TWO EXPERIENCE REPORTS IN ONE

Everyone's Building Now

Thrive Market's AI adoption journey, and what we learned along the way

Michael Winslow · Marya Caples

VP, Platform Engineering & SRE · Senior Food Safety Manager · Thrive Market

Enterprise AI Summit · Bletchley Park · November 1, 2026

Who we are

Thrive Market is an online-only grocery store for healthy, sustainable products.

THE MODEL

A membership grocer

Members join for lower everyday prices across the whole store, from pantry staples to frozen.

THE STANDARDS

A curated store

Every product is screened against our standards, which restrict more than 1,000 ingredients.

THE DELIVERY

Shipped to your door

Three fulfillment centers, in Pennsylvania, Nevada and Indiana, ship orders to members across the country.

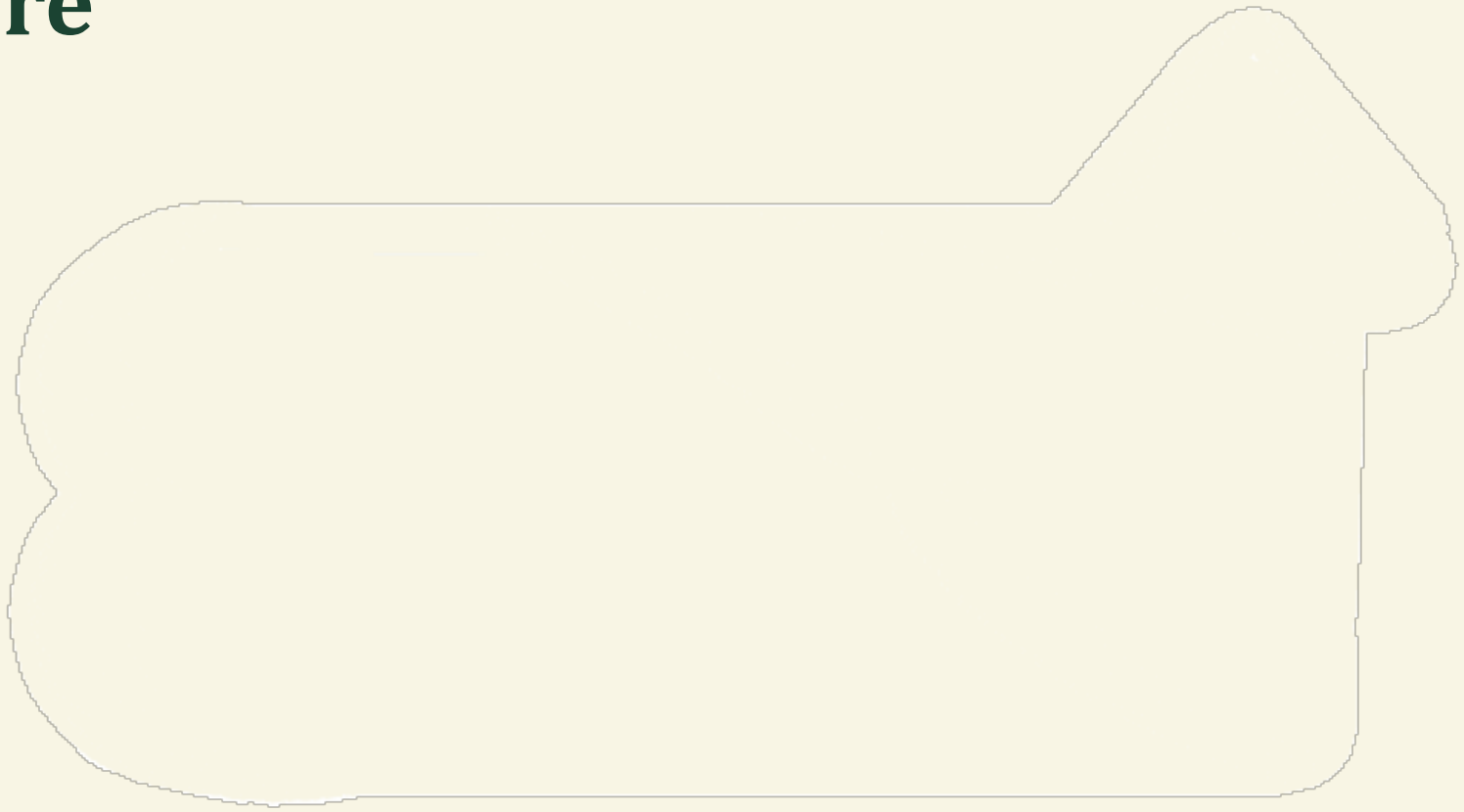
THE MISSION

A certified B Corp

The first online grocer to earn B Corp certification. Carbon-offset shipping since 2015.

Behind it: about 1,000 Thrivers, a few hundred in technology, building the site, the apps, and the systems behind every order.

Who we are



Michael Winslow

VP, Platform Engineering & SRE · Thrive Market

I lead Platform Engineering and SRE, with a focus on AI adoption. From DevOps Enterprise Summit to the Enterprise Technology Leadership Summit, this community has given me a forum to strengthen every part of that job.

