



How can leaders communicate in an age of scrutiny?

Analysing how C-suite and beyond can effectively communicate – and the traps they fall into

Audiences increase scrutiny towards communications leaders

Audiences have quietly moved from giving leaders the benefit of the doubt to far more actively scrutinising them.

But most executive communication still speaks to audiences with this past paradigm in mind. While messaging from top management was previously met with mild scepticism, it's now deeply scrutinised by audiences, and quickly discarded if found lacking.

In the report, we analyse:

- ◆ How audience scrutiny has increased and how they view and discuss the C-suite
- ◆ Why proof is much more valuable than relatability in leadership communications
- ◆ How operational leaders like CTOs and CMOs are seen as more authentic than CEOs
- ◆ How Isentia's AI-built suite of tools can help uncover the right story for the comms leader of today

Approach

Data Collection Period:
1 May 2025 – 18 June 2026

Channels:



Facebook



X



TikTok



YouTube



Threads



Blogs



LinkedIn



Forums



Online News

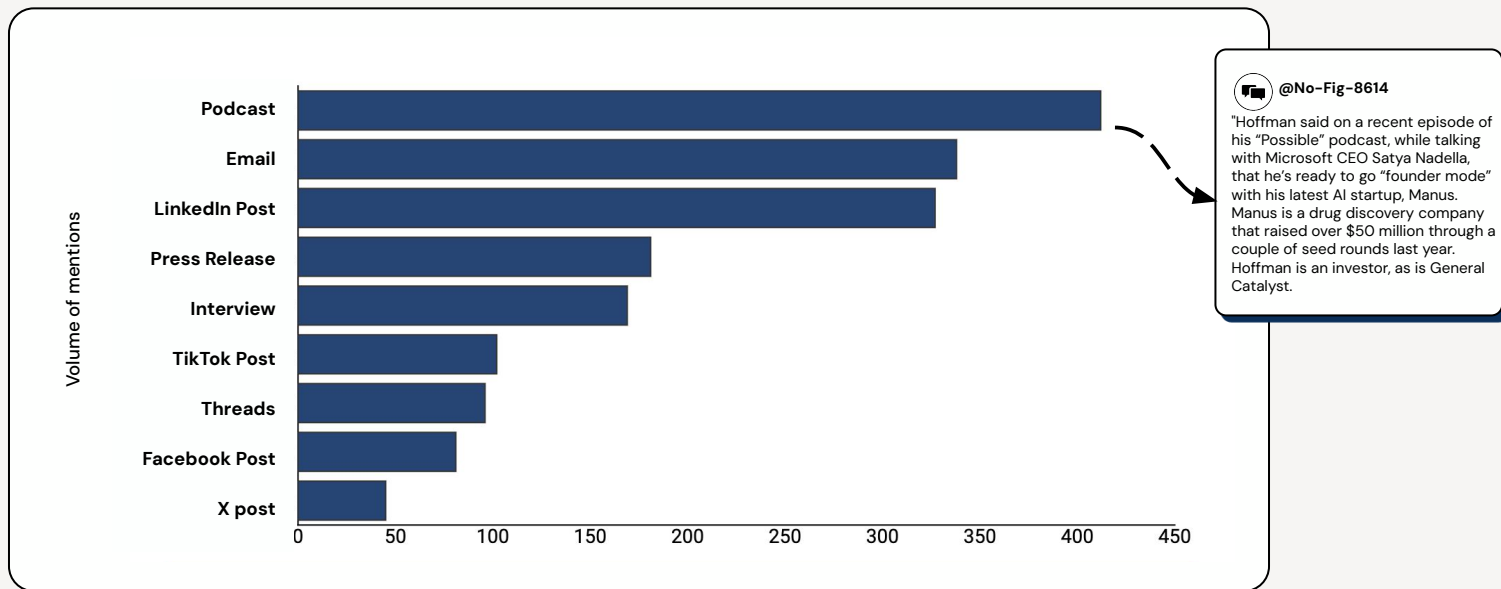
Markets

Singapore, Malaysia, Australia,
New Zealand

How do audiences discuss CEOs and the channels they use

We analysed the type of comms that audiences associate with CEO comms. Mentions of “podcasts”, “email”, “LinkedIn post” and “interview” were the highest. This gives us a fair idea of where they’re accessing CEO content.

Of course, messaging can travel. Podcasts with CEOs, for example, can be originally on YouTube, but the content of that podcast is discussed on other platforms like X or forums.



