

TRUSTABLE

A Feature Documentary by Robb Montgomery

Tagline: Everyone can publish. Not everyone is trustable.

Quick Facts

Runtime	88 minutes (festival cut) / 44 minutes (academic cut)
Genre	Documentary — Kinetic Ethnography, Longitudinal Visual Ethnography, Observational Cinema
Language	English
Countries Filmed	12 (USA, South Africa, Canada, UK, Germany, Croatia, France, Czech Republic, UAE, Singapore, Hong Kong, Egypt)
Co-Production	USA / Germany
Aspect Ratio	16:9 (opening) transitioning to 2.39:1 (Scope)
Status	88-minute festival master in final edit
Companion Work	<i>The Trust Graph: An Ethnography of Journalism Rituals and Verification in the Age of AI and News Creators</i> (monograph)

Logline

Over 19 years, a journalist-turned-filmmaker and visual media anthropologist interviews editors inside newsrooms across 11 countries, turning a story of media innovation into an ethnographic look at how journalism can still earn durable trust when algorithms, synthetic content, and creator channels define what the public sees as news.

Synopsis

For a century, the truth about the world passed through a handful of rooms. Then the rooms disappeared.

Over nineteen years, journalist-turned-anthropologist Robb Montgomery kept filming as those rooms emptied out. From Washington and Cape Town to London, Singapore, and Dubai, he recorded high-

stakes editorial meetings, off-script strategy sessions, and remarkably candid conversations with 34 of the most powerful voices in news — five of whom he returned to film again years later, including digital strategist Kevin Anderson, captured nineteen years apart.

Trustable assembles 500 hours of media archaeology — excavated from 63 master tapes and 25 hard drives across eleven countries — into an intimate mystery about what happens to trust when legacy newsrooms lose their monopoly on reality. Legendary editors, political dissidents, and creator-journalists each describe the same feeling from different angles: the old rituals of verification are slipping away, even as synthetic media floods in.

Bringing a photojournalist's rarely-seen approach to documentary craft, the film immerses viewers in thick description — long, observed passages inside newsrooms and the societies surrounding them, rather than quick illustrative cutaways. Interview segments are presented transparently, allowing viewers to judge authenticity for themselves rather than having it asserted to them.

The film never offers a simple villain or a nostalgic eulogy. Instead, it watches bodies — micro-gestures, hesitations, heavy sighs — at the exact moment people realize the system that trained them may not survive them. As camera-native practitioners step into the vacuum with radical transparency and "show your receipts" reporting, *Trustable* leaves viewers with an unsettling question: if anyone can publish, who has actually earned the right to be believed?

Why This Film, Why Now

Trustable focuses on the invisible, embodied rituals of verification — the phone calls, doubts, and confessions that once lived inside legacy newsrooms and are now being renegotiated in public. It rides current urgency around AI ethics, the creator economy, and media literacy, while offering something rare: nearly two decades of unguarded access to the people who actually run the news, filmed with a photojournalist's ethics and instincts for documenting the unstaged moment.

Key Selling Points

- **Unprecedented access** — Candid, behind-the-scenes footage with editors from *The Washington Post*, *ProPublica*, *The Guardian*, and other major outlets, filmed far from press-office talking points.
- **True longitudinal storytelling** — Five subjects, including digital strategist Kevin Anderson, were filmed twice across a 19-year span, capturing rare before-and-after testimony rarely possible in documentary.

- **A photojournalist's documentary craft** — Thick, observational description of newsrooms and their surrounding societies, rarely achieved in journalism-focused documentary.
- **Transparent interview method** — Segments are presented in a way that lets viewers assess authenticity themselves, rather than asking them to simply trust the frame.
- **Global scope** — A 19-year journey across eleven countries, tracing how the transfer of trust from institutions to individuals unfolds on different continents.
- **Creator-era urgency** — Testimonies from independent news creators, including strategist Jim Louderback, on why unvarnished fallibility may be the only antidote to AI-driven synthetic certainty.
- **Academic backbone** — Companion ethnography and teaching archive published as *The Trust Graph*, grounding the film in peer-reviewed research.
- **Festival-ready conversation starter** — A natural catalyst for panels on AI, media literacy, creator journalism, and the future of democratic truth-making.

Director's Statement

I started this project the way journalists start most things — by walking into a room and observing unfolding news events.. At first those rooms were familiar: storied newsrooms in Washington, Philadelphia, and London where a handful of editors decided, every morning, what the world would know by nightfall. They were confident. Sometimes they were scared. They never expected the walls around them to vanish.

I didn't set out to make an obituary for newspapers, I was hunting for innovation storylines.. as time passed, I wanted to know something more intimate: what happens to the rituals of trust when the institutions that housed them begin to crumble. So I kept filming — on trains, in hotel rooms, in side corridors at conferences, wherever people forgot the camera was rolling and confessed how close to the edge they really felt. I earned their trust, and I am presenting mine in return. There was no script written. Nobody had to learn any lines. These were 'on-the-record' conversations with top media minds. This is as real as it gets.

Over nineteen years, those first interviews shifted from economic anxiety to something stranger: a fear that younger journalists would never be apprenticed into the craft at all. By the time AI-generated certainty started flooding the feeds, I found a different kind of character emerging — creator-journalists who survive by doing the one thing machines can't: admitting when they're wrong.

Trustable is my attempt to sit with that tension without resolving it. The film doesn't tell viewers whom to trust. It shows how trust is performed, the price of losing it — and what it costs to keep doing it now.

The Vanguard (Principal Subjects)

Name	Role
Milton Coleman	Deputy Managing Editor, The Washington Post
Alison Smale	Editor-in-chief, International Herald-Tribune
Marcela Kunova	Managing Director, Journalism UK
Michael Cooke	Editor-in-Chief, The Toronto Star
Garry Kasparov	Former World Chess Champion, Russia Opposition Leader
Paul Steiger	Founding Editor-in-Chief, ProPublica
John H. White	Pulitzer Prize-winning Photojournalist, Chicago Sun-Times
Mario García	Media Designer and Consultant
Jim Louderback	Creator Economy Strategist
Lin Yi-Chung	Deputy News Editor, Chanel News Asia, Singapore
Kevin Anderson	Digital Strategy Director, WAN-IFRA (<i>longitudinal subject — filmed 19 years apart</i>)

(Full 34-subject list available on request; 5 subjects filmed longitudinally.)

Filming Locations

Washington D.C. · Cape Town · Chicago · Philadelphia · London · Isle of Skye, Scotland · Hamburg · Zagreb · Paris · Prague · Dubai · Singapore · Hong Kong · Cairo • Toronto

(21 countries: USA, South Africa, UK, Germany, Canada, Croatia, France, Czech Republic, UAE, Singapore, Hong Kong, Egypt.)

Facts & Figures

19-year field study · 63 master tapes · 25 hard drives · 500 hours of visual archaeology · 12 countries · 34 global editors and creators · 5 longitudinal subjects

Status & What We're Seeking

- 88-minute festival master in final edit.
- Seeking premiere partners, international sales representation, and academic/impact distribution collaborators.

Contact

Robb Montgomery

Director / Producer

Founder, Smart Film School

ceo@visualeditors.com

+1 312-380-1266