The Believability Gap: an expo floor splitting in two

Results from our audit of 216 assets collected from the expo floor across industry events in 2026.

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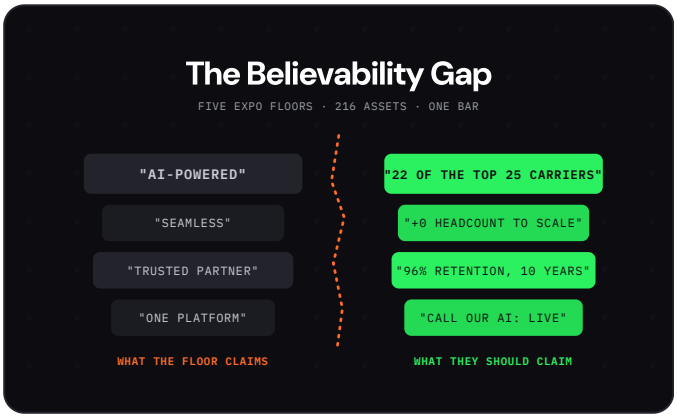
REVUP FIELD INTELLIGENCE · EDITION ONE · JULY 2026 · REVUPSTUDIO.COM/EXPO

Over the past year, we walked the expo floors of five insurance industry conferences: InsurTech Insights in New York, the AAIS Main Event, Target Markets, Insurance Innovators USA, and InsurTech NY. At every one, we collected what companies put in front of buyers: booth walls, banner stands, demo screens, one-pagers, brochures, whitepapers, the entire contents of the tote bag.



Then we audited all of it. We reviewed 209 files covering 216 distinct assets from roughly 128 companies. Each asset was scored against one bar: **who is it for, what outcome does it claim, and why should anyone believe it.** We summed up what emerged in four words: **polished, but not believed.** The 2026 expo floor is a tale of two booths. One kind claims. The other kind proves. **And almost everyone is telling the wrong story.**

No report you can buy contains this data, because collecting it required standing in the hall. The teardowns below stay anonymous: the mistakes are categories, never companies. The pattern is one we have all seen, but no one has analyzed and published advice on how to fix common mistakes. This report was built to give you that guidance.

One note on where this work exists: research like this is built into the Founder Intelligence Layer of every AI-Native Marketing Engine we build, where firsthand field signal keeps an engine current in ways scraped data never can.

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Our biggest takeaways

1. **The floor says the same sentence.** Roughly 45 companies run "AI-powered" variants, about 18 use "solutions" as identity, and a dozen each claim "one platform," "purpose-built," and "weeks, not years." The words have converged until whole aisles are interchangeable.

2. **Nobody proves anything.** 57% of all assets carry zero proof. On booth walls it is 62%. And across five conferences, exactly zero booth walls paired a named customer with a quantified result.

3. **Handouts out-target booths, and neither out-proves.** 79% of handouts name their buyer; only 35% of booth walls do. Half of the handouts still carry no evidence.

4. **The AI label stopped labeling.** 41% of booths lead with an AI claim while AI-labeled companies captured 95.2% of insurtech funding in a single quarter. When everyone says it, buyers screen against it.

5. **The best evidence is printed smallest.** The floor-wide rule our audit kept confirming: the more provable the statement, the smaller the type. Companies bury their crown jewels under swappable slogans.

6. **Four exhibitor archetypes explain most of the hall.** The Wallpaper, the Whisperer, the Catalog, and the Prover. You will recognize all four, and only one of them gets talked about after the show.

7. **Numbers without owners get discounted.** Unattributed multiplier walls ("90% fewer errors," measured where?) and absolutes ("zero errors") train sophisticated buyers to discount everything, including the true numbers.

8. **Lead capture is optimized for cooler-hunters.** 13 booths ran prize raffles, 8 had dead demo screens, 6 hung logo-only or blank primary surfaces, and about 30% of booth assets offered no call to action at all.

9. **The winners share six moves.** Proof in the headline slot, one named buyer, the product shown doing its job, evidence handouts, one owned idea, and a next step smaller than a demo.