Volume of mentions of CEO content in various comms channels, discussed by audiences on X in descending order, from 11 May – 18 June 2026. Source: Pulsar TRAC

The relatability trap

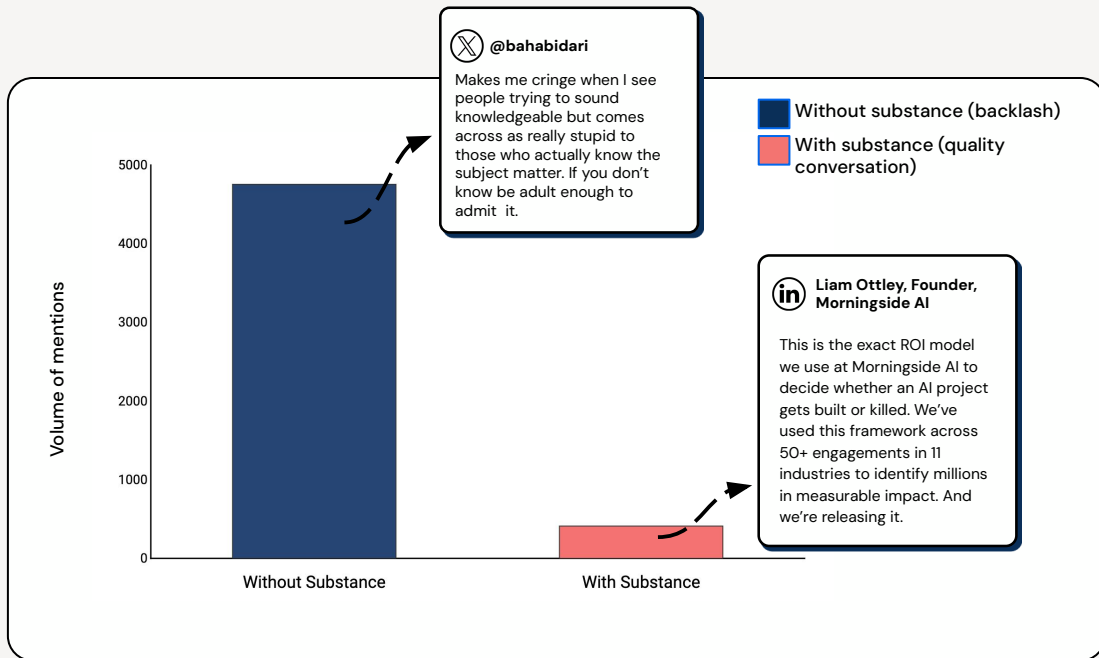
In times of declining trust, many leaders aim to imbue their comms with warmth and authenticity. But warmth without substance can come across as performative to today's increasingly sceptical audiences.

When we view how audiences & stakeholders react, i.e., posts on platforms like X, Forums, Threads — the discussions around C-suite content lacking proof are much larger in volume, compared to posts that audiences have validated as being authentic or with substance (provable points of interest).

However, this attention is almost wholly negative.

Audiences are much more likely to call out executives on posts that are unsubstantiated compared to the ones that aren't, and this signals active reputational damage to the brand too.

*Audiences engage with CEO content that lacks substance and actively call them out for it.



Analysing volume of audience reactions on X, Forums, Blogs, Threads, Facebook, TikTok, Online News around content that is with and without substance between May 11, 2025 – June 12, 2026. Source: Pulsar TRAC

Authenticity is something audiences grant to CEOs

The adjudicator of what is “authentic” has shifted — it’s no longer something the content creator can assert, increasingly power resides with the audience.

Audiences show fatigue towards CEO posts weighing in on common themes (AI personalisation, job displacement) with highly emotive language, but without supporting data. Audiences read these unevidenced hot takes

as the very “AI slop” the authors are trying to position themselves against.

These audience discussions mostly happen on platforms like X and forums, where users discuss CEO posts on other platforms like LinkedIn, emphasising how their content lacks depth.

ⓧ @Codefoxtrot



Firstly, consider the article written might just be a deceitful ad to draw more traffic and attention to this “CEO” and his AI slop products. Secondly, I’m a software engineer and I can say with confidence -- I’m still needed.

