dotSource
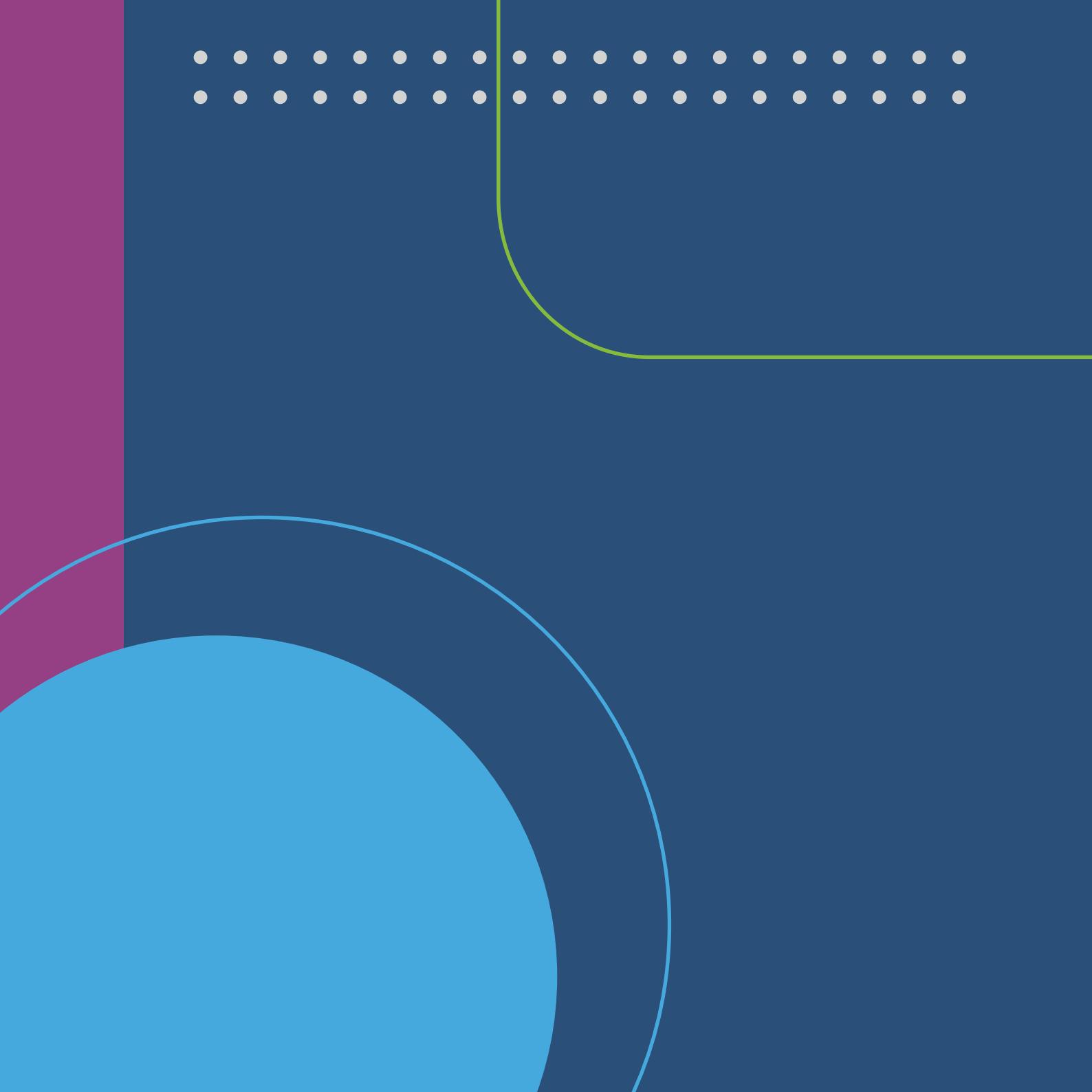
HANDELSKRAFT 2023

DIGITAL HORIZON

TREND BOOK 2023

DIGITAL HORIZON

DIGITAL HORIZON

An unobstructed view – a compelling argument for a property. A day at the beach – pure relaxation. A fascinating conversation – new perspectives. Whether it is about arriving or going further: it comes down to the horizon. It is about having the courage to take responsible steps in times of multiple challenges, but also about understanding that every solution is the beginning of another management challenge. Despite or precisely because of the climate crisis, the COVID-19 crisis and the Ukraine crisis, it is important to broaden our view, act responsibly and face the future.

To keep the horizon and therefore a successful future in view, the term »growth« is being redefined: it describes not only growth in numbers, but also a growing responsibility towards nothing less than the world.[1]

The Handelskraft Trend Book 2023 will not save the world or end the current crises. However, it shows perspectives on how companies can harness digital solutions to develop resilience – resistance to adversity.

The United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (in short: SDGs) also provide an incentive to rethink growth. The question of why is becoming a benchmark for success. A criterion for purchasing decisions. A loyalty factor for teams. A trust bonus for business relationships. While only a handful of brands and organisations marketed themselves as »purpose-driven« five years ago, no company can do without it in 2023: the meaningful horizon encompassing its organisation, its products and services.

For 17 years, we have been supporting companies in posing the right questions regarding digital transformation. Together with our partners, we provide companies from a wide range of industries with answers in the form of suitable digital strategies and solutions. On the Handelskraft blog, in the training modules

offered by Digital Business School and at the Handelskraft Conference, we broaden the digital horizon and find concrete solutions to help companies achieve digital success in a sustainable way.

Janine Bohnenberg   **Christian Malik**   **Christian Otto Grötsch**   **Frank Ertel**

Managing Directors, dotSource

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Digital companies achieve global sustainability goals more quickly and thus benefit twice from their innovations.

SETTING SAIL

The journey is the goal. Transformation starts in your mind. These are lessons digital transformation has been teaching us for decades. In the face of today's challenges, the importance of a positive mindset is more evident than ever. No one can accurately predict the future, and yet the world is changing rapidly.[2]

During the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous companies proved what is possible with the right mindset. They seized the opportunity presented by the upheaval and thrived as a result. These success stories are role models, showcasing that it pays off to put strategies to the test, re-evaluate technical solutions and be open to new digital perspectives. Companies will continue to need positive mindset narratives in 2023. They are the compass that will help them navigate – even in stormy times. Once again, it is a matter of embracing change.

NEW PERSPECTIVES ARE OPENING UP ON THE DIGITAL HORIZON – PERSPECTIVES FOR SUSTAINABLE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION.

WHAT IS THIS PARALLEL CHANGE ALL ABOUT?

WHICH TECHNOLOGIES AND TOOLS WILL BECOME INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT FOR DIGITAL BUSINESS?

HOW CAN COMPANIES REMAIN SUCCESSFUL IN CHALLENGING TIMES?

SUSTAINABLE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IS TRANSFORMING ITSELF.

It has been changing the world for more than 30 years. Now digital transformation itself seems to be at a turning point. It no longer just involves technological change, but with everything digital becoming a matter of course, it is turning into sustainable digital transformation. Companies are not assessed based on their digital transformation, but rather based on their sustainable digital transformation.
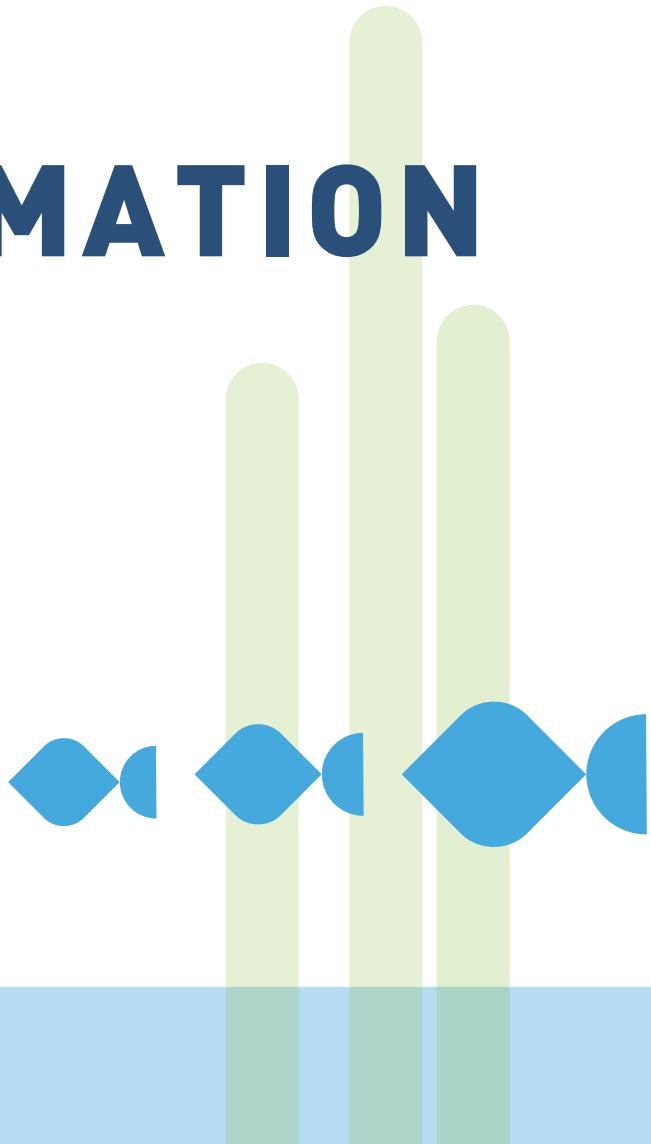
On the one hand, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (in short: SDGs) provide companies with guidance on how to navigate the transformation. On the other hand, they are also an important benchmark for external parties: Which company do I want to invest in? Which company do I want to collaborate with? Which company do I want to work for? Within the framework of the EU Taxonomy Regulation, the SDGs are now also highly relevant for corporate finance and the capital market.

COMPANIES THAT EMBRACE SUSTAINABLE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION CONTRIBUTE IN PARTICULAR TO THE FOLLOWING OF THE UN'S 17 SDGS[3]:

- Quality education

- Gender equality

- Partnerships to achieve the goals

- Decent work and economic growth

- Innovation and infrastructure

- Reduced inequalities

- Responsible consumption and production

- Climate action

- Affordable and clean energy
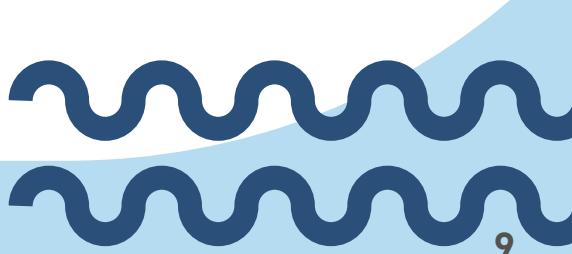
To implement sustainable digital change and achieve both the SDGs and one's own economic goals, a dual transformation is necessary. »Twin transformation« is the keyword used to describe this parallel change.[4] According to studies, twin transformers are among the market leaders of tomorrow.[5] They see digital and environmental responsibility not as a burden but as an opportunity – for their own corporate growth, for a more equitable society and for a healthier environment. They accelerate sustainability through responsible digitalisation – and thus benefit from new sources of value creation.[6]

»Companies need to become sustainable or they will disappear.«

**Prof. Dr. Rupert Felder, Senior VP Global HR,
Heidelberger Druckmaschinen AG[5]**

Companies that engage in a twin transformation are **3 times** more likely to be the market leaders of tomorrow.[7]

For **nine** out of **ten** CEOs and top executives, sustainability is just as relevant as digitalisation.[8]

Half of Germany's leading companies, such as BASF, the Otto Group and thyssenkrupp, even consider sustainability to be more important.[8]

DO YOU ALREADY ACT LIKE A TWIN TRANSFORMER, BRINGING TOGETHER DIGITALISATION AND SUSTAINABILITY?
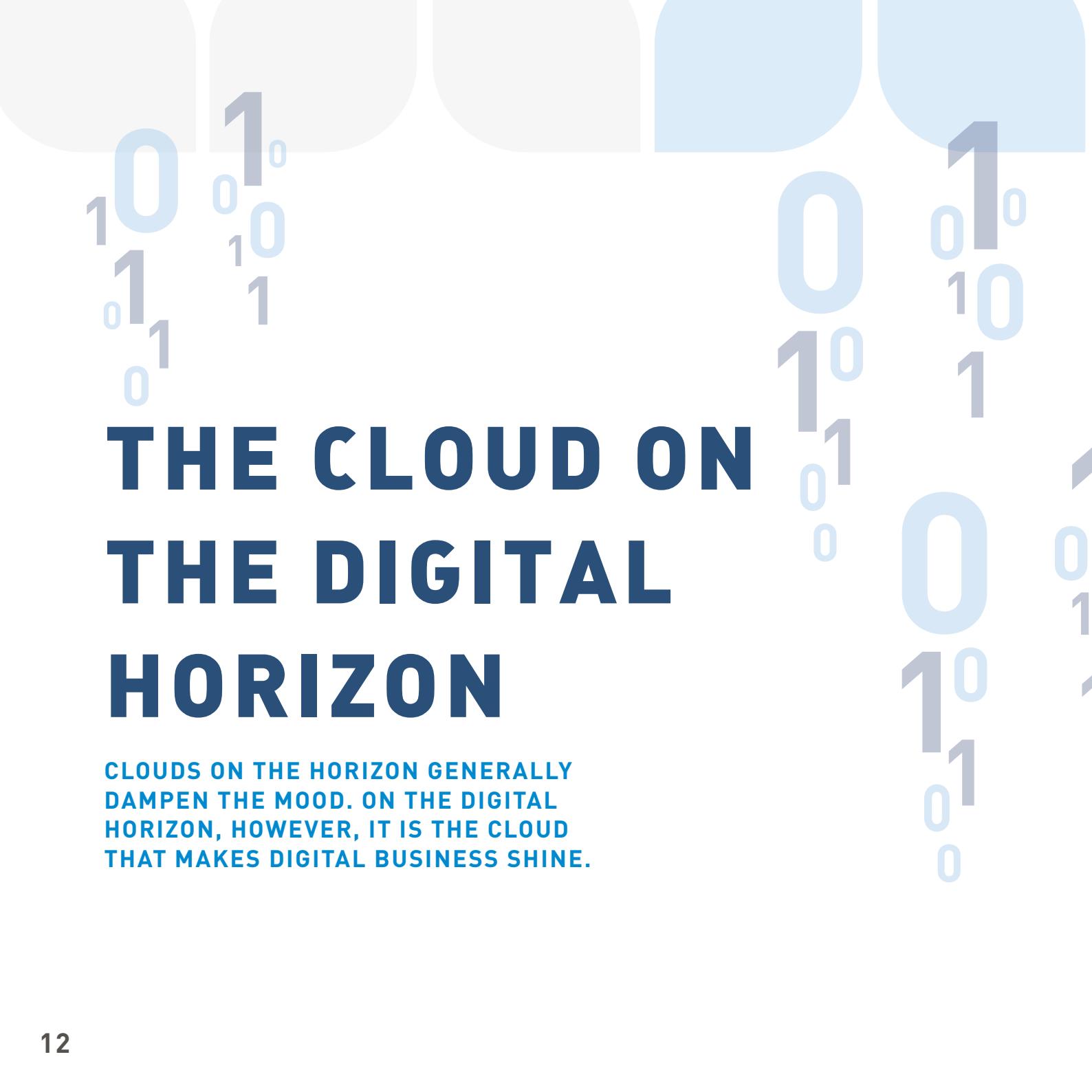
THE CLOUD ON THE DIGITAL HORIZON