The pillars of my day job:

- Platform engineering
- Site reliability engineering
- AI enablement
- All three, sharpened by this community

8

MONTHS

at Thrive Market, after 10 years at Comcast and 3 years at Amazon Music.



Marya Caples

Sr. Food Safety & Quality Manager · Thrive Market

I make sure the products we sell are safe and meet Thrive Market's standards. I am not an engineer, and before this project my coding experience was a little Google Apps Script.

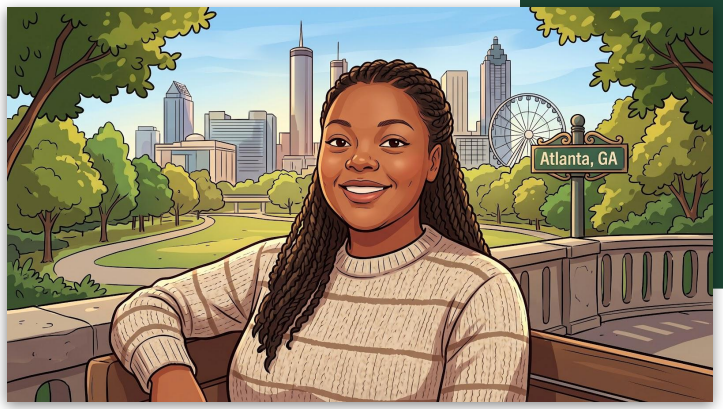
What I do:

- Food safety and quality assurance
- Ingredient standards and vetting
- Vendor quality issues, holds and recalls
- Builder of the Ingredient Vetting Portal

1,000+

RESTRICTED INGREDIENTS

that every product we sell is screened against.



What ingredient vetting used to look like

Before the portal, every new vendor product went through this:

1. Category Manager receives ingredient list from vendor via email
2. Manually searches ingredient standards spreadsheets
3. CM contacts FSQA. Back and forth dialogue to potentially resolve flags
4. CM Requests docs and ingredient info from vendor via email
5. FSQA reviews vendor supplied info. More back forth. Final decision made

Pain points:

Time-consuming · Error-prone · Very manual process · Unclear documentation · Extensive research required

The question wasn't

“How do I code this?”

It was

“Can AI help me build the system I wish we had?”

The prompt that started the Ingredient Vetting Portal

GOAL: Help build a web application to manage ingredient compliance review for vendor-submitted products.

CONTEXT: This tool will be used by our Category Managers, FSQA team, and vendors. Currently we review ingredient lists manually against three spreadsheet standards. The process is slow, error-prone, and lives in email chains. We need a traceable workflow.

CONSTRAINTS: No external infrastructure. It must run inside Google Workspace. I am not an engineer. The tool needs to be usable by CMs, an FSQA reviewer, and external vendors (without login credentials).

FORMAT: A Google Apps Script web app. Role-specific views for CM, FSQA, and Vendor. Use Google Sheets as the database.

This single prompt refined over a few exchanges launched a months-long build now in active UAT.

It didn't say localhost:3000

Where our two stories met

I was hunting for one place to host every team's AI apps when someone demoed Marya's ingredient portal. The URL didn't say localhost. It was hosted on Google Apps Script, behind our own login, on tools we already paid for.

What that told us:

- A non-engineer had already shipped a hosted app
- The platform we needed was already licensed
- Her work came before our program, and shaped it
- Good for internal apps: "Everyone at Thrive"

