

TheTin

The expertise gap

What your firm knows,
& what the market sees

The 2026 visibility briefing
for professional services.

Version 1.0

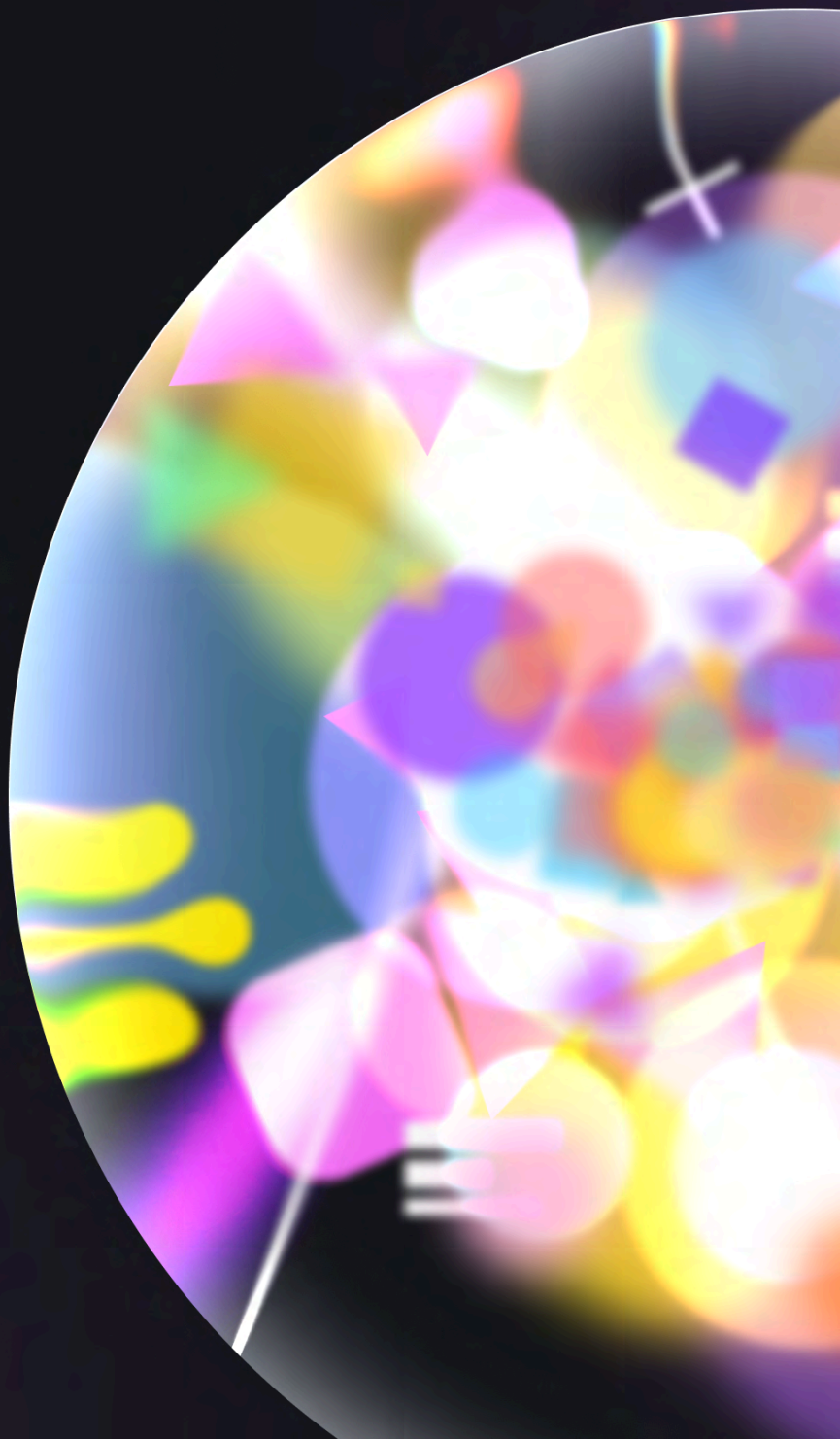


Table of contents

01	The problem in plain English	3
02	The one question worth asking	5
03	It isn't a marketing problem	7
04	Find your gap	9
05	Why this is harder in professional services	11
06	When too much visibility sits with too few people	13
07	What to do about it	14
08	Measure travel, not output	15
09	Making the case upstairs	17
10	When a partner says no	19
11	If you recognise the problem	20
12	If you did one thing	22

01

The problem in plain English

You're investing in thought leadership. Can you prove what it's delivering?