CLOUDS ON THE HORIZON GENERALLY DAMPEN THE MOOD. ON THE DIGITAL HORIZON, HOWEVER, IT IS THE CLOUD THAT MAKES DIGITAL BUSINESS SHINE.
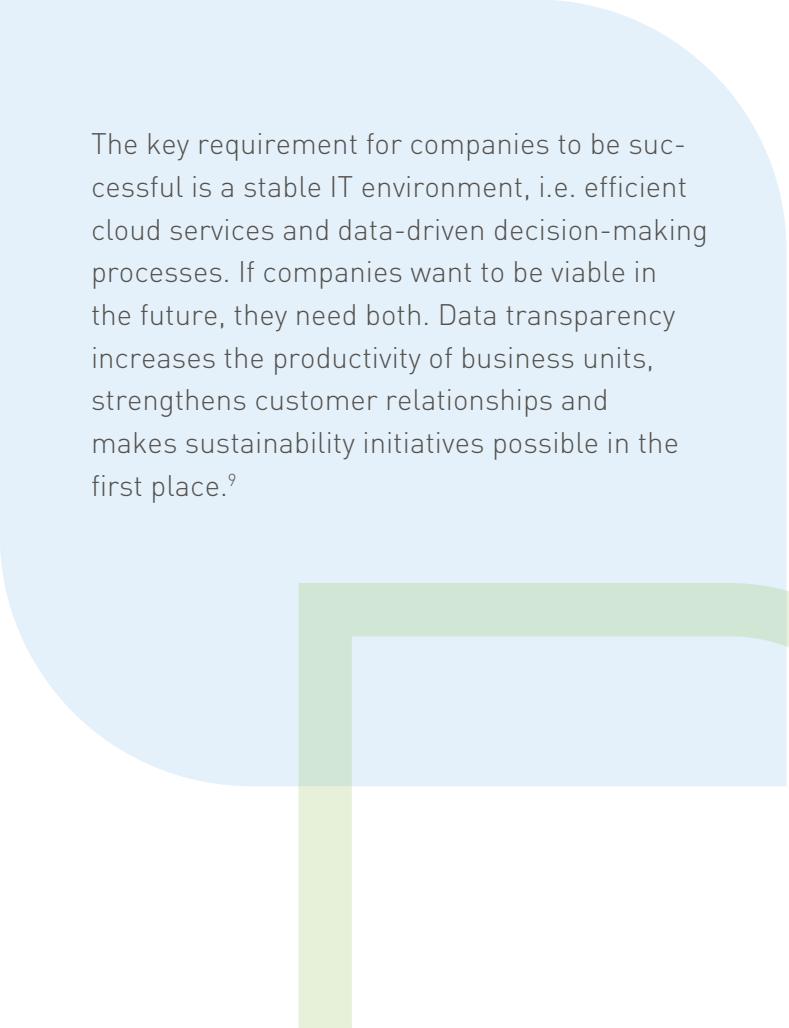
The key requirement for companies to be successful is a stable IT environment, i.e. efficient cloud services and data-driven decision-making processes. If companies want to be viable in the future, they need both. Data transparency increases the productivity of business units, strengthens customer relationships and makes sustainability initiatives possible in the first place.[9]

GREEN IT

Companies have a variety of options for making their IT more sustainable. In this context, »green IT« is a collective term. Ideally, this term is linked to a catalogue of measures. Tech giants like Microsoft and Google continuously communicate such efforts: thanks to wind power and solar energy, Google's cloud services are seven times more energy efficient than comparable on-premises environments.[10]

In addition, DeepMind – Google's own AI – monitors the environmentally friendly operation of the company's server rooms. Not only does it automatically open and close the windows, regulate the speed of the ventilation systems and control the air conditioning, but it also perfectly adjusts the amount of energy needed for cooling to temperature fluctuations. This way, Google saves hundreds of millions of US dollars in energy costs every year. In the future, Google's AI is expected to reduce the electricity consumption of entire countries by up to ten per cent. One of them is Germany.[11]

Smaller players such as the German data centre operator and hosting provider Keyweb also focus on operating their data centres as environmentally friendly as possible. The measures contained in Keyweb's own sustainability concept KeyEco include, for example, modern climate cabinets with infinitely variable fans. The use of these devices ensures[12]

up to **65**% more efficiency

energy savings of more than **30**%

60% of companies will use automated infrastructures by 2023.[14]

Successful cloud business requires automated IT processes and recurring tasks. Resources need to be aligned with the cloud in a more agile and scalable way. There is a clear trend emerging here: automated infrastructures are replacing manual scripts.[13]

Infrastructure as code (IaC) is considered one of the most important tech trends in the coming years.[14] The automation of IT processes in the cloud in general and IaC in particular make for a digital horizon with[15]

- increased revenue

- faster delivery of products and services

- higher quality of software development

- more rapid implementation of innovations

DATA MESH

As data in the cloud becomes more and more relevant to companies, it also becomes increasingly important to have more than just one department that can access and handle it.

- Trustworthy, high-quality data

- Data expertise and culture

- Scalable data applications

- Data governance and data strategy
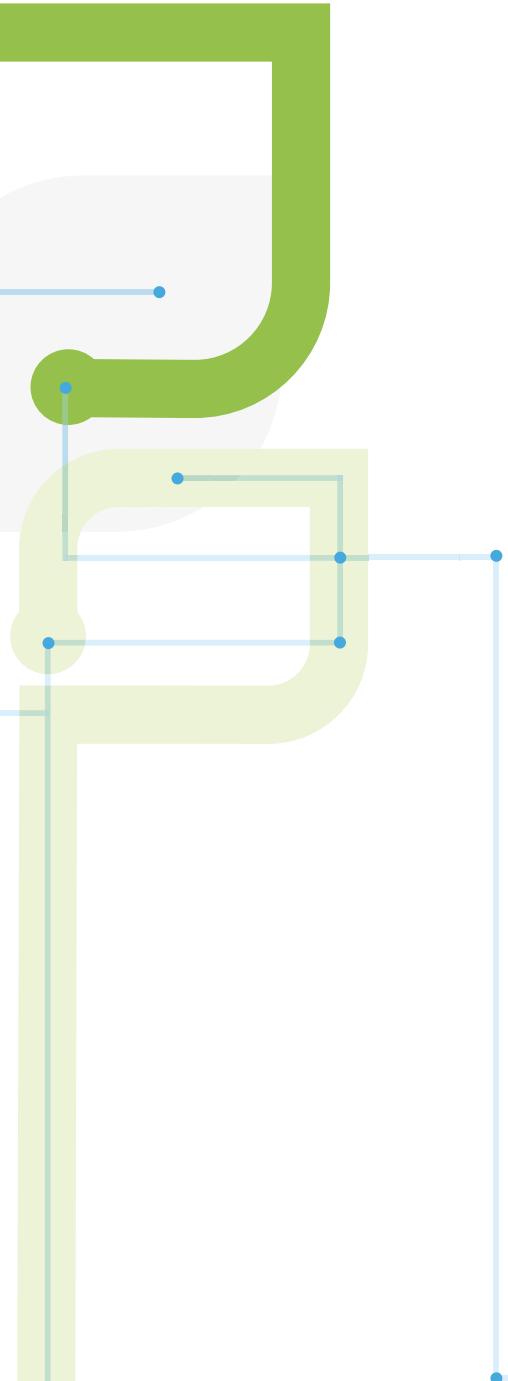
These basics have not changed for a long time. What is currently changing, however, are the data architectures. The need to work with data has led to a pooling of competencies and consequently to bottlenecks. The amount of data work that data engineers and IT professionals have to do is constantly increasing. Their output often fails to live up to the input from all teams. However, to ensure that all teams have access to the data they need in data-driven business, data expertise needs to be decentralised.

Data mesh technology provides teams – from development, production and marketing to sales – with a new perspective.[16] It builds on principles of modern software development, but applies them to data. Using domain-driven design, product-oriented thinking, self-service infrastructure platforms and data governance, data products from source systems that are responsible for them are developed for internal data consumption. In turn, they benefit from data products created by other teams. These data products work together and build on each other. This gradually leads to a network effect, to common standards and frameworks.[17]

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A NEW ARCHITECTURE SUCH AS A DATA MESH[17]

- changes the perspective on big data – from a purely technological to a product-oriented approach

- reconciles the needs of those who generate data with the needs of those who consume it

- drives corporate growth

- shifts the collection and maintenance of data to the departments where it is generated[18]

- forms the basis for sustainable digital processes, products and services

THIS RESULTS IN THE FOLLOWING BENEFITS[16]:

- Increased agility and scalability thanks to decentralised data management

- Greater flexibility and independence from data platforms and data products

- Faster access to critical data

- Enhanced data quality

- Better collaboration in cross-functional domain teams

- Smarter decision-making

- Less costs and time required
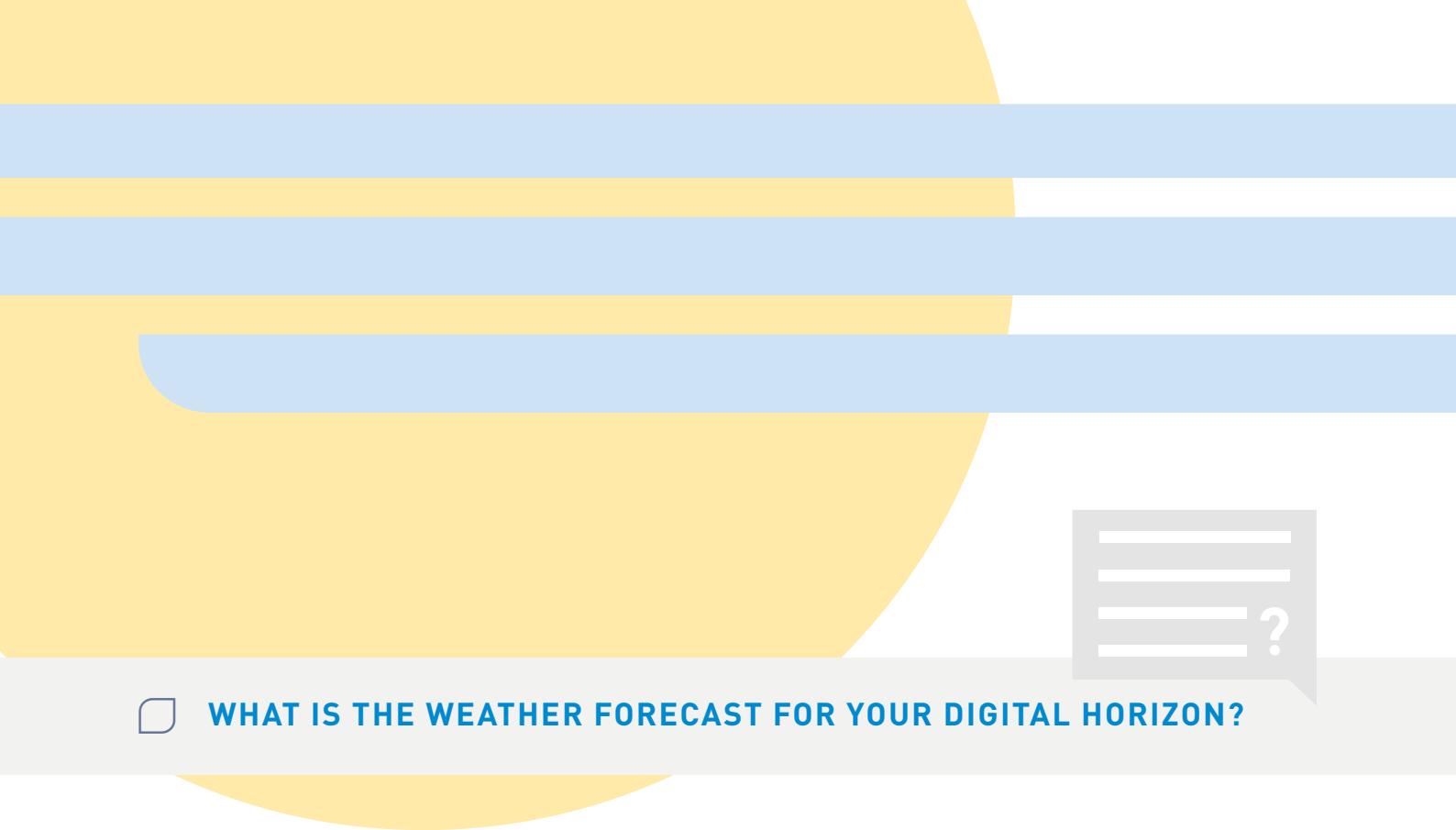
WHAT IS THE WEATHER FORECAST FOR YOUR DIGITAL HORIZON?
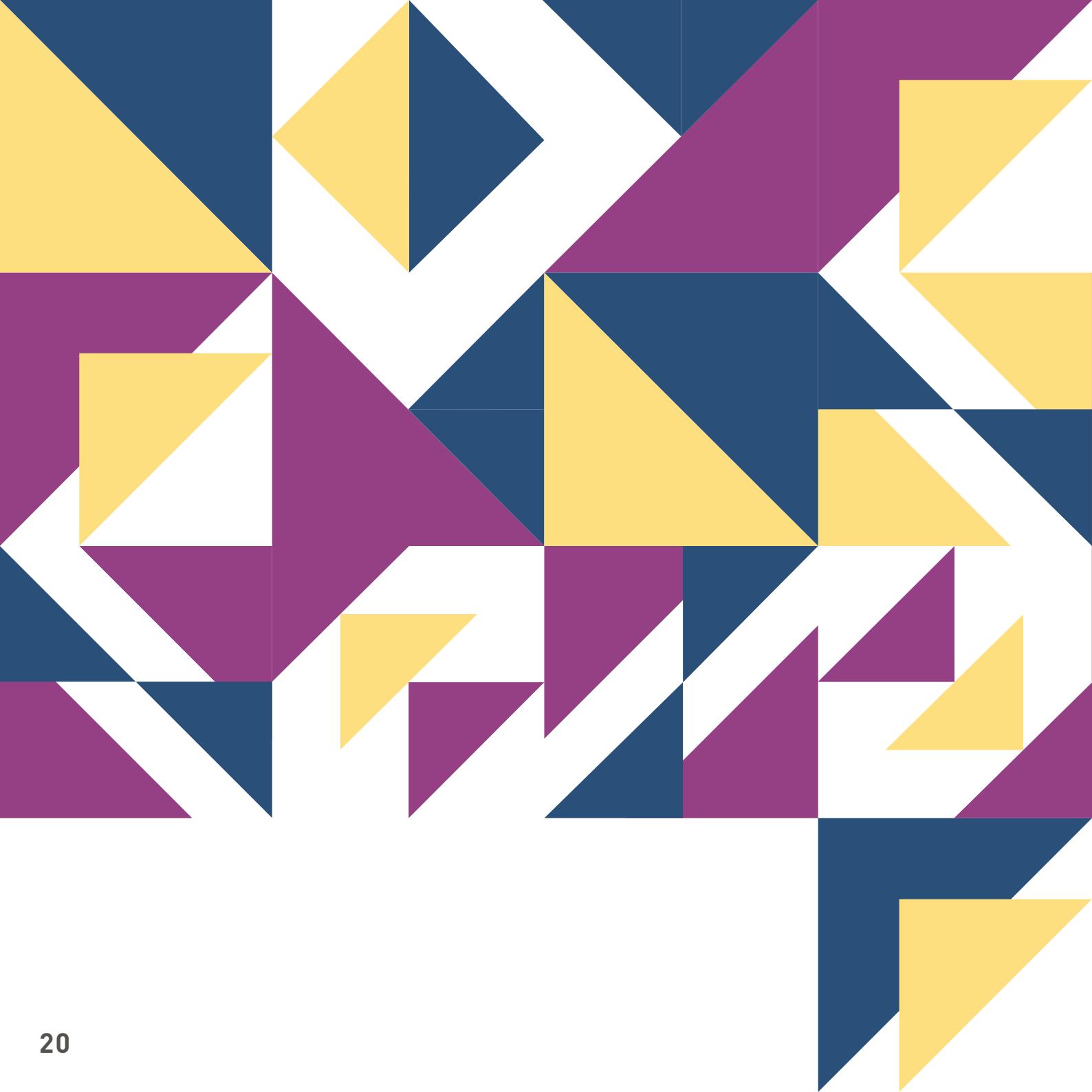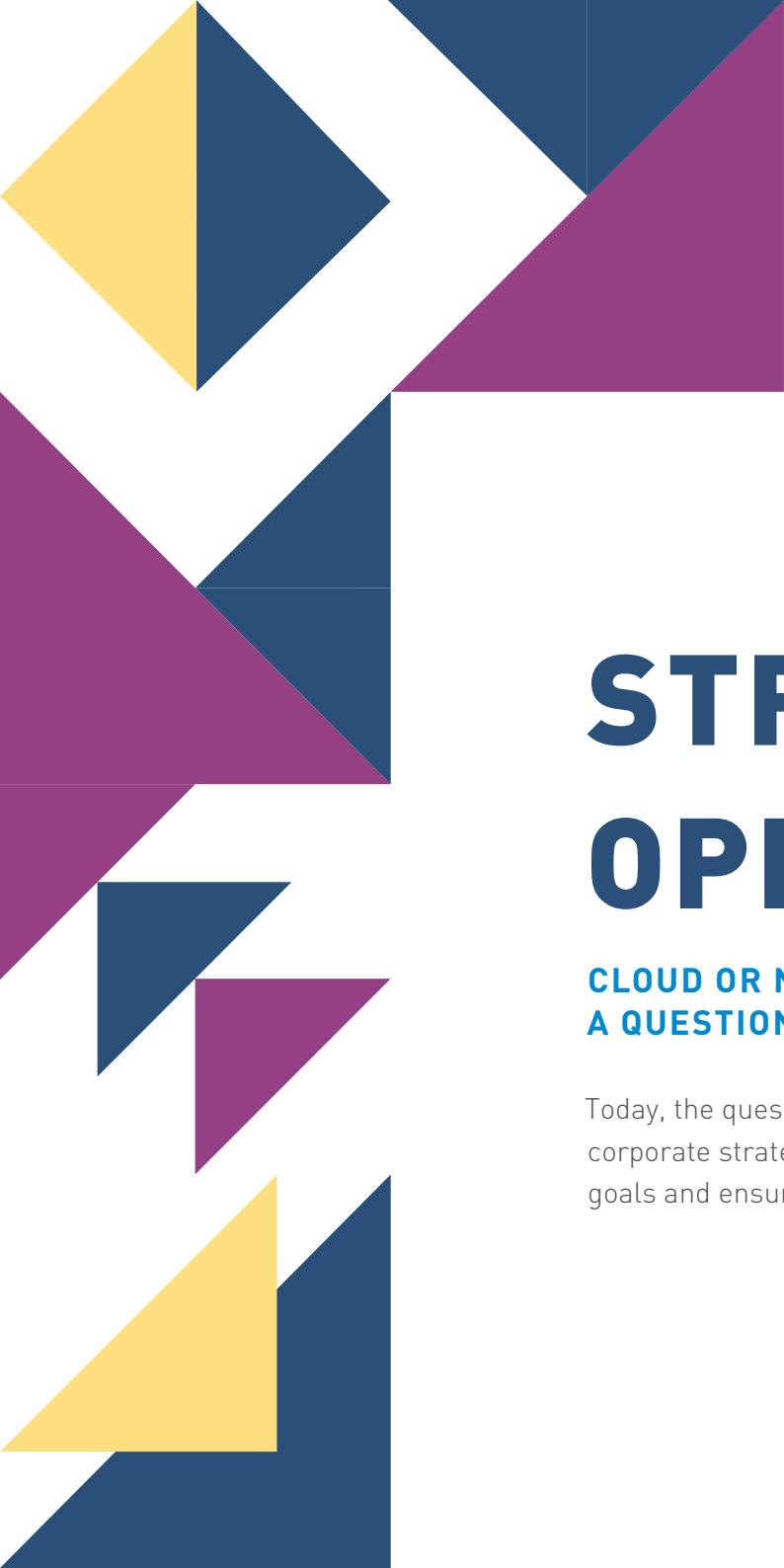
STRATEGY & OPERATIONS

