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Why AI keeps choosing the same brands



Part 1 of 4 — The Agentic Web series

The difference between being mentioned once and becoming a trusted recommendation.



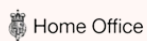
Hi, I'm Lisa

I've been making websites for over 20 years and run an award winning web development agency based just outside Bristol in the UK. You can find [our website here](#).

I'm a speaker at events, a writer of all things web, and have taught SEO for longer than I care to remember. I work with clients all over the world, from small one-person-bands to household names and websites that can get millions of visitors a day. My clients include...



Sainsbury's



I also founded a not-for-profit to help people find the best web developer for their project, rather than fall foul of a smooth talking cowboy. From that role, I was asked to represent the industry in discussions with the EU about online privacy reform.

Please do make sure you're [signed up to my mailing list](#) to keep in touch, and following me on your choice of social networks...

[LinkedIn](#) [Instagram](#) [TikTok](#) [YouTube](#)



Common AI advice:

- ☐ Content “chunking” AND remove “thin” content
- ☐ Set up free uptime monitoring
- ☐ Social media strategy for engagement
- ☐ Investigate Reddit
- ☐ Put structured data in place
- ☐ Write some FAQs
- ☐ Site speed optimised
- ☐ Offer guest blog posts
- ☐ Link building
- ☐ Win awards
- ☐ Keep case studies
- ☐ Blog authoritatively
- ☐ Get a LLMS.txt file
- ☐ Check robots can index your site



Useful? Yes.

Useful? Yes. Enough? Not without
the bigger picture...

Mentioned

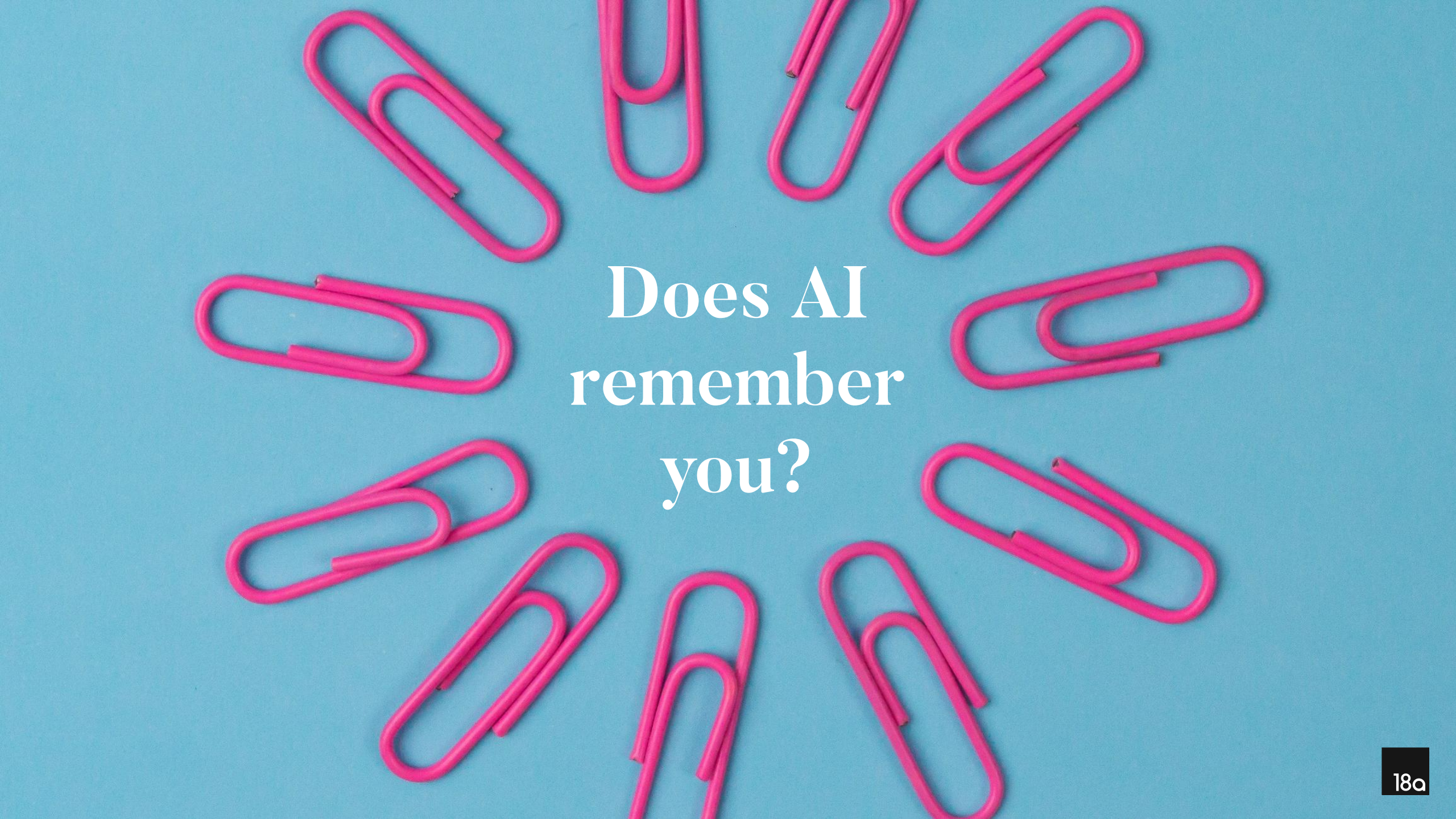
Chosen repeatedly

SEO was about retrieval. AI is about confidence.

Search engines asked: which page is most relevant?

AI increasingly asks: which brand am I safest recommending?



A collection of approximately 12 bright pink paper clips is arranged in a loose circular pattern around the central text. The clips are oriented in various directions, some facing outwards and others inwards. The background is a solid, muted teal color.

Does AI
remember
you?

The trained model is a snapshot

The base model - the thing that "knows" things - was trained on a massive dataset at a point in time. It has a cutoff. It doesn't learn from every conversation. There is no Stranger Things hive mind updating in real time every time someone asks ChatGPT something.

So when a new model is trained, it learns from whatever the web looked like up to that point. Brands that have been consistently mentioned, cited, and described the same way are what get absorbed.

It's not remembering you. It's learning from the record the web kept of you.