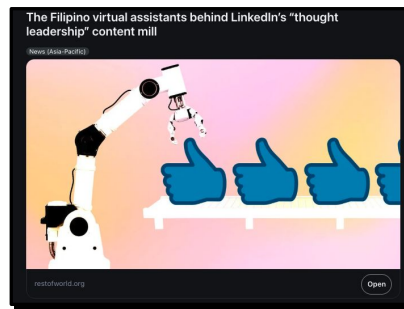
ⓧ coldemailchris

AI personalization is hurting more campaigns than it’s helping. Stop referencing someone’s LinkedIn post, their college, their recent hire. They know it’s AI slop. And it immediately signals “cold email.” What actually works:

Reference their job title or industry in a way that infers you understand their world. Keep it relevant. Keep it short. Keep it simple. The best performing cold emails we’ve ever sent are embarrassingly straightforward.

Short. Punchy. Zero links.

📺 nimbybuster



LinkedIn comment section is where you’ll find the largest concentration of NPCs on the planet. “Well put”, “Great advice”, “Wow, great way to look at it” All these on an obvious AI slop post. Are they even humans?

Operational leaders are more authentic than CEOs

The leaders closest to the actual work consistently out-communicate the ones at the top. CFOs, COOs and, division heads tend to outperform CEOs. This has a structural reason — operational leaders work with metrics, customer conversations and on-the-ground specifics everyday.

The posts showing a product and its features, along with quantifiable results on how it performed, were mostly from operational heads. CEO posts show more engagement when they stick to this formula. However, a majority of CEOs focus in on general topics like AI strategy, staff promotions, or where their company is headed. CEO's can project their brand's mission and values in a way that's compelling – but also far more imbued with risk.



Emmanuel Gob, Advisory Board Member, CIONET Belgium

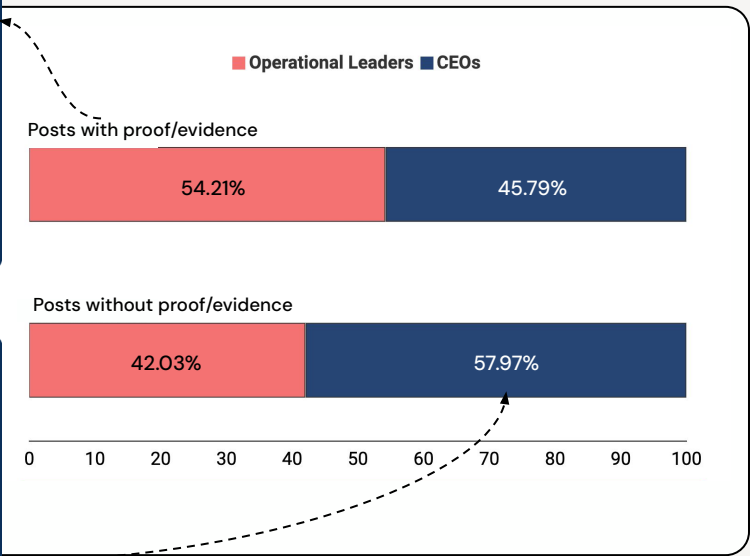
The best CIO I ever worked with was the most effective technology leader I have seen in 25 years. He could sit in a room with a CFO, a Head of Operations, and a Chief Commercial Officer, and translate a business problem into a technology brief that his team could actually execute. The gap between what the business needs and what the technology team understands...what the data says and what the leadership team hears. The CIO who closes that gap is more valuable than the CIO who can architect the most elegant system.



Chuck Robbins, Chair & CEO CISCO

That's where Cisco comes in. From Cisco Cloud Control to Cisco IQ, we are building the critical infrastructure for the AI era, [...] During today's keynote, it was great to sit down with Starbucks CEO Brian Niccol to talk about AI, leadership, connection, and business transformation (and our coffee orders). Thank you for joining us!

*volume of mentions in %



Analysing the difference between how operational leaders (CFOs/CTOs/COOs) prioritise posts that show proof/evidence vs CEOs between May 11, 2025 – June 12, 2026. Source: Pulsar TRAC

Which type of content from leaders sticks?

The substance in a specific post needs to be made visible. Audiences like posts that are clearly written. A post that does not have any sort of signal – proof, people, or place – lacks the value that will garner engagement

Many across the c-suite share comms without clear signals (“signal poverty”). Both the posts on the right garnered a lot of engagement. However, the first story about how Lego became profitable again is good evidence-based content that proves what works vs what doesn’t.