CLOUD OR NO CLOUD – THAT IS NO LONGER A QUESTION.

Today, the question of twin transformation is at the heart of corporate strategy updates to define internal sustainability goals and ensure transparency as well as compliance.[5]

TIPS FOR A SUSTAINABLE DIGITAL STRATEGY UPDATE

The following also applies to sustainable digital transformers: only those who keep track of their performance succeed – and continue to do so. Instead of launching random sustainability initiatives, companies should first analyse the current situation and ask themselves:

- **WHAT CAN BE DONE?**

- **WHAT CAN BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE SHORT TERM?**

- **WHAT PROCESSES AND STRUCTURES ARE CURRENTLY HINDERING SUSTAINABILITY AND HOW CAN THEY BE CHANGED IN THE LONG TERM?[5]**

- **WHAT IS THE VISION?**

In this regard, modern companies benefit from innovative consulting methods: design thinking helps them take a structured and creative approach, identify concrete measures and define responsibilities.

ANALYSE FIRST, THEN PLAN.
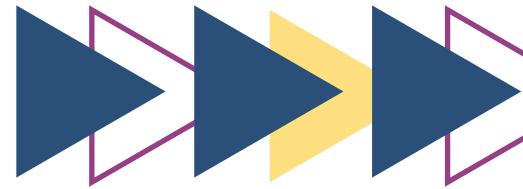
SMALL STEPS, BIG IMPACT

Global goals such as the SDGs provide guidance. Focusing on a few specific goals – not all of them – when carrying out a strategy update is a good way to develop a distinctive approach to sustainability. Outcomes from the analysis of the current situation can be linked to selected topics covered by the SDGs.

IT MAKES SENSE TO FOCUS ON TOPICS THAT[19]

▷ can be addressed within one financial year

▷ quickly lead to initial results

▷ have a big impact

More than **70**% of companies tie their own sustainability goals to the content of the SDGs: climate action, decent work and economic growth as well as industry, innovation and infrastructure.[20]

More than **60**% do so with gender equality, affordable and clean energy, responsible consumption and production as well as partnerships.[20]

HERE ARE SOME AREAS WHERE COMPANIES CAN MAKE A REAL DIFFERENCE:

HYBRID WORK[5]

▷ Contractually specify the number of days to be worked from home and from the office

▷ Maintain a decentralised working environment through digital communication and collaboration tools

▷ Offer remote training courses using mixed reality

▷ Provide equipment for working from home

MOBILITY MANAGEMENT[5]

▷ Offer job bikes

▷ Switch to e-mobility when it comes to company vehicles

▷ Take joint business trips and commute together

▷ Use mobility platforms

One day of working from home can save over **five** mil. tons of CO_2.[21]

Virtual training courses **minimise** the need for long journeys, reduce travel costs and improve occupational health and safety.[21]

The implementation of a mobility management strategy offers potential CO_2 savings of over 20%.[5]

FACILITY AND SERVICE MANAGEMENT[22]

▷ Optimise inspection, maintenance and cleaning intervals as well as intensities

▷ Compare the office space used with the office space required

▷ Make office space and entrances accessible to everyone

▷ Evaluate field service management software to enhance machines, equipment and service technology

ENERGY MANAGEMENT[23]

Outdated technical equipment and building substances lead to high energy consumption. Modernising these aspects can reduce running costs.

▷ Change energy supplier
▷ Reuse waste heat from servers
▷ Reduce heating, ventilation and room temperature by a few degrees
▷ Use water instead of refrigerants for cooling

Thüringer Energie AG (TEAG) applies principles of combined heat and power (CHP) to offer its industrial and commercial customers an innovative product: server waste heat from the company's own data centre and heat produced in parallel with electricity generation is reused for heating, water heating and production processes. This way, TEAG and its CHP customers save up to 1.5 million euros per year – and a lot of energy on top.[24]

SUSTAINABILITY FRAMEWORKS ARE BUILT ON AGILITY

Like any vision, digital sustainability, too, needs role models in companies. This is where executives are called upon to

▷ embody communicated values at C level

▷ hand over decisions to those involved in operations

This basic principle is common in agile organisations. Phoenix Contact shows that even long-established companies are capable of turning an agile mindset into sustainable digital reality. The global market leader for components, systems and solutions in the field of electrical engineering, electronics and automation makes sustainability an active responsibility – both internally and externally.[25]

For the majority of companies, taking a stance on sustainability is now an integral part of their external communication. They rely on various sustainability frameworks, i.e. models that define strategies, responsibilities, roles and tasks for the implementation of real sustainability management within the organisation.[5]

DIGITAL SUSTAINABILITY IS TEAMWORK

Trendsetters among executives look for company-wide expertise for their sustainable digital roadmap – and not just at management level. They also seek external advice. No twin transformer acts alone. The need for teamwork becomes particularly clear when it comes to supply chains. Companies optimise their strategy in this regard by

▷ examining supply partnerships in terms of sustainability and digital future viability
▷ using supplier onboarding tools to establish automated workflows and ensure efficient data exchange in their PIM system
▷ evaluating tools such as master data management systems to create a »single source of truth« for all data related to data-driven business

ALDI Nord is adopting this approach and is calling on suppliers to set their own climate targets by 2024. Even though the discounter has already reduced its greenhouse gas emissions by almost 50 per cent compared to 2015, indirect emissions continue to be generated along the entire value chain. ALDI Nord can only reduce these emissions and thus achieve its own climate targets if the sources of supply follow suit.[26]

As the first Akeneo partner worldwide, dotSource implemented the Onboarder solution for efficient supplier data management for FISHBULL Franz Fischer Qualitätswerkzeuge GmbH. Via this tool, supplier data can be automatically integrated and exchanged in the PIM system. As a result, Sonderpreis Baumarkt not only optimises its handling of supplier data, but also reduces sources of error and benefits from faster time to market.[27]

Effective partnerships are part of the 17 SDGs and overall a promising way for companies to tap into new sources of value, makets and audiences.

In the context of digital sustainability efforts, working together with other companies therefore pays off twice.

30% (6,000) of all German start-ups are focused on sustainability.[28]

Eight German start-ups are featured on the Global Cleantech 100 list.[29]

6.9 billion US dollars were generated by cleantech start-ups in 2021.[29]

DO YOU REGULARLY PUT YOUR DIGITAL STRATEGY TO THE TEST?
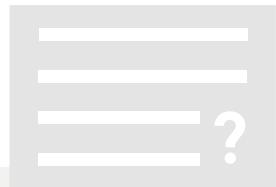
STRONG PARTNERS PROVIDE TAILWINDS

TECHNOLOGY PARTNERS

Adobe

akeneo

bloomreach

commercetools
Next generation commerce

Contentful

contentserv

emarsys
is part of SAP®

FACT-Finder®

magnolia®

Microsoft Partner

MuleSoft

PIWIK PRO

salesforce

SAP®

Spryker

STIBO SYSTEMS
MASTER DATA MANAGEMENT

NETWORKS & ASSOCIATIONS

BVDW
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UNIVERSITÄT
JENA

E-COMMERCE

MEGATRENDS REDEFINE GROWTH IN E-COMMERCE.

In the last three years, e-commerce has grown significantly. While B2C sales in Germany totalled 59.2 billion euros in 2019, they rose to 72.8 and 86.7 billion euros, respectively, in the pandemic years 2020 and 2021. Despite weakened purchasing power, 97.4 billion euros are expected for 2022.[30] B2B sales are more than ten times as high, amounting to 1.3 trillion euros.[31]

