

TWO EXPERIENCE REPORTS

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 · Charlotte · October 7 & 8, 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.

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:



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"

1

PROMPT

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

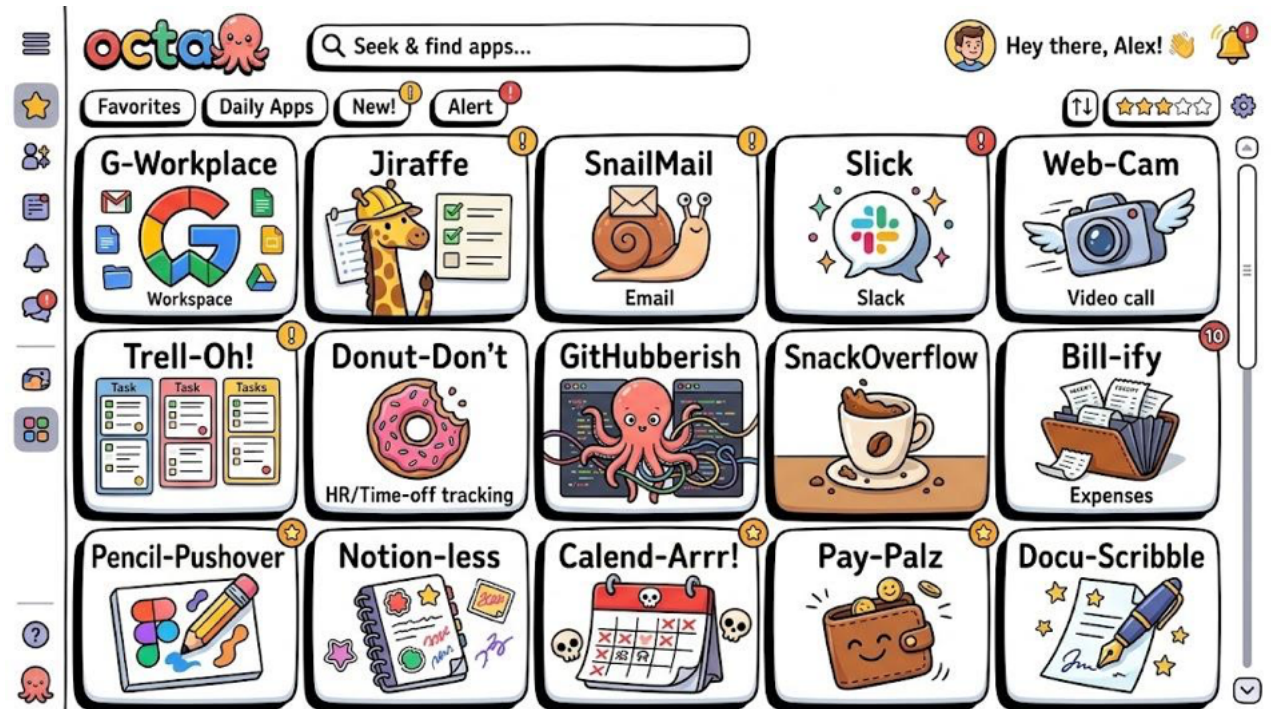
She gave the AI a picture of her toolbox

How Marya ended up on Google Apps Script

Before asking for anything new, Marya took a screenshot of every app in her Okta dashboard and gave it to Claude: build the portal, and choose only from these.

Why it worked:

- The context: what we already license
- Claude chose Google Workspace from that list
- No new software, no budget request, no procurement
- A context graph, in a single image



Seven Months, One Timeline

Every milestone in this talk, in order



WE PUT IT ON A SLIDE IN APRIL

The April roadmap story back to this

WHAT WE PREDICTED

November 202

We didn't know the date yet. We just
would gather again and wanted to b

We got the month wrong. We got

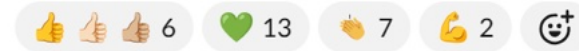
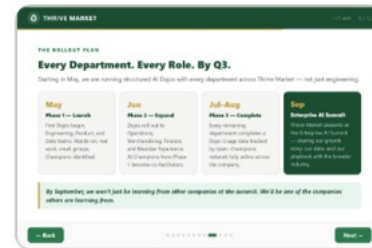
Thread



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 strategy in April.

image.png ▼



2 replies



Jane Dough Aug 27th at 11:08 AM

Very exciting!!