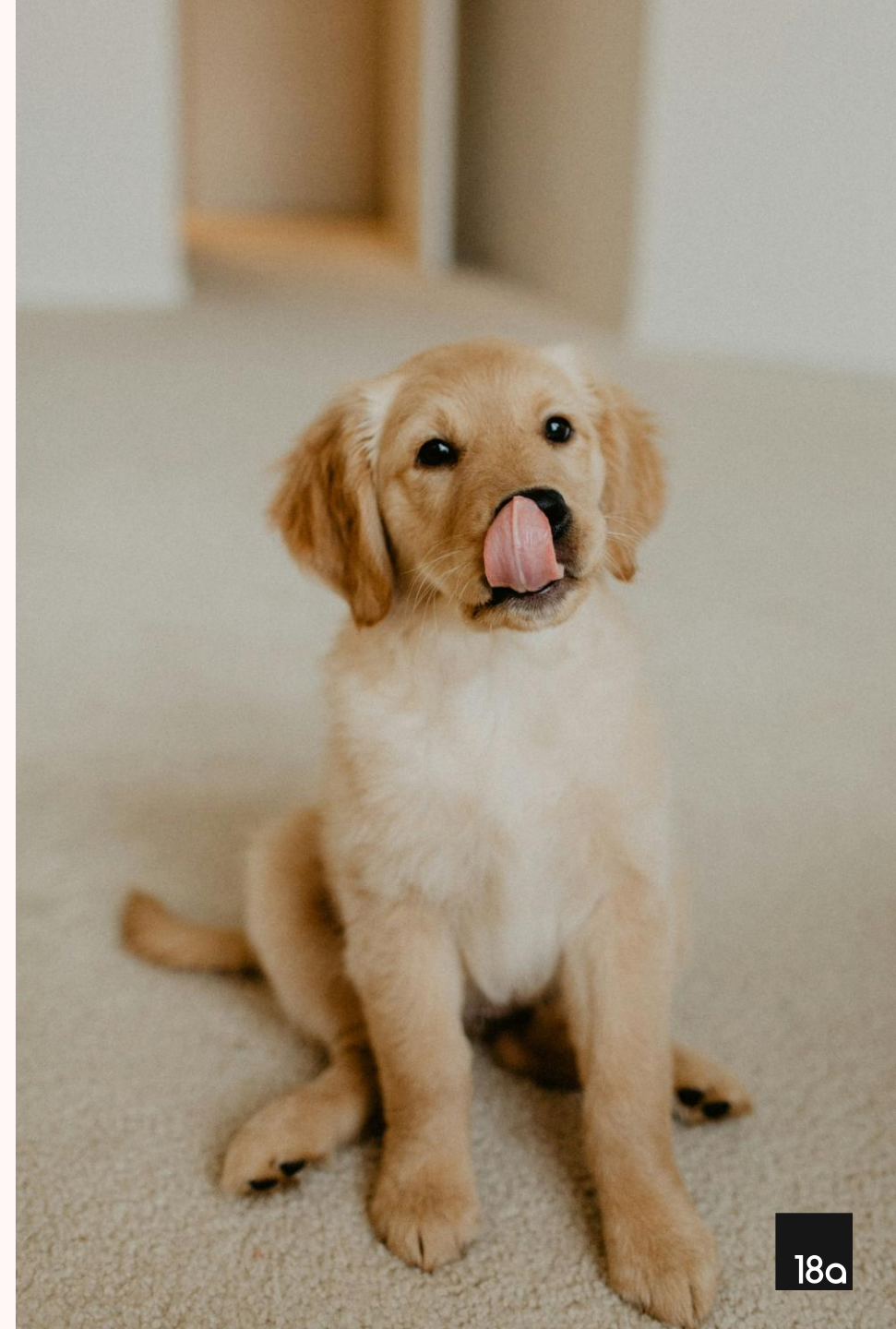
But retrieval systems are live

Modern AI products aren't just the trained model.

They're surrounded by retrieval systems - live search, indexed sources, structured data, reviews, citations - that check the current web every time a query is answered.

This is where recency matters. This is where your robots.txt matters. This is where uptime matters.

Every time someone asks AI a question, the retrieval layer may go and check the web right now.



Most people imagine AI as one thing. It's actually at least two things working together - and they behave very differently.

The trained model	The retrieval system
Learned from a huge snapshot of the web	Searches the live web in real time
Has a knowledge cutoff	Constantly refreshed
Not updating from your conversations	Checking sources every time
<i>Knows HubSpot exists</i>	<i>Finds the best current source about HubSpot</i>

So does AI "remember" brands?

The trained model has “knowledge” it’s absorbed from the web – it knows that certain brands consistently appear across high-confidence sources.

The retrieval layer repeatedly re-validates those same brands when it checks live.

So the end result – the output - **BEHAVES** like trust accumulation...
but it's actually closer to ***repeated successful re-validation***.



It's not that AI personally likes HubSpot. It's that HubSpot shows up **reliably**, in the **right places**, in a way that robots can **read and trust**.

AI recommendation behaves less
like loyalty and more like *continuous
due diligence.*

Every time your name comes up, the evidence is checked. The brands that keep being recommended are the ones where, every time it checks, the evidence still holds up.

So what does "holding up under scrutiny" actually look like?

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Consistency

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Consistency
Corroboration

So what does "holding up under scrutiny" actually look like?

Consistency
Corroboration
Expertise

So what does "holding up under scrutiny" actually look like?

- Consistency
- Corroboration
- Expertise
- Reliability

Consistency / Corroboration / Expertise / Reliability

This isn't a new checklist.

They're a way of thinking about what trustworthiness looks like to a machine that's doing due diligence on you.



Consistency

Humans ignore inconsistency more than machines do.

AI notices when the picture of you doesn't match across sources.

Your website says one thing. Your LinkedIn says another. Your schema markup says something else. An old blog post from 2021 describes you differently again.

Humans skim past inconsistency but retrieval systems notice it.



In practice...

Examples:

- Old service pages still live with different positioning
- Old prices / menus
- "About" sections that haven't been updated since a rebrand
- How many years you've been trading – maybe try to avoid numbers for this reason!
- Schema that describes what you used to do, not what you do now
- A founder bio that says "freelance web designer" on LinkedIn but "agency director" on the website



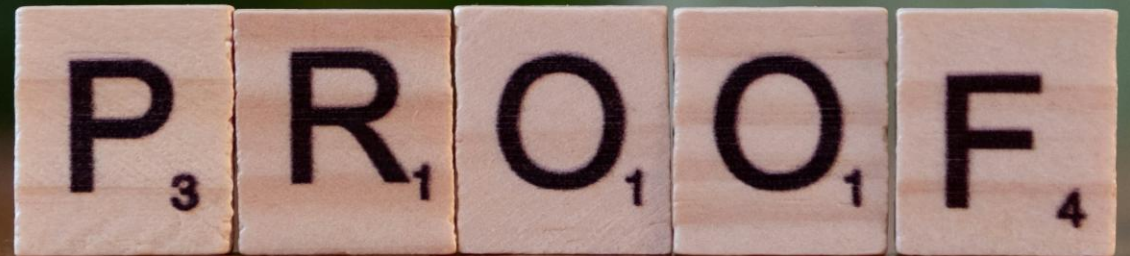
Corroboration

Do other people describe you the same way you describe yourself?

