# Best Practices for Finding and Vetting Experts

When writing an article, looking for podcast guests, conducting research, or doing any activities that require expert input and insights, Google is an obvious starting point. However, in a digital environment, it's easy for literally anyone to establish a presence as an authority on something. A well-designed website does not an expert make. What does? In this column, I take a look at some best practices that researchers can use when determining whether someone who claims to be an expert really is one.

A WELL-RECOGNIZED NAME OR BRAND

Certain sources have a ready-made cachet—companies that are widely known and well-recognized, as well as experts in certain fields who have an established presence. In business circles, people such as Jeff Bezos, Warren Buffett, and Bill Gates are clearly experts in their fields. It's unlikely, though, that these are the people you will enlist for input in most situations. The important thing for you to verify is that the person claiming to be the CEO of Deloitte really is the head of the company. Most branded websites have an area on the site listing board members and key staffers. Deloitte lists its global leadership (alongside photos) on its About Us page.

www2.deloitte.com/us/en/pages/about-deloitte/articles/about-deloitte.html
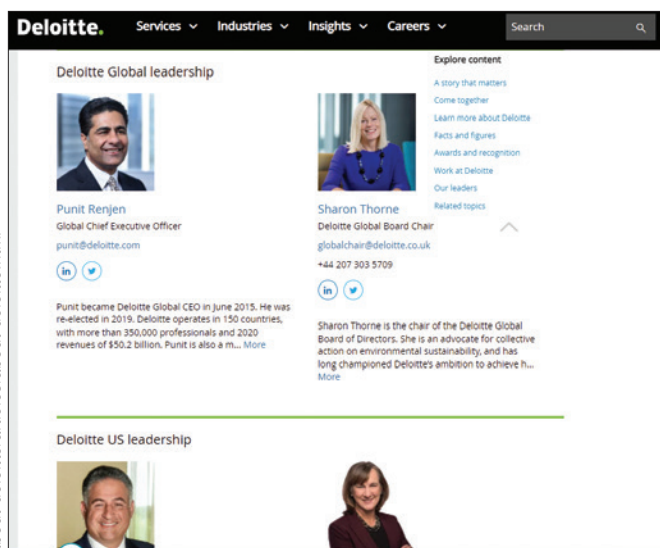
LINKEDIN

LinkedIn is an obvious—and generally reliable—outlet for verifying experts' credentials, says Brian Nagele, CEO of Restaurant Clicks, which is a digital marketing agency in the hospitality industry. Nagele leads a team of journalists who are responsible for publishing niche content that readers can trust. "As a professional platform, most users are diligent in updating their profile details. And most active account users also have meaningful engagement that can prove their expertise," Nagele states.

restaurantclicks.com/about
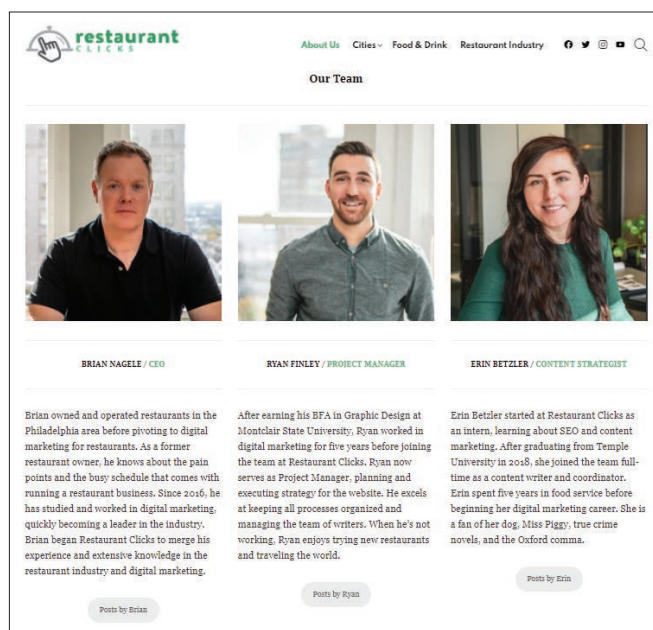
Nagele says that when vetting sources, he likes to check their recent activity to see what they're commenting on and if they offer good input. "If they consistently offer valuable insights, then I'm more inclined to trust their credentials," he states. "Conversely, if they spend most of their time liking posts, it's hard to gauge their authority on niche topics." Nagele acknowledges that there is a potential downfall to LinkedIn: "Anyone can insert credentials into their profile without actually verifying their claims." It may require additional research to confirm credentials.

VERIFIABLE CREDENTIALS

Vetting a source's credentials is simple to do in today's digital environment. But it's important to be aware of warning signs that might negate the credibility claims of a potential source. "In a digital environment, it's easy to manipulate your image in an effort to portray yourself as someone else," says Mike Grossman, CEO of GoodHire, a background checking company. For this reason, he says, "you should beware of sources that don't have a presence outside of their own website or LinkedIn profile."

Grossman suggests that sources being considered "should have a commanding multi-modal presence in multiple spaces across the internet, including a professional website, a full LinkedIn profile, and extracts of thought leadership on high-authority publications." He looks for individuals who have a footprint on at least five separate platforms, possibly including "interviews and guest appearances on podcasts, which can indicate that other journalists trust the source in question." When a source is present on multiple platforms, Grossman says, their image can't be easily manipulated. So, what are some signals that an individual is credible? The Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism at the City University of New York suggests looking for sources who are:

- Affiliated with a reputable organization, such as a university
- Authors of "works that have been characterized or identified as authoritative in the field in question, by multiple reputable sources"
- Recognized as authorities in their field by multiple reputable sources
- Authorities based on their position— e.g., working in a government agency

University and government sources tend to be good, low-risk, trusted sources in most cases. It's still important, though, to check out the background of a source a bit more to ensure they have not recently been subject to censure or involved in controversy.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE TO SAY

It's a big world full of billions of experts on a wide range of topics. A good majority of those experts are not household names. Their position and claims shouldn't be taken at face value. Even if they have a website and a LinkedIn profile, as Grossman suggests, it's wise to do some additional sleuthing.

LINKS TO THE SOURCE

Deloitte's About Us page
www2.deloitte.com/us/en/pages/about-deloitte/articles/about-deloitte.html

Restaurant Clicks
restaurantclicks.com

GoodHire
goodhire.com

The Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism's Finding Experts Guide
researchguides.journalism.cuny.edu/findingexperts

Podcast Hawk
podcasthawk.com

Google searches for their names plus various screening terms can help, such as the following:

- Chris Smith and controversy
- Chris Smith and complaints
- Chris Smith and negative reviews
- Chris Smith and lawsuits

There may also be clues on potential sources' own websites. Ray Blakney (CEO and co-founder of Podcast Hawk, which is a SaaS product that helps people get booked on podcasts) says this: "A surefire way to vet potential podcast guests is by checking to see if they have a personal or business website that mentions any accolades they have, such as 'As seen on …' badges for other podcasts they've been a guest on or links to expert articles they have written for industry publications. This will help you know that they are truly an expert that could share inspiring and engaging insights on your podcast show."

The more searching and investigation you do, the sooner you'll start to see some consistency in how the individual is viewed—whether positively or negatively. Keep in mind that these tips can also be helpful for those trying to establish themselves as experts. Understanding how researchers, journalists, and others evaluate the credibility of those they are considering as resources can help you position yourself to get exposure as well.

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