The second, while successful, comes with an important caveat: it was written by a figure with a very established personal brand. This therefore allows it to escape the need to imbue every post with the proof points outlined in this report – but this can itself become a trap when less famous business figures look to replicate. What’s more, the personal brand of the writer on the right will *still* been underlined by proof, but this occurs elsewhere in their online presence (interviews, books, etc).



By 2003, Lego was staring bankruptcy in the face. Then in 2004... they hired Jørgen Vig Knudstorp — the first non-family CEO in Lego's history. Cut Lego's unique bricks from nearly 12,000 down to less than 7,000... Shut down factories and cut 1,000 jobs — saving \$600M in two years. Within 5 years, Lego was profitable again. By 2015, it had overtaken Mattel to become the #1 toy company in the world.

With Evidence



There's a story I love to tell about leadership, but it doesn't start with a CEO or a general. It starts with someone you've probably never heard of—the person who holds the elevator when your hands are full, who notices when you're struggling and quietly asks, "Are you okay?" The person who makes the coffee and remembers birthdays, who gives away credit and takes responsibility when things go wrong.

Without Evidence

Leading with proof

Results, third party validation or checkable fact all count as being strong proof, so it's no surprise to see executives lean on it heavily in effective communications.

What's notable is how other, perhaps subtler forms of proof are utilised – people and place, for instance.

People, because it feeds on audience's social instinct and comes with the implication that everyone mentioned (and even tagged) would certify the truth of the message.

Place, meanwhile, ranks last in how often it's used, but can also be a potent means of engaging audience trust, particularly when it evokes highly-concentrated scenes and communities (ie, tech communities in urban hubs).

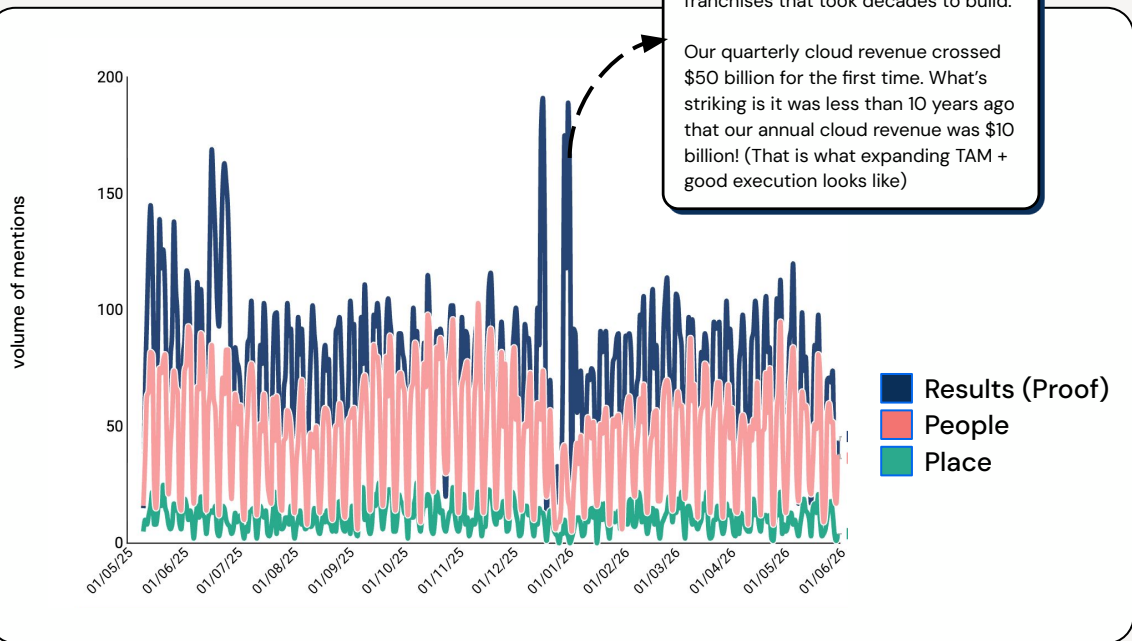


Satya Nadella, CEO,
Microsoft

Just reported our quarterly results.

We are still in the beginning phases of AI diffusion and its broad GDP impact, and already we've built an AI business that is larger than some of our biggest franchises that took decades to build.