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!



Presenting our AI er.

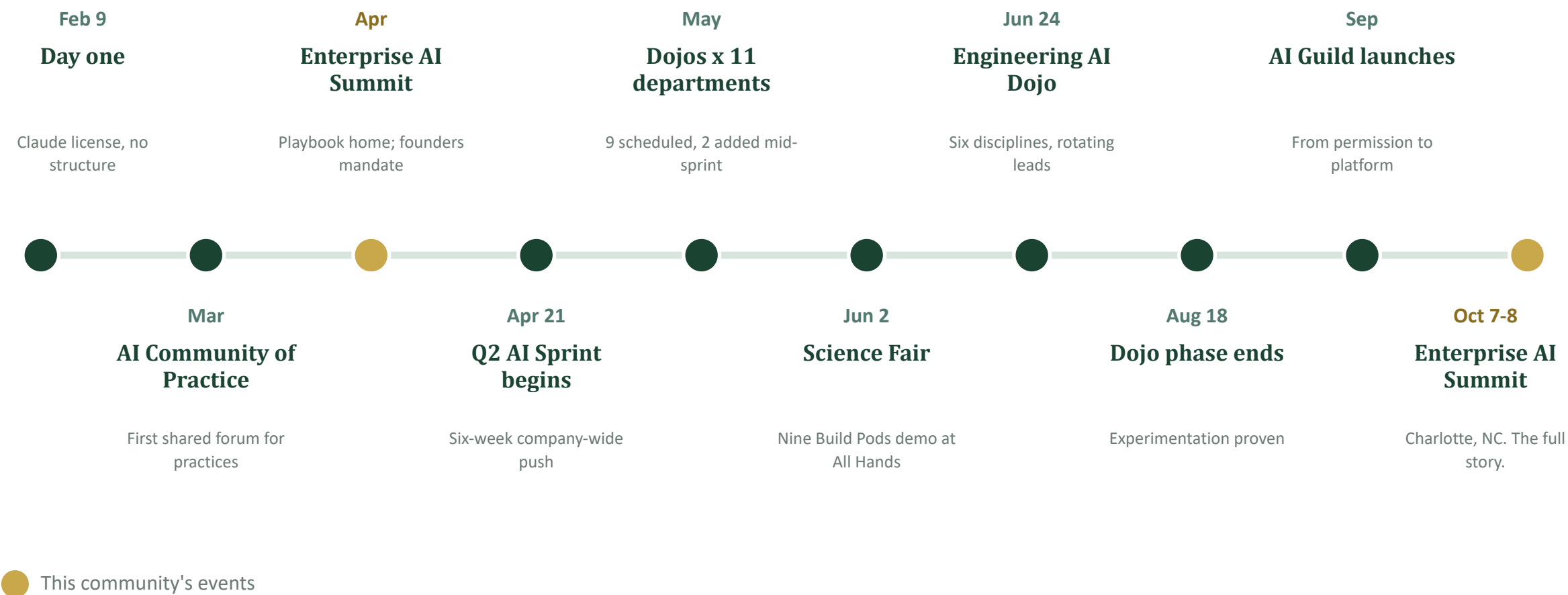
IED

7 & 8

forum in September. Then here in
th a builder whose work started before

Seven Months, One Timeline

Every milestone in this talk, in order



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.