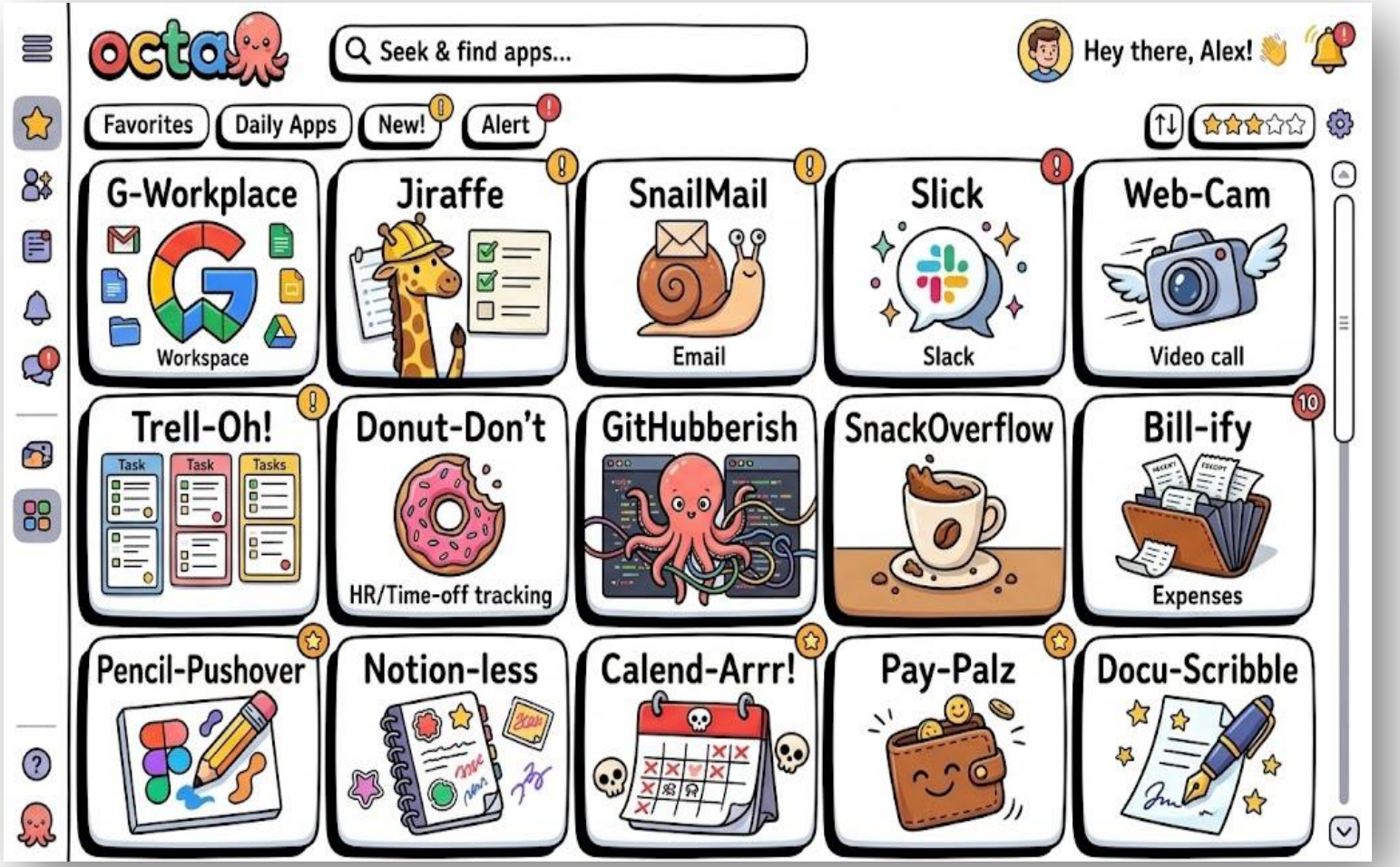
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PROMPT

One prompt, refined a few times, from someone who had never asked for a budget.

She gave the AI a picture of her toolbox

How Marya ended up on Google Apps Script



WE PUT IT ON A SLIDE IN APRIL

The April roadmap predicted we'd be presenting our AI story back to this community by November.

WHAT WE PREDICTED

November 2026

We didn't know the date yet. We just knew the community would gather again and wanted to be on the agenda.

WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED

October 7 & 8

A warm-up at the AI Forum in September. Then here in Charlotte, on stage with a builder whose work started before our program did.

We got the month wrong. We got the goal right.

WE PUT IT ON A SLIDE IN APRIL

The April roadm esenting our AI story back to thi er.

Thread

Michael Winslow Aug 27th at 11:05 AM

Thought this was interesting and exciting. Here is one of the slides I presented at the leadership meeting in April/May about the AI rollout plan for the company. Take a look at the final tile. Well, happy to announce that @Marya Caples and I are speaking in October at the Enterprise AI Summit in Charlotte! The very same summit that informed a lot of our



Mario K Aug 27th at 11:31 AM

In my almost six years here, I'd say this is one of the most influential things that has happened for us. It's transformed how I work, how I lead and how I think. Grateful for this initiative!

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Jane Dough Aug 27th at 11:08 AM

Very exciting!!

Mario K Aug 27th at 11:31 AM

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We got the month wrong. We g

The Thrive Market AI Dojo

Every team got a poster. So we made one for the Dojo itself.

"Workbench. Genome. Victory."



Day One of Each Dojo: Build It, Then Throw It Away

The most important lesson of the whole program happened before lunch on the first morning

9:00 · Build

Your AI Buddy gets you set up on Workbench. By mid-morning you have real, running software solving your real problem.

11:30 · Throw it away

On purpose. The code was never the valuable thing. The context you gave the AI to build it was. Reload the context, rebuild it in an afternoon, better each time.