Professional services firms spend serious money producing genuinely good thinking – research, articles, talks and campaigns. But when it's time to justify that investment to a board or finance director, the evidence can be surprisingly thin.

Usually, the quality of the work isn't the problem. Too much of it simply reaches the people who already know the firm.

That's the gap this guide is about: the distance between what your firm knows and what the market actually sees. Understanding that gap gives you a much clearer picture of what your thought leadership investment is achieving – and where it could work harder.

We've spent 25 years helping professional services firms tackle the marketing challenges that come with organisational complexity.

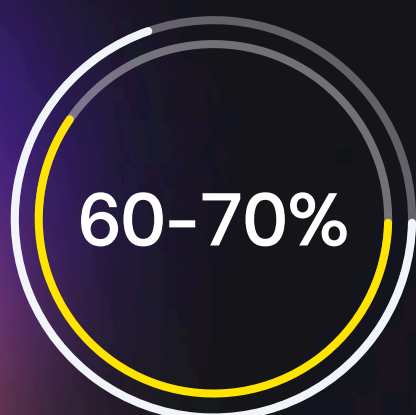
We've also been guilty of this one ourselves. Client work came first and our own visibility got whatever time was left over – which often meant very little. It's one reason we recognise the problem so quickly in other firms.

Who this is for

Marketing leaders in professional services firms with roughly £50–500m in revenue, where much of the expertise sits with fee-earners and marketing is responsible for building visibility without always having control over the people, time or material it depends on.

What you get out of it

An audit you can run in an afternoon, one specific number to help you understand how much of your work is reaching new audiences, a benchmark to judge it against, and a clearer way to talk about that investment internally. If you want to skip straight to the audit, it's on page nine.



Of B2B content is never used at all. Some firms report more than 80%.

Source: Forrester

02

The one question worth asking

How much of your best work reaches someone new?

Think of the best thing your firm published in the last two years – something people genuinely put time and effort into.

Now ask yourself how many people saw it who didn't already know you. Not existing clients, your mailing list or alumni who already follow the firm.

Most firms struggle to answer that. And that tells you something important: reach beyond existing audiences isn't being measured or owned.

It helps separate two questions that often get treated as one:

- **Is the work good?** In professional services, the quality of the thinking often isn't the problem.
- **Does it reach anyone new?** That's a different question – and one that often falls between teams and responsibilities.

Once you separate the two, it becomes much easier to see where the problem actually sits.

One caveat before any of this. You know your firm, we don't. What follows is what we've seen across a lot of firms that look something like yours, which is useful up to a point and no further. Where it doesn't match your situation, trust your own read over ours.