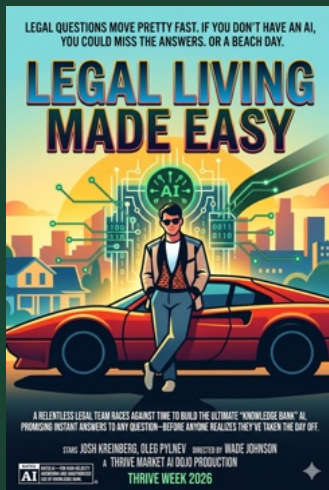
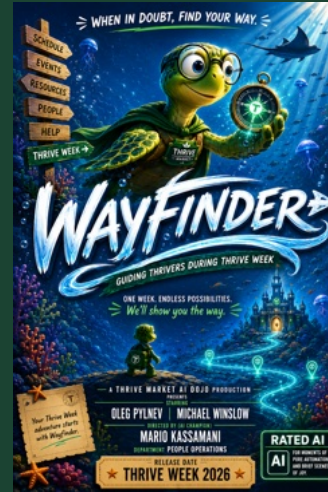
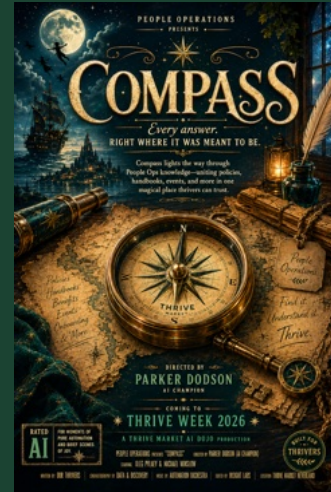
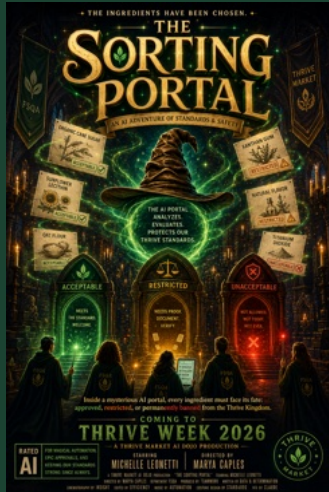
Day 2 · Hand off

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.

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.



AND ONE MORE

The Thrive Market AI Dojo

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

"Workbench. Genome. Victory."



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



The Problem

This agent targets PUV (Purchase/Unit Variance): the billed quantity doesn't match what highest-frequency exception type.

15%

of bills fail
3-way match

~6,000

manual exceptions
per year

Tolerance thresholds: each line-item within 5% of PO AND bill total within \$200 of PO. Our

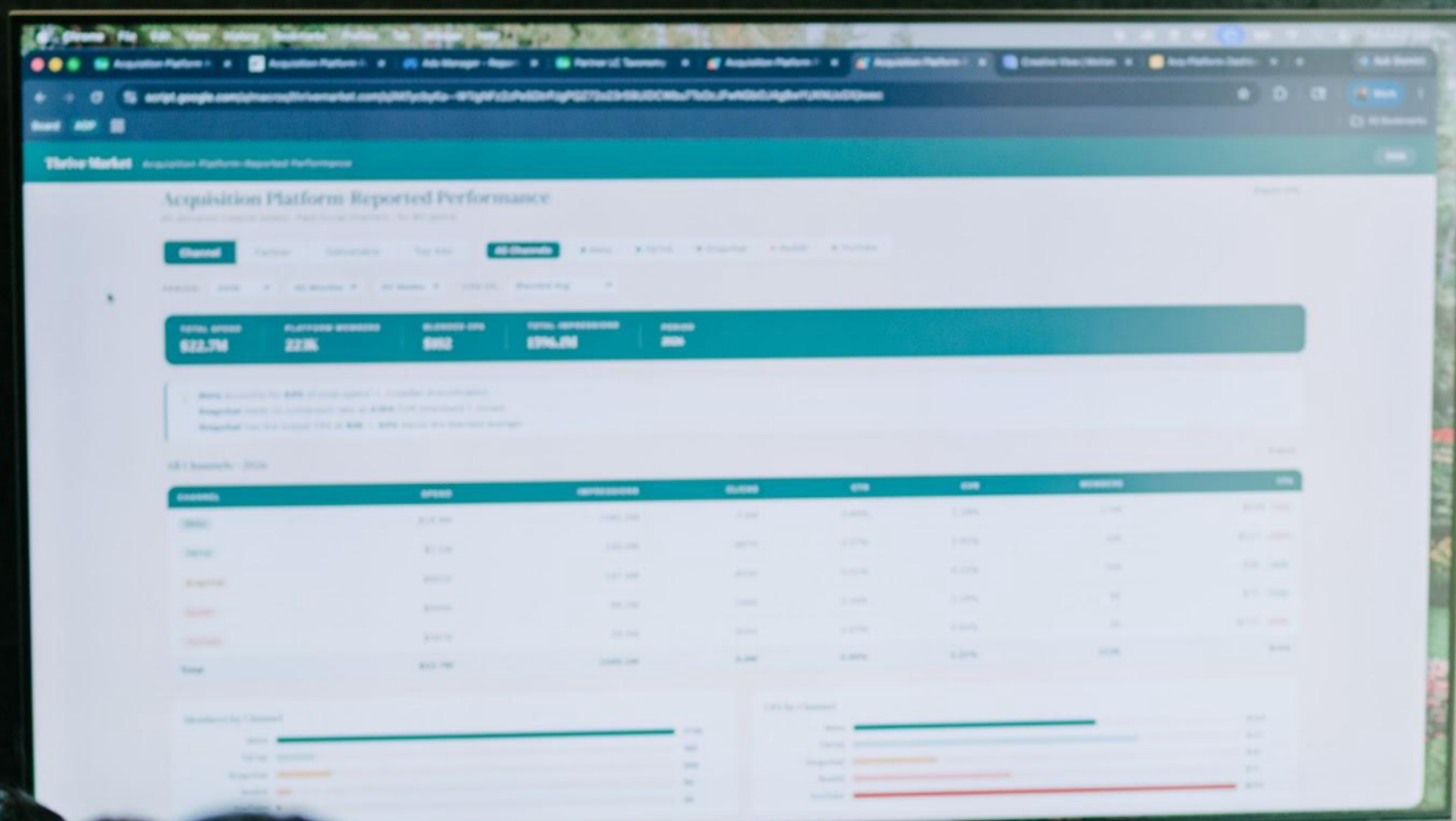
WHAT AP DOES FOR EVERY EXCEPTION — TODAY:

- Pull packing list the FC sent via email
- Email vendor to send credit memo or new invoice for shortage
- Wait for vendor response — sometimes days
- After
- Rou

Impact: time-intensive, inconsistently executed, and cannot scale without adding headcount —

Three-Way Match Exception Agent

Jennifer · Finance · Accounts Payable



Acquisition Platform Performance

Marketing

SRE Priority Manager

Alex · Platform & SRE

The image shows a man with glasses and a beard, wearing a light pink shirt, standing at a podium and speaking into a microphone. Behind him is a large projection screen displaying the SRE Priority Manager web application. The browser address bar shows the URL: `script.google.com/macros/@thrivemarket.com/d/51BRa10-FNkXsRqEBStzBaKLyvgwDFBWXzJR03Y16sGckDsPnEVPNUe7yW2w/esac7asc?usp=sharing`. The application header includes the title "SRE Priority Manager" and a "Tour" link. A notification bar states: "Your item is in the queue. Positions update as the SRE team pulls work." Below this, a button indicates "TM-7166 #17 of 18". The main navigation bar has tabs for "My Items", "Global Queue", "Completed", and "Needs Triage" (with a red badge showing "18"). The "Global Queue" section shows "18 items" and a summary: "18 open across all teams. DevOps velocity: 1/week (trailing 4 wks, 0 tickets closed)." A search bar and a "Filter by team: All Teams" dropdown are present. The main content area displays a table of items:

#	Item	Team	Submitter	Status	Age	Target	Actions
#1	TM-5058 Not Prioritized magento github actions refactor to match patterns established in fe-web-app In Progress · lly.rapaport	DevOps / SRE	lly.rapaport	In Progress	57 days	This week	🔥 🟢
	TM-5949 Highest Restrict pod egress from frontend-web-app -- remove default-allow to 0.0.0.0/0 In Progress · rohit.jha	DevOps / SRE	Troy Conrad	In Progress	40 days	This week	🔥 🟢
#3	TM-6122 Not Prioritized Onboard Platform team as DevOps engineers In Progress	DevOps / SRE	alex.mendoza	In Progress	35 days	This week	🔥 🟢
	High Update SOX GitHub Access log script to flag assign/revoke of privileged roles Troy Conrad	DevOps / SRE	Troy Conrad	Planned	53 days	Jun 28-3	🔥 🟢
	TM-11605 Not Prioritized 1 tickets April - 2026 - Access Requests alex.mendoza	DevOps / SRE	alex.mendoza	Backlog	46 days	Jul 6-10	🔥 🟢