AI trusts what it can verify somewhere else.

Not just what you say about yourself - but whether the web agrees.

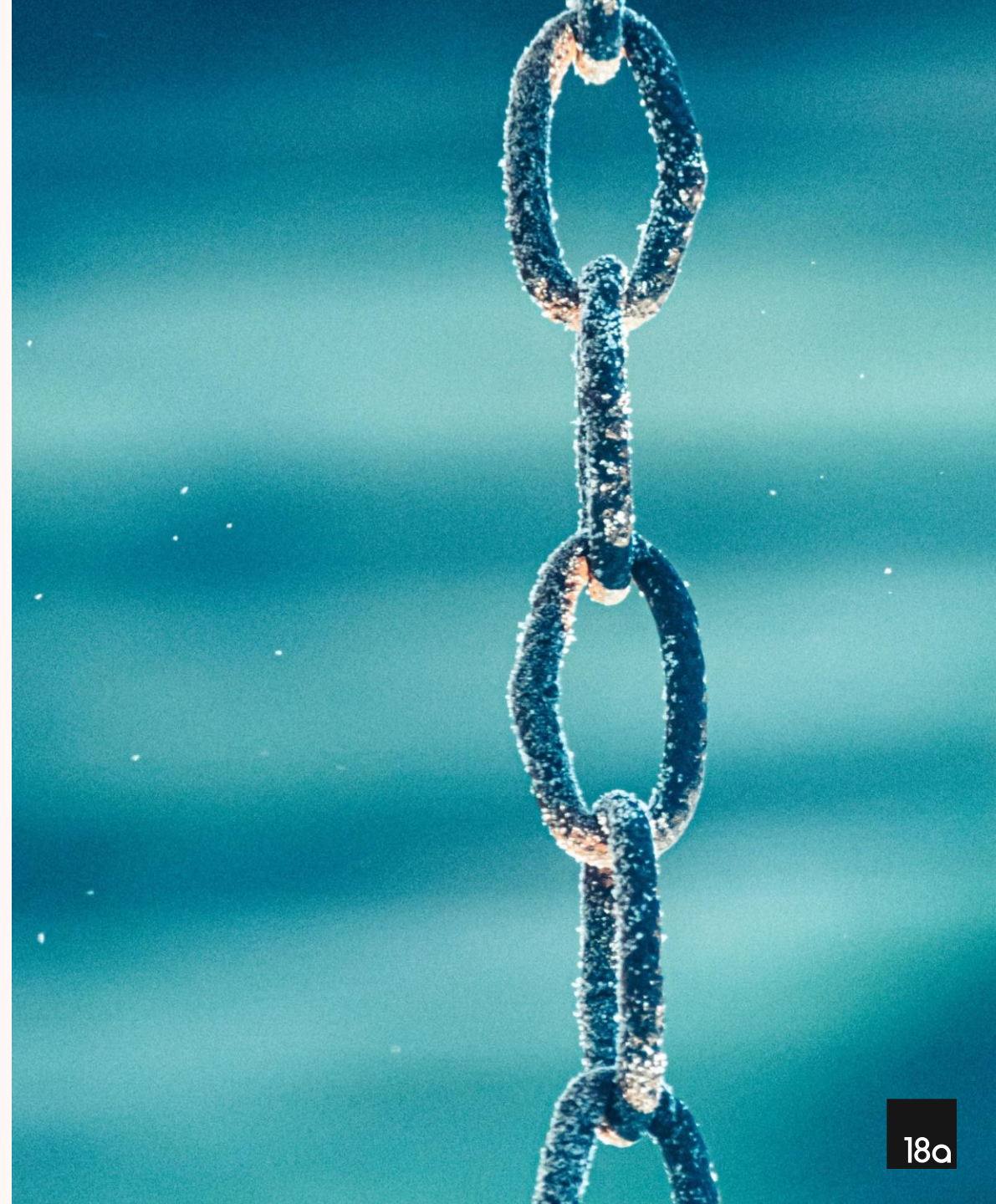
- Reviews
- Reddit
- Industry mentions
- Podcast appearances
- Conference talks
- Guest articles
- Citations in relevant places



Citations vs. links

Traditional SEO cared about links but AI cares about mentions - because AI can recognise your brand or expertise even without a clickable URL pointing to you.

This is why Reddit matters, and why being quoted in trade press matters and why speaking at events and having those talks referenced online matters.



Why small brands can win

A small, focused brand with unusually strong corroboration in a specific niche can outperform a larger, more generic competitor.

Because the signal consistency is tight.

The expertise is obvious.

The founder is visible.

The citations all say the same thing.

Niche authority, consistently corroborated, can beat generic scale.



Expertise

AI prefers demonstrated expertise to generic summaries.

This ties directly to E-E-A-T - Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, Trustworthiness.

But the important word is *demonstrated*. Not *claimed*.

- Case studies
- First-hand stories
- Specific outcomes
- Opinion
- Nuanced judgement

The kind of thing that only comes from actually having done the work.



