

The Authoritative Internet

The first Internet connected information. The next one connects action.

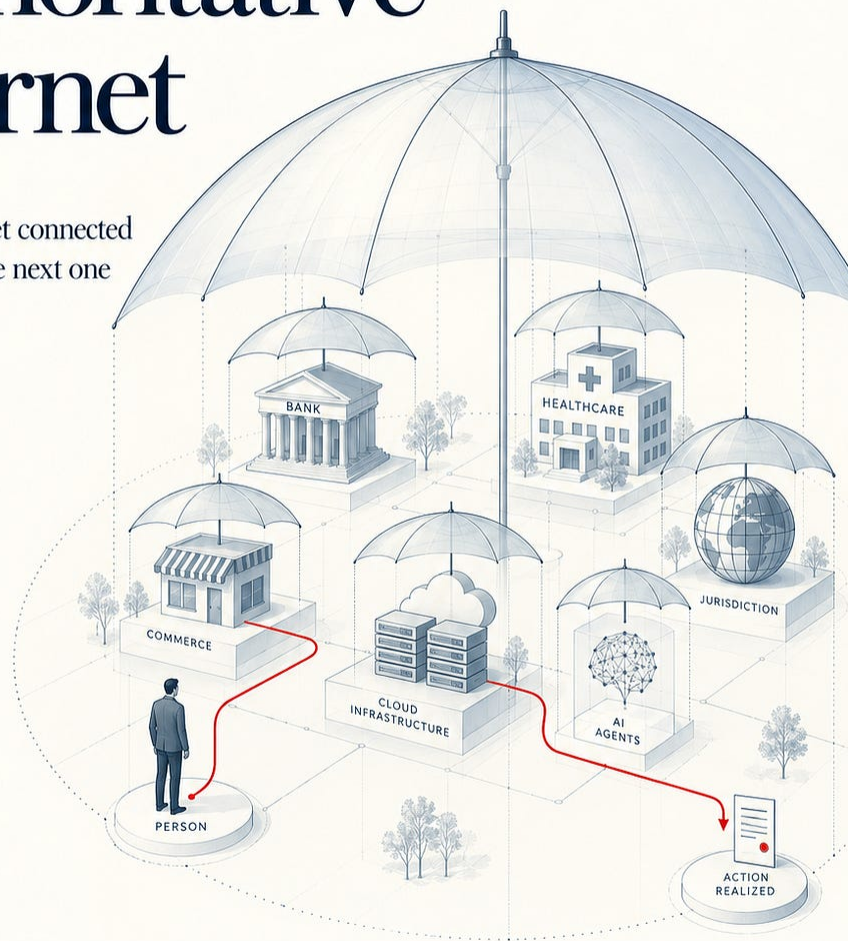


THOMAS ROCHA III

SEP 23, 2026

The Authoritative Internet

The first Internet connected information. The next one connects action.



THOMAS ROCHA III

SEPTEMBER 2026

For fifty years we built an Internet that could move anything anywhere.

Computers to computers. People to information. Applications to applications. Companies to companies across continents, in

milliseconds. It answers its founding questions extraordinarily well. Where should this go? How does it get there? Did it arrive? Who sent it?

Then software stopped merely carrying information and started acting on behalf of people and organizations. It books, buys, approves, denies, transfers, prescribes, schedules, and records.

That changes the question.

Not whether the Internet can connect everything. It already can. The question now is: under whose authority is it acting?

I called the company

A customer contacts her bank to dispute a charge.

An AI agent answers. It verifies her identity through one service, pulls her account from another, invokes a fraud model run by a third, hands her to a human employee, and the employee issues a provisional credit that lands in the bank's system of record.

Seven systems. Several companies. Voice becomes text becomes structured data becomes a transaction. Machine hands to human.

Ask the customer what happened and she will say one thing.

I called the bank.

She is right, and that sentence is the whole problem. She did not authorize seven undertakings. She authorized one, and every participant in the chain is working beneath it. The fraud service did not get a separate grant from her. The employee did not receive unlimited authority because the AI transferred the call. The system of record did not decide the credit was legitimate because a valid credential arrived.

Something has to connect every one of them to the reason the undertaking exists.

Call it an umbrella. Over the whole interaction sits the customer's governed undertaking. Everyone who touches it works beneath it.

Umbrellas under the umbrella

It is not one umbrella. It is a canopy of them.

Beneath the undertaking are local umbrellas, each covering only part of the path. The customer's own authorization. The bank's policy. What this particular employee is permitted to do. Banking regulation. Privacy law. What each vendor may do with the data. What each system is allowed to change.

Some cover the entire undertaking. Some apply only at one crossing. They overlap without being identical.

And they obey one rule.

A local umbrella can say less. It cannot independently say more.

If the customer authorized five hundred dollars, a payment system's technical capacity to move fifty thousand does not enlarge the undertaking. If policy forbids a class of data from leaving a jurisdiction, holding a valid API credential does not authorize sending it elsewhere. Local authority can narrow what happens. It cannot quietly create authority the undertaking never had.

Raise the stakes

A patient asks her health system about a medication problem.

An AI intake system collects symptoms. A clinical model analyzes them. A pharmacy service checks interactions. An insurer supplies coverage. A physician reviews everything and changes the prescription. The change enters the medical record.

From the patient's side: I asked my doctor for help.

