

PLAYBOOK

Digital PR for Founders: Getting Quoted Without a PR Firm

By Scott Tischler · September 9, 2026 · 8 min read

Third-party corroboration is one of the strongest signals in AI visibility, and the good news is you don't need a PR firm to earn it. A founder with a clear point of view and a little discipline can get genuinely quoted and cited — honestly, without a retainer.

Let me set the honest expectation first. This isn't about manufacturing coverage or gaming your way into mentions. It's about becoming genuinely useful to the people who write, publish, and discuss things in your space, so they cite you because you deserve it. That's slower than buying placement, but it's the only kind that builds durable authority — and it's the kind AI engines actually reward, because it's real.

Why founders have an advantage

Founders often assume PR requires an agency's contacts. In practice, founders have edges an agency can't replicate. You have real expertise and a real point of view. You can speak with authority about your industry. You can respond to a journalist in your own voice, fast, with something specific and true. Reporters and creators want expert sources who are reachable and quotable — and a founder who actually knows the subject beats a polished pitch about a subject nobody at the firm understands.

The playbook

- **Develop a real point of view.** Vague, hedge-everything positions don't get quoted. Decide what you actually think about the important questions in your field and be willing to say it. A specific, defensible stance is quotable; corporate mush is not.
- **Be findable and reachable.** Make it easy for someone to discover you're an expert and easy to contact you. A lot of coverage goes to whoever was reachable when the reporter needed a source.

- **Respond fast and useful.** When an opportunity to comment appears — a reporter query, a relevant discussion, a chance to contribute — reply quickly with something genuinely useful and specific. Speed and substance win.
- **Show up where the conversation is.** Be a real participant in the communities, forums, and platforms where your industry talks — contributing, not promoting. Genuine presence earns genuine mentions.
- **Publish work worth citing.** Original observations, useful frameworks, honest takes. The work you publish is what earns the reference; make it referenceable.
- **Make yourself easy to quote correctly.** Consistent facts, a clear bio, a stable description — so when someone does mention you, they get it right.

The line you don't cross

Everything above is about earning. The line — and it's a bright one — is manufacturing. Don't buy fake mentions, plant astroturf, or dress up paid placement as organic. Beyond being dishonest, it's increasingly detectable and can do lasting damage to the credibility you're building. The whole value of earned media is that it's earned; fake it and you've destroyed the very thing that made it worth having. When in doubt, ask whether the mention would exist if you hadn't paid or planted it. If not, it's not earned.

The compounding payoff

Digital PR is slow at first and then compounds. Your first genuine quote is hard. But each real mention makes the next easier — you become a known quantity, a source people return to, a name that shows up enough that both journalists and AI engines start treating you as an authority. That accumulation is the asset. You don't need a firm to start it. You need a point of view, reachability, responsiveness, and the patience to earn it honestly. Start with one: pick a question you have a real opinion on, and put it where the right people will see it.

Key takeaways

- ◆ Third-party corroboration strongly drives AI visibility, and founders can earn it themselves without a PR firm.
- ◆ Founders have real advantages: genuine expertise, a real point of view, and the ability to respond fast and quotably in their own voice.

- ♦ The playbook: develop a real point of view, be findable and reachable, respond fast and useful, show up in real conversations, publish work worth citing, and be easy to quote correctly.
- ♦ The bright line is earning versus manufacturing — never buy fake mentions or dress up paid placement as organic; it's detectable and corrosive.
- ♦ The test: would the mention exist if you hadn't paid or planted it? If not, it's not earned.
- ♦ Digital PR compounds — each genuine mention makes the next easier until journalists and AI engines treat you as an authority.

Frequently asked questions

Do I need a PR agency to earn media for AI visibility?

No. Founders have edges an agency can't replicate — real expertise, a genuine point of view, and the ability to respond to a journalist fast and quotably in their own voice. What earns coverage is being useful, reachable, and specific, which a knowledgeable founder can do directly. An agency can help scale it, but it isn't required to start.

What's the fastest honest way to get quoted?

Develop a specific, defensible point of view, make yourself easy to find and contact, and respond quickly and usefully when an opportunity to comment appears. A lot of coverage goes to whoever was reachable with something substantive when a reporter needed a source. Pair that with showing up genuinely in your industry's conversations.

Isn't it faster to just pay for mentions?

It's faster and it backfires. Buying fake mentions, planting astroturf, or disguising paid placement as organic is increasingly detectable and can lastingly damage your credibility — and it destroys the whole point, since earned media only works because it's earned. A simple test: would the mention exist if you hadn't paid or planted it? If not, it isn't earned.

About the author. Scott Tischler is the Founder & Chairman of Alrecommend.ai and a practitioner-authority on AI search and Answer Engine Optimization. With 20+ years in marketing technology — including American Express, MetLife, and UBS — and executive and professional study at Wharton, Harvard, and Oxford, he helps businesses become the ones AI recommends.