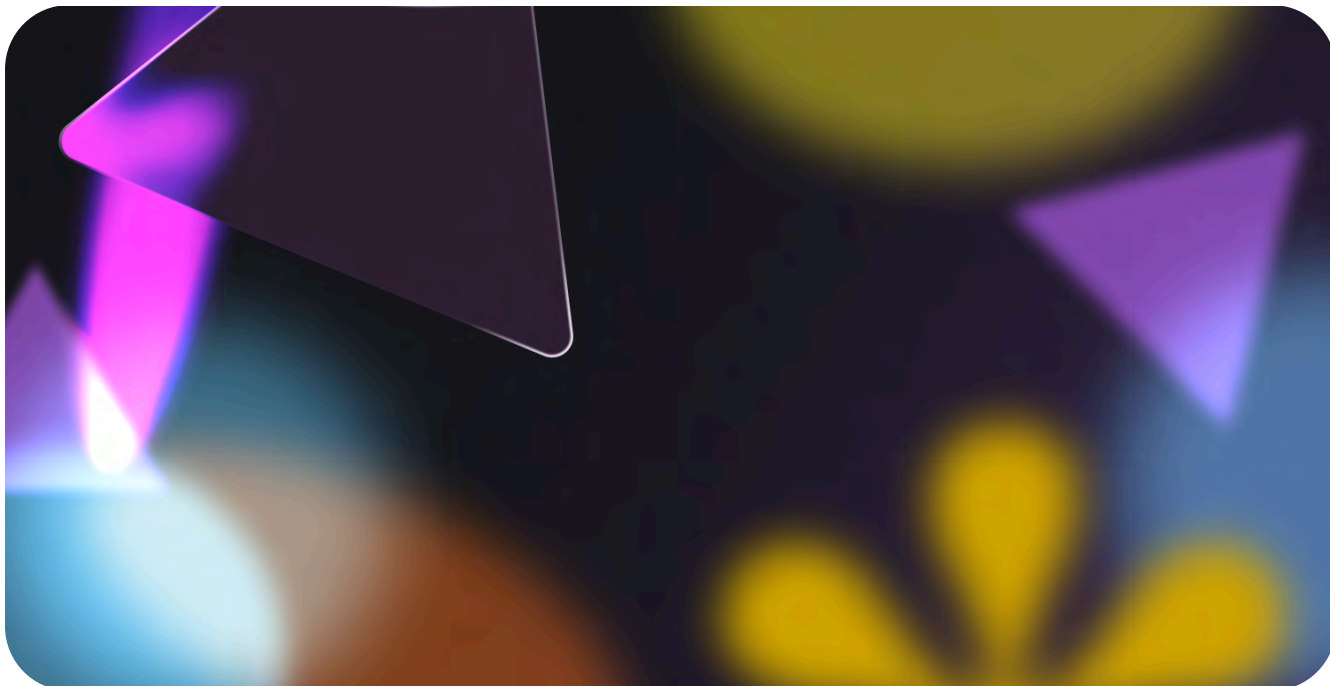
03

It isn't a marketing problem

The problem is often organisational, not creative.

Four things tend to get in the way:

- 1 The money stops too early.** Research, analysis, writing and design are funded. Getting the finished work in front of new audiences is often assumed rather than properly planned or resourced.
- 2 Nobody owns what happens next.** Marketing owns the channels. Partners own the knowledge. What happens between creating the thinking and getting it to the right audience can often fall between the two.
- 3 Reporting focuses on output.** Pieces published, downloads and impressions tell you what happened. They don't necessarily tell you whether the work reached the people you wanted it to.
- 4 The incentive sits with the individual.** A partner who builds a following gets the invitations and inbound opportunities directly. How much of that visibility builds the firm's reputation is harder to see.



Individually, none of these is particularly unusual. Together, they can limit the value firms get from work they've already invested in.

Understanding which is having the greatest impact in your firm is the first step towards knowing what to change. The audit on page nine will help you find out.

"A partner who builds a following gets the invitations and inbound opportunities directly."

04

Find your gap

An afternoon's work, using what you already have

The audit is designed to answer one question: how much of what your firm publishes reaches people who don't already know you?

At the end, you'll have a number, a benchmark to judge it against and a better idea of what might be limiting your reach.

The audit:

- 1 Pull the last ten things your firm published that took real effort.**
White papers, articles, talks or properly considered posts.
- 2 Look at the data the fortnight after each one was published.**
Note inbound enquiries, form completions, event registrations, meeting requests and relevant connection requests to the author.
- 3 Check those names against your CRM.** Separate existing relationships from genuinely new contacts. That split gives you your new-audience share.

4

Check company-level reach. Compare the organisations reached through company channels with your target-firm list. How many of the firms you actually want to influence appeared?

5

Compare firm and individual performance. Where similar material was shared by both, look at the difference between the brand channel and a named expert.

6

Count second lives. How many pieces were reshared, cited, followed up or reused after the first couple of weeks?

7

What good looks like. In the firms we've looked at, the proportion of post-publication inbound coming from genuinely new contacts typically falls between 5% and 15%. Below 5% may indicate a structural problem, rather than a creative one. Above 25%, you're doing better than almost anyone we've seen, and we'd genuinely like to know how.

And if most of your ten pieces had no second life at all, that tells you something too: you're basically paying to produce something and then discarding it.



25%

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05

Why this is harder in professional services

The expertise sits with people whose time is already spoken for.

In professional services, the people with the most valuable things to say are usually also billing, managing client relationships and delivering the work.