Our quarterly cloud revenue crossed \$50 billion for the first time. What's striking is it was less than 10 years ago that our annual cloud revenue was \$10 billion! (That is what expanding TAM + good execution looks like)



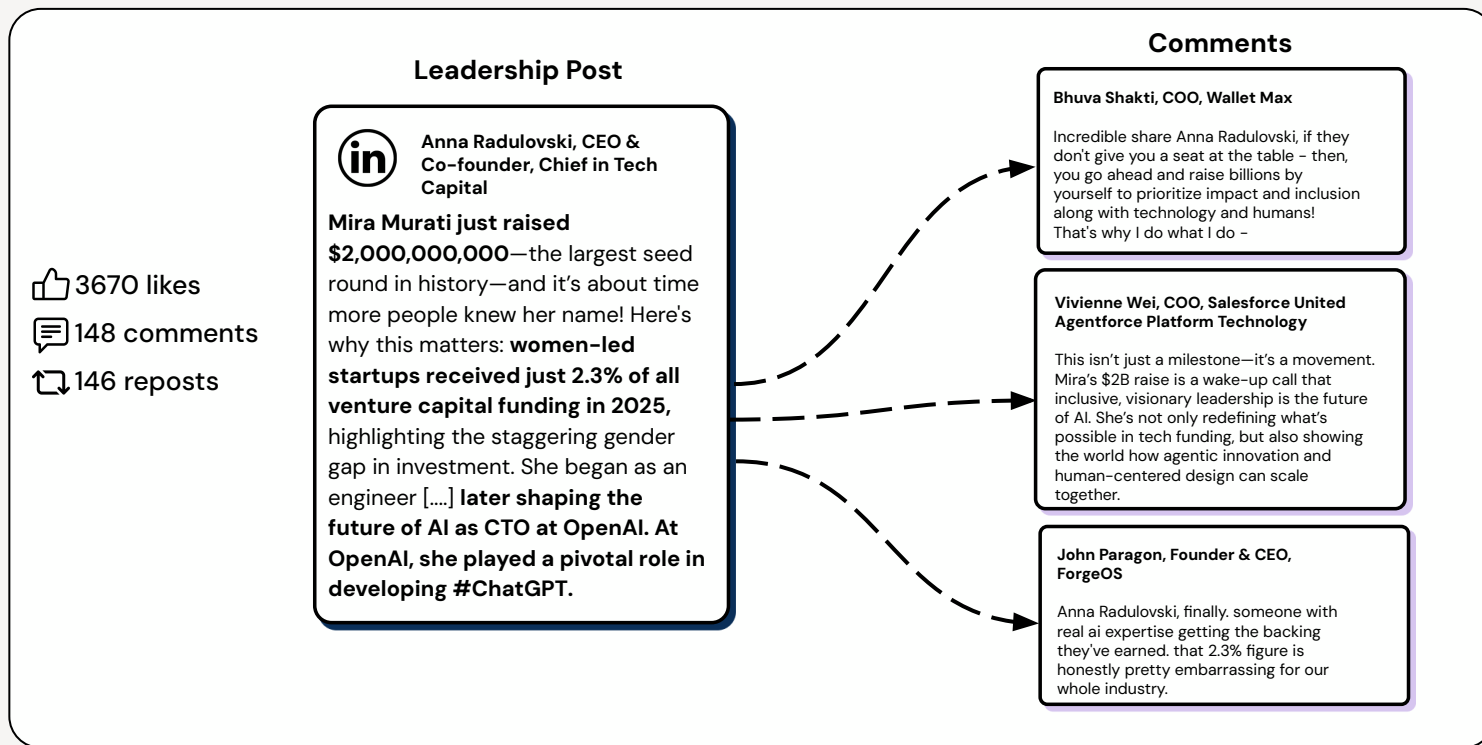
Analysing what the C-suite prioritise amongst proof, people and place when it comes to online posts on X, Forums, Blogs, Threads, Facebook, TikTok, Online News between 1 May 2025 – 31 May 2026.

Source: Pulsar TRAC

Leadership posts written with proof are also more likely to attract amplifiers

Posts with proof also allow others to share without feeling that their own credibility is at risk, whilst allowing them to align themselves with the success or lessons described.

What's also interesting to note is that the comments engaging with these posts are from operational leaders like CMOs, CTOs, COOs or more specifically, AI analysts, business analysts or, tech specialists.



How can PR and communications leaders build trust and reputation?

AI systems, including agentic browsers and AI companions like Copilot and Perplexity now synthesise information to form opinions, replacing traditional research channels. Your stakeholders will often form an opinion about you without leaving an LLM.