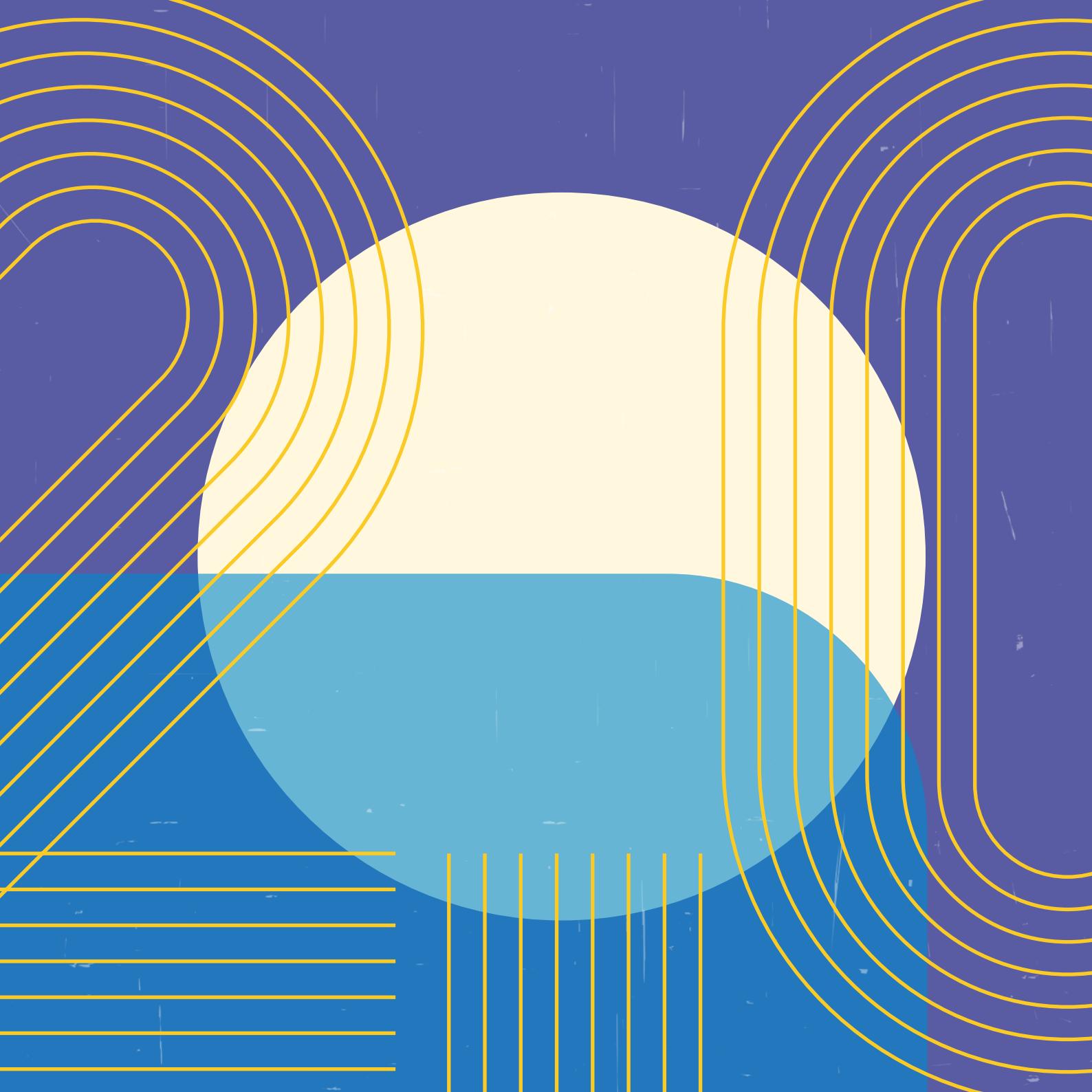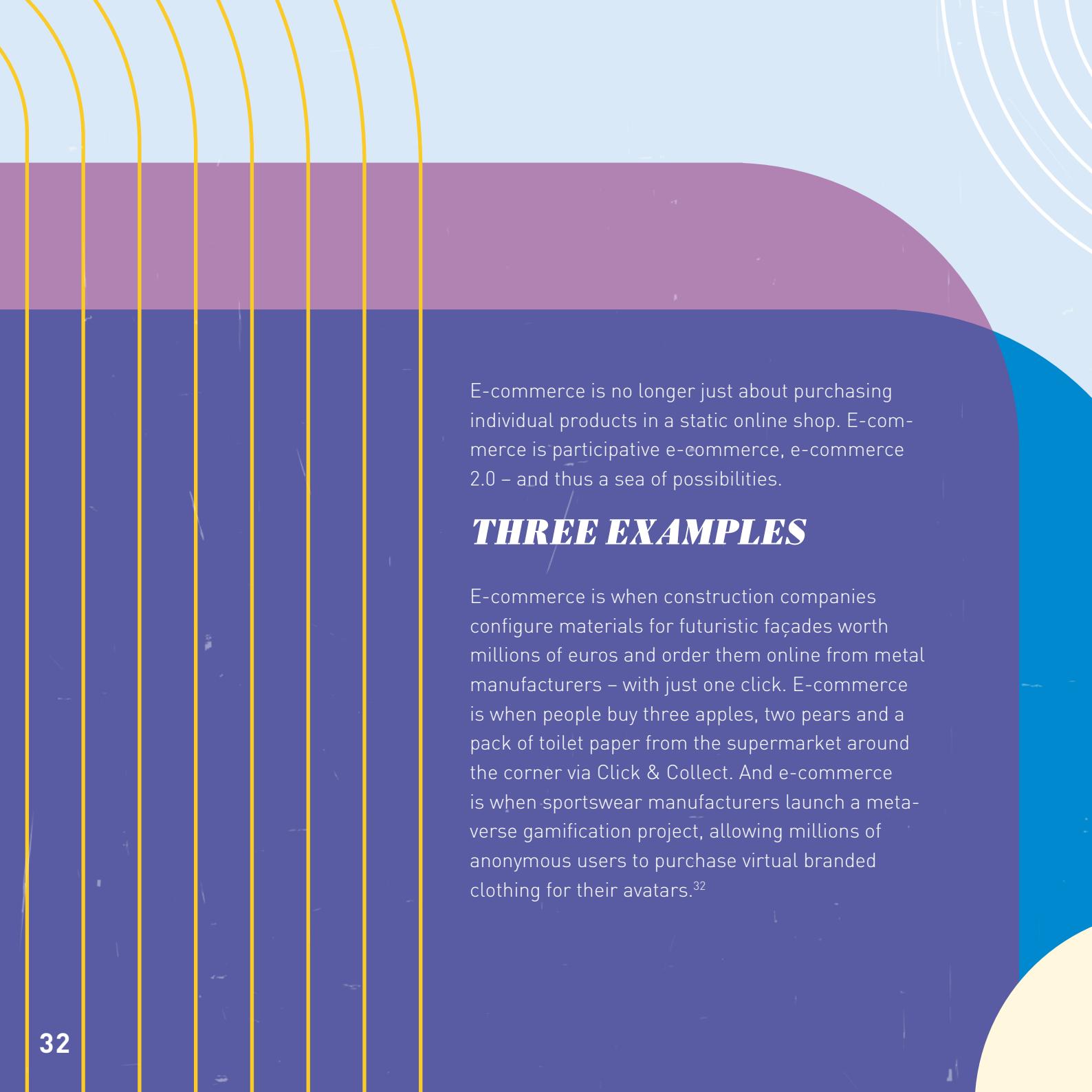E-commerce is no longer just about purchasing individual products in a static online shop. E-commerce is participative e-commerce, e-commerce 2.0 – and thus a sea of possibilities.

THREE EXAMPLES

E-commerce is when construction companies configure materials for futuristic façades worth millions of euros and order them online from metal manufacturers – with just one click. E-commerce is when people buy three apples, two pears and a pack of toilet paper from the supermarket around the corner via Click & Collect. And e-commerce is when sportswear manufacturers launch a metaverse gamification project, allowing millions of anonymous users to purchase virtual branded clothing for their avatars.[32]

Whether it is MEVACO as a B2B company in the construction industry, REWE as a grocery retailer or Nike as a fashion brand: in 2023, the e-commerce horizon is as wide as digital business itself. However, those who want to emerge on this horizon and play a role in e-business must truly master the twin transformation consisting of profit and responsibility as well as the combination of e-commerce and other technologies. MEVACO attaches great importance to social commitment and supports educational institutions, thereby also recruiting young talent.[33] REWE positions the sustainability section at the very top of its own company description, even before »About REWE«, and launched one of the most successful social media campaigns under the hashtag #umdenkbar (rethinkable).[34] And Nike? The company operates not only NIKELAND as an e-commerce innovation, but also Nike Refurbished, a digital logistics service for refurbished sneakers sold in brick-and-mortar stores.[35]

E-commerce continues to grow and is becoming more multi-faceted in itself. However, the most important trends all equally build on the megatrends of

SUSTAINABILITY, RESPONSIBILITY and PARTICIPATION.
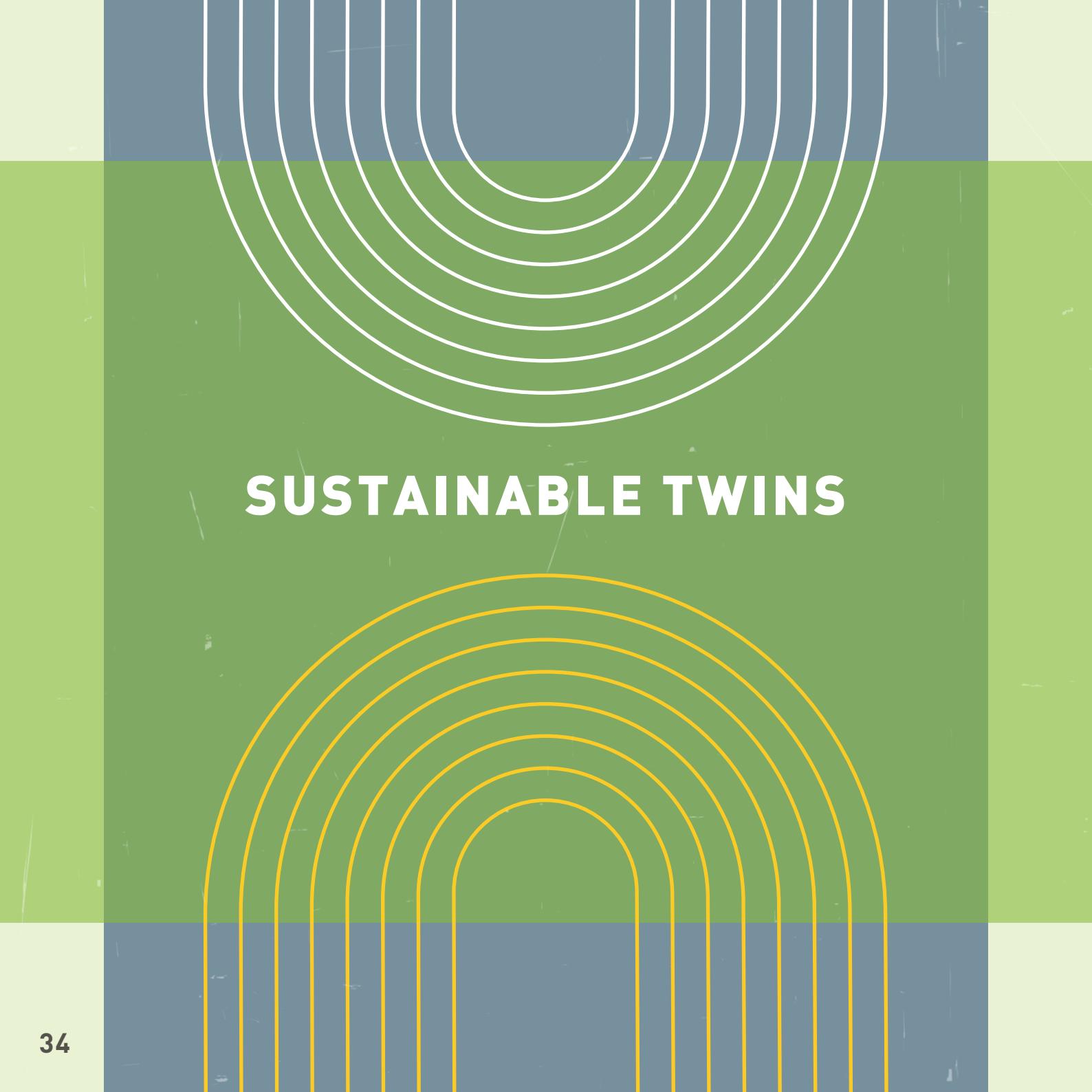
SUSTAINABLE TWINS

Digital transformation is becoming sustainable digital transformation. Digital technologies are becoming twin technologies. They ensure that companies are not only more economically successful, but also more environmentally efficient. Digital twins already had this dual role before the era of twin transformation. They are virtual representations of physical products, machines or systems. Their benefits in the fields of sustainability and resilience are now increasingly being recognised. This turns digital twins into sustainable twins – not only in terms of wording.[36]

Sustainable twins have the potential to generate economic benefits of 1.3 trillion US dollars and save **7.5** Gt of CO_2 emissions by 2030.

In 2020, the global market for digital twins was estimated to have a value of **5.4** billion US dollars.

Over the next five years, a compound annual growth rate of almost **40%** is expected.

The physical original, be it a machine or even an entire plant, and its digital twin are connected to each other via data networking. The digital twin collects data and information on its analogue twin throughout the whole production cycle and can thus[5]

- simulate architectures and processes
- simplify planning and management
- improve production quality
- lower lead times
- minimise the use of resources
- reduce waste production
- optimise CO_2 emissions, energy and water consumption as well as the use of chemicals

Digital twins can also simulate the production process of a product. This enables companies to digitally test production processes until an excellent solution is found – one that is fast, free of errors as well as low in CO_2 emissions and produces little waste. The French pharmaceutical company Sanofi is already taking advantage of this principle. In the USA, the company operates a digitally controlled production facility.

With these production processes, Sanofi is 80 times more productive than with a traditional factory and reduces[37]

waste by **321** tons

water consumption by **91**%

the use of chemicals by **94**%

CO_2 emissions by **80**%

The pharmaceutical company uses digital twins at its German sites as well. Augmented reality glasses provide those in charge with real-time data on the condition and operation of the equipment.[38]

Companies that work in a digitally driven manner can not only produce in a more environmentally friendly way, but also faster. Products can be brought to market more quickly – this is of enormous importance, especially in the case of systemically important products such as pharmaceuticals, all the more so because the pharmaceutical industry is one of the fastest growing e-commerce segments there is.[39]

HAVE YOU ALREADY RECOGNISED THE DUAL POTENTIAL OF YOUR TECHNOLOGIES?

SEAMLESS TWIN TRANSFORMATION

Krones AG is the global market leader for filling and packaging technology. One out of every four beverage containers worldwide passes through one of the lines developed by Krones. To continuously improve the overall equipment effectiveness and minimise repair times as well as downtimes, Krones collects a wide range of data on its production lines. A »Datalog Dashboard« developed and implemented by dotSource visualises retrieved machine data and makes it available in a web interface.[40] This enables the service department of Krones and external stakeholders to

Digital technologies like these make it easy for the company to use its materials sustainably and profitably and build circular, climate-neutral production facilities. On its corporate website, Krones also provides in-depth insights into its ambitious and exemplary sustainability efforts.[41] The line manufacturer also maintains this transparency in the »Fact Check« section of its corporate blog.[42] The combination of data-driven business, field service and content management makes Krones a high-performance, credible and exemplary twin transformer.

- quickly access valuable machine data

- effectively monitor production processes and optimise them accordingly

- reduce the number of manual, time-consuming processes

- maintain machines more efficiently

- avoid unnecessary waste and lower energy consumption

WHEN WILL YOU BECOME A TWIN TRANSFORMER?
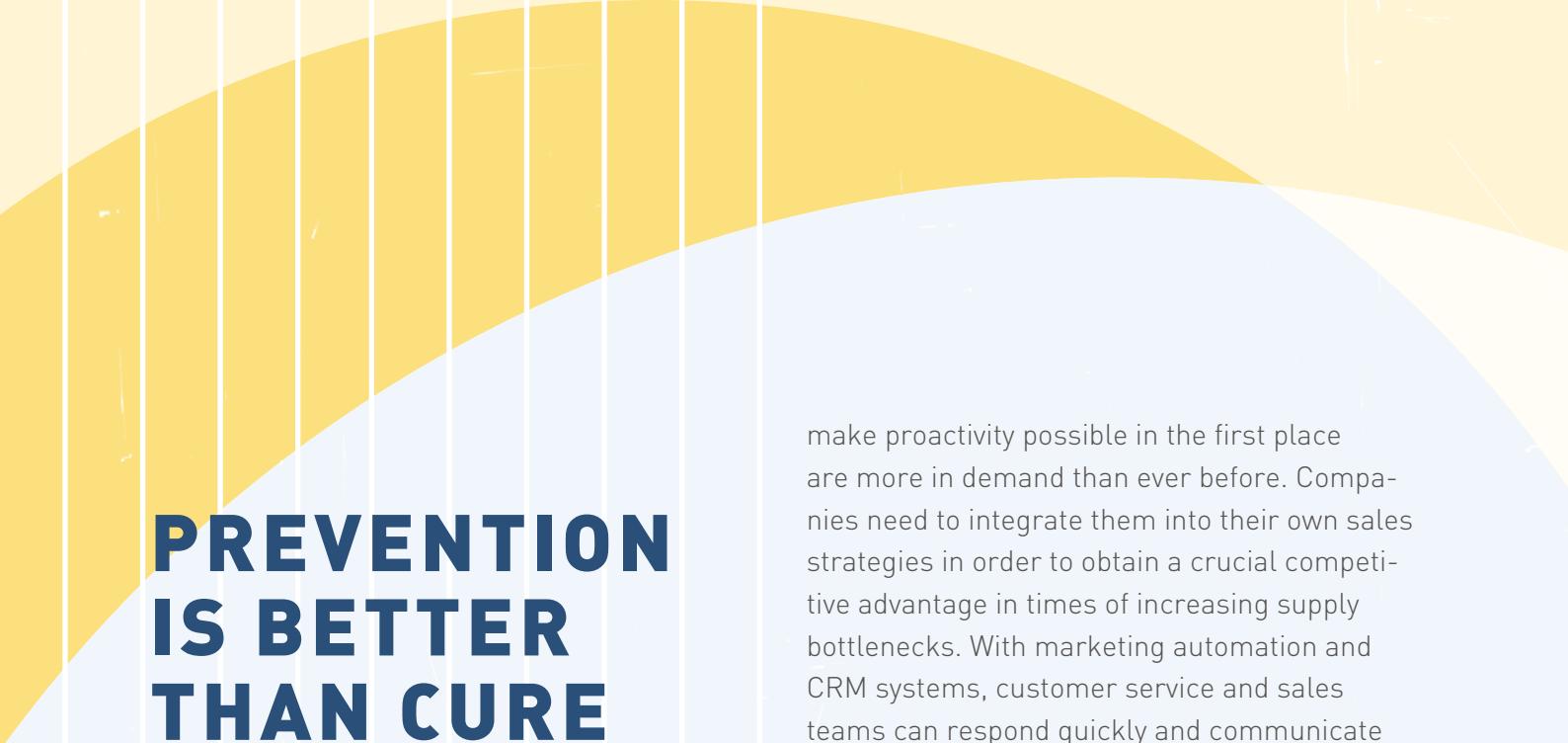
PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE

There is no e-commerce presence without a reference to the »current situation« – and this has been the case for three years now. However, pointing out potential delivery delays is important. Companies that are honest and talk about things that are not going as expected at an early stage remain highly popular – despite the crisis.