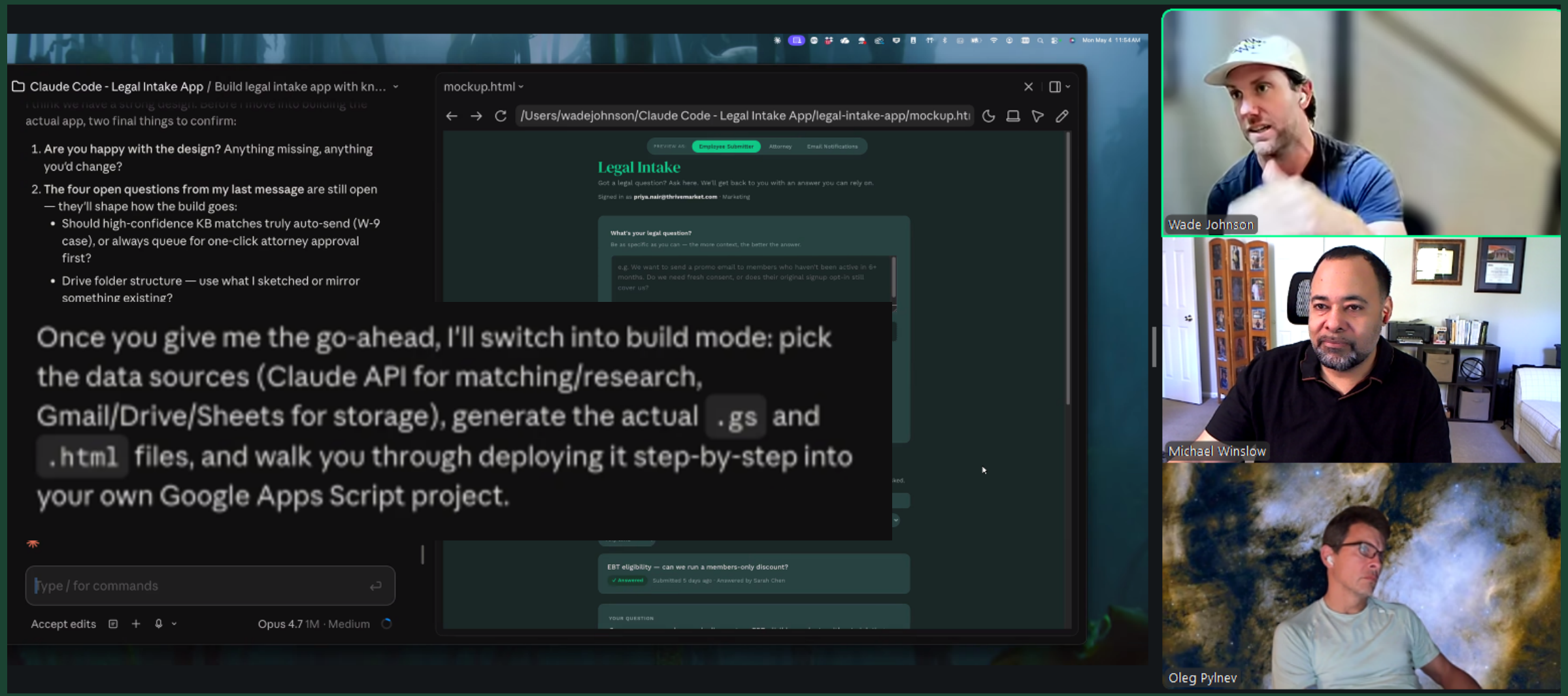
1:00 · Do it right

Fear gone, the afternoon slows down: planning, iteration, trial and error, with Genome holding your team's knowledge so nothing has to be locked in early.

Day 2 · Hand off

Signed handoff checklist, working software, and a job: pay it forward and help the next department through theirs.

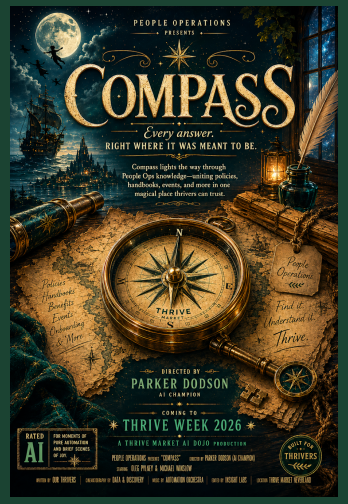
Merchandising and Legal went first. The next morning they did a live fireside chat at All Hands for every team still waiting their turn.

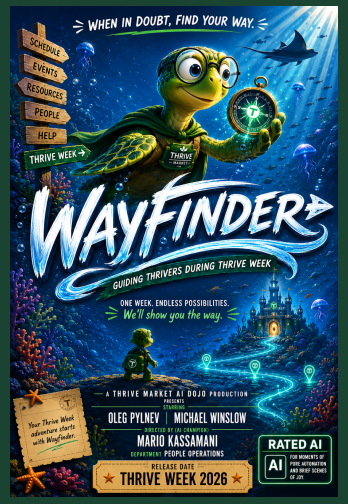

Claude Code - Legal Intake App / Build legal intake app with kn...
actual app, two final things to confirm:
1. Are you happy with the design? Anything missing, anything you'd change?
2. The four open questions from my last message are still open — they'll shape how the build goes:
• Should high-confidence KB matches truly auto-send (W-9 case), or always queue for one-click attorney approval first?
• Drive folder structure — use what I sketched or mirror something existing?
mockup.html
/Users/wadejohnson/Claude Code - Legal Intake App/legal-intake-app/mockup.ht
Legal Intake
Got a legal question? Ask here. We'll get back to you with an answer you can rely on.
What's your legal question?
Be as specific as you can — the more context, the better the answer.
EBT eligibility — can we run a members-only discount?
Once you give me the go-ahead, I'll switch into build mode: pick the data sources (Claude API for matching/research, Gmail/Drive/Sheets for storage), generate the actual .gs and .html files, and walk you through deploying it step-by-step into your own Google Apps Script project.
Type / for commands
Accept edits
Opus 4.7 1M · Medium
Wade Johnson
Michael Winslow
Oleg Pylnev

Every Dojo project got its own movie premiere

One prompt turned each team's app into a blockbuster poster. The idea, the prompt and the prints came from Mario.





















