BrandRank.AI Completes the Initial Closing of a $3 Million Series Seed Financing

Series Seed Financing to Help Brands Win, Defend Trust & Grow Recommendation Share in AI Answer Engines & Build on Averi Acquisition to Drive Enterprise Growth

CINCINNATI, OH, UNITED STATES, July 28, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- BrandRank.AI, a SaaS platform helping companies measure, protect, and grow brand trust and recommendation share in ChatGPT, Claude, and other "Answer Engines," today announced the initial closing of its $3 million seed financing. The round was co-led by Grit Capital Partners and QCA Ventures and included participation from other strategic investors including SideCar Angels.

Across the globe, AI answer engines now field over 6 billion prompts a day — and that number is climbing fast. Every one of those prompts is a moment where brands are recommended, distorted, or ignored. BrandRank.AI is an Answer Engine Optimization (AEO) platform highly differentiated around building trust, managing risk and reputation, and rigorously measuring brand claims and instructional, or "how-to," accuracy.

The investment will help BrandRank.AI accelerate enterprise growth, expand delivery capabilities, and further verticalize its platform in key sectors, building on the company's current strengths in consumer-packaged goods, nutrition, health, and wellness.

The financing builds on BrandRank.AI's recent acquisition of New York-based Averi, expanding the company's platform beyond AI measurement and recommendations into AI-assisted content creation and activation.

"This financing validates both the market opportunity and the momentum we've built over the past two years," said Pete Blackshaw, Co-Founder and CEO of BrandRank.AI. "Early on, the conversation centered on AI visibility. We've helped expand that conversation to what matters more: brand trust, vulnerability, readiness, accuracy, and ultimately recommendation."

“AI is changing how brands are discovered, evaluated, and selected, and it’s happening inside conversations brands can’t see,” said Hank Hudepohl, Co-Founder and COO of BrandRank.AI and a former Tripadvisor and Paycor product executive. “We built this platform to help brands see exactly where they stand, and we help them immediately fix what’s holding them back.”

BrandRank.AI's proprietary Visibility, Vulnerability, and Content Readiness framework helps align marketing, consumer insights, R&D, communications, legal, and executive leadership around a shared goal: improving how brands are represented, evaluated, and recommended by AI systems.

The company's next-generation roadmap includes expanded capabilities for accuracy verification, anti-hallucination monitoring, brand risk alerts, Brand Health Index measurement, and enterprise trust analytics — as well as tools designed for a future increasingly shaped by agentic AI systems making autonomous discovery, comparison, and purchase decisions on behalf of consumers.

A distinguishing feature of BrandRank.AI is its combination of automated, action-oriented recommendations across content, search, reputation, product claims, and advertising strategy with hands-on client support — helping enterprises move from diagnosis to action with both scalable intelligence and practical guidance.

Through the integration of Averi's technology, BrandRank.AI is extending that model into AI-assisted content creation, helping clients move through a continuous workflow of measuring, diagnosing, creating, publishing, verifying, and optimizing.

"AI is becoming the interface for consumer intention, and the pace of this change makes it urgent for companies to understand and impact their brand's visibility and role in fulfilling that intention," said Paul Palmieri, Managing Partner of Grit Capital Partners. "The company is building a leading enterprise grade platform for measuring and actively improving how brands appear in AI-generated answers and has a top-notch founding team. We're delighted to back BrandRank.AI as they expand upon their significant traction."

"We were excited to discover BrandRank.AI in our own backyard and help bring its story and financing opportunity to investors around the country," said Scott Jacobs, Executive Director of QCA Ventures. "The company is defining an important new category at the intersection of AI, brand trust, and enterprise intelligence. Its traction with global brands, differentiated technology, and expansion into content activation through the Averi acquisition made this a compelling investment."

Growing Enterprise Traction

In just over two years, BrandRank.AI has worked with nearly 100 brands and organizations, joined the NVIDIA Inception Program, and was named Nestlé Canada's 2026 Startup of the Year. BrandRank.AI has been named as a Representative Vendor in the 2026 Gartner® Market Guide for Answer Engine Visibility Tools*.

Key customers include Nestlé, Procter & Gamble, Goodwill International, National Public Media, Kroger, Mars, the American Medical Association, and the national and local chapters of the Better Business Bureau. Earlier this month, BrandRank.AI co-presented with Kenvue — maker of Tylenol, Neutrogena®, Listerine®, Aveeno®, and Zyrtec® — at the Association of National Advertisers' Annual Digital & Social Media Conference.

That momentum also extends through a growing ecosystem of strategic partnerships. BrandRank.AI recently partnered with Burke to launch Brand Answer, combining consumer insights with AI answer engine measurement, and with S2B Group to launch AnswerSync™, which tracks how AI systems influence recommendations across nutrition, health, food, and GLP-1-related consumer journeys. BrandRank.AI's deep industry experience will also be reflected in CEO Pete Blackshaw's forthcoming book, The Answer Economy: How AI Agents Will Decide Your Brand's Future, to be published by Wiley Business Publishing in September.

Advisors and Investors

Institutional investors include Sandberg Bernthal Venture Partners, co-led by Sheryl Sandberg, former COO of Meta, along with Mercury Fund and Atlanta-based Engage / Tech Square Ventures. Key investors also include John Pepper, former Chairman and CEO of Procter & Gamble and former Chairman of Disney; John Costello, former President of Dunkin'; Chris Hood, former North American President of Kellogg's/Kellanova; and Julie Eddleman, former Google and DoubleVerify executive.

Key advisors include Brian Krausz, Member of Technical Staff at Anthropic; Shiv Singh, AI and marketing advisor whose past roles include Visa and PepsiCo, and Kelly Cohen, University of Cincinnati Aerospace and AI Professor.

Use of Proceeds

Proceeds from the round will accelerate enterprise sales, expand delivery capabilities, deepen verticalized solutions in key sectors, and advance the company's roadmap around AI accuracy, trust, brand intelligence, agentic systems, and brand defense. The investment will also support continued integration of Averi's AI-assisted content creation capabilities, enabling customers to move more seamlessly from insight to execution across the AI Answer Economy.

In connection with the financing, Paul Palmieri, Managing Partner of Grit Capital, will join BrandRank.AI's Board of Directors. Jack Wyant will also join the Board representing QCA Ventures. Together, these appointments bring additional investment, operating, and company-building experience to BrandRank.AI as it enters its next phase of growth.

Grit Capital Partners (New York)

Grit Capital Partners is a New York-based venture capital firm that invests in ambitious founders building AI-native and technology-driven companies. The firm combines early-stage capital with hands-on operating expertise, helping entrepreneurs accelerate product-market fit, scale go-to-market strategies, and build enduring businesses. Grit is known for backing category-defining startups at the forefront of the AI economy.

QCA Ventures (Cincinnati)
QCA Ventures is a leading early-stage investment firm with deep roots in Cincinnati and a national reach. Founded in 2000, it backs high-growth startups with capital, strategic guidance, and access to an extensive network of experienced entrepreneurs, operators, and investors. The firm has supported more than 130 companies and helped its portfolio attract significant follow-on investment.

*Gartner Report, Market Guide for Answer Engine Visibility Tools, By Noam Dorros, Isoke Mitchell, etc., March 2026. Gartner is a trademark of Gartner, Inc. and/or its affiliates. Gartner does not endorse any company, vendor, product or service depicted in its publications, and does not advise technology users to select only those vendors with the highest ratings or other designation. Gartner publications consist of the opinions of Gartner's business and technology insights organization and should not be construed as statements of fact. Gartner disclaims all warranties, expressed or implied, with respect to this publication, including any warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose.

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