LinkedIn is a source of training data for these LLMs. And beyond that, the personal branding and trust that comes from imbuing messaging with proof points impacts how an organisation or individual is described in media, video, and all the other sources that are cited on LLMs.

To remain effective, PR leaders and teams must now focus on core responsibilities like providing verifiable evidence, amplifying independent voices, grounding communications in human experience, and optimising information for AI discoverability.

These pillars help PR and Communications leaders build reputation and clarity through trust, evidence and alignment:



Earned Proof



Reputation Agility



Human Authenticity



Curated Discoverability



Cross Functional Integration

Introducing Lumina the reputation suite for the modern communicator

Lumina is Isentia's proprietary suite of AI-powered solutions, custom designed for communications and PR professionals, engineered for the specific challenges they face.

Lumina evolves traditional media monitoring into narrative intelligence — enabling organisations to understand how perceptions form, evolve and impact reputation.

Stories & Perspectives uses AI to cluster media mentions into distinct stories, showing which ones are gaining or fading traction while filtering out neutral noise. It lets users track the voices shaping each story, catch shifts from opportunity to risk early, and respond with clear strategy.

AI View surfaces how LLMs represent, cite, and position the organisation, competitors, and industry as part of the Lumina suite. While the rest of Lumina uses AI to shift from media intelligence to narrative intelligence, AIView addresses the changing landscape of information and influence itself, with LLMs as a new stakeholder to manage.

UK Inflation Falls to 3- Year Low

126 Stories 4 Perspectives

Labour Party Wins General Election

127 Stories 3 Perspectives

FTSE 100 Hits Record High

85 Stories 3 Perspectives

How can I help you today?

Stories

Ask Lumina

Driving forces

5 Stories

30 Perspectives

187 Articles

What's driving the conversation

-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-



Click a segment to drill down

Other	Other, Video/Streaming, Government	198 (38.7%)	>
Editorial	Industry Public, News Media	166 (32.5%)	>
Company-Controlled	Company Content, Press Releases	92 (18.0%)	>
Reference	Research/Academic, Wikipedia		
Community	Social Media, Reddit/Forum		

Brand Sentiment Analysis for Apple

Overall Sentiment
Balanced
Score
+8%

74 Positive 14%
33 Negative 6%
378 Neutral 74%
26 Mixed 5%



Share of Voice

104
Competitors Identified

824
Total Mentions

Competitor Sentiment

53 positive 47 neutral 4 negative

Most Referenced Competitor

Samsung
100 mentions

Next on our Lumina AI Roadmap



Personalised Newsletters

AI driven Newsletters customised to leadership priorities, highlighting the stories that matter most each day, including the introduction of an audio delivery.



Intelligent Agents

A growing suite of AI agents working continuously in the background, scanning for everything from key spokespeople and messages to emerging risks and opportunities.



Pulse Reputation Analysis

Measure and understand how themes like ethics, innovation, and leadership shape perception.



Enhanced Audio & Broadcast Intelligence

Advanced image detection and boundary updates. Enhancing our best in class broadcast even further for increased speed, along with broadcast content type handing.



Predictive Intelligence Layer

Track story momentum, anticipate change, and act before the window of opportunity closes.



Crisis Detection & Response

Detect issues early, build context fast, and deliver the best response.

To discover more about our Lumina suite, click below to get in touch.

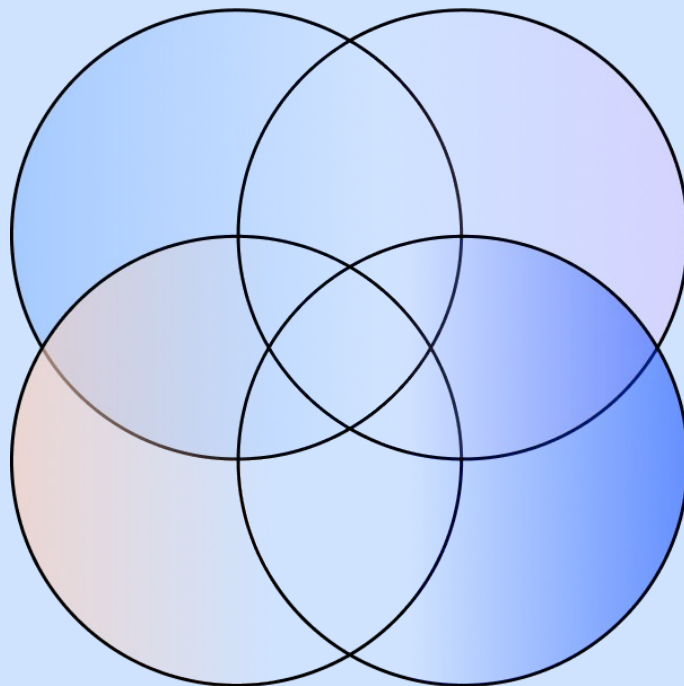
Get in touch!