June 2: The Science Fair

The whole company rotating through live demos, run on an app built in one of our own Dojos







Wayfinder	Schedules, RSVPs, rotations, even food-truck picks by allergy. Built in People Ops' Dojo, then ran the event.
Sherpas	Groups of 10+ guided through live demos on a rotation.
Movie posters	Every project got an AI-generated cinematic poster. Blockbuster energy.



Mission Control

Asad · Operations · one view across all three fulfillment centers



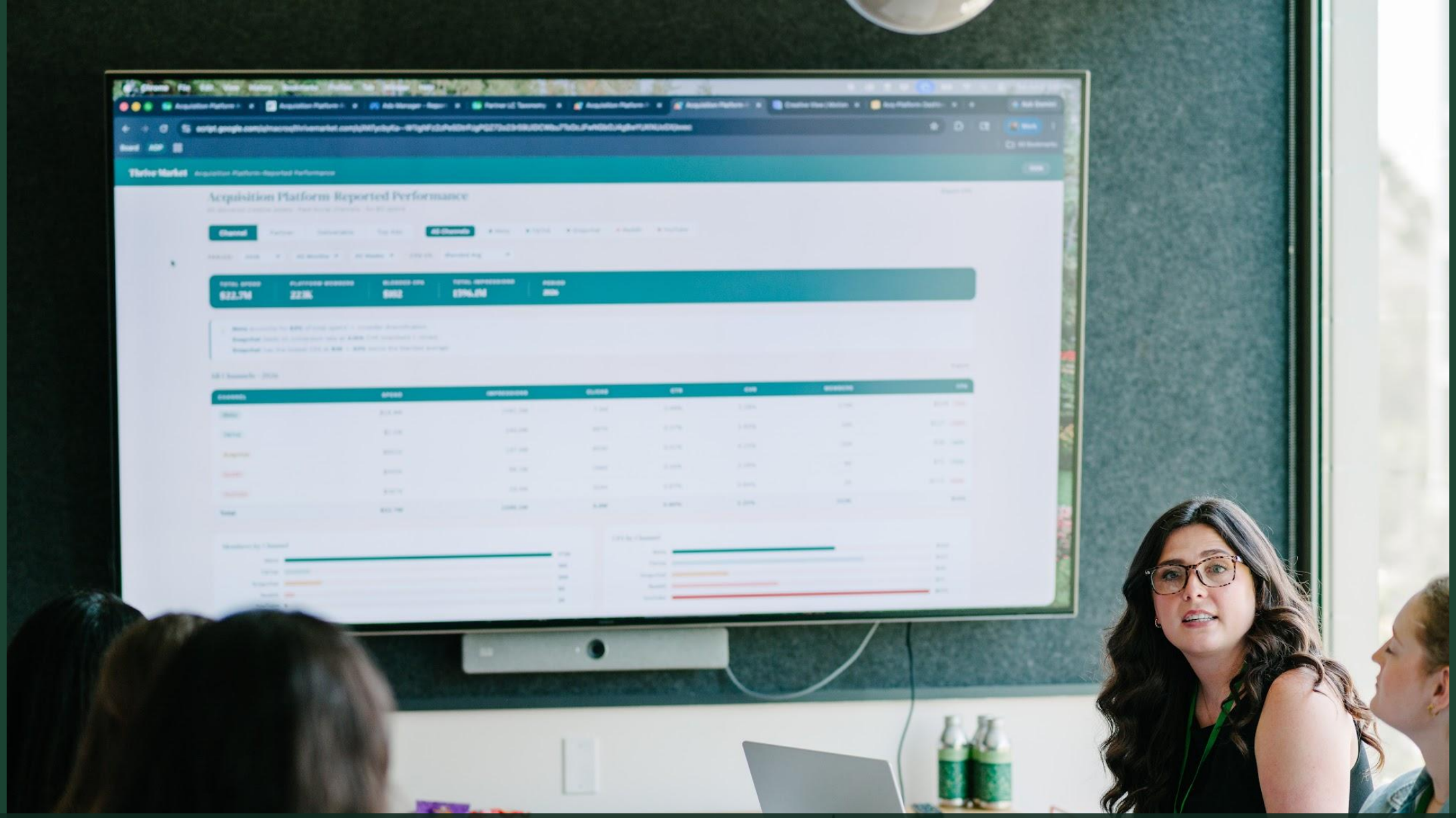
Forecast Health Monitor

Brian · Demand Planning



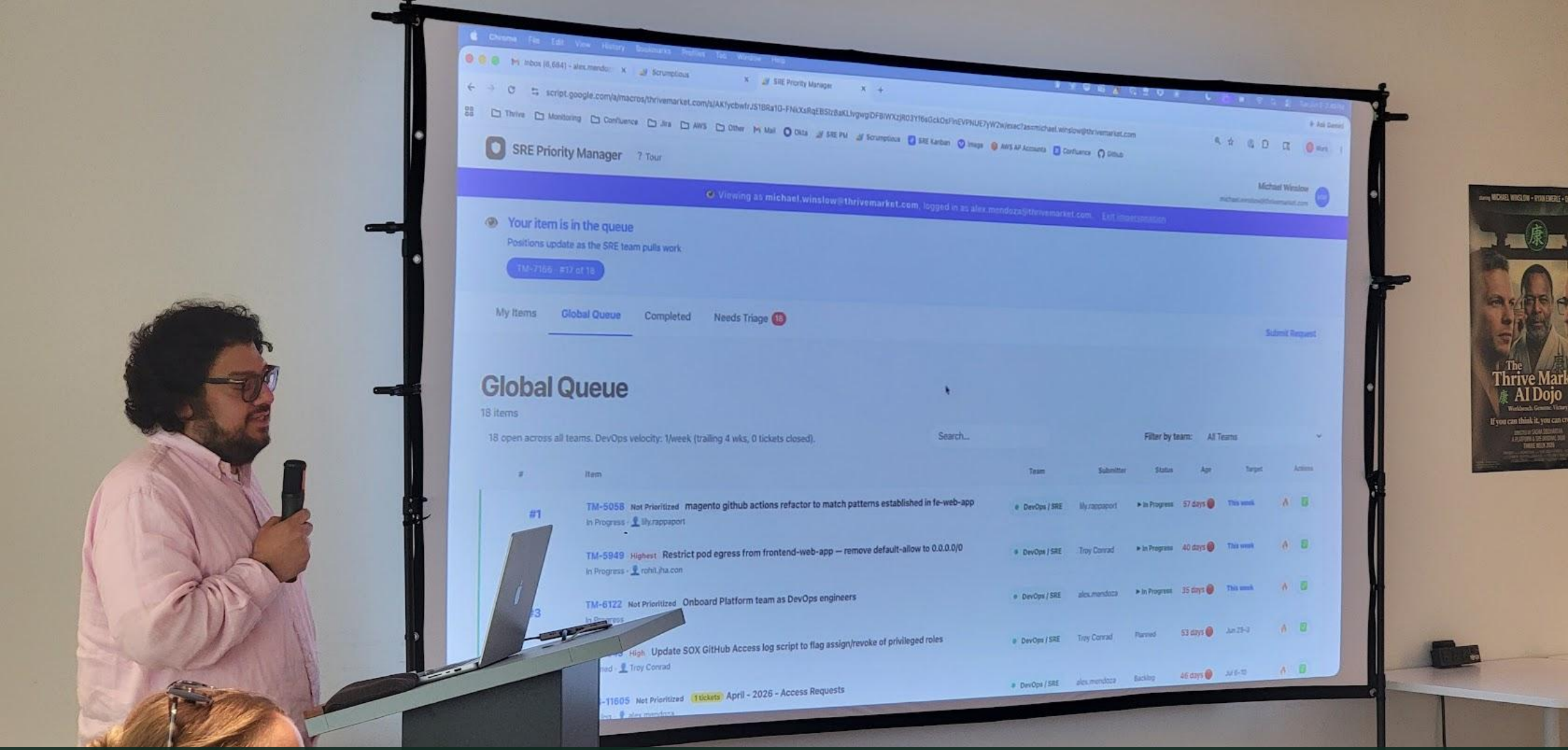
Three-Way Match Exception Agent

Jennifer · Finance · Accounts Payable



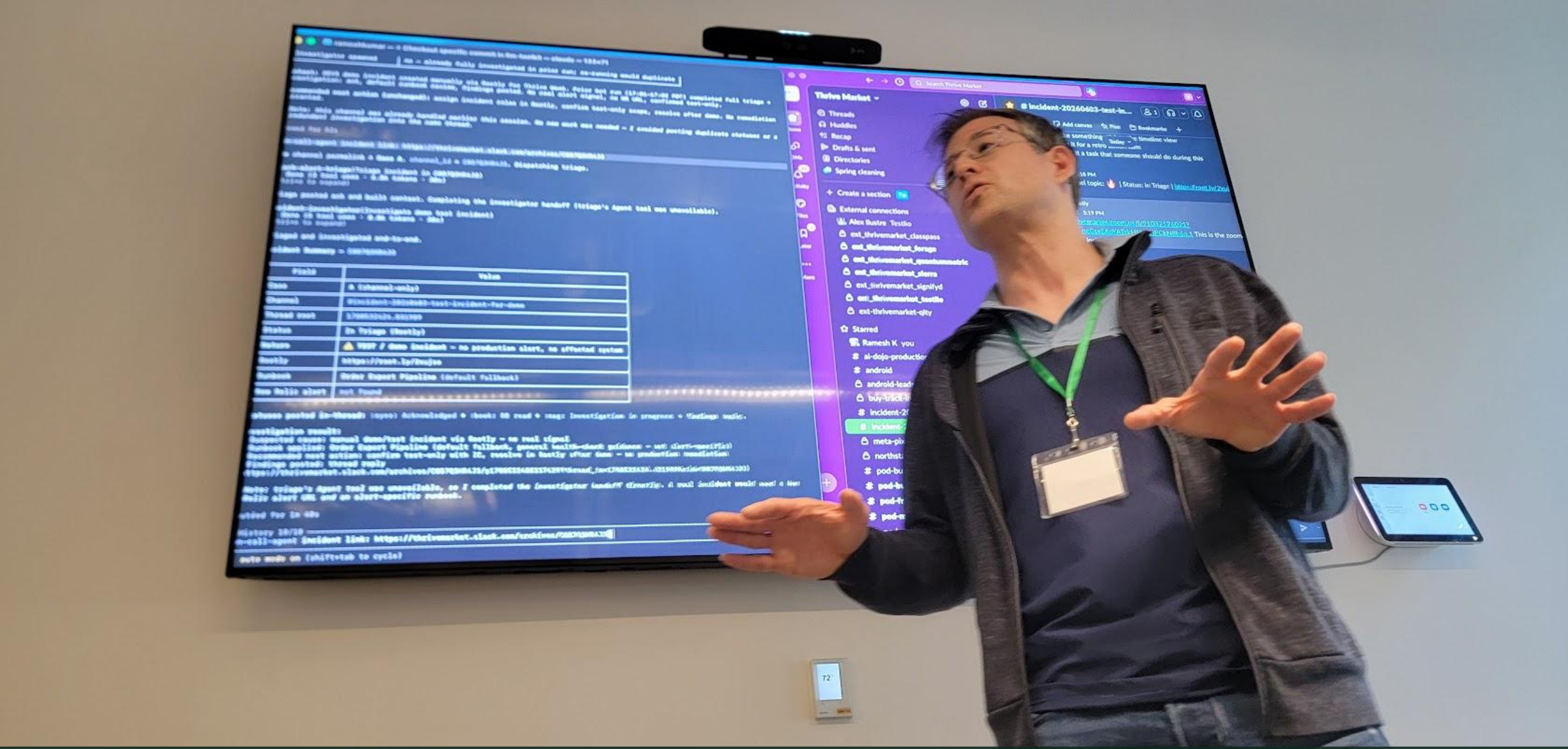
