

# Trust Economy and Reputation Systems

Trust Economy: 'trəst 'ska-mər

“Economic system where reputation, credibility, and mutual reliance act as the primary currency rather than just money or products.”

## Who is KAM?

- Distinguished Senior Fellow in Cyber Security at Thomas University’s Armed Services Institute in the Center for Military Life
- Member, Apache Software Foundation
- Google Developer Expert for Cloud, Workspace, and Cloud AI
- Member, U.S. Marine Corps Cyber Auxiliary
- M3AAWG 2025 Mary Litynski Award Winner for lifetime achievements in making the internet safer for all
- Buys a new phone when his old one gets full of cat photos / memes. His cat is named Stella Bella Moonshine and she steals onions.



# How Trust Economy Impacts your Business / Website

Trust Economy and Reputation Systems are designed to **create trust** and **improve sales**.

The evolution of digital trust:

- **BBS Systems:** Reputation and uploads required for access.
- **eBay:** The first mainstream internet reputation system.
- **Open Source Software:** Meritocracies.

*“People are basically good.”*

— Pierre Omidyar, eBay's Feedback Forum, 1996



## Five Key Characteristics of Trust Champions



**Radical  
Transparency**



**Digital  
Intermediaries**



**Ethical  
Behavior &  
Values**



**Investment in  
Security**



**Long-term  
Relationships**

# Trust Economy and Reputation System Examples

## Reputation Systems

Explicit systems tracking user behavior and reliability:

**eBay:** Peer feedback loops

**Amazon:** Verified reviews

**Airbnb:** Host & guest ratings

**Freecycle:** Community trust

**Craigslist:** Problem flagging

**Reddit:** Upvoting for Trust

## Trust Economy

Built through ethical behavior and alignment with user values:

**Sponsorships:** Strategic brand alignment

**Sonos:** Privacy focus by opting out of microphones

**Toyota:** Trust via consistent manufacturing quality

## NOT Trust/Reputation

These are **Customer Service** or **Warranties**, which are distinct:

- Patagonia & Zippo
- Le Creuset & Apple
- Costco & Tesla
- Chewy.com

*Excellent service does not inherently constitute a reputation system or trust economy model.*

## Abuse of Reputation Systems

**Q: What does decades of fighting online abuse reveal about growth?**

A: This is why we can't have nice things.

### Review Manipulation

1. Paid/Incentivized Reviews
2. The "Verified Purchase" Manipulation
3. Review Routing (Cherry-picking)

### Inorganic Growth Tactics

1. Brushing Scams
2. Competitor Sabotage
3. Fake Accounts



# Examples of Abuse of Trust Economy

## Operational Abuses

Minimal Purchase Amounts  
Bundled Items  
Lowering Quality  
Sale of Accounts  
Restriction of Banking/CC

## Strategic Exploitation

Identity Theft  
Info Asymmetry Abuse

Amazon “Buy for Me”

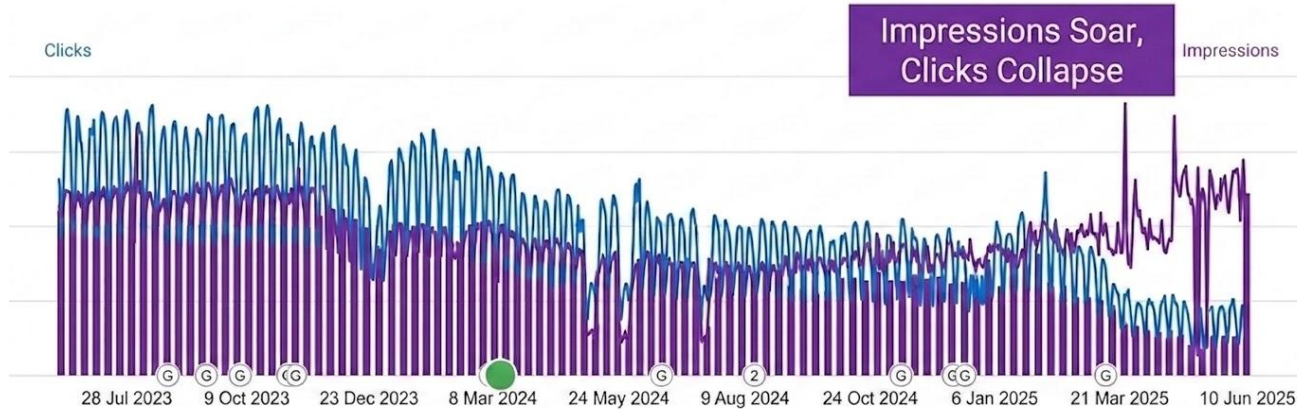
- Erosion of Brands
- Rise of AI Facilitators



**Q: Are Influencers an Abuse of Trust Economy?**

Or just an evolution of “Spokespersons”? +The Value of Eating Your Own Dog Food.

