

E-E-A-T RESEARCH REPORT

THE CONSTRUCTION AUTHORITY GAP

What the websites of the 2026 *ENR* Top 400 Contractors reveal about visible experience, expertise, authority, trust, and content systems.

The industry has an authority gap, not an expertise gap.

Construction companies know how to solve difficult problems. Their websites often fail to make that knowledge visible. Across the 2026 *ENR* Top 400 Contractors, the average public-authority score was 44.9 out of 100. Eighty-one percent of contractors scored below the Established Thought Leader threshold, while only 8% reached the two highest tiers.



The most common pattern was not a lack of credibility. It was a failure to convert credible operating experience into useful public knowledge. Project portfolios, awards, community news, and recruiting content were abundant. Buyer-oriented education, named expert perspectives, original analysis, transparent evidence, and sustained topic ownership were much harder to find.

That gap matters more in an AI-saturated market. Generic content is now inexpensive and abundant. When every contractor can publish a polished article that sounds competent, undifferentiated content creates more sameness and further commoditizes construction. The durable advantage is not volume. It is specific, attributable, evidence-backed knowledge that only experienced practitioners can produce.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION FOR CONTRACTOR LEADERSHIP IS SIMPLE:

Does your website demonstrate what your people know, or does it simply describe what your company does?

Bottom line: Most contractors do not need to invent expertise. They need an editorial system that identifies it, documents it, attributes it, and makes it easy for buyers to use.

Trust is built from visible proof.

E-E-A-T stands for **Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness**. Google introduced the additional E for Experience to emphasize firsthand knowledge, while also clarifying that its quality-rater guidelines help evaluate search systems and do not directly determine rankings. This study adapts the framework for an A/E/C buyer context; it is not an official Google score.

EXPERIENCE	Firsthand knowledge from doing the work: detailed examples, decisions, lessons, and tradeoffs.
EXPERTISE	Technically credible, useful teaching supported by named subject-matter experts and original thinking.
AUTHORITY	Recognition beyond the company website through respected publications, conferences, associations, citations, and durable expert visibility.
TRUST	Clear authorship, sources, examples, dates, methods, disclosures, and a reliable technical experience.

A/E/C CMOs added a fifth category, **Content Ecosystem**, because isolated good work is not the same as a functioning authority system. We evaluated whether expertise was current, organized, discoverable, and sustained across mutually reinforcing formats.

In the age of AI slop, these signals help a buyer distinguish lived knowledge from plausible-sounding synthesis. A named superintendent explaining a sequencing decision, an estimator publishing a transparent cost index, or a market leader documenting a repeatable framework creates a stronger trust signal than a broad article assembled from familiar industry talking points.

Important distinction: E-E-A-T is not a synonym for content marketing volume. A smaller library of rigorous, attributable material can demonstrate more authority than a busy newsroom dominated by corporate announcements.

A buyer-view assessment of public evidence.

The sample comprised the websites of the 2026 *ENR* Top 400 Contractors. Researchers reviewed the supplied corporate domains and directly connected official content systems. The unit of analysis was visible thought-leadership authority: the degree to which a buyer could discover, understand, and trust the expertise presented online.

Only publicly available evidence received credit. We did not review unlinked social media, private proposals, internal knowledge, live presentations or webinars, or interviews with subject-matter experts. We also did not judge the objective quality of a contractor's field operations. Buyers are rarely equipped to validate technical mastery directly; they evaluate the proof a company chooses to make visible.

SCORING FRAMEWORK

CATEGORY	POINTS	WHAT THE SCORE RECOGNIZED
Experience	20	Firsthand observations, original cases, practical lessons, and sustained depth.
Expertise	20	Educational usefulness, technical depth, named experts, research, and frameworks.
Authority	20	Independent publication, speaking, citations, recognition, and expert continuity.
Trust	20	Authorship, evidence, methods, dates, disclosures, and technical reliability.
Content Ecosystem	20	Format breadth, topic organization, recency, continuity, and sustained experts.