Acquisition Platform Performance

Marketing



SRE Priority Manager

Alex · Platform & SRE



AI On-Call Agent

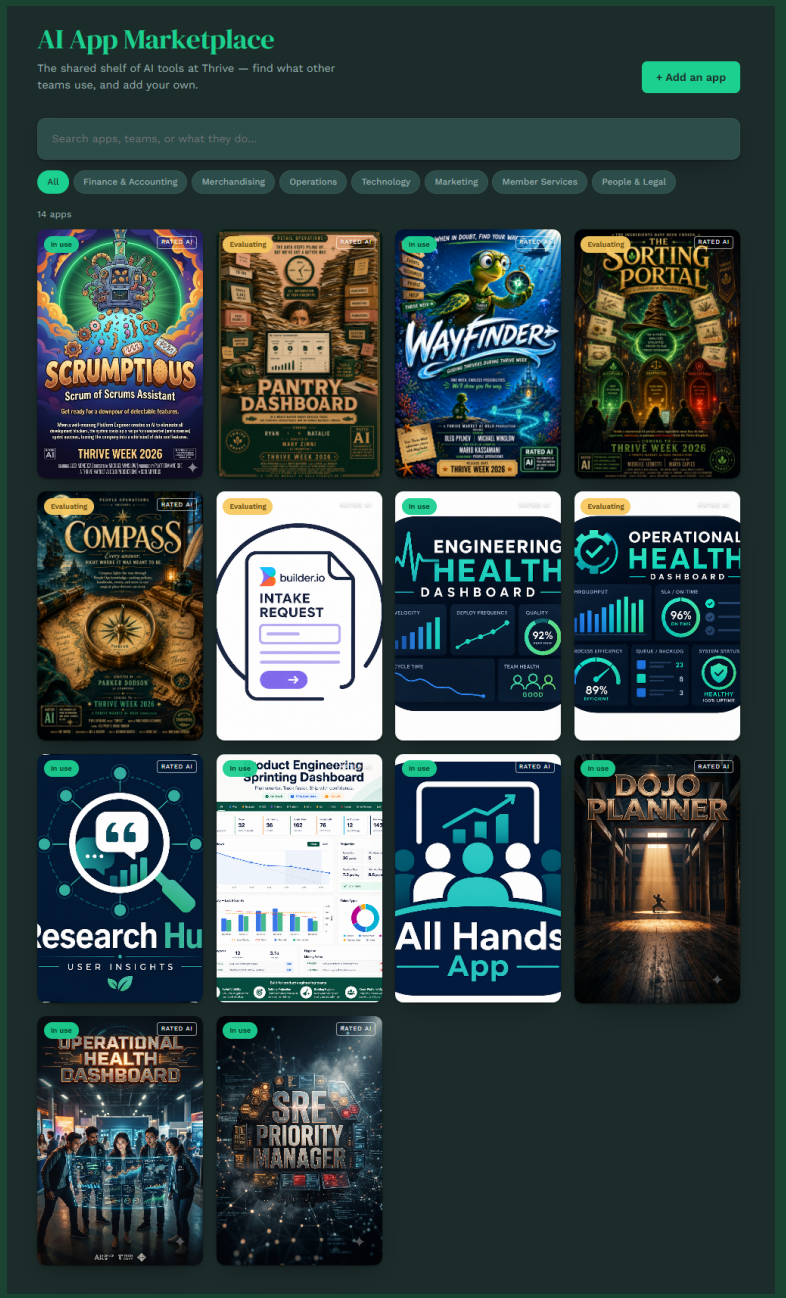
Troy · Engineering

MERCHANDISING

So many apps, they needed a portal

The AI App Marketplace: one shelf for every AI tool built at Thrive. Find what other teams built, use it, and add your own.