Proactivity has played a crucial role in shaping digital customer relationships for years. The events of the past few years have increased its importance even more. Digital solutions that make proactivity possible in the first place are more in demand than ever before. Companies need to integrate them into their own sales strategies in order to obtain a crucial competitive advantage in times of increasing supply bottlenecks. With marketing automation and CRM systems, customer service and sales teams can respond quickly and communicate proactively.

With the right PIM or MDM system, product availability and delivery times can also be displayed transparently and updated on a daily basis. Self-service portals and chatbots are other options that can help reduce enquiry volumes and shorten response times. Although these technologies cannot compensate for supply bottlenecks, they do strengthen customer relationships in difficult times – it is very likely that transparency will be rewarded with loyalty.

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EXAMPLES OF CRISIS-PROOF CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT[43]:

- **ADOPTING THE CUSTOMERS' PERSPECTIVE – REVIEWING THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY**

  - ☐ Are current delivery times clearly communicated?
  - ☐ Are there alternatives to desired products?

- **EVALUATING SYSTEMS AND PEOPLE**

  - ☐ Are there sufficient staff resources to respond to customer enquiries?
  - ☐ Is the CRM in place fast, scalable and easy to use?

- **IDENTIFYING CHALLENGES AND NEEDS**

  - ☐ Are there any low-hanging fruits in the existing system landscape? (FAQ, chatbots)
  - ☐ Are there likeable individuals who represent the company externally and create a sense of identity?

☐ **CAN YOU MEET THE INREASING COMMUNICATION NEEDS OF YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE?**

DIGITAL TRUST

Loyalty is always important. In times of multiple challenges, however, it becomes the most precious asset. Willingness to buy despite declining consumption, loyalty despite delivery delays, customer praise via social media despite information overload: these moments are more relevant than ever for companies, even if they cannot generate e-commerce sales with their core business, but only sell their products in brick-and-mortar stores – just like Dunkin' Donuts. In a 2022 ranking of the brands with the most loyal customers, the fast food chain ended up in the top 3. When over-the-counter sales plummeted due to the COVID-19 pandemic,

Dunkin' Donuts looked for a new place to engage customers: the digital realm. This helped the donut giant attract new customers and gain momentum. In 2021, Dunkin' Donuts grew from 70 to 78 stores in Germany – despite the crisis.

By way of comparison, Subway, another global fast food chain, had to permanently close one out of every seven branches in Germany in 2021. With a diverse range of vegan products that is primarily promoted on social media, Dunkin' Donuts is making long-term investments in the trust of its community and in sustainable change, strengthening its own resilience by doing so.[44]

82% of medium-sized enterprises and **88%** of corporations in the DACH region see digital customer engagement as a key factor contributing to business success.[44]

80% introduced one or two new communication channels between 2020 and 2022.[44]

Almost **70%** have embedded digital customer engagement in their corporate strategy.

Half of them have reported additional successes in strengthening customer loyalty.[44]

WHICH DIGITAL COMMUNICATION CHANNELS DO YOU USE TO INCREASE YOUR SALES?

SOCIAL PROOF

Social commerce is a term that has appeared in e-commerce trend forecasts every year since 2005. Over the years, it is not only social media platforms that have evolved, but also the importance they have for successful digital business. To a greater extent than ever before, e-commerce is interacting with social networks.[45]

Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn and the like are more than just a digital business card for companies. They are intuitive, entertaining and profitable add-ons to websites and online shops – or even points of sale themselves. Even if users are not looking for a product and do not intend to make a purchase when opening their Instagram or Pinterest app: stories and reels are increasingly triggering purchases, especially spontaneous ones. The verdict of the community is crucial in this regard. Whether unpaid or commissioned: social shares as a concept of social proof are becoming more and more important for online retailers.[46] Experiences that the social media community shares regarding the purchase, shipping or quality of a product make brands trustworthy and spark the desire to buy.

Other ways of social proof marketing are references, reviews and testimonials.

»Do good and talk about it«

becomes

»Do good and let people talk about it«.

The core of traditional marketing is turning into an opportunity to create additional shopping incentives – even in the face of declining consumer confidence. Investing in social proof also provides companies with significant advantages that go beyond the purchase of products. LinkedIn has evolved from a business network to a place to B2B: employees become corporate influencers, customers generate reach by commenting on reference posts and partner companies report on successful projects. This shows that social proof holds tremendous potential to foster staff growth, generate valuable leads and establish fruitful collaborations.

70% of the population trust recommendations from people they do not know.[46]

For **97**%, online reviews and references are crucial factors when it comes to making a purchase.[46]
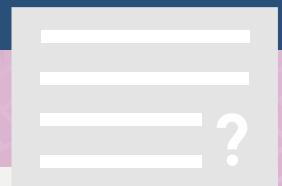
80% of B2B leads come from LinkedIn.[47]

50% of social traffic on B2B websites comes from LinkedIn.[47]

LinkedIn generates **three** times more conversions than Twitter and Facebook.[47]

WHICH EXPERTS CAN HELP YOU BOOST YOUR SOCIAL REPUTATION?

BROADENING THE DIGITAL HORIZON WITH ALL SENSES

Social Media

On our social media channels Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Twitter, Mastodon and LinkedIn, we keep our community up to date on worthwhile events as well as successful projects and provide insights into our daily business. On LinkedIn alone, we share insights with more than 2,500 followers on a daily basis.

Handelskraft Digital. Business.Talk.

Digital business ready for your ears: trends, analyses, industry knowledge, technology insights and – most importantly – everything straight forward. With the »Handelskraft Digital. Business.Talk.« podcast, digital enthusiasts can stay informed wherever they are – whether on the road, in the office or at home.

YouTube Channel

On our YouTube channel, you can get insights into dotSource projects and events. In addition, our digital experts at »dotSource Research« explain the basics of digital customer relationships in easy-to-understand videos.

Webinars

Whether it is digital strategies, New Work or system selection: our webinars offer the opportunity to get information on digital trends, build up industry knowledge and gain insights into current software solutions.

Handelskraft Blog

Handelskraft.de is one of the leading German e-commerce and digital marketing blogs. Since 2007, we have been reporting on trends and developments in digital business on a daily basis. We already share our insights and ideas with over 7,000 users.

Research

Clear. Easy to understand. Practical. Our publications such as trend books, white papers and success stories as well as our »Best Practices« format provide insights into the most important digital topics, analyse trends and share knowledge about successful digital projects that we have carried out with our clients.

B2B CUSTOMER AND SERVICE PORTALS

Behind B2B companies, there are people with personal expectations regarding digital shopping experiences. However, B2B products – and thus the related ordering processes – are often much more complex than in B2C. This makes it all the more important to digitally map time-saving services, additional consulting options and real-time product availability.

BHS Corrugated, the global market leader in the corrugated board industry, for example, has automated the reordering of spare parts and individual components using a digital experience platform implemented by dotSource. This allows the machine manufacturer's international customers to place their orders online at any time. Not only does this reduce the workload of the customer service department, which previously had to process all orders manually, but it has also led to a doubling of the order rate.[48]

For such service portals to run smoothly, all relevant information such as technical specifications, product materials and sizes, contract documents, spare parts catalogues as well as repair and installation services must be readily available. That is why the commerce solution must be closely connected to the sales, content and product data management systems. Following the best-of-breed approach, 64 per cent of companies in the DACH region opt for various individual solutions. This gives them the opportunity to continuously develop and adapt their portal to the individual needs of the target audience.[49]

Companies' expectations of digital service portals in figures[49]:

46% expect accelerated and automated processes.

40% wish for a better customer experience.

39% hope for optimised data analytics.

WHAT SERVICES CAN YOU OFFER YOUR CUSTOMERS?

DIRECT TO CONSUMER

When it comes to strengthening customer loyalty in 2023, manufacturers can no longer do without D2C – digital direct-to-consumer sales. This trend has had prominent pioneers for decades: Tupperware has long been committed to it.[50]

Successful companies like ESPRIT and FUJIFILM also supplement their sales channels with multi-channel direct-to-consumer sales via brand shops or D2C portals.[51] The pandemic has accelerated this development enormously. However, D2C is also becoming a crucial competitive advantage beyond that.[52]

In **4** out of **5** cases, searches in a brand shop lead to a direct purchase.[50]

Almost **half** of the German population bought directly from brands in the first half of 2022.[50]

On a scale of 1 to 5, consumer goods manufacturers rate the potential of D2C as **4.7** on average.[50]
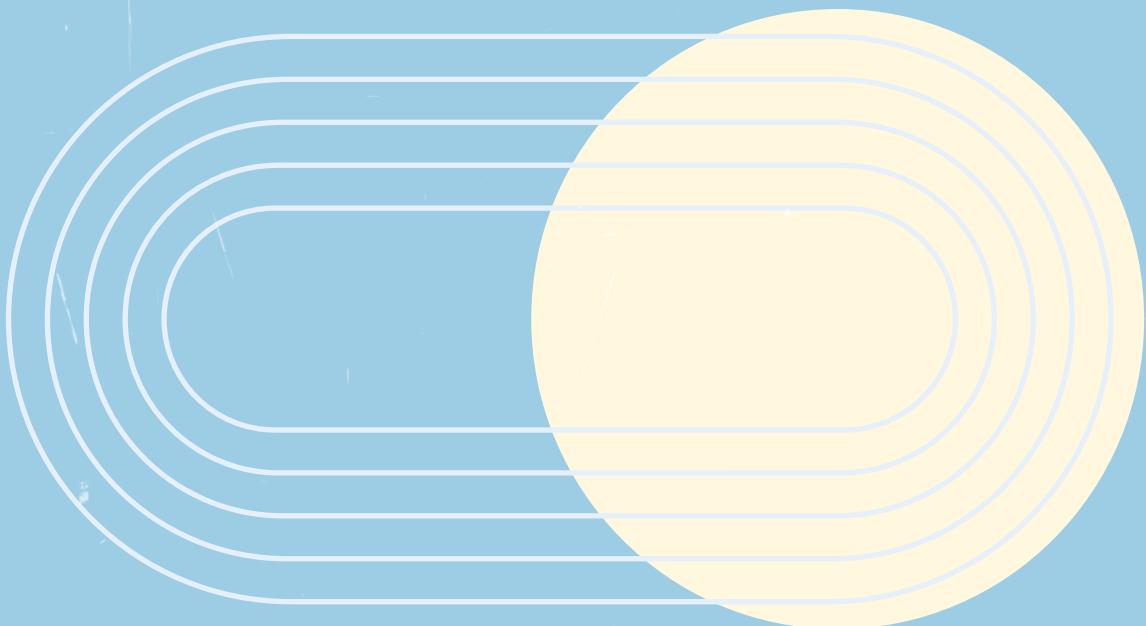
ADVANTAGES OF D2C[52]:

- More independence and control over your brand, products, pricing and image

- Stronger customer loyalty through direct interaction

- Great cross-selling and upselling potential

- Central access to customer data

- Higher margins

WHAT IS STILLL STANDING IN THE WAY OF DIRECT ACCESS TO YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE?

BUY NOW,

PAY LATER

When costs of living and energy prices rise sharply, people significantly limit themselves in their purchasing behaviour. This means that retailers have to make an effort to cater to everyone's needs – even in the comparatively successful e-commerce sector.[53]

One way to make online shopping more attractive is »buy now, pay later« (BNPL). The concept itself is thousands of years old – the credit system is based on it. Although BNPL has been a widespread payment method since the 1990s, it is currently experiencing great success with both customers and online retailers. The trend is to outsource the billing process to third-party providers such as Klarna, PayPal or Afterpay. By integrating these solutions into shop systems via interfaces, online retailers in B2B and B2C can[54]

- gain new customers
- strengthen existing customer relationships
- offer checkout processes without media discontinuity
- significantly lower shopping cart abandonment rates
- reduce staff costs and the time required to complete tasks

DO YOU OFFER MODERN PAYMENT METHODS?

SUBSCRIPTION COMMERCE

Uncertain times make reliable revenue more important than ever. One way to achieve predictable, stable revenue is subscription commerce. Newspaper and magazines have been doing it for years, Netflix and Spotify are following suit digitally. However, the commerce horizon regarding products and services that can be offered as part of a subscription package now extends far beyond media products. Whether it is pet food, razor blades, nappies or wine: nearly every product can be sold online on a subscription basis – and people take advantage of this option, with numbers on the rise. The delivery cycle can be determined individually. Additionally, subscription offers are generally cheaper than one-off orders and certainly more convenient – and, as we all know, society has always valued convenience, even more so in times of crisis. Online retailers that respond to this purchasing behaviour with subscription offers secure key advantages such as[55]

- guaranteed recurring revenue
- lower costs for acquiring new customers
- a loyal customer base
- detailed insights into purchasing behaviour
- great cross-selling and upselling potential

The global e-commerce market for subscriptions is expected to be worth **473** billion US dollars by 2025.[55]

In 2019, this figure was only **15** billion US dollars.[55]

Costs for acquiring new customers are up to **10 times** higher than those for retaining existing customers.[56]

WHICH OF YOUR PRODUCTS AND SERVICES COULD BE OFFERED ON A SUBSCRIPTION BASIS?

PRODUCT TRANSPARENCY REDUCES RETURN RATES

Implementing product information management systems has a positive impact on both a company's level of digital sustainability and its e-commerce balance sheet. Companies can use the product data that a PIM system stores centrally to significantly influence purchasing decisions.[57]

Over **70%** of Germans say that detailed information on the sustainability of a product increases the likelihood of them buying it.[57]

Almost **60%** rethink their purchasing behaviour and opt for sustainable products when retailers provide full transparency on the carbon footprint of products using a PIM system.[57]

No PIM system – no valid data. Those who have valid data and display it along the customer journey ensure high product transparency, which in turn increases revenue and reduces return rates.[58] Returns are a vexed subject – from several perspectives. They neither contribute to sales growth nor reduce the carbon footprint.

Melvin & Hamilton, a brand shop for shoes, for example, added »Fit and Width« to the product attributes in the back end of its PIM system from Akeneo. A small change with a big impact. Since this information has been displayed in the online shop, the return rates and thus the costs as well as the environmental impact have decreased significantly. In return, user satisfaction and conversion rates have increased.[59]

WHY DO YOU RECEIVE RETURNS?

INCLUSIVE
USER EXPERIENCE DESIGN

Consistent product data and appealing media assets such as photos and product videos are important, but another factor is absolutely essential: the general look and feel of a company's website and its digital sales channels. Digital accessibility is one of the focus topics here – even more so because inclusive design will become mandatory from 2025 with the Act to Strengthen Accessibility (Barrierefreiheitsstärkungsgesetz, BFSG).

A UX audit focused on accessible design can uncover pain points and help make lasting improvements to a website – not only for users living with impairments, but for everyone. In a UX audit, user experience professionals examine the existing website from the users' perspective.

