST MODEL

Old Model	New Model
Chase high-volume keywords	Focus on expertise + credibility
Measure traffic	Measure trust and discovery
Disguise ads as articles	Invest in genuine editorial
Publish for SEO	Publish for influence
Prioritise clicks	Prioritise citations

The next time someone asks, "Who's shaping the future of work?" make sure your brand is part of the answer.



# THE CREDIBILITY PLAYBOOK: 7 TOUCHPOINTS EVERY VENDOR NEEDS

Our research confirms what many HR leaders already practise in their own decision-making: they rarely act after a single vendor contact. Trust builds over time and it builds through consistency. Studies show prospects need at least seven encounters before engaging seriously, and HRDs are no exception. But not all touchpoints are equal.

HR directors told us they only value those that feel **independent, credible, high-level and relevant to their world**. These are the seven that matter most:

## Peer-Led Events

1.

Small, senior roundtables and closed-door salons top HRDs' preferences. They want to learn from peers first, not from vendors.

- **Why it works:** Demonstrates thought leadership by association, without forcing a sales pitch. You gain credibility by contributing to the conversation, not by dominating it.
- **HRD voice:** "A smaller event with a strong peer group and relevant topic is a major attraction." – HR director, healthcare

## Independent Articles & Reports

3.

Research-led reports and editorially credible articles carry weight, especially when published in trusted environments. HRDs are quick to spot advertorials and self-promotion.

- **Why it works:** These pieces are quotable, citable, and increasingly surfaced by AI tools. They demonstrate external validation and expertise rather than self-praise.
- **Key point:** Reports must be actionable, giving HRDs frameworks or insights they can apply, not just broad trend commentary.

## Evidence-Based Case Studies

2.

Case studies are one of the most compelling ways to prove credibility. HRDs want to see real-world outcomes, not theoretical claims.

- **Why it works:** Moves you from *selling features* to *proving outcomes*. A strong case study shows not just what your product does but what changes because of it.
- **HRD voice:** "Most useful are whitepapers and case studies which allow practical solutions to complex problems." – HR director, professional services

## Selective Webinars

4.

Webinars still work but only if designed with care. HRDs are frustrated by sessions that feel generic, overly long or thinly veiled sales demos.

- **Why it works:** Short, curated webinars on emerging themes provide learning opportunities that fit into busy schedules. They're most effective when panel-led, interactive and senior-focused.
- **HRD voice:** "I used to attend but stopped as they became too functional and pedestrian. This space really needs shaking up." – HR director, professional services



## 5. Targeted Email Content

5.

HRDs are guarded with their inboxes but they *will* exchange data when the content is clearly relevant and valuable.

- **Why it works:** A personalised, insight-driven message signals that you understand their role and context. Generic ‘spray and pray’ campaigns, by contrast, erode trust.
- **Key point:** Think *fewer, higher-value emails*, not more volume. Bespoke reports, sector-specific insights or legal/regulatory updates are the types HRDs will open.

## Trusted Digests & Newsletters

7.

While generic newsletters ranked low in our survey, trusted editorial digests with real analysis are a different story. HRDs save and share those that synthesise complexity into clear, usable insights.

- **Why it works:** Keeps you present in a non-intrusive way. When your content becomes part of how HRDs brief themselves, you’ve crossed from vendor into trusted resource.
- **HRD voice:** “*I’m unlikely to exchange my email unless I’m certain of the validity behind the content.*” – Chief people officer, global

## Peer Recommendations & External Authority

6.

Peer endorsement is one of the most powerful credibility drivers. HRDs rely heavily on trusted networks and references.

- **Why it works:** Reputation travels faster through peer networks than through vendor outreach. An HRD is far more likely to engage if they’ve heard of you through a colleague, speaker event or independent source.
- **HRD voice:** “*Having a reference from someone I know and trust is one of the key decisions I take into consideration.*” – Chief people officer, retail

## PUTTING IT TOGETHER

Each of these touchpoints might seem small in isolation – a case study here, a quote there, a digest opened in the inbox. But together they form a **credibility footprint**.

The vendors who succeed are those who combine multiple, high-quality touchpoints into a consistent, long-term presence. That consistency proves seriousness, builds familiarity and ensures that, when HRDs are ready to act, your brand is one they already recognise and trust.



# THE CREDIBILITY PLAYBOOK: 7 TOUCHPOINTS EVERY VENDOR NEEDS



# PARTNERING WITH HR, NOT SELLING TO HR

If there's one lesson that comes through consistently from HR directors it's this: they do not want to be 'sold to.' They want vendors who respect their time, understand their challenges and bring credible insight to the table.

The difference between selling and partnering is subtle but decisive:

- **Selling** is about your product.
- **Partnering** is about their problem.

## What Turns HR Directors Off

Our research reveals the fastest ways to lose credibility:

- Vague, unevicenced claims of superiority.
- Generic mass outreach that ignores context.
- Presumptive diary invites and pushy follow-ups.
- Overuse of AI-heavy content with no human authenticity.

## What Makes Them Engage

By contrast HRDs lean in when they encounter vendors who:

- Offer **credible, evidence-based content** that helps them think differently.
- Share **real-world case studies** that prove outcomes.
- Provide access to **peer-led conversations** on relevant, timely issues.
- Respect their autonomy to explore solutions in their own time.