10. **The bar is mechanically cheap to clear.** A named buyer plus one verifiable number plus self-serve proof plus a working CTA beat every asset we reviewed. Almost nobody does all four at once.

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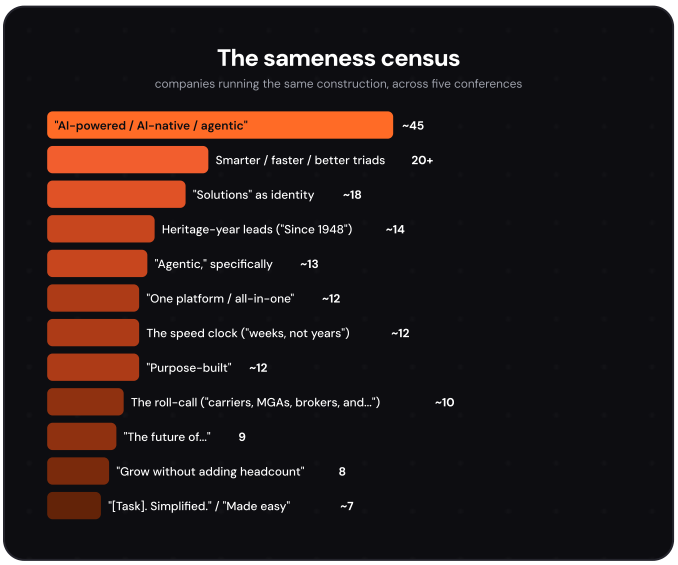
Takeaway 1: The floor says the same sentence

We tracked every phrase and construction that appeared on materials from two or more different companies. Here is the census, and it reads like one company wrote the whole hall:



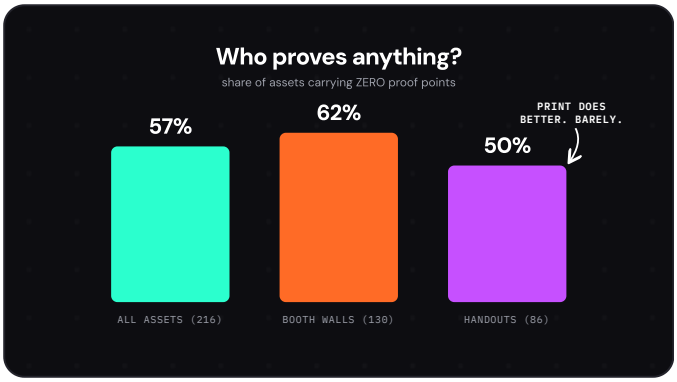
Two details make the point better than the counts. At one show, two wellness platforms fifty feet apart both led with a phone mockup showing a wellness score: one said 80, the other said 85%. A buyer walking that aisle could not attribute either screenshot an hour later. And in one tote bag, two direct competitors displayed the same analyst badge from the same research firm, each claiming leadership on the same matrix.

The floor retired the 2019 vocabulary. Synergy, frictionless, and one-stop have vanished. They were replaced wholesale by "AI," "platform," "purpose-built," and "agentic," and every replacement has already crossed from differentiation into sameness. **What is scarce is a number a buyer can repeat, a named client, and a point of view.**

Takeaway 2: Nobody proves anything

In every asset, we looked for proof in the form of a number tied to a result, a client name, or third-party validation. The result is the single most damning statistic in the audit.

It gets worse when you look for the strongest form of evidence a company can display: a named customer next to a quantified result. Around 5% of exhibitors have it anywhere, and every single instance is a print handout. On booth walls, the count is zero. Here are all 130 booth walls we audited:



That empty square is the opportunity. The single most persuasive thing a

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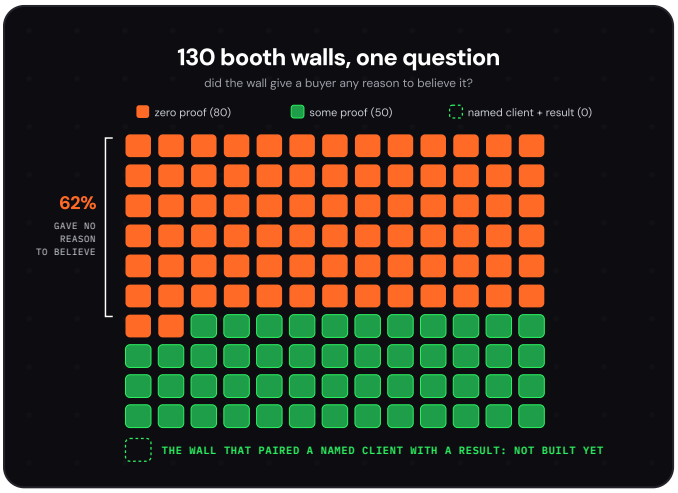
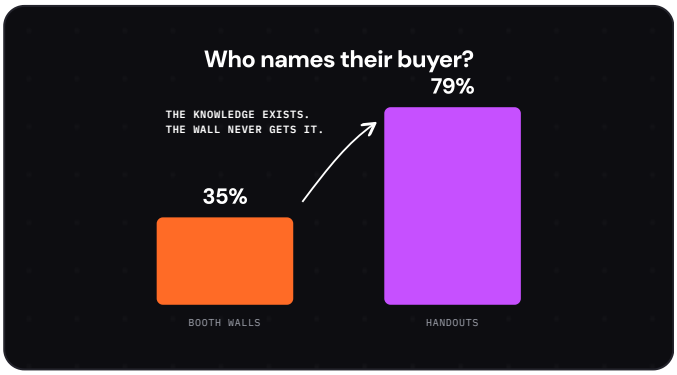


company can display at an industry event has never been hung in the halls we walked. The first exhibitor in your category to display it wins the aisle and just might convince that elusive buyer to stop and ask questions.

Takeaway 3: Handouts out-target booths, and neither out-proves

Here is the strangest split in the data. Companies clearly know who they serve: 79% of handouts name the buyer. Then they leave it off the one giant surface everyone actually sees. The cost of replacing the skin on a booth is minimal, and it is worth it to add a quantifiable and believable result.

One caution before you fix this by listing everyone (the roll-call is dead): "For carriers, MGAs, brokers, and syndicates" appeared on roughly ten companies' materials, and naming everyone has become the new naming no one. Commit to one buyer on the wall. The others will still stop.



And print has its own diseases. The handout stack is where the best assets we collected live, and where the worst habits get amplified: eight-stat walls with no sources, absolutes a procurement team will file for the contract negotiation ("zero errors," "near-zero hallucination"), and five companies in one tote bag selling the identical speed clock. The tote-bag test decides everything: a buyer empties the bag onto a hotel bed and keeps two pieces. **The keepers, every time, have an attributed number and a reason to act.**

Takeaway 4: The AI label stopped labeling

41% of the booths we audited lead with an AI claim as their headline or identity. We have all had this conversation already: "the floor is all AI." On one event floor map, eight or more exhibitors had AI in the company name itself. The floor is only mirroring the capital behind it:

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One widely circulated analysis of 97 insurtech marketing messages found 94% converged on some version of the same sentence: an advanced AI platform that modernizes processes and reduces costs. Buyers respond with a question: how is this different from the last twelve vendors? The industry even has a name for what they screen against now: AI-washing. Regulators publish model bulletins on responsible AI use. Capacity providers ask how models are validated. **The era when the claim was the credential is over.**

The insight inside this pattern is that the companies running it usually have a real wedge, and it is always somewhere smaller. One claims-analytics vendor's wall said "AI" twice at headline scale while its genuinely differentiated line, detecting suspicious claims with precision, sat in 20-point column text. The fix is one move: attach the AI to a P&L line with a unit. "We flag the suspicious 3% of claims before they cost you" out-positions every AI headline in the hall.

Takeaway 5: The best evidence is printed smallest

The floor-wide rule the audit kept confirming: **the more provable the statement, the smaller it was printed.** The industry asserts at headline scale and proves at footnote scale, exactly backwards.