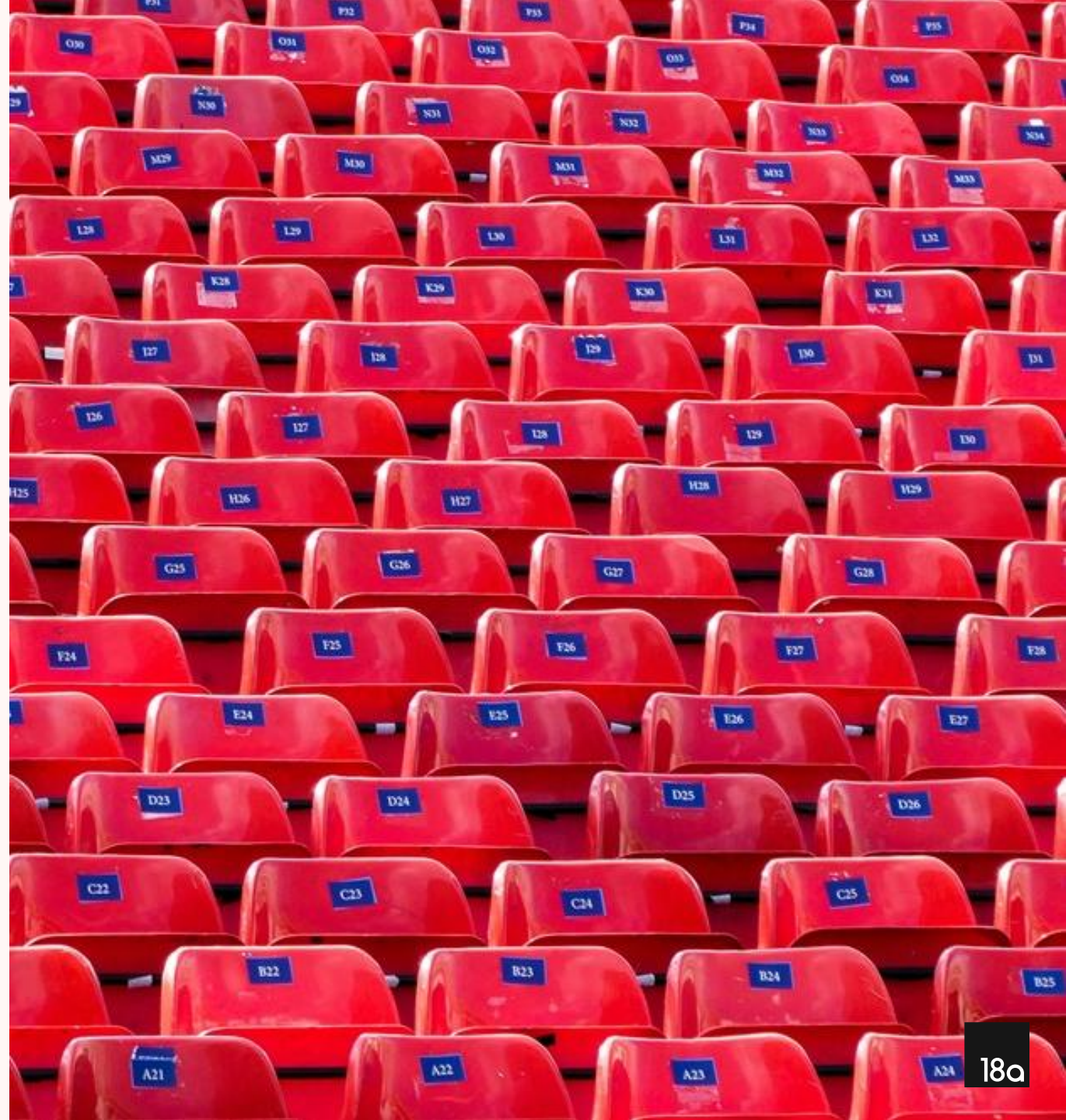
The AI content problem

There are now thousands of blog posts saying identical things with no lived experience, no opinion, no evidence. Just restructured summaries of other summaries.

AI models increasingly treat generic content with nothing new to say as background noise.

If you want to stand out, you need to put your own spin on it.

The future isn't less human content. It's less generic content.



Your weird client situations are your best assets

The stuff that only exists in your head is your best content.

The messy client project. The thing that didn't work. The edge case that surprised you. That's the content AI can't synthesise from five other sources.



Reliability

AI retrieval systems are expensive to run.

They prefer sources that are predictably available, consistently fast, and structurally clean.

A site that's frequently down, slow to respond, or returning errors when a bot tries to crawl it is a less safe recommendation - not just for humans, but for the machine deciding whether to surface it.

Technical reliability is a brand signal.



What happens when AI comes back tomorrow?

Is your site still fast? Same structure? Same content?
Available? Crawlable? Schema intact?

This isn't a one-time audit question. It's a continuous one.

