Scammed! Who Can We Trust? Lessons on Truth and Trust from the 2025 Tri-Livery Debate

By Omaid Hiwaizi, Liveryman Marketor

Setting the Scene: From Caxton to ChatGPT

Master Stationer **Doug Wills** opened the evening by reminding guests that technological disruption is nothing new. Gesturing to a stained-glass window of William Caxton, he said: "There's a picture of Caxton down the bottom there, showing his printing press to the King. And you can see the King saying, 'What the **** is this? It's never going to catch on.'"

Master Information Technologist **Gary Moore** followed, defining trust in simple human terms: "To believe that someone is good and honest and will not harm you, or that something is safe and reliable. It feels to me as though trust and its bedfellow truth are under attack at scale in a way I have not experienced in my lifetime."

He added that, for society and business alike, "having confidence in what we see and what we hear" is essential, warning that without it, stable governance and commerce are impossible.

Chair **Paul Connew** then introduced the night's four speakers: **Dominic Aslan**, cyber-resilience consultant; **Dr Victoria Baines**, cybersecurity researcher and former Europol official; **Christian Broughton**, CEO of *The Independent*; **Emily Somers**, brand strategist and former marketing chief at McDonald's, Domino's and Deliveroo.

Connew called trust "the thread that interlinks all these ambitious, wide-ranging subjects" - from AI to media to human behaviour.

How Scams Work on the Mind

Cyber-attack expert **Domonic Aslan**, explained the psychology of deception: "People call me when they've been breached, when they've been attacked, and when they're in an absolute panic. Attackers use authority, urgency, fear, greed - all these things play a psychological part in your day-to-day life. When those things are playing against your corporate goals, you drop your guard and you will do things that are stupid. And then you get breached, you get hacked." He concluded that embarrassment often makes matters worse.

Technology and Fear

Dr Victoria Baines connected those same psychological levers to society's wider mistrust of technology: "Whatever technology is available to people will be misused. We talk about technology being neutral - that concept is getting more and more strained. For every risk there will be a benefit, and for every benefit there will be a risk."

She drew a historical line from Roman security through to Donald Trump's rhetoric: "Donald Trump in his 2016 national security strategy didn't just say he was going to make America great again. He said, 'We live in an extraordinarily dangerous world full of myriad threats.' Then he said, 'Don't worry, because in just nine months I have made America secure again.' It's heightening your fears in order to rescue you from them."

Media in the Age of AI

The Independent's **Christian Broughton** offered a candid view: "We're now in our tenth year since we embraced the last big disruptive technology - the internet… Now AI and the proliferation of content everywhere, are a much bigger change."

Yet he remained optimistic: "We invested in AI heavily. About 20% of everything that's read has had some kind of AI tool used on it, all overseen by humans. It's like a spell-check. AI can't go to a warzone and bear witness to what's happening, or knock on a bereaved family's door. But it can give journalists more time to do original stuff."

Brand Trust in a Sceptical World

For **Emily Somers**, brand trust has always been hard-won. Reflecting on her time at McDonald's, she recalled the "pink slime" rumours that spread through social media nearly a decade ago: "The best results came when we leaned in. We took the crazy misinformation, presented it satirically back to people, and then showed the real facts in a simple, transparent way. It increased trust by nearly twenty percent."

She compared two corporate crises: "Volkswagen refused to admit any guilt over diesel engines and lost billions. KFC ran out of chicken, owned up immediately, and ran the 'FCK' campaign on its buckets. They turned disaster into credibility. It's not just the mistake, but how you deal with it."

Misinformation and the Generational Divide

Baines then offered a surprise generational insight: "Over the last twenty or thirty years we've spent a lot of time keeping young people safe online. But studies show the group that most regularly falls for and shares misinformation is the over-55s. They're more likely to share unverified or harmful information. We need to make sure we don't leave anyone behind."

Broughton added: "Everybody expects the answer to be kids, but older people grew up trusting the BBC. Young people question everything. We've always lived in influence bubbles - families who always read *The Guardian* or *The Telegraph*. That's an influence bubble too. The difference now is that individuals have a reach like never before. Keep an eye on the humans."

AI, Authenticity and Illusion

Baines warned of blurred boundaries between truth and fabrication: "There's a big distinction between authentic, honest use of AI and dishonest misuse. It's about transparency.
We're used to resurrecting dead actors like Princess Leia after Carrie Fisher had died. But Bruce Willis found he was in a Russian telecoms ad when he hadn't appeared in it. The AI company said he'd licensed his likeness. And an estate agent used AI to furnish a flat that didn't look like mine at all. Is that misleading? Absolutely."

Somers extended the point: "From a brand perspective, partnerships with influencers work when they're authentic - when the influencer genuinely loves the brand. It's almost more honest than some celebrity advertising from the past."

Rebuilding Trust

Aslan summarised the professional side of trust-repair: "In my world, to regain trust you need to communicate competence: Can I deal with this? Do they care about me? Or are they just protecting themselves?"

Somers agreed that truth must be active, not assumed: “Trust isn’t something that’s lost - it’s something that’s earned again and again.”

Conclusion: The Currency of Confidence

By the evening’s end, one thread united every perspective: trust is not a soft value but a hard currency.

Baines put it simply: “We can’t tell what’s real if there’s no transparency, and without that, trust evaporates.”

Broughton saw opportunity amid chaos: “We can’t put the genie back in the bottle. Disruption is happening. Either we use AI responsibly, or we fall behind.”

And Aslan offered perhaps the paradox of the night: “Ten years ago, you couldn’t make fake content look real. Now you can - and that means we question everything. In a strange way, that might actually increase trust.”

For marketers, technologists and journalists alike, the challenge is clear: use truth as a strategy, not an afterthought.

Closing Reflections

Master Marketor **Julian Boulding** closed the evening by thanking the three Companies “for a great discussion, which achieved the object of every good debate - not necessarily to come up with an answer, but to come up with questions.”

Reflecting on trust, he said, “If you are empathetic, people are more likely to trust you. Behaviour and attitude change are caused much more by emotional empathy than by rational argument.”

He ended simply: “It’s we as people who have to build trust - and people at the end of the day will choose who they trust.”