AI On-Call Agent

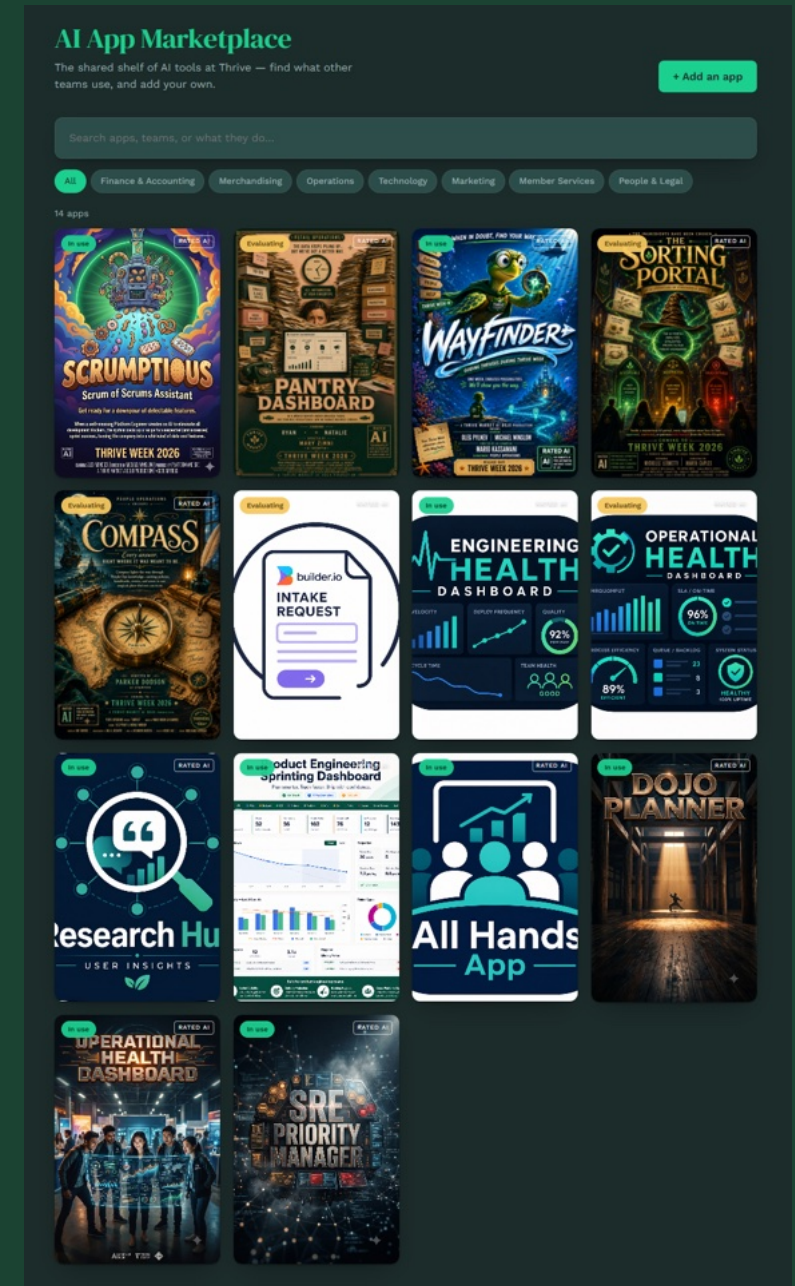
Troy · Engineering

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.