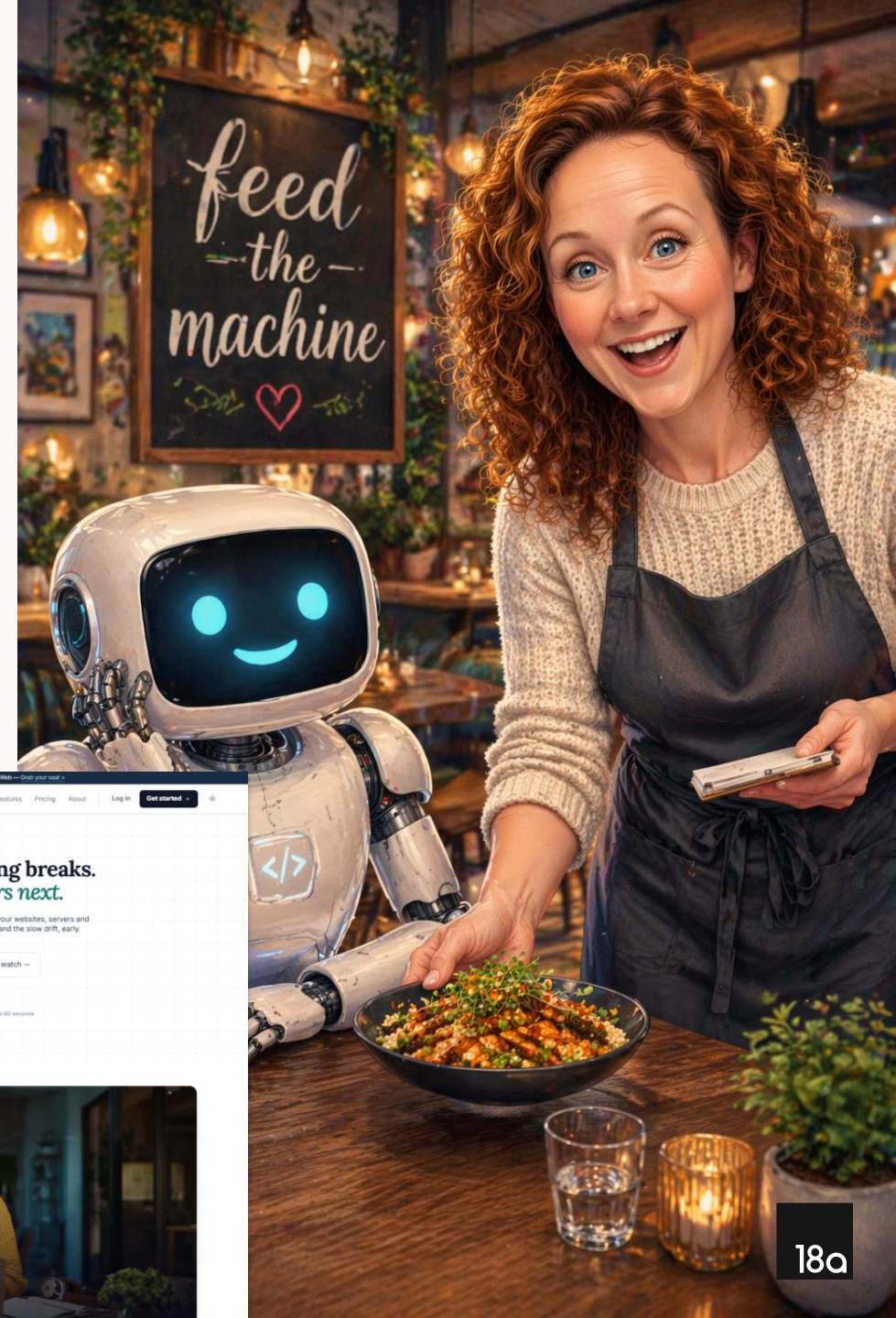
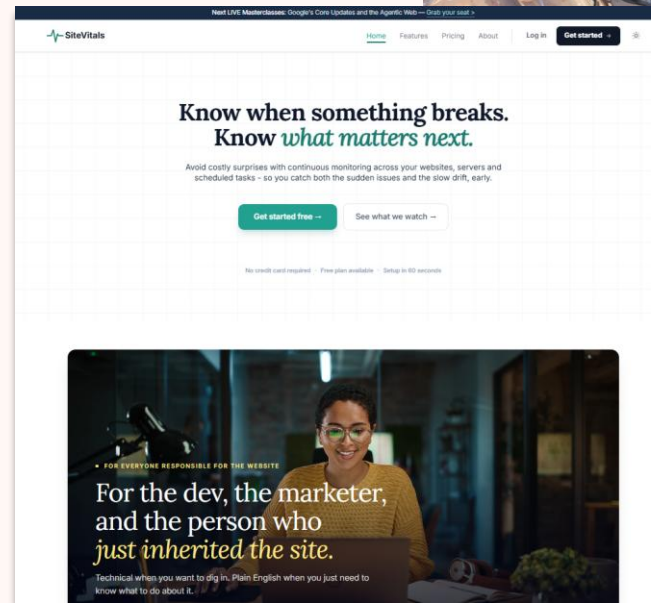


Continuous trust verification

We have a tool that's based on ***real client problems*** and gives a site health check on **speed, security, SEO, accessibility, robots access** and more, as well as **constantly monitoring uptime**. It then emails a report when something takes a dip so you know to investigate.

Visit [SiteVitals](#) and get **absolutely free uptime checking**, or pay a low monthly fee for a whole host of different monitors and reports.

[SiteVitals >>](#)



• THE QUIET THINGS, CAUGHT LOUD

The ways a website breaks when *nobody's watching*.

Real kinds of issue SiteVitals catches every week - the sort that only become visible when you're already explaining them to your boss.

16:48 · LAST TUESDAY

Credit card expires. Domain renewal notice goes to an address no one checks.

You have 14 days to notice, or the name goes back on the open market.

09:04 · MONDAY

Tiny server config change breaks the Instagram widget.

Home page now returns a 500 - which makes it look completely broken.

02:00 · OVERNIGHT

Scheduled task doesn't run. Prices don't update.

You find out when a customer emails at lunchtime.

03:12 · THURSDAY

A third-party script fails and the home page loads without a stylesheet.

Looks broken to every visitor for 40 minutes. No error in your inbox.

16:4

Cre
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08:00 · EVERY MORNING

A paid campaign lands on a page that's been returning a 404 since Saturday.

£40 a click, nothing converting.

11:30 · THIS MORNING

Well-optimised title tag is overwritten in a page update.

Nobody knows. Rankings start sliding in four weeks.

06:20 · FRIDAY

CSP header dropped after a plugin update.

Inline scripts still working - but your form submissions now fail.

22:45 · SUNDAY

Someone pushes a canonical tag pointing at staging.

Google starts de-indexing the live site by Monday lunchtime.

nical tag

e site by Monday

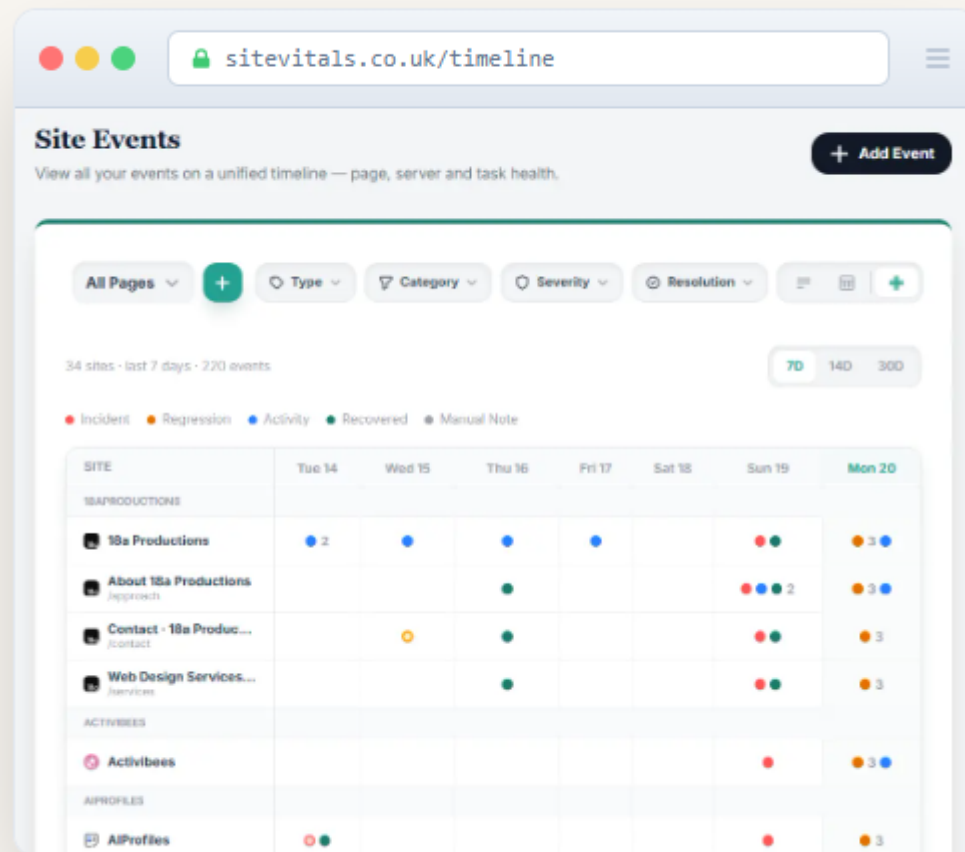
A site issue caught early is a *five-minute fix*. The same issue discovered by a customer, a client, or your boss is a *very different kind of afternoon*.