The challenge is often having enough time and resource to identify the strongest thinking, capture it and get it into market effectively.

Most larger firms now have established content or marketing teams, so persuading fee-earners to write an article from scratch is less of the issue than it once was.

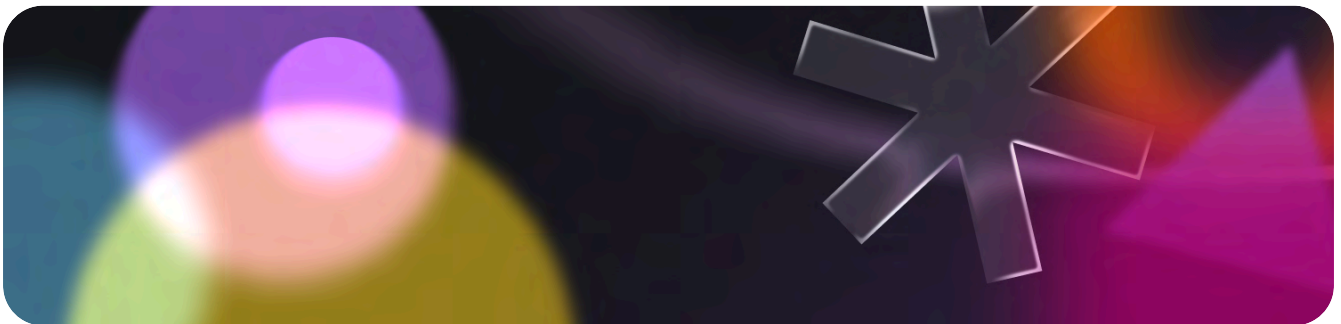
There are other constraints too.

Some services naturally produce stronger public stories than others. Some of the most interesting work can't be discussed because of live matters, active cases, client confidentiality or NDAs. And some experts are much more comfortable being visible than others.

None of those things needs fixing. They simply shape what marketing has to work with.

The result is that marketing can carry responsibility for firm-wide visibility without always controlling the people, time or material that visibility depends on.

But marketing also has an advantage: you can see across the organisation. Individual partners know their practices, clients and areas of expertise. Marketing can see how those individual parts add up to a wider reputation for the firm.



Three things we've seen work:

- 1 Ask rather than brief.** Start with what someone is seeing, hearing or repeatedly explaining to clients rather than asking them for "a thought leadership idea".
- 2 Make the ask manageable.** A focused conversation that someone else turns into content is usually more realistic than a blank page and a deadline.
- 3 Make the value clear.** Building visibility around someone's expertise benefits them as well as the firm. Make that part of the proposition.

When too much visibility sits with too few people

Work published by named experts will often outperform the firm's own channels.

Put a properly resourced piece of research or a polished brand film up against a senior person writing a few hundred words about something they actually did, and the plain, personal post usually wins, sometimes by a wide margin.

That makes sense. People want to hear from people – especially the ones who have actually done the work. It's LinkedIn *raison d'être* and it's a strength professional services firms should use.

The risk comes when too much of the firm's visibility and reputation becomes concentrated around a small number of individuals. If one of those people retires or moves to a competitor, some of that visibility – and potentially some of those relationships – can move with them.

What to do about it

Keep the individual voices, but connect them to a bigger story.

If your senior people are all making completely different arguments, the reputation they build is likely to remain personal.

If their individual perspectives reinforce a recognisable point of view that belongs to the firm, their visibility starts to build something bigger.

Give the firm a clear argument. Be clear about the ideas and issues you want the business to be known for, while leaving room for experts to bring their own experience and perspective.

Widen the bench. Don't tell everyone to post more. Identify three or four more people who genuinely have something useful to say, then make it easier for them to participate.

Do the handover before you need it. When someone does leave, the relationships transfer far more easily if the client already associates the thinking with the firm rather than the person.

A useful test: if your best-known expert left tomorrow, would the market still know what your firm thinks?

Measure travel, not output

Four numbers, all available in what you already have.

New-audience share isn't another marketing metric for the sake of it. It helps you understand whether your thought leadership is creating visibility beyond existing relationships.

There's another useful way to look at reach: measure it against a named list of target firms rather than the whole market.