This pattern repeated everywhere we looked. A property-AI startup trapped its four best numbers on a ten-inch counter card beneath two dead televisions and a banner that said only "The AI Platform." A 47-year-old claims firm buried "many of the Top 25 U.S. insurers work with us" in forty lines of brochure text. A large operations firm printed an elevation tagline at headline scale while its collateral printed "96% client retention for over 10 years" further down. A 200-year-old broker holds an exclusive binding authority no competitor in its market can access, and printed it in justified small print under a generic category headline.

Why does this happen? Traditional marketing treats numbers as supporting detail and brand voice as the lead. Nobody redesigns the hierarchy after the proof arrives. The result: **roughly half the failures**

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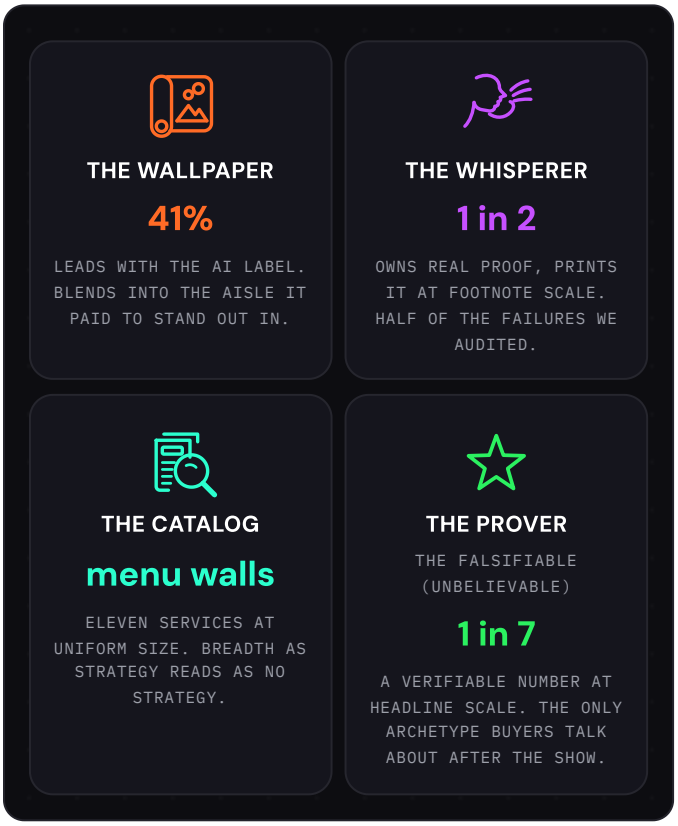
in this audit belonged to companies that own real proof and printed it too small. The fastest positioning win available to most exhibitors is a hierarchy flip on claims they already own. And if you do not have the proof yet, you do have proprietary data that validates what you have built, right? Use it.

Takeaway 6: Meet the four exhibitors of 2026

Cluster the exhibitors by behavior instead of segment and four archetypes emerge. You've seen all four, and you almost certainly recognize your own company in one of them.



The Wallpaper (41% of booths). The technology label as identity. "Meet the AI intelligence platform." "Insurance in the age of agentic AI." Polished, well-lit, and interchangeable with every third booth on the floor. The differentiator usually exists, in small type, somewhere below.

The Whisperer (roughly half of the failures). The company with the unfakeable fact and the committee-safe headline. Its booth loses to weaker companies with bigger type. This archetype hurts the most because the fix is free.

The Catalog (the everything wall). Sixteen specialty niches in bullet wallpaper. A nine-spoke capability wheel next to a seven-item checklist. The attendee files the booth under "for someone else" and keeps walking.

The Prover (roughly one asset in seven). "40% faster from submission to bind. 60 days to launch. +0 headcount added to scale." A named buyer, a checkable number, a working CTA. It is the rarest archetype, and the only one whose lines we heard attendees repeating later in the day.

Takeaway 7: Numbers without owners get discounted

Some booths look quantified and prove nothing. Stacked percentages with no client, no source, and no baseline read as decoration:

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> *"2x revenue per employee. 3x faster client request processing. 90% fewer errors. 75% faster onboarding."*
>
> ONE BOOTH WALL. MEASURED WHERE? FOR WHOM?