One company that has benefitted from a UX audit by dotSource is divibib GmbH from Reutlingen, Germany. The media company is the leading partner for digital library lending in German-speaking countries. With the help of the platform, users can digitally access e-books, e-audios, e-papers and e-learning courses from the collections of all German libraries.[60] Thanks to the multi-device redesign, divibib has succeeded in making this comprehensive portfolio accessible not only on all devices, but also for all users – regardless of impairment.

**QUESTIONS THAT COMPANIES SHOULD ASK THEMSELVES
WHEN DESIGNING A MODERN, INCLUSIVE WEBSITE:**

- [ ] **WHICH USABILITY VIOLATIONS ARE A HURDLE FOR WHOM?**

- [ ] **HOW EASY ARE THE LAYOUTS TO USE?**

- [ ] **DOES THE COLOUR SCHEME HAVE ENOUGH CONTRAST?**

- [ ] **TO WHAT EXTENT DOES GRAPHIC CONTENT ALLOW FOR RESIZING?**

- [ ] **CAN TEXTS BE READ ALOUD BY SCREEN READERS?**

- [ ] **IS READABILITY STILL GUARANTEED WHEN ZOOMED IN MANY TIMES?**

- [ ] **HOW INTUITIVE ARE FORMS AND OTHER INTERACTIVE ELEMENTS?**

- [ ] **IS THE NUMBER OF NAVIGATION ELEMENTS APPROPRIATE?**

CIRCULAR COMMERCE

One of the most important SDGs has

»RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION«

as its main focus. A series of national and international guidelines are making this increasingly binding:

- Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) [2023][61]

- EU Taxonomy Regulation [2022][62]

- Electrical and Electronic Equipment Act (ElektroG3) [2022][63]

- Eco-Design Directive and Energy-Related Products Act (EVPG) [2008][64]

- New Packaging Act (VerpackG2) [2022][65]

- Fuel Emissions Trading Act (BEHG) [2021][66]

- Act on Corporate Due Diligence Obligations in Supply Chains (LkSG) [2023][67]

If companies start questioning their value creation processes and, for example, add circular e-commerce aspects, that is, the sale of products that are not primarily new, these goals can be achieved more effectively.

ADVANTAGES FOR COMPANIES WITH CIRCULAR VALUE CREATION:

- New recurring revenue streams arising from resource-efficient business models[68]

- Major savings on increasingly expensive raw materials, goods and transport costs[69]

- Increased independence of one's own value creation[69]

- Better image through more credibility

- Greater customer satisfaction

- New customer groups

Circular sales initiatives increase the potential for longer product life cycles, which are currently in vogue: more than half of all Germans have already purchased second-hand clothing; another 32 per cent can imagine buying second-hand fashion in the future.[71]

In 2020, the circular economy reached a global market volume of **148** billion euros.

With an annual growth rate of **5.9%**, the market volume is expected to grow to **263** billion euros by 2030.[70]

REFURBISHED

Many companies still have the chance to be the first in their industry to have their own secondary market concepts – just like the start-up restado, which recognised the potential for reusing building materials back in 2015 and is now the leading online marketplace for circular building materials in Germany.[72]

The market for used and refurbished electronics is already booming. E-commerce start-ups such as refurbed and Back Market are taking advantage of this and have their refurbished products listed on price comparison portals like shopping24 and idealo. They are even present on private sales portals such as eBay Kleinanzeigen.

This market potential is also attracting the attention of manufacturers. Apple and Samsung have recently expanded their core business by offering customers the option of trading in old devices, which are then refurbished.[73]

Aniel Marketplace, a leading French distributor of automotive body parts, shows that such offers are also worthwhile in B2B. The company has added remanufactured parts to its marketplace portfolio, which not only ensures greater sustainability, but also addresses the shortage of raw materials with a pioneering e-commerce concept.[74]

A ONE-STOP SHOP SOLUTION[74]

- eliminates the hassle of searching through third-party platforms

- improves the customer experience

- results in more valuable shopping carts

- expands the product portfolio

- strengthens customer loyalty, especially in B2B

50% of the German population can imagine buying a refurbished device in the future.[75]

20% of all 16- to 29-year-olds in Germany have already purchased a refurbished device.[75]

REPAIRED

Companies that offer repair services for products purchased from them are also very popular with customers. New products that break sooner than expected are a source of frustration and increase the likelihood of customers switching to a competitor. A product information or multi-domain master data management system can help companies create additional service structures with individual attributes such as service description or spare parts.

The technology company FUJIFILM attaches particular importance to high-quality customer service. On its e-commerce platform, the globally operating group offers various subservices and discount campaigns. Photography enthusiasts, for example, can register their purchased products there to benefit from repair services and an annual »Check & Clean«. FUJIFILM can then use these data sets to analyse how often certain camera models have been repaired and improve its products accordingly.[76]

77% of the EU population would rather have their devices repaired than replaced.[77]

Strengthening customer loyalty with additional services works just as well for clothing as it does for electronic devices. Zalando has been offering second-hand fashion since 2020 and joined forces with the London-based start-up Save Your Wardrobe in 2021 to launch a cleaning and repair programme called »Care & Repair«. With these sustainable services, the fashion platform aims to further increase its market power.[78]

SHARING IS CARING

Besides the reuse and further use of existing property, new product-service systems also offer the option of sharing services and goods or limiting their use to a certain period of time.

In industry, real-time machine data can be made available through increased networking in the IoT. This enables companies in an industrial estate to share machines and equipment and clearly allocate the usage data.[79]

The start-up V-INDUSTRY, founded in 2018, has set itself the goal of helping companies digitally procure components for industrial manufac-turing. On an online platform that follows e-commerce logics, users can not only specify the required material and the preferred delivery date, but also upload component drawings and 3D CAD files. The system then determines which platform partner has which machine available at the desired time.[80]

ADVANTAGES OF SHARING CONCEPTS FOR COMPANIES[81]:

- Lower investment costs and less tied-up capital
- More in-house production due to a larger selection of machines
- Positive synergy effects such as exchange of innovations
- Faster response time to market changes
- Higher profitability of resource-efficient large-scale investments

Through sharing models, **13%** of companies get access to technologies and services that they could not otherwise afford.[82]

WHICH PRODUCTS, PROCESSES AND BUSINESS MODELS CAN YOUR COMPANY USE TO STAND OUT IN THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY?

ROADMAPS TOWARDS THE DIGITAL HORIZON

We present digital topics concisely and in step with actual practice. Our white papers combine trends, analyses and system comparisons with the experience of our clients and our expertise from 17 years of digital business..

SELECTING SYSTEMS

»E-Commerce Software«

»CRM Software«

»Content Management Systeme«

»PIM and
DAM Software«

»Integration Solutions«

»Marketing Automation
Systems«

»Migration in E-Business«

»Content Commerce«

»A/B Testing«

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»SEO in the Mobile Era«

»E-Commerce Potential in B2B«

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TECHNOLOGIES & SYSTEMS

THERE IS NO LONGER A ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL SOLUTION OR CENTRAL PLATFORM.

New challenges call for new, multi-faceted solutions. Technical requirements are becoming more complex, customer expectations more demanding and the market more differentiated than ever. The online world is constantly evolving. The digital horizon shimmers in the most diverse facets. Successful companies use this wide variety to set themselves apart from the competition.

COMPOSABLE: MIX & MATCH OF THE SYSTEM LANDSCAPE

Companies and their customers are unique. They have different requirements, expectations and goals. For this reason, monolithic software packages that cover all aspects of e-commerce in one solution are often unsuitable due to their lack of flexibility – especially when business processes are very complex, as is the case in B2B, or when companies are active in different markets. Modern online shops combine multiple software solutions via interfaces, creating a system architecture that is optimally tailored to the company and the target audience.[83]

ADVANTAGES OF COMPOSABLE:

- Flexible and scalable infrastructure
- Faster time to market for products
- More resilient system against bugs
- Personalised services and customer journeys

MACH

The four technology trends microservices, API, cloud and headless form the basis for flexible and scalable architectures that enable companies to implement innovations as quickly as possible.

With **microservices**, systems can be planned in such a way that individual processes are not executed by one large application, but by many small ones. These are each responsible for only one task, but complement each other. This makes it possible for applications to be developed, operated and individually assembled by separate teams in an agile manner.

Application programming interfaces (APIs) are the interfaces between these systems and enable seamless data exchange.

Flexible and stable system landscapes are the basis for personalised digital solutions. That is why hosting in the **cloud** is an integral part of the MACH principle.

Headless systems separate front end and back end, thereby giving companies more flexibility. Instead of waiting for updates of an all-in-one solution for a long time, companies can focus on the integration and features of different front ends such as social media, apps and voice assistants, enabling them to provide unique services.[84]

With a headless CMS, for example, content can be distributed to different channels and devices at the same time without having to transfer it manually.[85] This allows e-commerce companies to use IoT to display their offers on various devices without additional adjustments, thereby increasing their conversion rate by 15 to 30 per cent.[86]

MACH ALLIANCE

Collaboration creates synergies and accelerates progress – as in the case of the MACH Alliance, a partner network of system integrators, software vendors and ambassadors. The digital business alliance supports companies in the implementation of efficient, agile systems and processes so that they can keep up with the competition even better and, above all, faster. From the selection of a suitable solution provider and the delivery of technical expertise to the integration into the existing IT landscape – companies benefit from the close collaboration of the technology companies involved.

The partner network was founded in 2020 by leading technology companies such as commercetools, Contentstack, EPAM Systems and Valtech as a non-profit organisation – and the alliance continues to grow. Companies interested in joining the network must meet strict certification requirements, such as extensive expertise in working with MACH technologies.[87]

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DECENTRALISATION

The Internet emerged towards the end of the 1980s as a sort of experiment among physicists. To better exchange scientific data, they initially networked their computers within the European nuclear research centre CERN. This idea rapidly gained momentum beyond CERN in the 1990s. Search engines were created to help people find their way around this web of data. By now, this decentralised, free World Wide Web has largely disappeared.

Web 2.0 has seen the emergence of platforms run by a few providers that manage interactions between users – from online banking and web hosting to social networks. This makes the use of various services more convenient, but also gives these platforms sovereignty over the users' data.

But how will the web continue to evolve? At the moment, much is hinting towards another decentralised infrastructure. Distributed ledger technologies (DLT) could make autonomous organisation via independent computers and servers possible and serve as an alternative to the platform monopolists.

The demand for these technologies is immense because they help record transactions and their details in multiple places at once. Block-chain technology, for example, works according to this concept.[88]

Especially industries that work with many intermediaries, such as finance, pharmacy and healthcare, can use these security technologies to increase trust and comply with the audit-proof archiving of documents that is required by law.

PEER-TO-PEER (P2P)

P2P networks do not require an additional instance either. The network devices involved, known as peers, act as equals without a central server. Each computer can provide features, resources or services. Such a decentralised network is well suited, for example, for file-sharing services on the Internet such as BitTorrent. The peers can offer files for download or download files from other peers themselves. This way, all peers involved benefit from the network's scalability. The more computers are connected, the better the network's performance and the greater the available resources. Messaging and voice-over-IP services such as FireChat are also based on this model. They ensure more privacy.

ADVANTAGES OF DECENTRALISED SYSTEMS[89]:

- Content is verifiably documented

- Data is identical on all nodes – system failures and cyberattacks cannot affect the data

- Transfers take place in real time

- Values can be clearly assigned

- Cryptography ensures transparency and confidentiality at the same time

DESIGN SYSTEMS

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Creating an optimal user experience (UX) is not a trend – it is a necessity. In parts, it is even getting passed into law, as is the case with accessibility. But how do you achieve a consistent, inclusive and inspiring UX across all touchpoints?

The big new trend is called »design systems«, also known as DesignOps. It does not just pick up on coding trends in terms of wording: no-code or rather low-code platforms can be used by citizen developers – i.e. people with a technical understanding – without having a degree in computer science, for example to build interfaces based on an API library.

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Design systems are nothing more –
but also nothing less – than intelligent
databases. The UX repositories provide
design components and thus help to
skilfully bridge historically evolved gaps.

CODE AND DESIGN ARE NO LONGER KEPT SEPARATE.

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This is because design systems encompass
both the visual design and the related
code: the content can vary from major,
fundamental design principles and work
processes to detailed guidelines on the use
of individual user interface components.
The goal is to ensure consistency and
effective scaling of the design across all
channels, automate processes and establish
standards or take them into account from
the outset.

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The design team of the global payment service provider PayPal, for example, developed the PayPal console according to DesignOps principles. This internal design system not only looks like a PayPal product – it is just as intuitive to use. This ensures consistency and brand loyalty in multiple ways and speeds up the developers' work. It also keeps the design team lean: only five people work there – remotely and spread across four continents. With the PayPal console, they provide several thousand developers with self-service product design so that the core team can focus on innovation development and UX optimisation.[90]

The dotSource UX experts also create design systems. A living style guide was developed for the website of Leipziger Messe. This repository ensures that the design components it contains always match the current development status and the live system so that the style guide does not become outdated. Documentation is also part of the living style guide. Not only does this make it easier for the trade fair company to further develop the website code, but it also facilitates collaboration with external stakeholders.[91]

DESIGN SYSTEMS ARE USED COLLABORATIVELY BY BOTH CREATIVE AND DEVELOPMENT TEAMS AND OFFER THE FOLLOWING ADVANTAGES:

- Common development strategy for design, coding and documentation

- Constant updating of the codebase according to the latest design standards

- Scalable design across all touchpoints

- No design inconsistencies

- Automated processes that simplify the implementation of applicable legislation, such as the Act to Strengthen Accessibility from 2025 onwards

- Lower design and development costs

COMPANIES WITH A DIGITAL HORIZON

BayWa

WÜRTH

hessnatur

FUJIFILM

Villeroy & Boch
1748

ESPRIT

SEAT

Röchling

Angst+Pfister

C.H.BECK

Netto Digital

KWS

STIHL

ottobock.