How many of the organisations you actually want to influence did you reach, and how many engaged more than once?

That number is considerably more persuasive in a partner meeting than an impression count, because partners recognise the names on the list.

What most firms measure	What's worth measuring instead	Why it matters
Downloads	New-audience share. Proportion of post-publication inbound from people with no existing relationship.	Shows whether your thinking is reaching beyond the people who already know you. The single most useful number here. Almost nobody tracks it.
Pieces published	Second-life rate. How many pieces did anything after week two.	Tells you if you're building a lasting asset or a stream of disposable ones.
Impressions	Firm-to-individual split. What brand channels reach versus named people.	Shows where visibility is actually being created. Not to correct it. To know what it is.
Engagement rate	Concentration. Share of individual reach coming from your top one or two people.	Helps identify over-reliance on a small number of experts. Key person exposure with a number attached.

Making the case upstairs

Where good arguments usually stall

Marketing arrives asking for investment in reach. Finance hears a request for more money to make more things. Three things help.

Give the board something more useful than activity metrics

Marketing asks for more investment in reach. Finance can easily hear *“more money to make more things”*.

Three things can change that conversation.

1

Lead with risk, not opportunity. *"Most of our visibility depends on two people, one of whom retires within four years"* is a different conversation from *"we should invest in thought leadership."* Boards respond to risk considerably faster than to potential, and concentration is a business risk that boards already understand.

2

You're moving money, not adding to it. The firm is already investing in content. Reallocating some of that spend to help it reach the right audiences is often an easier ask than increasing the overall budget.

3

Agree the measure before you start. Finance will trust a number you volunteered and then held yourself to far more than one produced afterwards to justify the spend. Choose one from page 16, establish the baseline and report against it consistently – whether or not the result is flattering.



53%

53% of B2B decision-makers say the strength of a firm's thought leadership matters more to them than how well known its brand is.

Source: Edelman-LinkedIn, 2025

When a partner says no

Understand what's behind the reluctance

Most of this guide assumes you can get senior people to take part. Sometimes they won't. The reason matters.

- ***"I haven't got time."*** Often true. Make the ask smaller: a focused conversation that someone else writes up can remove most of the burden.
- ***"I don't know what I'd say."*** Ask what they've had to explain to a client three times this year. Expertise often feels obvious to the person who has it.
- ***"Isn't this marketing's job?"*** Partly. Marketing can do the work around the expertise, but the credibility has to come from the expert. Worth saying that plainly rather than defending the request.
- ***"What if I get it wrong in public?"*** A legitimate concern, particularly in regulated work. Clear sign-off and review processes can make participation much easier.
- ***"The last time I did this, nothing happened."*** Then show what will be different this time – including what you'll do with the content after publication and how you'll measure whether it worked.



If you recognise the problem

Here's where we can help

Everything in this guide can be done in-house. Plenty of firms do it. But if you'd rather not, here's where we can help: identifying what's actually getting in the way and building the right response around it.

- 1 Find the gap properly.** The audit on page nine is the version you can run yourself in an afternoon. We run a fuller one, using data most firms can't easily assemble alone, benchmarked against firms of a similar shape.
- 2 Decide what the firm's argument is.** Define the positioning, themes and arguments that connect individual expertise to the reputation you want to build for the firm.
- 3 Make expertise easier to activate.** Build practical ways to capture expertise from busy people without relying on them to become content creators.

4

Get it in front of the right audiences. Focus distribution around the firms and people you actually want to influence, measured against a named list rather than the open market.

5

Measure what matters. Put measures in place that show what the investment is achieving in terms your senior stakeholders can use.

Most firms need two of these five. Very few need all of them, and we'd tell you which before you spent anything.

Why we'd be quicker about it. We've spent 25 years helping professional services firms navigate the marketing challenges that come with organisational complexity. That experience means we can usually identify where the real problem sits quickly – and focus effort where it will make the biggest difference.



If you did one thing

Run the audit on page nine.

It takes an afternoon, uses data you already have and gives you something much more useful than a general sense that your thought leadership could be working harder.

If the result is what you expected, you've learnt something useful, saved yourself a conversation and we've done our job. We're genuinely pleased to have been unnecessary.