The umbrellas multiply. Patient consent. Health privacy law. State medical regulation. The physician's license. Pharmacy rules. Insurance terms. Data restrictions. The physician holds authority; the AI does not. The pharmacy imposes constraints neither the patient nor the doctor controls. A state may forbid something that is technically trivial.

And eventually something becomes true in the world. A prescription exists. A record changed.

Provenance can tell you where the information came from. It cannot tell you, by itself, whether that resulting state was produced under the authority governing the patient's undertaking. That is a different question, and it matters when the record is wrong.

Remove the humans

Now take the people out entirely.

A manufacturer's inventory falls below threshold. A procurement agent requests quotes. Supplier agents respond. Another system weighs price and delivery. Logistics is calculated. Export controls are checked. Customs requirements resolve. Payment is authorized. The supplier accepts. Two companies' records change, possibly across four countries, in seconds.

Nobody spoke to anybody.

Authority did not disappear when the humans did. It became more important because no one is in the loop to notice when something drifts.

Corporate purchasing authority sits above it all. The procurement agent has a spending limit. The supplier has its own authority structure. Export law governs one crossing, customs another, banking a third. A procurement agent cleared to spend fifty thousand does not gain

authority to spend five hundred thousand because the payment rail would technically allow it.

A valid credential establishes something. It does not establish everything.

Three industries, one boundary

Customer service looks like communications. Healthcare looks like regulated workflow. The supply chain looks like autonomous commerce.

Strip away the vocabulary and all three are the same shape: a principal begins an undertaking, actors and systems carry it through a series of transitions, and at the end the world is different.

The paths differ. The regulations differ. The local umbrellas differ.

The requirement does not. The authority governing the undertaking has to stay meaningful as execution crosses boundaries.

And the path will not stay simple. A line becomes a fork. A fork becomes a loop, where execution returns to an agent that already acted. Add subagents, other clouds, other companies, other countries, and the graph turns to spaghetti.

The graph can become arbitrarily complicated. The authority cannot become arbitrary with it.

Someone was holding the umbrella

None of this is new. What is new is that nobody is holding it anymore.

For decades, a human supplied the continuity. The service representative who moved between five applications knew which customer she was helping, what the customer asked for, what she was allowed to do, why she was opening the next screen, and what outcome

she was after. The systems could be fragmented because she carried the undertaking between them. She was the umbrella.

Agents remove her. They cross the same systems at machine speed, exposing the fragments.

Authentication is not authority. Identity is not authority. A permission is not a purpose. A credential is not an undertaking. Provenance is not authorization. A log is not governance.

Every one of those is a necessary piece. None of them, alone, answers the question that decides whether an action was legitimate: under whose authority did this system just change the world?

AI did not create that question. It removed the person who used to answer it.

The path is not the authority

Look at what actually moves in these examples.

The undertaking can travel from voice to text, then to an API, then to a database write. It can pass from a human to an agent to a tool and back. It can cross clouds and borders. Each of those describes how execution moved.

None of them describes why it was permitted.

Transport tells you where the thing went. Authority tells you why it was allowed to go there and what it was allowed to become. The two are independent. You can change the carrier without changing the authority, and you can change the authority without touching the carrier.

The path is not the authority. The carrier is not the authority. The actor is not the authority.

Authority moves with the session

So if the authority is not in the path, the carrier, or the actor, what gives it continuity?

The authority governs the undertaking, and the undertaking needs a container that persists while everything underneath it changes.

The session is the temporal container for the governed undertaking.

Not a phone session, not a browser login, not a model's context window. The bounded period during which an undertaking exists, changes state, and closes.

Which reduces everything above to one line.

Authority moves with the session.

Actors change. Tools change. Models change. Companies change. Jurisdictions change. Local umbrellas appear along the way and narrow what may happen. The path forks, merges, loops, and returns.

The undertaking remains governed, because its authority travels with it rather than being reinvented at every crossing.

It isn't optional

It would be convenient to call this an elegant architectural idea. It is not optional enough to be elegant.

Regulation requires it; obligations do not dissolve at an API boundary. Contracts require it; the customer's relationship is with the business, not with every subprocess. Delegation requires it; no actor receives unlimited authority. Audit requires it; someone eventually has to explain who did what, and why it was allowed. Systems of record require it; at some point a transaction becomes true, and truth needs a basis.

None of those forces came from AI. AI just made them collide at machine speed, across organizations, with no human in the middle to absorb the friction.

That is why the same problem keeps surfacing, independently, in agent frameworks, identity systems, contact centers, payments, healthcare, provenance, residency, and autonomous commerce. From inside each field, they look like separate problems. From above, they are the same boundary seen from different sides.

From connected to authoritative

The early Internet connected computers. The Web connected people and information. Cloud and APIs connected services. What is arriving now connects actors that change state on others' behalf.

That is not another increment. It is a change in kind.

Information can tolerate a surprising amount of ambiguity about why it moved. Action cannot.

Once software can purchase, approve, transfer, prescribe, and commit, knowing where an instruction came from is no longer enough. The system has to know whose authority the action falls under, and whether that authority still holds at the moment it happens.

We spent fifty years building an Internet that could move anything anywhere.

Now we are teaching it to act.

The actors will change. The systems will change. The path will branch, loop, and cross borders.

The undertaking remains the undertaking. Authority moves with the session.

The next Internet will not simply be more connected. It will have to be authoritative.