## The Partnership Mindset

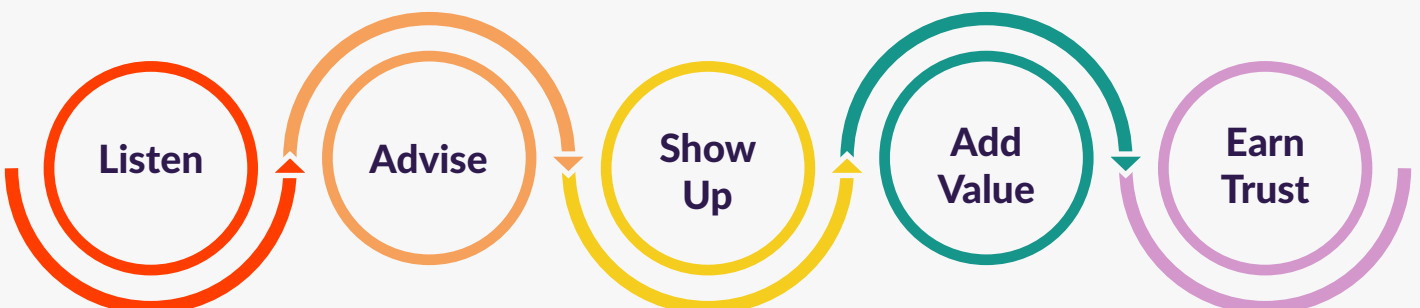
To HRDs partnership means:

- **Listening first:** Understanding their priorities before pitching.
- **Advising, not selling:** Bringing insights that help them solve challenges, even if it doesn't immediately lead to a sale.
- **Showing up consistently:** Being present in the right spaces over time so trust can grow naturally.
- **Adding value at every interaction:** Leaving them with something useful – a statistic, a framework, a case study – rather than just a product pitch.

## Why It Matters More in the AI Era

In a world where AI filters amplify credible voices and mute generic ones, the vendors who thrive will be those already seen as trusted partners by HR leaders. If HRDs don't trust you, neither will the platforms they're turning to for answers.

## PARTNERSHIP CYCLE



# CONCLUSION: CREDIBILITY IS THE NEW CURRENCY

HR directors are clear: they don't respond to generic marketing, inflated claims or hard sells. They act when they see evidence, outcomes and authenticity. In an era where AI tools are filtering information as aggressively as HRDs themselves, these qualities are not an option but the baseline.

Building credibility takes time. It requires patience, multiple touchpoints and the discipline to prioritise quality over volume. HRDs notice the difference between noise and value. They remember the vendors who show up consistently with something useful, thoughtful and human.

The future of vendor engagement won't be won by who shouts the loudest but by who earns trust. As one HR director puts it:

*“Credibility is everything. Without it, you won't even be considered.”*

– HRD, survey respondent



**So just ask yourself this:** when HR leaders look for answers, or when AI platforms surface the voices shaping the future of work, will your brand be among them?



# PARTNER WITH CREDIBILITY

## THIS REPORT HAS SHOWN WHAT HR DIRECTORS VALUE MOST:

- Authenticity and trust
- Evidence and outcomes
- Consistency across multiple touchpoints
- Respect for their time and autonomy

These aren't just lessons for vendors. They're also the values that guide our own work.

## Why Work With Us?

The People Space is a trusted editorial platform focused on HR and the future of work. Our content is shaped by award-winning HR journalists and backed by decades of insight into how senior HR leaders think, act and decide.

That's why HR directors from some of the world's most respected organisations engage with our work, including leaders at:

**Coca-Cola Europacific Partners, NHS England, Standard Chartered, ING Bank, Dole plc, BAE Systems, Euromonitor and the International Committee of the Red Cross.**

And why global experts like **Dave Ulrich** say:

*"I always learn from your thoughtful insights... you do a marvellous service to so many and it helps me validate my work."*



## How We Help Vendors Like You

- **Editorial credibility** – Position your voice in trusted, insight-driven environments senior HRDs already read and cite.
- **Visibility with decision-makers** – Appear in front of CHROs, HR directors and transformation leaders who value credibility over volume.
- **AI-era discoverability** – Ensure your thought leadership is surfaced by both HRDs and the AI tools they use to filter information.
- **Event access** – Connect with senior HR peers in intimate, unscripted settings through our invite-only HR Leaders Club.



### LET'S TALK

If you're ready to build credibility and visibility with senior HR leaders – in ways that align with what they actually want from vendors – we'd love to start a conversation.

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🌐 [www.thepeoplespace.com](http://www.thepeoplespace.com)

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# MarketInHR

## Go Further With MarketIn-HR

While The People Space helps you build credibility and visibility with senior HRDs we know vendors often need wider support to turn credibility into measurable growth.

That's why we are part of MarketIn-HR – the first collective of independent specialists dedicated to helping HR suppliers grow. Through **MarketIn-HR** you can:

- Access a **free diagnostic tool** to benchmark your current marketing approach.
- Get help with wider marketing strategy and execution, from positioning and campaigns to digital and lead generation.
- Work with experts who understand the HR vendor space inside out.

**The People Space builds your credibility. MarketIn-HR extends it into your full marketing strategy.**

**Get in touch for more information: [sian@thepeoplespace.com](mailto:sian@thepeoplespace.com)**



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