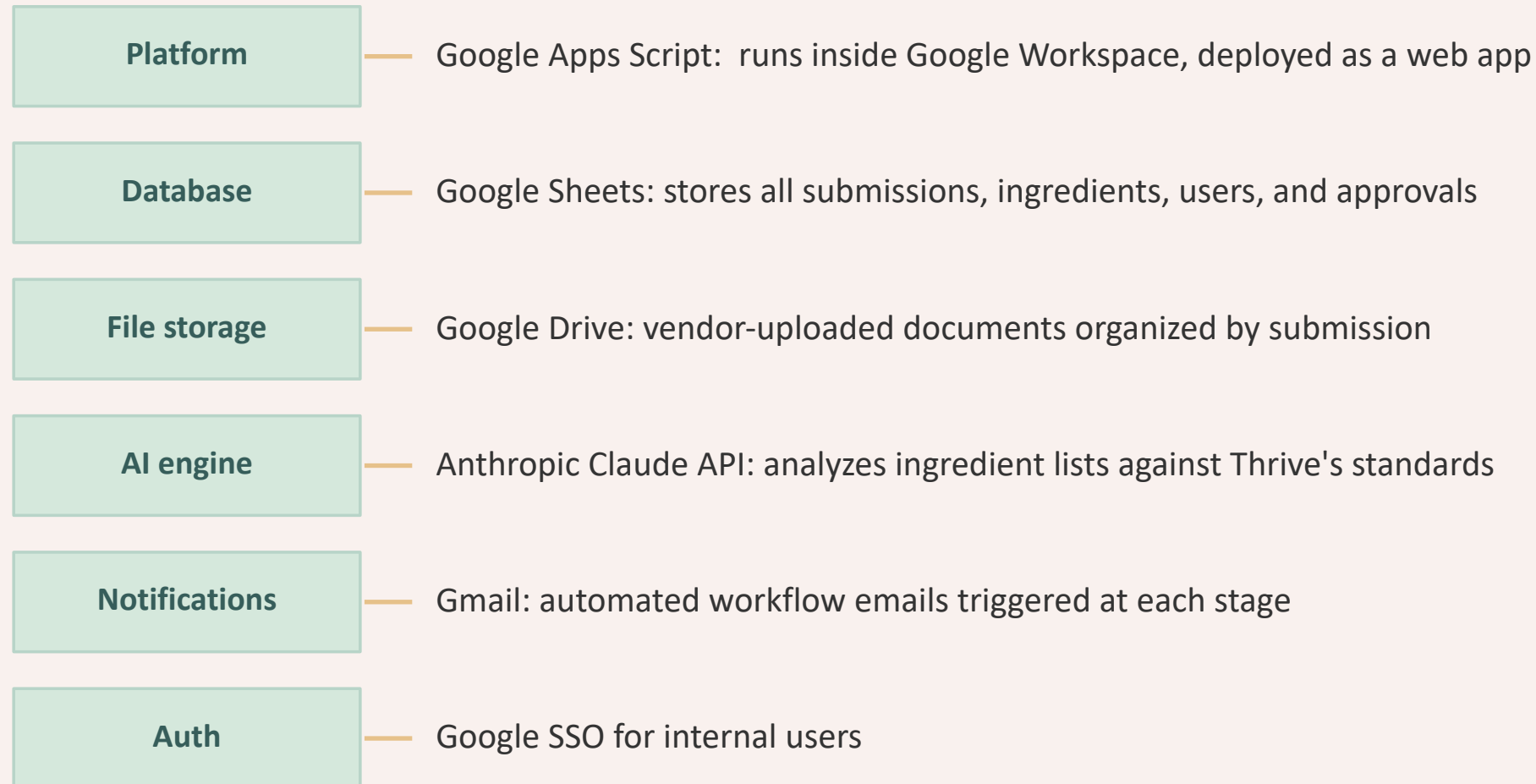


Ingredient Vetting Portal

Marya · Food Safety & Quality Assurance

What's powering it

Built entirely inside tools Thrive already uses with no new infrastructure/IT procurement.



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.

Software development ≠ systems engineering

AI lowered the barrier to building. It did not eliminate the complexity of operating software.

THE BUILDER MINDSET

Focused on Speed & Features

*"I need this feature." • "I fixed the bug."
"Why can't I deploy?" • "It works!"*

Driven by immediate problem-solving, rapid prototyping, and short-term functional goals. Prioritizes making ideas tangible quickly over long-term architecture.

THE SYSTEMS ENGINEERING MINDSET

Focused on Impact & Sustainability

*"What does this change affect?" • "Did it break something else?"
"What needs testing?" • "Can we support this in 6 months?"*

Driven by operational resilience, side-effect analysis, edge-case testing, and long-term maintainability across entire software ecosystems.

Empowerment creates a new responsibility

Once anyone can build, the enterprise needs governance and visibility.

WHAT EXISTS & WHO OWNS IT

Inventory & Ownership

Tracking custom apps across departments to prevent shadow IT, identifying clear business owners, and maintaining a centralized registry of active tools.

DATA & MAINTENANCE

Security & Upkeep

Understanding what data touches the application, ensuring compliance and security controls, and establishing routine maintenance processes.

LONGEVITY & CONTINUITY

Offboarding & Transfer

Planning for what happens when the builder leaves, creating documentation standards, and ensuring smooth succession to prevent abandoned critical software.

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 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.



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?

NON-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?

ENGINEERING

Thank you.

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

Michael Winslow · Marya Caples · Thrive Market