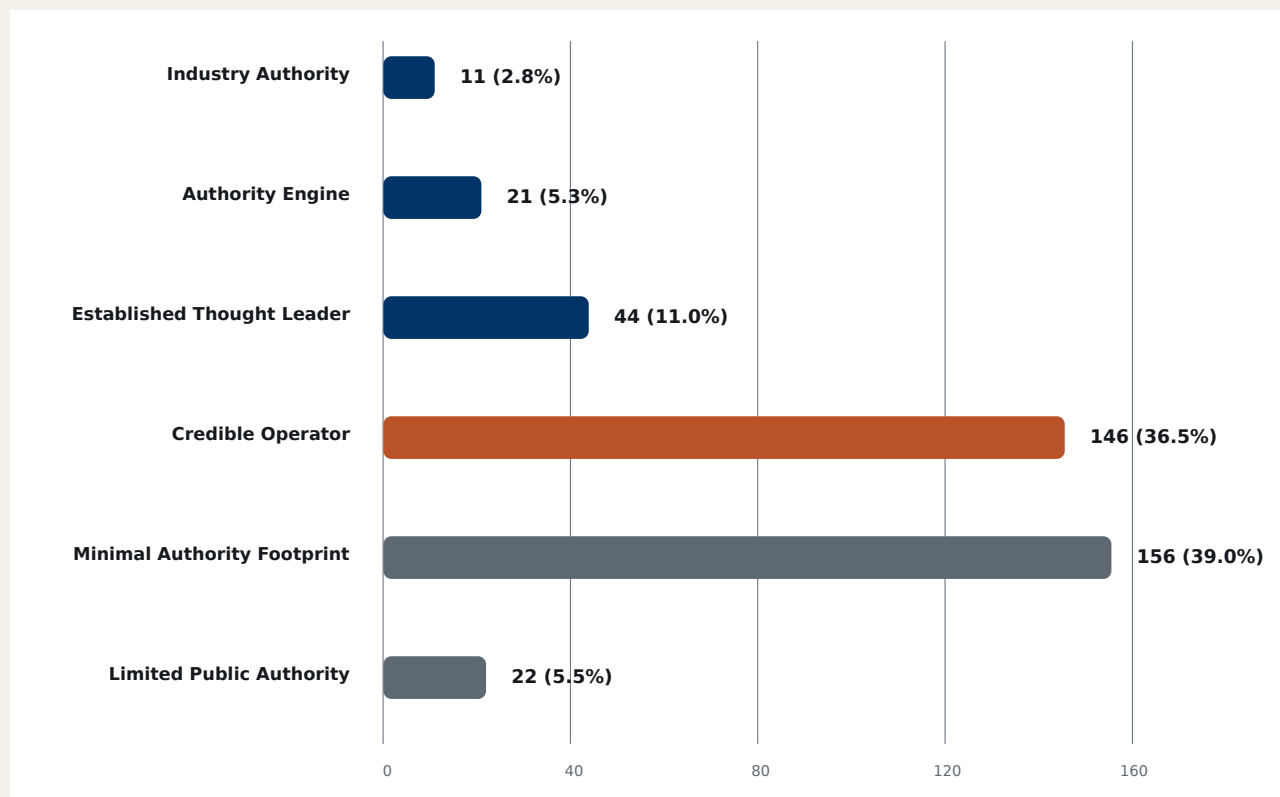
The rubric contained 24 measures and a 100-point base score. The standard research opportunity sampled recent meaningful pieces, older cornerstone material, the latest report or guide, substantive audio or video, resource hubs, expert profiles, and a fixed set of external authority signals.

What did not count as meaningful thought leadership: awards, new hires, project announcements, company news, community activity, promotional posts, job listings, press-release syndication, contract wins, and sponsorships. These materials may support brand and trust, but they do not, by themselves, teach a buyer or establish topic authority.

Research access date: September 7, 2026. Websites change continuously; this report is a point-in-time view.

Most contractor websites stop at credibility.

The center of the market is concentrated in two tiers. Minimal Authority Footprint accounts for 156 contractors, and Credible Operator accounts for 146. Together, they represent 75.5% of the *ENR* Top 400. These contractors usually show that they can do the work; far fewer consistently teach buyers how to think about the work.



324 contractors scored below 60. The opportunity is not simply to publish more articles. It is to turn project knowledge into a sustained, buyer-useful system with clear expertise, evidence, ownership, and continuity.