TEAG

axel springer

LEIPZIGER MESSE

HEIDELBERG

KRONES

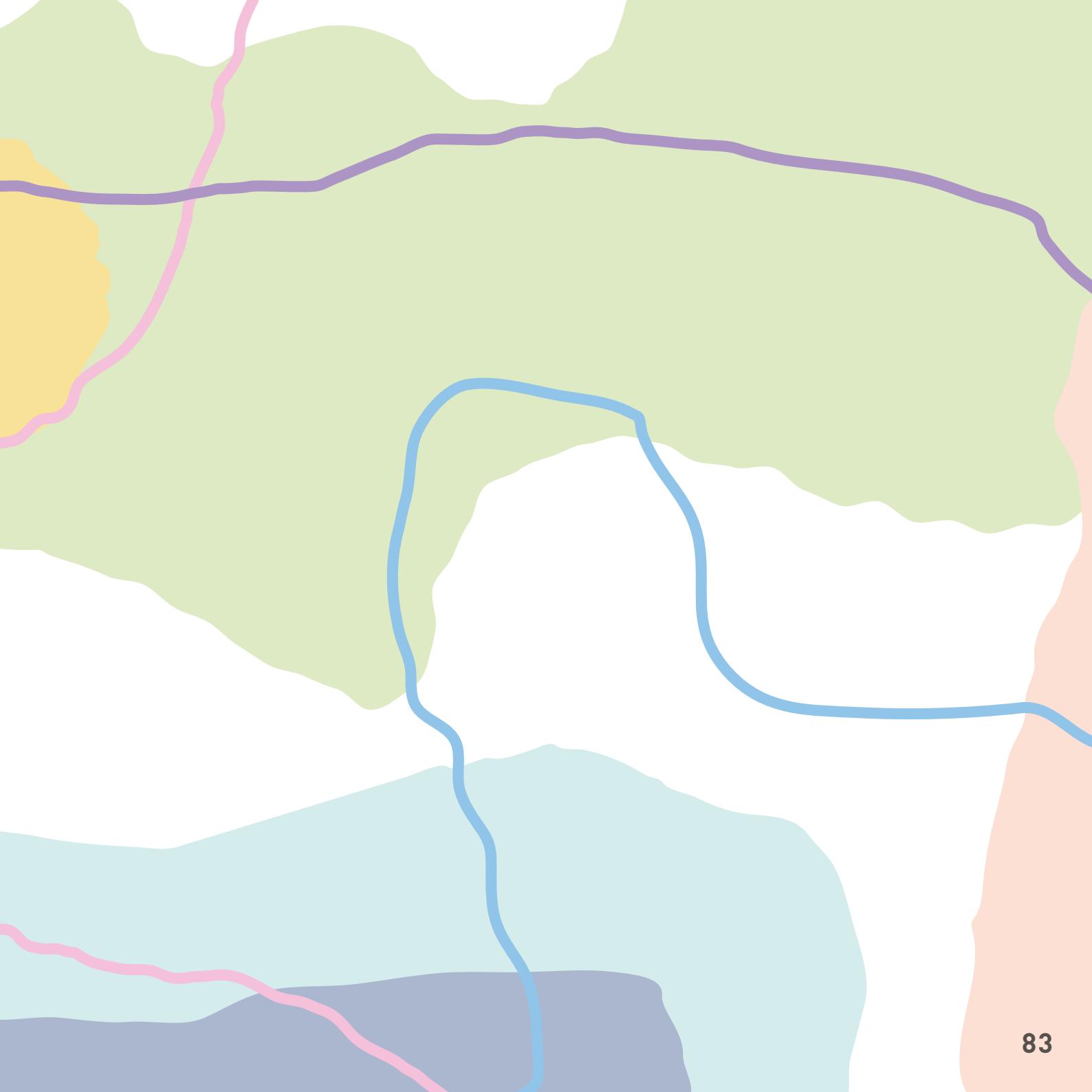britax römer

Fissler

TROX TECHNIK
The art of handling air

hagebau

Messe Düsseldorf

HAVEN'T FOUND YOUR INDUSTRY?

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PURPOSE & PEOPLE

ONLY A STRONG TEAM MAKES A STRONG BRAND.

Success and growth go hand in hand if you want to boost KPIs such as revenue, leads and conversions and build a strong team. Companies benefit from diverse perspectives and special skills if opportunities are created for colleagues to further develop themselves.

However, the market for qualified employees is extremely competitive. In spring 2022, almost half the companies in Germany saw the shortage of skilled labour as an obstacle to their business activities.[92] But what tips the scales in favour of a company when it comes to skilled workers? Besides the brand image, the values a company stands for are among the reasons to submit an application. Independence, freedom and participation in society are examples of these values. Collaboration from anywhere, flexible working models and diversity-focused leadership are other aspects of a future-oriented work culture that encourage people to apply.

COMPANIES THAT EMBRACE SUSTAINABLE VALUES BENEFIT FROM THE FOLLOWING[93]:

- More top-tier candidates among applicants

- Higher motivation and commitment of all teams

- Greater employee satisfaction

In 2021, **66**% of companies in Germany faced a shortage of skilled labour. In 2020, this figure was only **54**%.[94]

In spring 2022, **558,000** positions could not be filled with qualified employees.[95]

71% of professionals would accept a pay cut if they worked for a company whose mission they believe in and whose values they share (2018).[96]
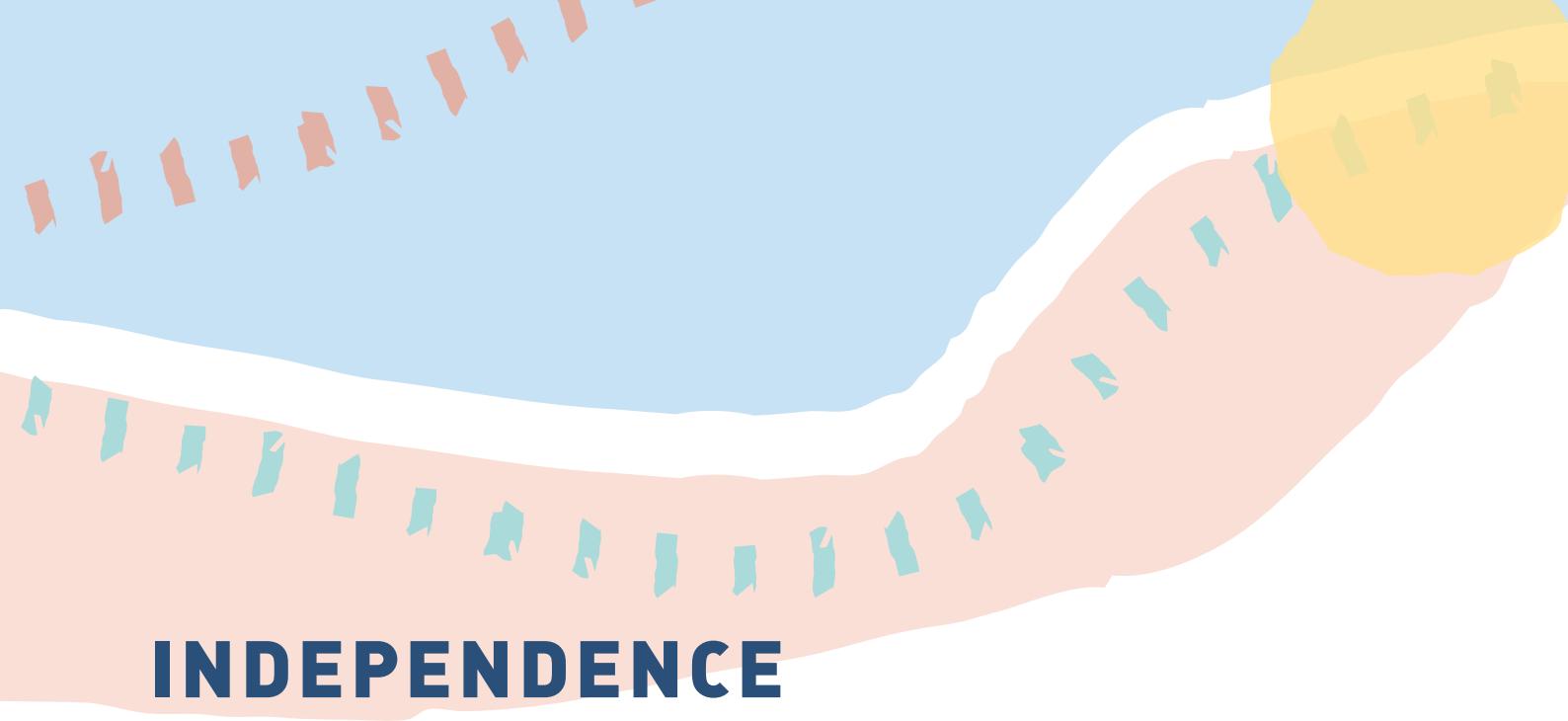
INDEPENDENCE

Independence is not an end in itself. Companies that distribute responsibilities among employees benefit from increased loyalty and faster decision-making. This makes them more agile and resilient when faced with challenges as well as more attractive to applicants.

RETHINKING LEADERSHIP
Executives are involved in a wide variety of projects that require different professional expertise. Project teams, however, are specialised in one particular area. That is why it makes sense to transfer decision-making powers to project teams.[97]

For executives, handing over responsibility means having the courage to take risks. To ensure that expectations are met or even exceeded, executives and project managers need to communicate with each other on a regular basis.

Agile approaches such as Scrum and design thinking help manage projects effectively, even in smaller teams, because interim goals are defined and interim results are reported to executives.

With the distribution of responsibilities, the requirements placed on tools that provide decision-relevant data centrally also increase. A modern CRM system brings together all relevant customer data. Departments such as sales, marketing and management can check individually which marketing measures are successful, which new projects have been added and which conditions apply.

It is not only the democratisation of data that promotes the ability of team members to work independently, but also the option of further training: internal academy platforms and external training partners are key levers for positive change.

ADVANTAGES OF EMPOWERD LEADERSHIP:

- Reduced workload for executives
- Increased employee loyalty
- Greater product innovation – more minds lead to more ideas

People who feel appreciated are **3 times** more likely to be committed to their work.[98]

People are **5 times** more likely to stand up for their company if they feel appreciated within the company.[98]

FREEDOM – FLEX WORK

Flexible working models enable companies to recruit talented individuals who otherwise would have opted for a different job. Those who cannot work 40 hours a week, move for a job or come to the office regularly are not less qualified for the position – quite the opposite. Studies have shown that employees working fewer hours optimise work processes and make more efficient use of their working time.[99] Other advantages of flexible working models are as follows[100]:

- Better organisation of tasks
- Increased productivity
- Fewer meetings with more efficient time management
- Reduced number of additional breaks
- Enhanced well-being of employees

However, it still seems to be difficult to reduce the number of working hours, especially in executive positions. Yet 30 per cent of executives are overworked – at the same time, interesting personalities who want to work part time because of family responsibilities or volunteering are excluded from higher positions.[101]

Job sharing – especially top sharing at management level – is an excellent solution here: two or more people share a full-time position. To avoid potential conflicts between job sharing partners, responsibilities and decision-making processes must be clearly defined in advance and communicated to the team. It takes a lot of patience and regular exchange, particularly at the beginning, to ensure that existing processes are adapted to the model in the best possible way.

Beiersdorf AG has already made use of job sharing to fill vacancies. In this context, the skincare company works together with the software provider Tandemploy. This tool allows interested individuals, both from within and outside the company, to anonymously state their preferences regarding a job sharing partnership. Based on this information, an algorithm determines which interested individuals would fit which positions.[103]

ADVANTAGES OF JOB SHARING[102]:

- Experienced employees who are happy to stay with the company

- Prompt decision-making

- Better availability

- Lower risk of burnout

- Higher innovation potential

- Fewer mistakes by having a second pair of eyes

- Easier induction of management trainees

WORKING FROM ANYWHERE

With the TUI WORKWIDE programme launched in 2021, the travel company TUI offers its permanent employees the opportunity to work abroad for up to 30 days a year. Being able to combine work and a change of location makes companies attractive and is even more important than a higher salary for 62 per cent of employees.[104] This also benefits the tourism group, which – as part of its digitalisation strategy – is looking to fill 500 new positions in the areas of technology and e-commerce alone.[105] Companies that want to implement all this have to overcome several hurdles. Besides compliance with labour law regulations, IT security and data protection play a crucial role. Virtual private network connections, the use of the cloud and strong, regularly changed passwords prevent third parties from accessing sensitive data.

This is what skilled workers value in a company[106]:

A 4-day work week **(45%)**

The option of flexible working hours **(38%)**

The individual decision on the number of days of leave **(28%)**

The opportunity to work from anywhere **(28%)**

DIVERSITY AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Diversity has many facets: age, gender, origin, sexual orientation and physical characteristics determine people's perceptions and abilities. If everyone feels appreciated and understood, this has a positive impact on the company's performance.[107]

Companies that promote diversity and put it to good use benefit from the following[108]:

- A positive brand image
- Motivated teams
- Higher appeal to qualified professionals
- New target groups
- Greater capability to innovate

Different experiences, backgrounds and physical constitutions foster diversity in perspectives. Diversity at management level makes it easier to adequately respond to changes.

Diverse management teams improve crisis management for the following reasons[108]:

- They are better at striking the right tone, enabling them to guide employees more effectively
- They ensure more sustainable and innovative business activities
- They combine a wide variety of strengths and perspectives to overcome economic challenges

TIPS FOR PROMOTING DIVERSITY[109]:

- **KEEP THE APPLICATION PROCESS SIMPLE**
  If it is possible to submit an application with just a few clicks, more people will be inclined to apply

- **PUBLISH JOB ADVERTISEMENTS IN DIFFERENT LANGUAGES**
  To attract the attention of people from diverse backgrounds, the local language should not be the only option for the application process

- **USE GENDER-NEUTRAL LANGUAGE IN JOB ADVERTISEMENTS**
  To ensure that everyone is addressed correctly, it is important that the job description is kept neutral and that (f/m/x) is mentioned alongside the job title.

- **REDUCE JOB ADVERTISEMENTS TO CORE COMPETENCIES**
  Women in particular tend to apply only if they meet all the listed requirements. For this reason, recruitment teams should check which skills are absolutely necessary.[110]

- **HIGHLIGHT FLEXIBILITY**
  To show that the company is willing to accommodate individual preferences, modern working models such as job sharing and remote work should already be mentioned in the job advertisement.

- **DEFINE GUIDELINES FOR JOB INTERVIEWS**
  To avoid bias in HR and attract a diverse pool of applicants, it is vital to have transparent assessment criteria and interview guidelines

- **SET UP DIVERSE RECRUITING TEAMS**
  The recruitment team is the first point of contact and thus represents the diversity of the company. When scouting, diverse teams also benefit from different perspectives and experiences as well as multiple opportunities to identify with others.

- **PROVIDE TRAINING COURSES**
  In addition to staying up to date with the latest trends in recruitment, it is important to regularly organise training courses on topics such as diversity, inclusion and unconscious bias in order to drive the company forward.

78% of employees would like to work in an environment that is characterised by openness and diversity.[108]

83% of Germans confirm that diversity in their company exists only on paper and is not actively implemented or even enhanced.[108]

50/50 GENDER DIVERSITY

Companies with a diverse workforce are 25 per cent more likely to achieve above-average profitability than those with less gender diversity.[111]

Diverse companies actively advocate for the fifth SDG – gender equality and empowerment of women and girls – and strengthen their business in the long run.

New challenges at increasingly shorter intervals require diverse approaches and modern executives. The essential discourse on diverse leadership should not be about thinking in terms of stereotypes or even reinforcing them, but rather about focusing on redefining good leadership and collaboration.[112]

Despite all the advantages, only slightly more than **a quarter** of executive positions in Germany are occupied by women.[113]

If **30%** of executive positions in a company are held by women, the XX factor sets in, describing positive effects such as increased productivity and profitability.[114]

Companies that make use of the XX factor through diverse leadership can increase their profits by up to **15%**.[114]

COMPANIES THAT PROMOTE WOMEN IN EXECUTIVE POSITIONS BENEFIT FROM THE FOLLOWING:

- A diverse corporate culture
- Increased involvement and responsiveness of the entire team
- An improved brand image
- Greater recognition among the female target group
- Higher motivation in the team
- A better working atmosphere

LGBTQIA+ COMMITMENT

With creative advertising campaigns, companies like PENNY, Zalando and Levi Strauss & Co. have taken a public stand in support of the LGBTQIA+ movement. However, it takes a few more steps to turn good publicity into real change. Measures such as dedicated networks, training courses and inclusive language help companies attract people from the LGBTQIA+ community and make them feel at home.[115]

Because of their diverse views, members of the LGBTQIA+ community are valuable to companies – and they also have above-average educational qualifications.