HOW THE ADVICE IS BUILT

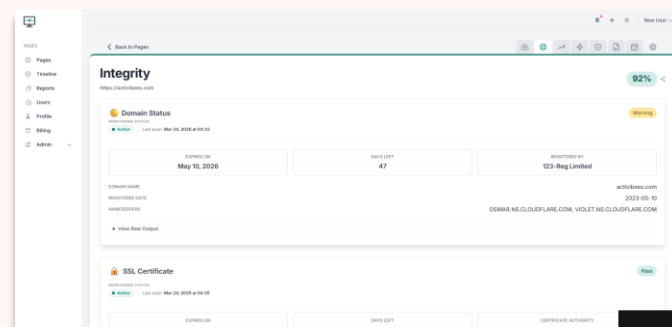
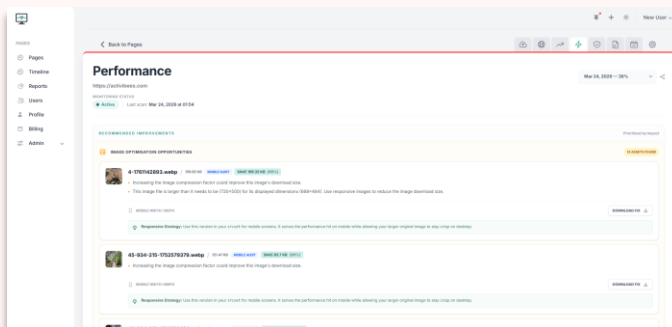
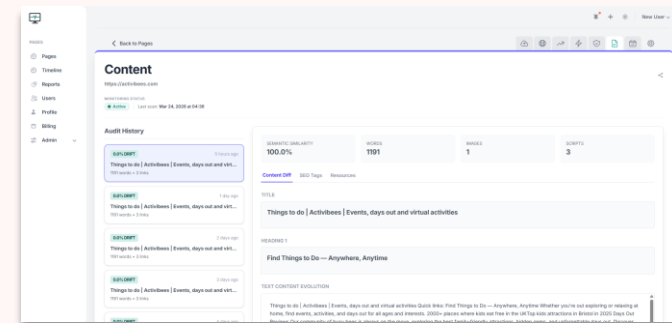
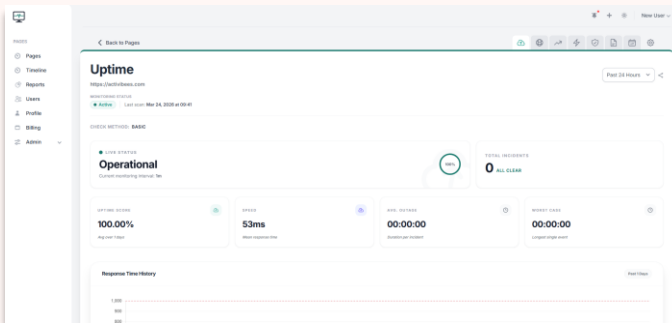
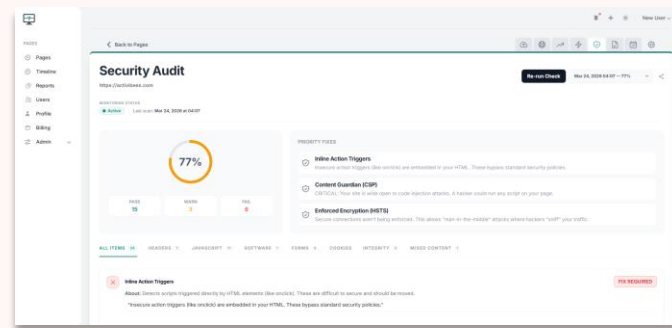
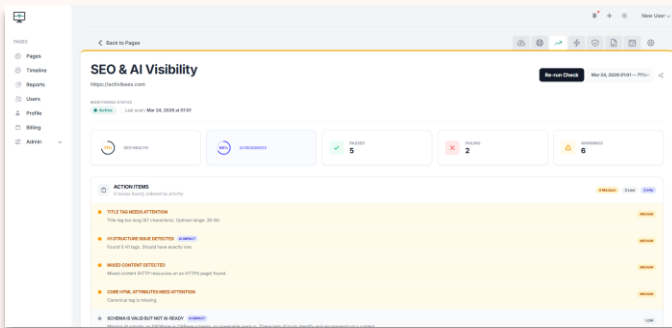
Every recommendation
is backed by a
continuous timeline of
your entire portfolio.

Notes, regressions, improvements and risks, logged minute by minute, stitched together and weighted. Nothing you see in the digest came from a hunch. You can trace every line back to the moment it was observed. Add your own updates to the timeline too.

What is Change Intelligence? →



**Graphs, reports,
stats, tables – all
laid out in easy to
understand ways
– or just rely on
the updates.**



Accidental competitor analysis...

BEYOND YOUR OWN SITES

Know when the market is moving, *not just when your client's site is.*

One of the subtler advantages of continuous change monitoring is that it works on any public URL - including your clients' competitors. When a rival brand quietly repositions their homepage, shifts their service copy, or starts targeting a different set of keywords, you'll see it. Not because you were watching, but because SiteVitals was.

Being the agency that notices a competitor has pivoted before your client does is a very different conversation than the one where you're catching up.

This isn't surveillance - it's market awareness. Every page you're tracking is publicly accessible. SiteVitals simply means you don't have to visit them manually to know something has changed. Add a competitor's homepage alongside your client's, and the same monitoring that protects your client's site starts informing their strategy.

But I heard structured data doesn't matter anymore...