HOW TO INTERPRET THE RESULTS

The score is a benchmark of **publicly available thought leadership authority**. It is not a rating of overall company quality, project performance, safety, financial strength, brand distinction, or general corporate credibility. A low score means the website offers limited public proof of useful expertise; it does not mean the organization lacks expertise.

Five findings for construction marketers and leaders.

OPERATIONAL PROOF IS COMMON; EDUCATIONAL PROOF IS NOT.

- 1** Most contractors can demonstrate projects, markets served, safety commitments, and years in business. Those signals support credibility. They do not automatically demonstrate how the company diagnoses risk, makes decisions, applies lessons, or creates better outcomes.

COMPANY NEWS IS OFTEN MISTAKEN FOR THOUGHT LEADERSHIP.

- 2** A current newsroom can create the impression of an active content program while providing little buyer education. Awards, promotions, groundbreakings, openings, and community stories answer “What happened at our company?” Thought leadership answers “What should the buyer understand or do next?”

ATTRIBUTION IS A MAJOR DIVIDING LINE.

- 3** Higher-scoring contractors consistently connect insights to named practitioners and durable expert profiles. This makes expertise inspectable, gives buyers a reason to trust the material, and creates authority that can compound across articles, reports, speaking, and third-party recognition.

ORIGINAL RESEARCH CREATES DISPROPORTIONATE VALUE.

- 4** Recurring cost indices, market reports, benchmarks, technical studies, and proprietary frameworks give other people something to cite. They also create a defensible point of view that generic AI-generated content cannot easily replicate.

AUTHORITY IS A SYSTEM, NOT A CAMPAIGN.

- 5** The strongest websites organize expertise by topic, publish across multiple useful formats, maintain continuity over time, and connect content to the people who know the subject. A few isolated articles can show promise; institutional authority requires repeatable operations.

The pattern suggests that many contractors already possess the raw material for stronger authority. **The knowledge is simply trapped in project teams, pursuit interviews, conference decks, client conversations, and closeout lessons.**

What each tier looks like, and how to advance.

LIMITED PUBLIC AUTHORITY 0-19

22 CONTRACTORS



What it is now: The site shows corporate or project proof, but virtually no visible public thought-leadership system.

How to move up: Publish three to four useful lessons tied to real work. Name the practitioner, date the material, and create a functioning insights hub.

MINIMAL AUTHORITY FOOTPRINT 20-39

156 CONTRACTORS



What it is now: Some usable expertise, case evidence, expert visibility, or occasional education exists, but it is isolated rather than sustained.

How to move up: Choose two to three topics to own. Publish at least quarterly with named experts, examples, metrics, and sources; build a 12-month educational archive.

CREDIBLE OPERATOR 40-59

146 CONTRACTORS



What it is now: A real but limited educational or content system exists. Buyers can find useful material, but depth, cadence, attribution, or organization is inconsistent.

How to move up: Create recurring series, guides, webinars, or market reports. Strengthen methods, expert profiles, topic clusters, and external speaking.

The largest practical opportunity sits between 20 and 59. These 302 contractors already have enough operational proof to build from. The next step is not a broad brand campaign; it is disciplined knowledge capture and publication.

From recognizable expertise to category leadership.



ESTABLISHED THOUGHT LEADER 60-75

44 CONTRACTORS

What it is now: The contractor sustains public education and has recognizable topic authority, with recurring useful material and visible experts.

How to advance: Add proprietary research, multiple recurring formats, documented methods, and a stronger connection between topics, experts, and external authority.



AUTHORITY ENGINE 76-90

21 CONTRACTORS

What it is now: A mature, expert-led, multi-format authority system is operating across topics and formats with clear continuity.

How to advance: Create benchmark research and flagship intellectual property. Increase citations, conference roles, industry adoption, and durable institutional ownership.



INDUSTRY AUTHORITY 91-100

11 CONTRACTORS

What it is now: The contractor operates an institutional, category-shaping knowledge system that others can reference, reuse, and trust.

How to advance: Keep research current, develop the next generation of experts, protect editorial quality, and produce knowledge the market relies on.