## The Great Decoupling and the Impact on Branding



Ahref's Blog Results from Google Search Console in June 2025

Source: <https://ahrefs.com/blog/the-great-decoupling/>

webpros<sup>7</sup>

### STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE: THE NEW PARADIGM



#### GEO (Generative Engine Optimization):

Optimizing for AI-driven answer engines becomes critical as traditional clicks decline.



#### E-E-A-T (Experience, Expertise, Authority, Trust):

Paramount for visibility in a trust-based, AI-mediated landscape.

# The Value of Consent in Online Marketing

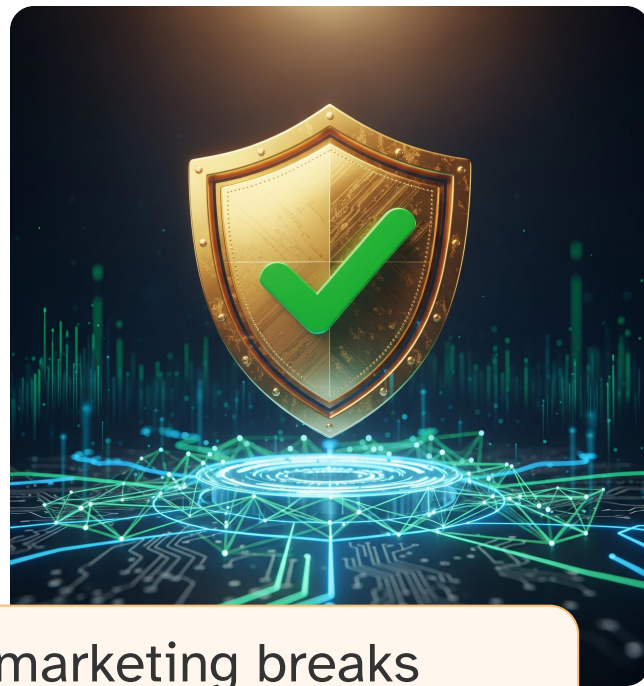
*“Spam is about consent not content.”*

— Chris Santere

**The Key Point:** Trust as Infrastructure underpins everything from email deliverability to platform reputation to online identity.

Your E-E-A-T from your domain, IP, brand, messaging, blogs, advertising, and products are all key parts of a **Trust Economy**.

**Warning:** Using alternate domains for marketing breaks from a Trust Economy. Branding is too important to dilute.



# Using Reputation Systems to Improve Your Business



**Reputation Systems determine visibility, sales, and influence.**

Like the Shaman of old, we hire people who reverse engineer or just guess at postmaster, SEO, and online ranking systems. Some simple tips:

- Don't send Spam; Create Original Content
- Embrace GEO (Generative Engine Optimization)
- Respond to Negative Comments
- Value a 4.5 star review vs. a "perfect" 5.0

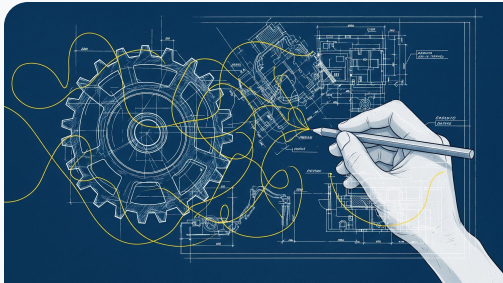
**Q: Are reaction videos, "Original Content"?**

Does navigating the Trust Economy requires authentic value creation?

# Three Final Tips

## 01. Think like an Engineer

Don't just follow a script like a robot. Reverse engineer systems and solve for the underlying logic of the Trust Economy.



## 02. Focus on Trust

Prioritize long-term integrity over short-term hacks. Consent and authenticity are the infrastructure of future sales.



## 03. Be Strategic

Treat reputation as a managed asset. Align your domain, content, & feedback loops with Generative Engine standards.





# Thank You!

Find me on LinkedIn to discuss more about Trust and Reputation or to hear about PCCC's newest product:

[GEOAnalyzerPro.com](https://www.geoanalyzerpro.com)

Launching May 4th

SEO is Dead. Long Live GEO.

<https://linkedin.com/in/kmcgrail>



**SENDER  
SYMPOSIUM**