- Caveats in recent studies
- It's about understanding you, not necessarily discovering you
- Google SERP rich results haven't featured FAQ structured data for years

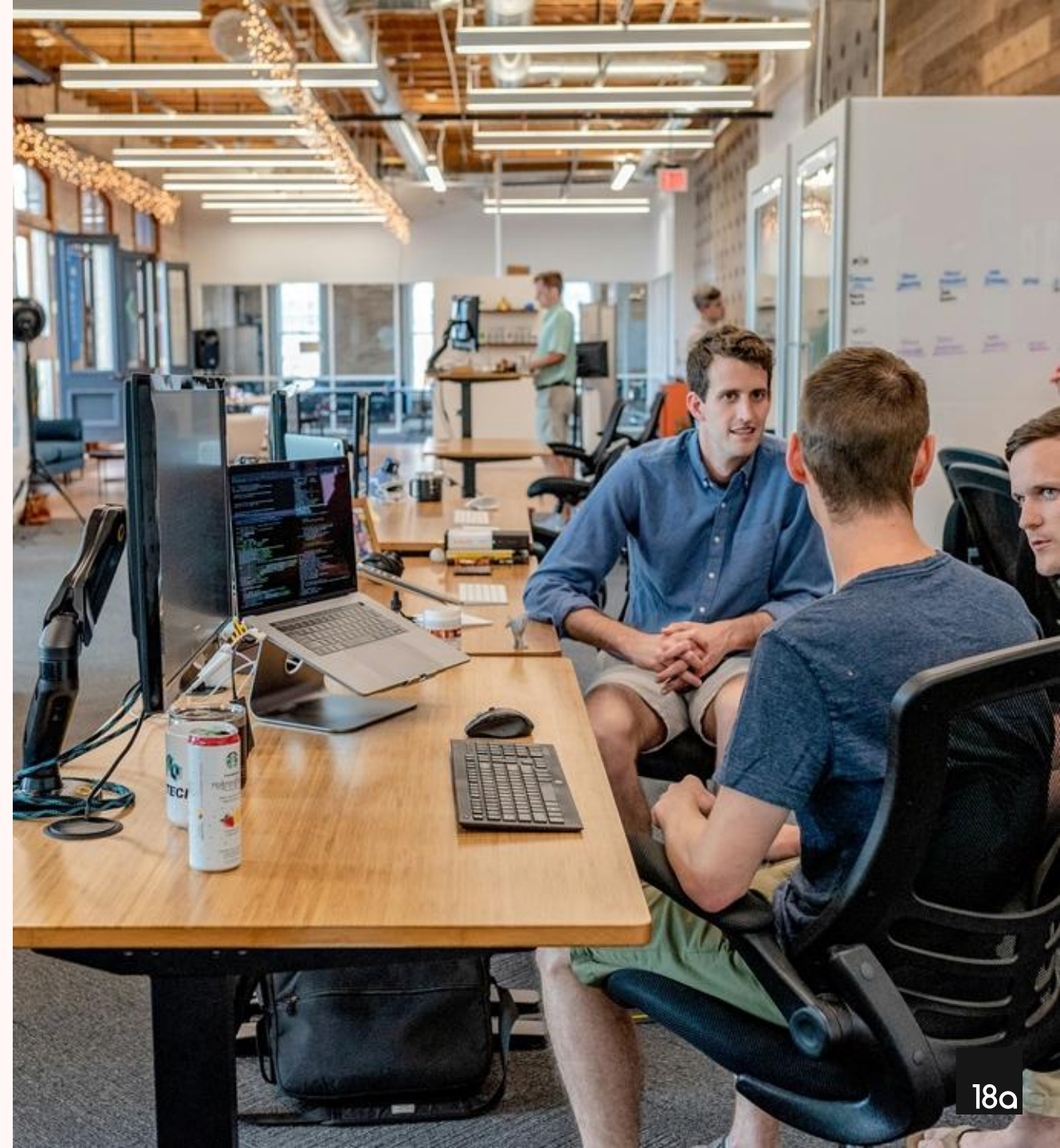


The goal isn't to get mentioned by AI. It's **to be the brand that AI keeps coming back to** - because every time it checks, you hold up.

The agency opportunity inside all of this

If AI can generate websites, write content, do basic SEO - what's left? The answer is 2 fold and is tangled up in everything we've talked about today...

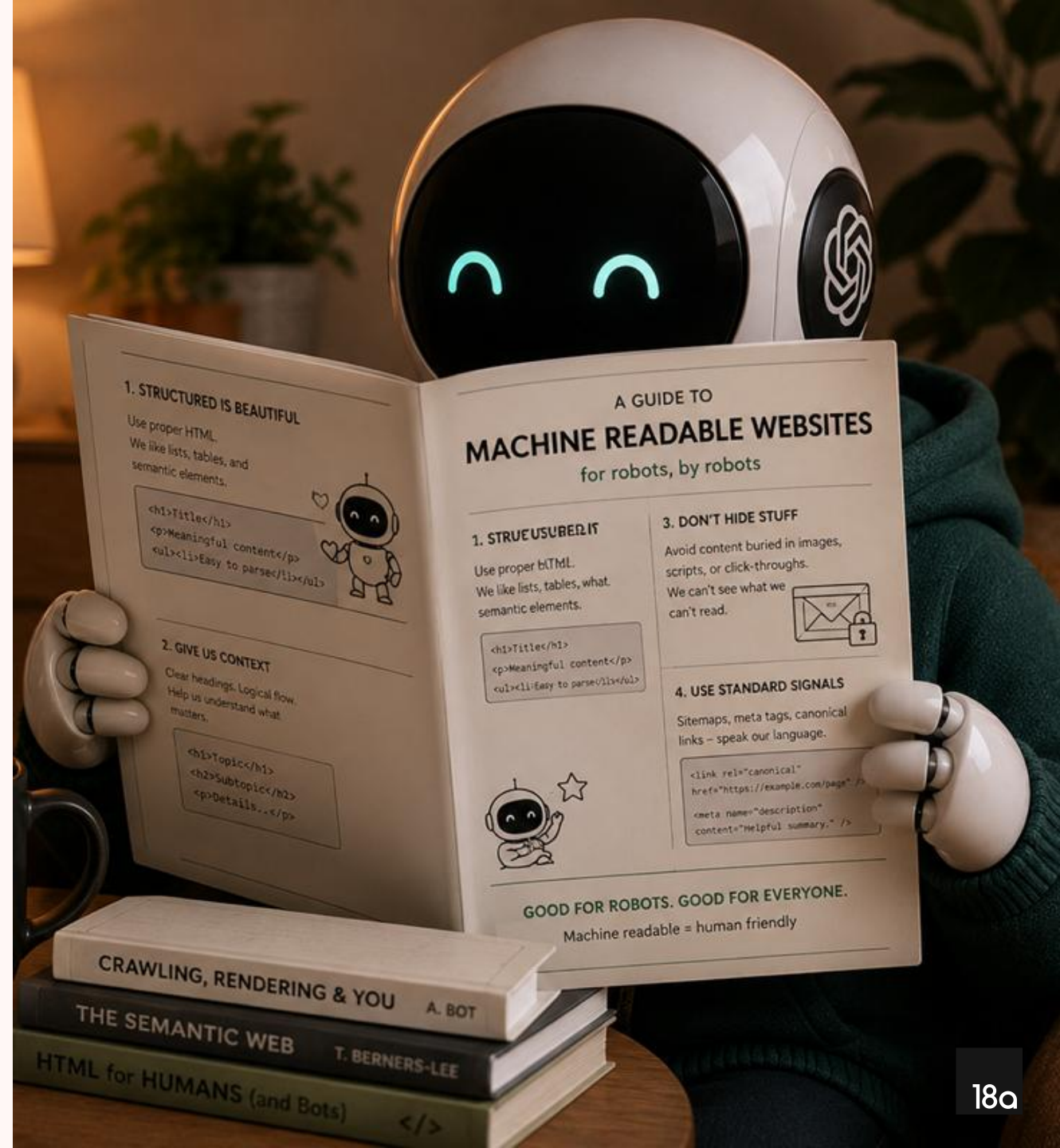
- Add expertise to everything generated in 2 minutes
- Help clients with their strategy – help them know what they're about and shout that from the roof tops. AND help them make sure their messaging is consistent, technically as well as in marketing material
- Conduct your own strategy in the same way