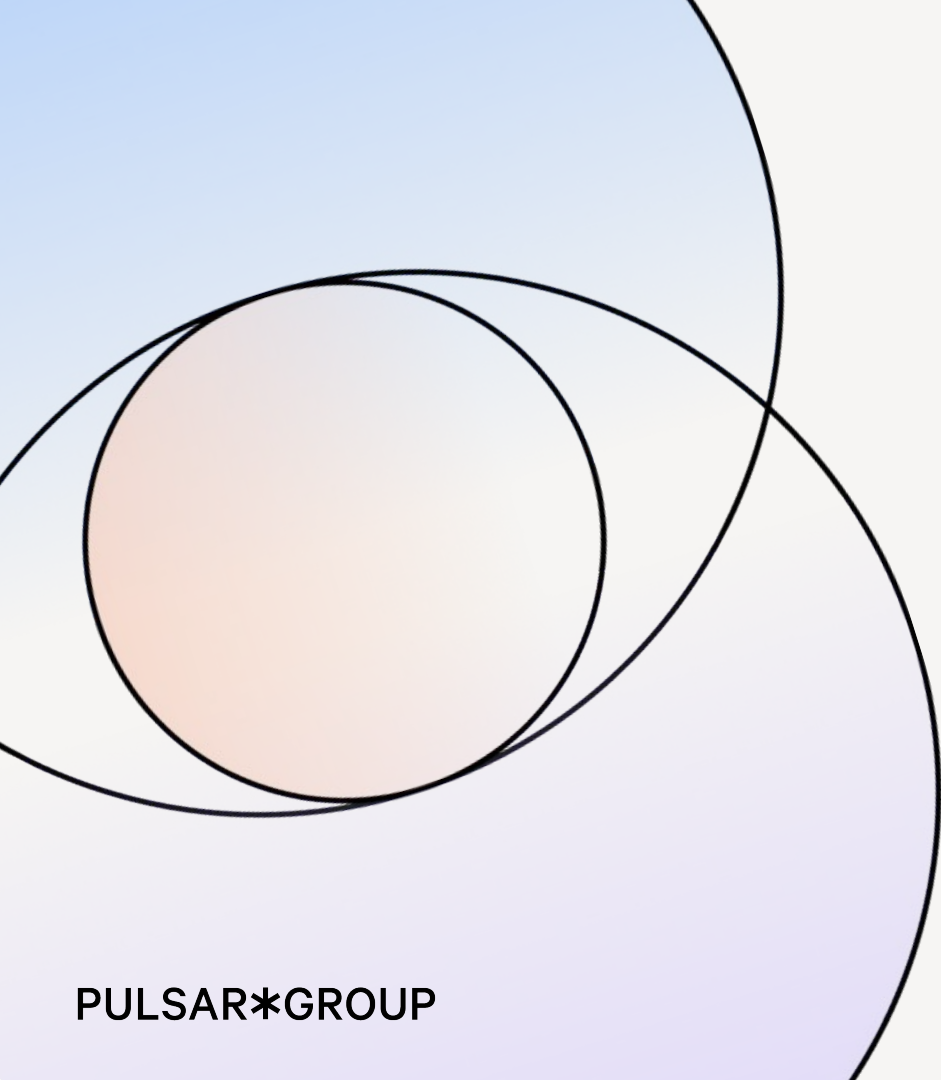


You can't manufacture trust. You earn it through authenticity. Verifiable proof, external validation, and genuine context are what separate content that performs from content that's forgotten. And this can all be measured, so get those right, and reputation takes care of itself.



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Isentia is a leading integrated media intelligence in APAC, blending market-leading monitoring experience with analytics to help the world's biggest brands uncover the whole picture – and act on it.

[Discover more about Isentia's Lumina AI suite of tools.](#)