Look closely: the movie posters became the app icons.





Ingredient Vetting Portal

Marya · Food Safety & Quality Assurance

Build vs. Buy is becoming a different question

How AI-assisted development is shifting the traditional software procurement calculus

The Old Paradigm

Cost Justification

"Can we justify buying software for this?"

Focused primarily on software licensing costs versus internal operational overhead and resource constraints.

The New Paradigm

Speed & Fit

"Can we build a purpose-built solution faster than we can find, configure and maintain a commercial one?"

Focuses on speed to delivery, perfect operational alignment, and eliminating long vendor evaluation cycles.

Key Insight: Specificity Drives Advantage

The narrower and more specific the workflow, the more compelling bespoke internal builds become. Custom solutions eliminate unnecessary software bloat, align 100% with exact business logic, and drastically reduce maintenance overhead.

Then came the plot twist...

"Congratulations. You're an engineer now."

The Reality Shift

Me: "I built an app!"

Engineering: "Great. Who owns it?"

The Responsibility Horizon

Building the solution is only phase one. Transitioning a bespoke tool into production introduces essential operational responsibilities.

NEW OPERATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

- Deployment
- Security
- Access
- Testing
- Support
- Change Mgmt

Key Takeaway: The Developer Lifecycle

AI empowers anyone to build software quickly, but long-term success requires partnering with IT and Engineering early to establish clear ownership, governance, and long-term maintenance strategies.

Engineering adoption is a different problem

Non-engineering was greenfield. Engineering was brownfield. The playbook did not transfer.

NON-ENGINEERING · GREENFIELD

Start from scratch

- Waited to be shown where to start
- New apps, no existing code
- One common path for every team
- Working software in two days

ENGINEERING · BROWNFIELD

Start from what exists

- Engineers were already using AI, each their own way
- Live code already powers web, iOS and Android
- AI must learn every code base and its dependencies
- And why the code is the way it is
- Without that, it makes destructive unilateral changes

AI paid off first in running engineering

The SDLC does not go away with AI. It has to speed up as fast as code generation does.

WHERE WE FOUND VALUE FIRST

Running the tech org

- Sprint planning and monitoring
- Engineering and operational health dashboards
- SRE tools that did not exist before
- Making sense of production logs

WHAT HAS TO CHANGE

Rebuild the SDLC for AI

- Code review
- Bug triage
- Build and deploy pipelines
- Testing
- Each becomes more crucial, and has to keep pace with the code

AI made code faster. People became the queue.

Where a pull request's time goes: 3,574 merged PRs, measured August 1 to September 23, 2026.

THE WAIT

57%

of PR cycle time is spent waiting for the first human reviewer.

THE MERGE BUTTON

26%

is approval to merge: a manual button that often waits overnight.

THE MACHINES

Under 2%

is CI. AI review answers every PR in 5 minutes or less.

THE CATCH

11 to 17 h

for a human to pick up a PR after AI review runs first, versus 1 to 2 h without it.

At the same time, PRs per engineer rose from 4 to about 6 a week, and grew 40% in size.

The problems gave the AI Guild its charter

A guild started for its own sake has no teeth. Ours started with a list of open questions.

WHAT BROWNFIELD TAUGHT US TO ASK

The open questions

- Is AI giving us value, or just activity?
- Which tool and model wins for each job?
- What does "ready for use" actually mean?
- How do we stop everyone building their own?
- How does AI learn code it did not write?



WHAT THE GUILD IS CHARTERED TO DO

The AI Guild

- Measure outcomes like cycle time and bug backlog, not just adoption
- Run bake-offs scored against human reviewers, with cost per PR
- Publish a readiness rubric, tiered by task complexity
- One canonical tool per workflow, open to inner-source contributions
- Make specs and shared code context the starting point

What Do We Need From You?

Some of you are further along. Here is where your experience would help us most.

NON-ENGINEERING



Who owns the app after it ships?

Builders outgrow what they can support. We have no clean handoff path to engineering yet.

NON-ENGINEERING



Scaling the enablement team

The coaches were the bottleneck. How have you made enablement scale without diluting it?

NON-ENGINEERING



Governance that doesn't kill the spark

Safety rules, data access, support. How much structure before people stop building?

ENGINEERING



When can AI clear a PR alone?

Today every PR gets a human review. Risk tiering could change that. Where would you draw the line?

Thank you.

From both of us, and from every Thriver who built something along the way.

Michael Winslow · Marya Caples · Thrive Market