... and...

Websites need to become “machine usable environments”.

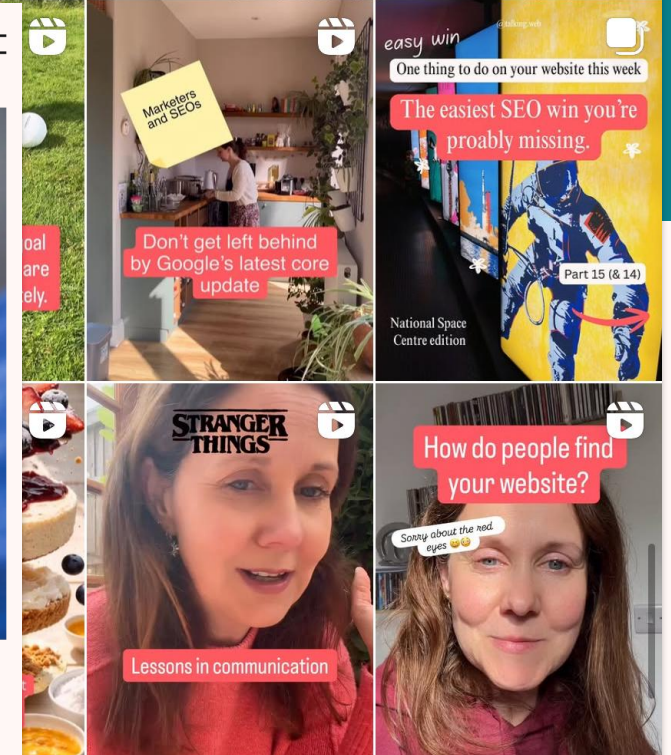
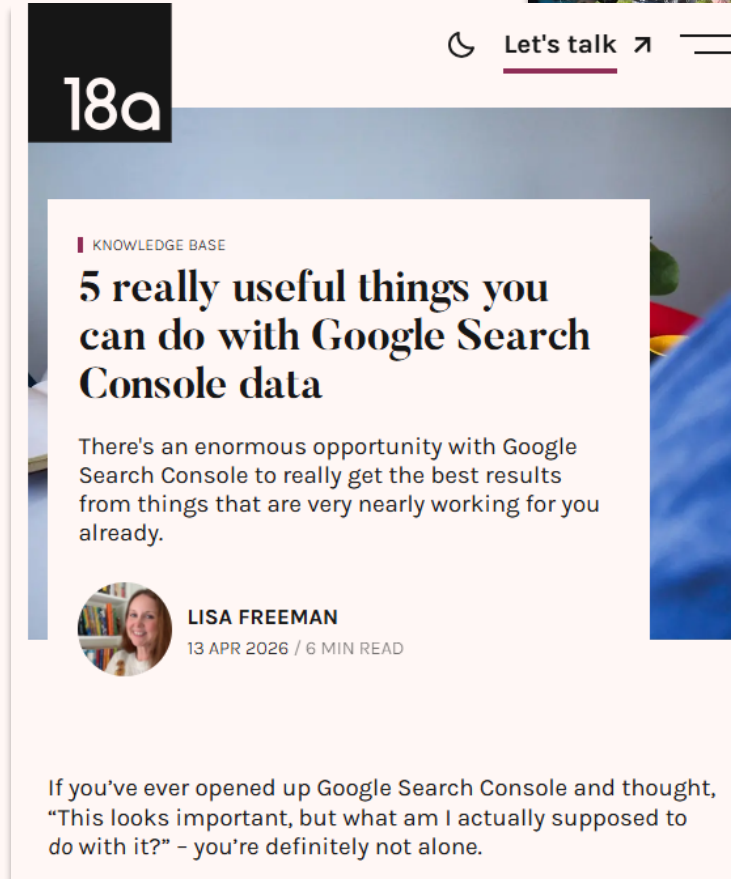
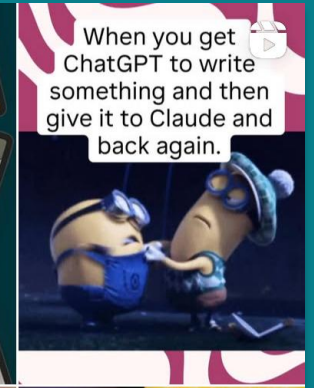
That’s coming up!



Any questions?

If you've got any questions about anything in this guide, please leave a comment on [any post on my Instagram](#) or [LinkedIn](#).

And don't forget to [follow me on Insta](#) or [LinkedIn](#) for lots of free advice and tutorials.



Thank you!

I really hope you found this useful?

I'd love it if you could leave us a Google review...

<https://g.page/r/CVm5MXjXu-lhEAI/review>