> *"Zero errors." "Error-free intake." "Near-zero hallucination."*
>
> ONE VENDOR'S FLYER, THREE ABSOLUTES PROCUREMENT WILL FILE FOR LATER

One booth displayed "100x increase in self-service resolution" directly beside "1.5% improvement in conversion rates," and the honest small number invited the obvious question about the big one. In a tote bag where a neighbor publishes 83% and 89% with named customers or data specificity, sourceless round numbers read as fiction. **A smaller attributed number beats a bigger orphaned one, every time.**

Takeaway 8: Lead capture is optimized for cooler-hunters

The physical execution failures cluster at the exact moment a booth is supposed to convert attention into pipeline.

The prizes were MacBooks, gift cards, coolers, and steaks. A raffle collects badge scans from people who want a cooler, and the follow-up sequence inherits the quality of the capture. Meanwhile an AI vendor's television displayed a "looking for signal" message all day, and one of the largest software companies at a tabletop show hung a full-height backwall that was entirely blank, with its actual message on a letter-size card next to a gift-card raffle sign.

13	8	6	1 in 3
BOOTHS RUNNING PRIZE RAFFLES AS LEAD CAPTURE	DEAD OR NO-SIGNAL DEMO SCREENS	LOGO-ONLY OR ENTIRELY BLANK PRIMARY SURFACES	BOOTH ASSETS WITH NO CTA OF ANY KIND

Fifty qualified conversations beat four hundred cooler-hunters. Replace the prize with a give: a diagnostic, a benchmark, an artifact worth a real conversation. And set a two-temperature CTA so visitors pick their commitment level: one low path, one high path.

Takeaway 9: The winners share six moves

The assets that worked cluster into six repeatable moves you can copy at the next event. None of these require a bigger budget.

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- **Put the proof in the headline slot.** "Trusted by 22 of the top 25 P&C carriers and 7 of the top 10 MGAs," at headline scale, backed by the only live demo in its aisle. If the number is the reason to believe, the number is the headline. This proof will get them to read what you offer with a completely different mindset.
- **Name one buyer, first.** "The complete pricing platform for the modern actuary." The right visitor self-selects in one second, and the wall tells everyone else exactly who to send over.
- **Show the product doing the job.** An aerial-imagery vendor printed a real annotated photo: a roof scored 73 out of 100, detection chips reading "yard debris" and "staining." Best of all, a voice-AI vendor put live phone numbers on the wall: call and talk to the product. A skeptic verifies the entire pitch in sixty seconds with no rep involved.
- **Hand out evidence, not adjectives.** The best asset class in all of the 216 records is the named-client case handout: one named customer, before-and-after mechanics, "96% reduction in processing time, 1,100+ invoices in month one, three-month payback." The odd precision reads as true.
- **Own an idea and build it in three dimensions.** A full-size subway car with a coined category. "Where bordereaux meets rocket science" carried across every surface, fused with customer-attributed numbers. One word, "REBEL," in hall-height letters over "never pay licensing fees." A coined category plus a named enemy plus a physical theme is a position.
- **Teach first, then make the next step small.** A CEO-authored whitepaper with a sharp market thesis, closed with "No pitch. Just 20 minutes." A point of view is the one asset a competitor cannot photocopy.

Takeaway 10: The bar is mechanically cheap to clear

Add it all up and the strangest fact about the 2026 expo floor is how low the winning bar actually sits. Only 35% of booths name one buyer on the wall. Roughly one asset in seven puts a verifiable number at headline scale. Fewer still show the product doing its job. Barely 70% offer any CTA at all. **Doing all four at once beat every asset we reviewed.**

The cleanest way to say it: the hall is not losing to better competitors. It is losing to its own messaging and positioning.

Where do we go from here?

The 2026 floor is more polished and less believed than a year ago, splitting along the fault line of proof into the few who get talked about and the many who get walked past. It is a complicated

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moment for anyone planning a booth for the next event. It is also a cheap moment to win. Here is what the audit suggests you actually do about it.