The band labels describe the public system, not the organization's inherent expertise. Advancement depends on making more of that expertise visible in a form that is specific, useful, attributable, and sustained.

The top tier is small and heavily weighted toward scale.



Only 11 contractors reached **Industry Authority**, scoring 91-100. Most are among the largest companies in the *ENR* Top 400 (and even the *ENR* Top 500 Design Firms), which is not surprising: research, editorial operations, expert development, and multi-format publishing require resources and continuity. Still, scale is not sufficient on its own. The top tier is distinguished by how deliberately those resources are converted into public knowledge.

01 AECOM

02 Skanska USA

03 Black & Veatch

04 DPR Construction

05 Turner Construction

06 Burns & McDonnell

07 Haskell

08 Mortenson

09 Suffolk Construction

10 VINCI Construction

11 CDM Smith

Two design-led companies - AECOM and CDM Smith - demonstrate another advantage: organizations built around technical consulting often have mature mechanisms for publishing specialist knowledge. Contractors can borrow that discipline without trying to imitate the scale of a global enterprise.

Build the authority system from the work outward.

Contractors do not need a publishing factory. They need a repeatable way to extract and package knowledge that already exists. The following sequence is deliberately practical and can support movement from one tier to the next.

1 Choose a narrow authority territory.

Select two or three buyer problems where the company has real experience, evidence, and a differentiated point of view. Avoid trying to cover the entire construction industry.

2 Build an expert bench.

Identify practitioners who can explain decisions, tradeoffs, and lessons. Create substantive bios that connect each expert to specific topics, projects, credentials, and published work.

3 Capture evidence at the source.

Add knowledge capture to project reviews, pursuit debriefs, cost updates, safety meetings, and closeouts. Record numbers, constraints, alternatives, and outcomes while they are still accessible.

4 Create recurring formats.

Use a manageable mix: a quarterly market update, a technical article series, an annual benchmark, a case lesson, and a substantive webinar or podcast. Consistency matters more than novelty.

5 Strengthen trust signals.

Name authors and reviewers, date every piece, cite sources, explain methods, disclose limitations, and connect claims to examples. Make the proof easy to inspect.

6 Distribute for recognition.

Turn the strongest ideas into conference submissions, association education, contributed articles, media commentary, and partner content. External authority is earned when useful knowledge travels.

A useful operating principle: one strong idea should produce several mutually reinforcing assets, but every asset should add value. A benchmark can become a report, executive briefing, webinar, expert commentary, and a series of technical articles without becoming repetitive.

Visible expertise is becoming a competitive requirement.

The 2026 *ENR* Top 400 results show a market rich in operating experience but uneven in public authority. Most contractors have already built the hard part: years of projects, technical judgment, specialized teams, and lessons earned under real constraints. What is missing is a disciplined system for turning that knowledge into buyer value.

AI raises the stakes. It can accelerate research, drafting, repurposing, and production, but it also makes average content abundant. Contractors that rely on generic summaries will become harder to distinguish. Contractors that combine real experience with named experts, original evidence, useful teaching, and consistent publication will become easier to trust.

The goal is not to sound like a thought leader. It is to become a reliable source of knowledge for the markets the company wants to lead.

ABOUT A/E/C CMOs

A/E/C CMOs provides fractional CMO leadership and implementation support for construction companies ready to grow with greater focus. We combine construction-specific marketing strategy, original industry research, brand positioning, content, digital marketing, and practical execution to help contractors construction magnetic brands that attract better work, better talent, and better margins.

Constructing Magnetic Brands. | www.aeccmos.com

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Perryn Olson, FSMPS, CPSM, CCMP is a construction marketing strategist, researcher, and author who has worked in the construction industry since 2005. He is the founder and president of A/E/C CMOs and a longtime leader within the Society for Marketing Professional Services (SMPS). Perryn is a frequent speaker and educator on construction marketing, brand strategy, and the evolving role of marketing leadership in the built environment.

USE OF THIS RESEARCH

This report is intended for strategy, benchmarking, and discussion. Because websites and content systems change, scores should be treated as a point-in-time assessment. Reuse of findings should preserve the stated scope: public website authority, not overall contractor competence or quality.

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