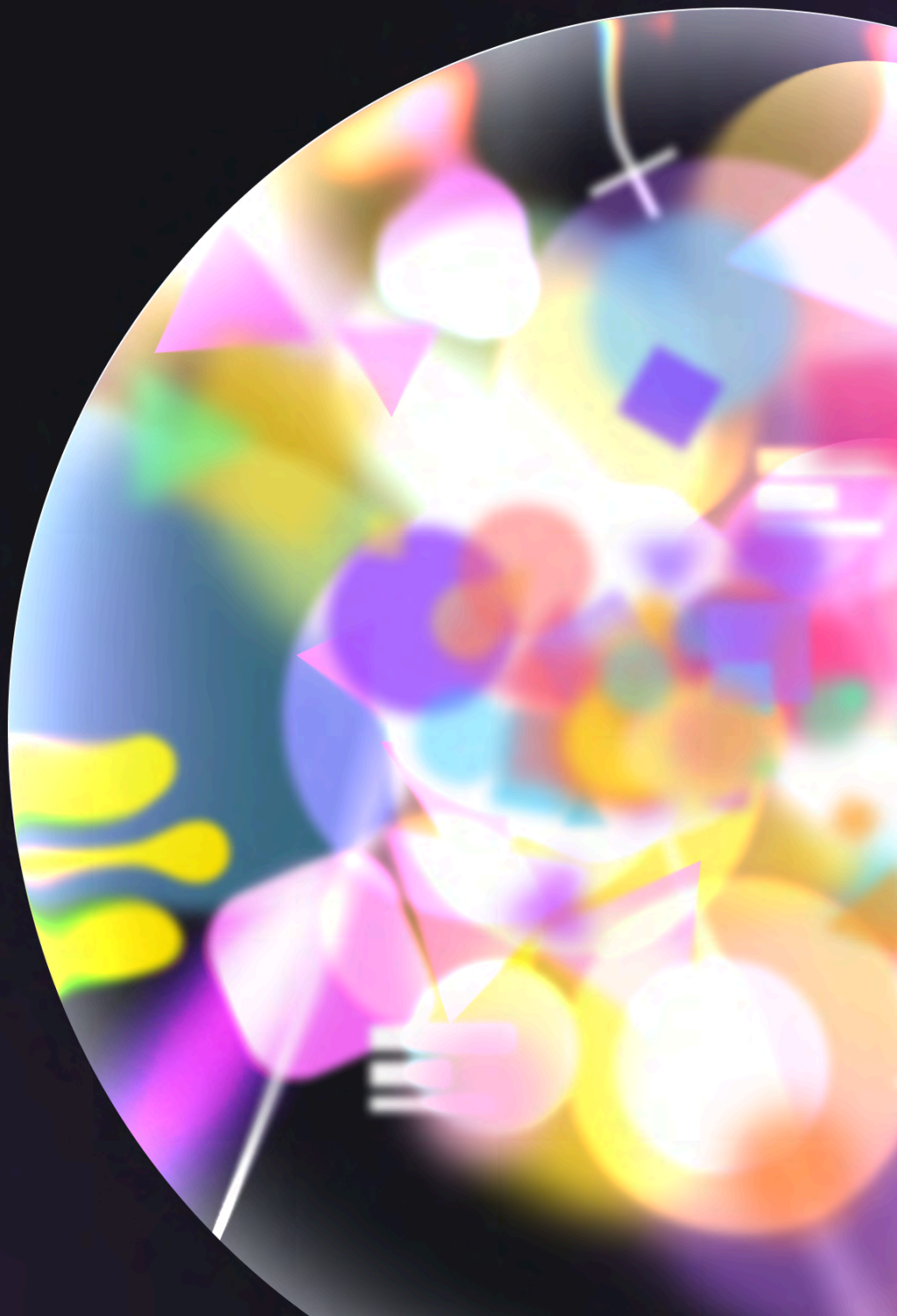
If it isn't, the next question is **why** – and which of the issues in this guide is getting in the way. That one's harder to answer from the inside, because all four of them feel completely normal when you're living in them.

If you want another perspective on that, that's a conversation we'd be happy to have.

45 minutes. One specific problem. No deck and no follow-up unless you ask for one.

[Book a conversation](#)

Thank you



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