If you are exhibiting at the next event:

- **Run the swap test before you print.** Cover the logo and ask whether the sentence could hang over any competitor's booth. If yes, retire it.
- **Run the 10-foot test on the replacement.** WHO it is for, WHAT outcome, WHY believable, in under ten words, readable at ten feet in three seconds. This is the single highest-return exercise in this report.
- **Call your best customer this quarter.** Ask permission to publish one number with their name. That one sentence makes you the first booth wall in five conferences to hang the empty square from Takeaway 2.
- **Kill the raffle.** Replace prize-gated badge scans with a give worth a real conversation, and set a two-temperature CTA.
- **Photograph your booth from ten feet and from a forty-five degree angle.** Copy at the wall's far edge disappears at the angle people actually walk. Fix what dies.

If you are building the collateral:

- **One rack card beats a brochure.** Your best attributed number as the headline, three supporting proof points, one QR to depth, one QR to a calendar.
- **Anchor every number.** A smaller attributed stat outperforms a bigger orphan, and one visibly weak orphan deflates the whole page.
- **Never print an absolute you would not sign.** Procurement keeps the flyer.
- **Design for the tote-bag test.** The buyer keeps two pieces. Both have an attributed number and a reason to act.
- **Find your self-serve proof.** The live phone line, the worked calculation, the annotated screenshot. A claim a skeptic can verify alone is worth more than anything you can assert.

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Score your own booth

Twelve questions, one point per yes. Score your current booth, one-pager, or homepage hero. Be brutal.

The believability scorecard

- [ ] Does your headline name one specific buyer?
- [ ] Does it state a specific outcome, with a unit?
- [ ] Does it carry proof: a number, a named client, or third-party validation?
- [ ] Is it under ten words and readable at ten feet?
- [ ] Does it survive the swap test? Could no competitor print it?
- [ ] Is your single most checkable fact printed at headline scale, anywhere?
- [ ] Does at least one surface show the product actually doing its job?
- [ ] Can a skeptic verify one claim without talking to a rep?
- [ ] Does every number on every surface have an attributable source?
- [ ] Is there a CTA smaller than "book a demo"?
- [ ] Would your handout survive the tote-bag test on a hotel bed?
- [ ] Can every staffer deliver the same eight-second answer to "what do you do?"

10 to 12: you will out-position most of the hall. **7 to 9:** strong bones; fix the proof hierarchy. **4 to 6:** you are funding a booth that markets your category. **0 to 3:** the audit found dozens of you, and could not tell you apart.

Closing the gap is a discipline: engineering the believability of truths you already own.

That discipline is what RevUp Studio builds. We are a builder studio for InsurTech and B2B tech founders: we find the truths a company was built on and build AI-native marketing engines the founder owns outright. If you want a second set of eyes on your booth message before your next event, we read every reply. And if you are a founder building your voice into pipeline, watch for what we are launching in August.

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Appendix: what we audited

Corpus. We collected 209 files at five conferences (InsurTech Insights NYC, AAIS Main Event, Target Markets, Insurance Innovators USA, InsurTech NY): 148 booth and signage photographs and 61 scanned handouts. After merging duplicate camera angles, they yielded 216 distinct asset records: 130 booth assets and 86 handout assets from roughly 128 companies.

Method. Every asset was scored on a fixed rubric: audience named, claim type, differentiation, proof points, buzzword census, CTA, and legibility at distance. The results were consolidated into a single findings file with each statistic tagged as an exact count or an estimate. Counts labeled with a tilde are estimates where deduplication across analysts was approximate. All headline statistics (the 57% zero-proof rate, the 35% and 79% buyer-naming rates, the zero named-client booth walls) are exact counts against the stated denominators.

A note for the careful reader. Booth formats ranged from convention-center island booths to hotel-ballroom tabletop rows, so per-event comparisons are avoided throughout. All teardowns are pattern-level and anonymized; no company is identified, and no confidential information appears in this report. Funding-share figures are from Gallagher Re's Global InsurTech Reports as compiled in our market review.

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