A study found that 60 per cent of LGBTQIA+ people have a university degree. For the rest of the population, this figure is only 42 per cent.[116]

Those who feel appreciated and understood can develop above-average skills on the job. However, this particular feeling is what 20 per cent of LGBTQIA+ people miss in their professional environment.[117]

Mercedes-Benz is a company that raises awareness of the Pride movement not only in the month of June by participating in parades and events worldwide. Under the slogan »365 Days of Pride«, the car manufacturer offers online talks by and with its internal LGBTQIA+ networks throughout the year to improve the well-being of everyone in the company and benefit from diverse opinions in everyday working life.[118]

Even small steps pave the way to more diversity in a company. To mark the 10th German Diversity Day, the formwork and scaffolding manufacturer PERI SE organised a week-long event across all its locations that included networking opportunities and an interactive info wall. This clearly sets the company apart from other family-run businesses, only 20 per cent of which are rated as tolerant and diverse.[119]

The *PRIDE* Index, launched by the UHLALA Group in 2021, seeks to recognise companies that actively promote a diverse corporate culture. The LGBTQIA+ audit conducted for this purpose provides companies with new approaches to improve their diversity management. Apart from large companies such as Allianz and SAP, which achieved the best results in 2021, medium-sized enterprises also have the opportunity to attract and retain LGBTQIA+ talent.[120]

TIPS FOR BETTER DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT:

- **CREATE LGBTQIA+ NETWORKS**
- **PROMOTE LGBTQIA+ EVENTS**
- **ESTABLISH A CONTACT POINT FOR COMMUNITY CONCERNS**
- **SPECIFY SANCTIONS FOR DISCRIMINATORY BEHAVIOUR AND ENFORCE THEM**

INCLUSION OF PEOPLE LIVING WITH IMPAIRMENTS

Deutsche Post DHL Group has 15,000 employees with recognised severe disabilities and considers this diversity to be a particular strength.

As Germany's largest inclusive employer, DHL implements measures at various locations, including a counselling hotline for young applicants with impairments, special flashing lights in warehouses and a programme tailored to deaf people.[121]

Through diversity management, almost **70%** of companies see added value in terms of recruitment and brand positioning.[122]

After four years, inclusive companies generated **28%** more revenue and **50%** higher profits compared to non-inclusive companies.[123]
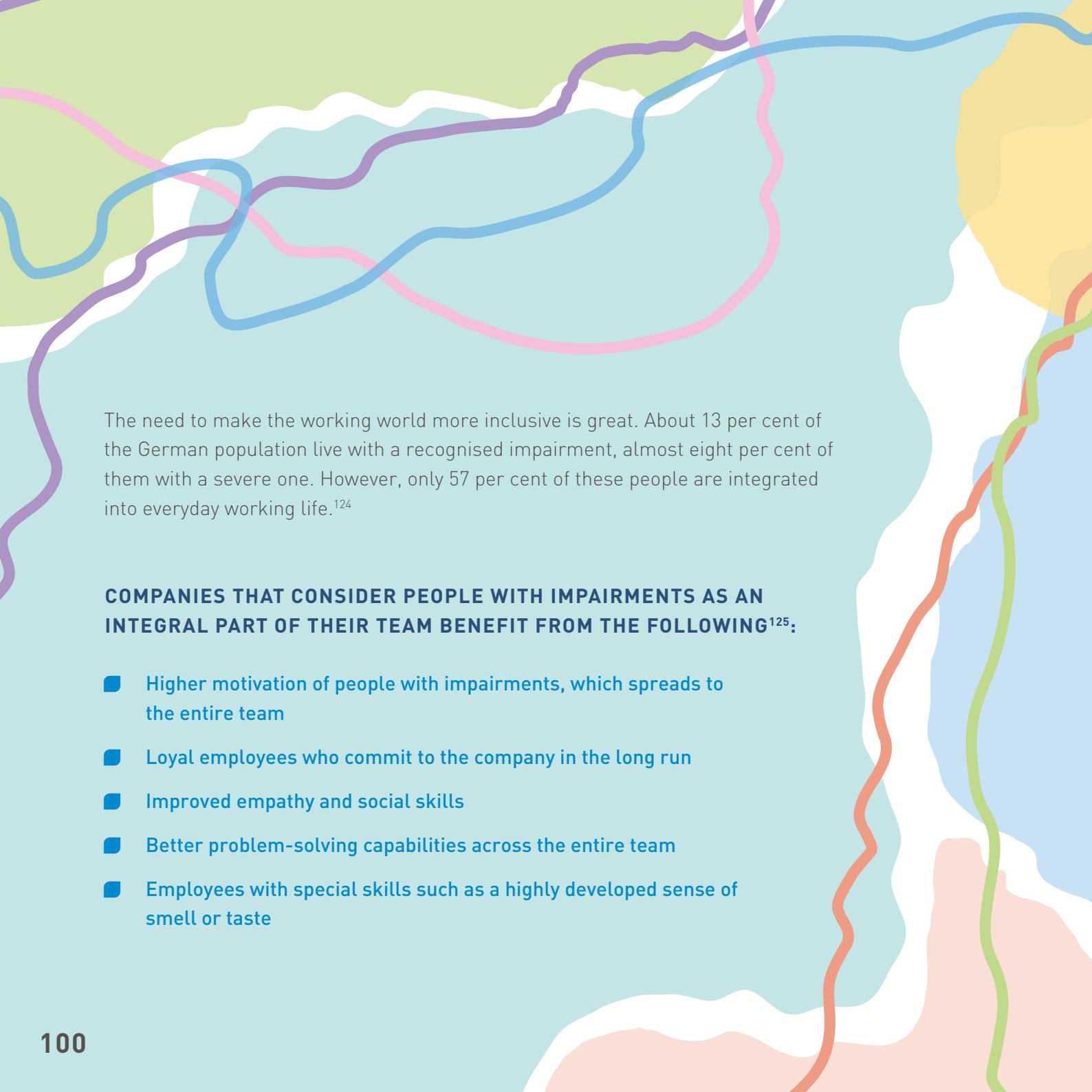
The need to make the working world more inclusive is great. About 13 per cent of the German population live with a recognised impairment, almost eight per cent of them with a severe one. However, only 57 per cent of these people are integrated into everyday working life.[124]

COMPANIES THAT CONSIDER PEOPLE WITH IMPAIRMENTS AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THEIR TEAM BENEFIT FROM THE FOLLOWING[125]:

- Higher motivation of people with impairments, which spreads to the entire team

- Loyal employees who commit to the company in the long run

- Improved empathy and social skills

- Better problem-solving capabilities across the entire team

- Employees with special skills such as a highly developed sense of smell or taste
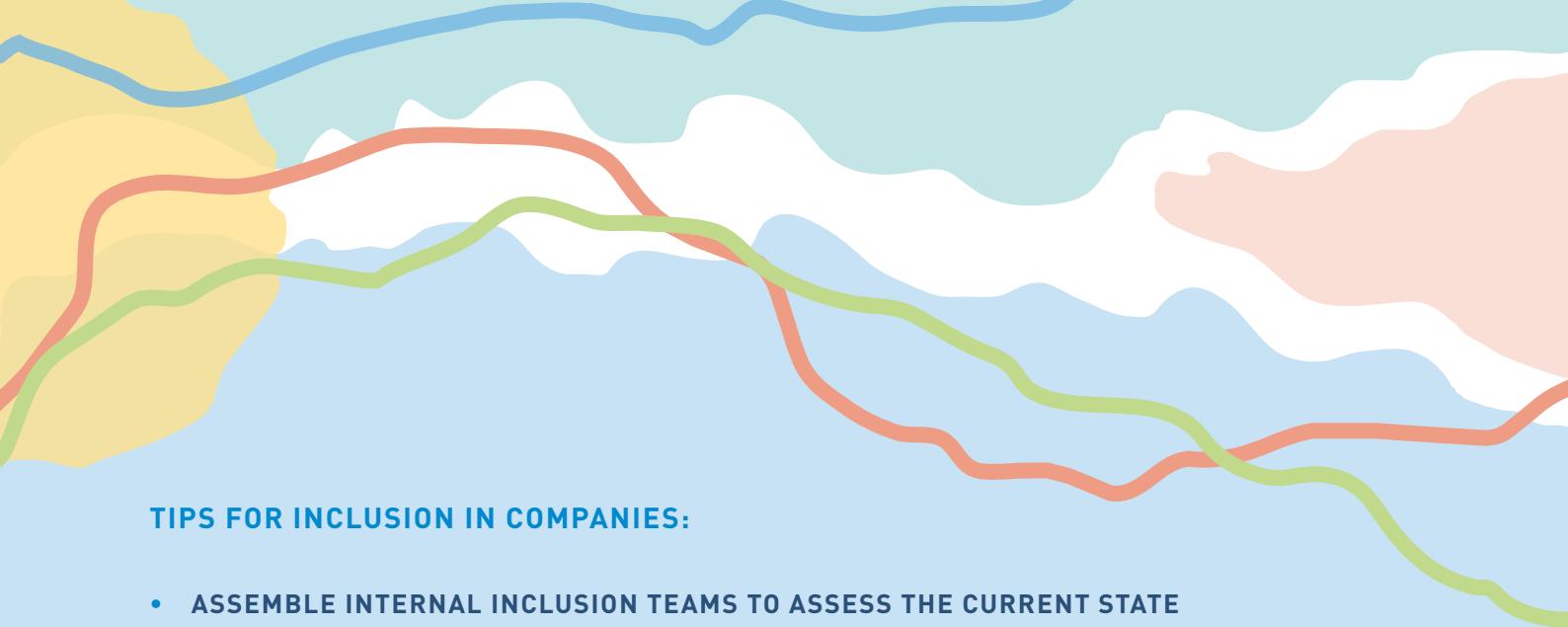
TIPS FOR INCLUSION IN COMPANIES:

- ASSEMBLE INTERNAL INCLUSION TEAMS TO ASSESS THE CURRENT STATE
- DEVELOP A ROADMAP FOR FILLING EXECUTIVE POSITIONS WITH PEOPLE LIVING WITH IMPAIRMENTS
- FACILITATE EXCHANGE OF EXPERIENCES TO RAISE AWARENESS
- BUILD AN ACCESSIBLE CAREER WEBSITE FOR AN INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT PROCESS
- CREATE ACCESSIBLE WORKPLACES AND ENTRANCES
- INSTALL ORIENTATION AND GUIDANCE SYSTEMS
- IMPLEMENT SOFTWARE THAT COMPLIES WITH ACCESSIBILITY GUIDELINES
- APPOINT SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS AND SPEECH-TO-TEXT REPORTERS FOR EVENTS
- OPTIMISE DOCUMENT USE THROUGH APPROPRIATE FONT SIZES, CONTRASTS AND COLOURS

DOES YOUR COMPANY ALREADY BENEFIT FROM DIVERSE TEAMS?

BEYOND THE DIGITAL HORIZON

»You have to be ready to change plans at any moment.«

James Yorke[126]

People instinctively try to avoid chaos. They seek stability. It gives them a sense of security. Of control.[127] The last few years have been anything but. In our search for stability and control, they have shown us that nothing is certain, that we do not and cannot always have everything under control. They have made us feel James Yorke's famous butterfly effect: the world does not obey a linear equation. Even small events and decisions can have a big impact on the future. This is precisely where the opportunity lies: every measure a company takes to conduct sustainable digital business helps determine the bigger picture – starting with the use of renewable energies and going far beyond virtual industrial plants.

The Handelskraft Trend Book 2023 has proven that digital companies are at the helm and steer their businesses towards calmer waters with modern digital solutions. On the one hand, because they achieve global sustainability goals more quickly. On the other hand, because they live up to their reputation as role models and show that being data-driven and proactive instead of acting on gut instinct and out of necessity pays off twice. With agile cloud solutions and new data architectures, with future-oriented strategies and flexible working models, with teams that develop innovations and embody diversity, they reduce CO_2 emissions, encourage sustainable consumption and become a magnet for qualified employees.

Sustainable digital companies are not just blindly sailing towards the digital horizon – they have a smart value compass on board. The reward: loyalty from all sides and economic resilience; yes, even success in stormy times.

DIGITAL SUCCESS FROM THE FIRST IDEA – DOTSOURCE'S

Develop perspectives with digital consulting

Select solutions with requirements analysis and assessment

UX & Brand Design

- Understand user needs
- Optimise your website
- Increase conversions

Content Management

- Reduce content management effort
- Distribute channel- and country-specific content automatically

Digital Marketing

- Manage campaigns successfully
- Analyse marketing measures and optimise them for specific channels
- Use the marketing mix effectively

Marketing automation

- Analyse user activities
- Combine customer data
- Address customers in a personalised way

An overview of our services:
dotSource.com/services/

INTEGRAL PROJECT APPROACH

Implement digital projects
with agile principles

Manage digital business
with scalable platforms and
cloud services

Expand knowledge
with Digital Business School

**Your requirements are
our focus**

Data-Driven Business with AI & BI
- Recognise the potential of data
- Enable data-driven decisions

Platform Integration
- Connect systems seamlessly
- Ensure consistent data exchange
- Break down data silos

PIM, MDM & DAM
- Manage product data centrally
  and digitally
- Ensure high data quality
- Reduce manual effort

E-Commerce
- Sell products and services online
- Create digital shopping experiences
- Implement new business models

CRM, Sales & Service
- Optimise sales processes
- Improve services
- Strengthen customer loyalty

ABOUT dot.Source®

dotSource transforms companies into digital champions.

dotSource has been developing and implementing scalable digital products for marketing, sales and services since 2006. Specialised consulting and development teams rely on a highly integrated combination of strategy consulting and technology selection – from branding, concept creation, UX design and conversion optimisation to operation in the cloud. Whether it is e-commerce and content platforms, customer relationship and product data management or digital marketing and business intelligence: dotSource solutions are user-oriented, targeted and data-driven.

When it comes to collaboration, dotSource relies on New Work, integral planning and agile methodologies such as Scrum and design thinking. More than 500 digital natives see themselves as partners of their clients, taking into account individual requirements and living up to the dotSource vision of »Digital Success Right from the Start«. Companies like ESPRIT, hessnatur, Ottobock, TEAG, KWS, BayWa, Axel Springer, C.H.Beck, Würth and Netto Digital trust in this expertise.

On the agency's own blog Handelskraft.com, in the annual Trend Book and at the Handelskraft Conference, dotSource networks industry knowledge and provides insights into current opportunities and developments of digital brand management. Digital Business School, which was launched together with Steinbeis Technology Group in 2015, comprehensively prepares professionals and executives for the entrepreneurial challenges of the digital world.

dotSource has established itself as one of the leading digital agencies in German-speaking Europe and is now one of the top 10 most successful companies in the industry.

ABOUT HANDELSKRAFT

What started as a spontaneous idea by the two dotSource founders and managing directors Christian Otto Grötsch and Christian Malik in 2007 quickly developed into one of the strongest corporate blogs in the DACH region. While our first articles were mainly about e-commerce and online marketing, we have spent the last few years building up comprehensive industry knowledge, getting new bloggers on board and expanding as well as professionalising the line-up of our daily articles.

Since 2013, the Handelskraft brand has included the print and web publication Handelskraft Trend Book. Since 2016, we have brought digital business experts onto the stage of the Handelskraft Conference – and since 2017, we have also brought them behind the microphones of our »Handelskraft Digital.Business.Talk.« podcast. The digital world is hybrid and agile: new technologies replace yesterday's hype, user behaviour and thus the expectations regarding digital experiences change anew with every digital advance. Digging into this sweet spot – the intersection of user needs and trends, customer experience and technology, business goals and added value – and showing Handelskraft fans and newbies how to turn it into sustainable innovations: that is what makes Handelskraft unique and worth reading and listening to – whether analogue, remote or hybrid.

The Handelskraft blog, trend book, conference and podcast are closely linked. For the content of our channels, we keep an eye on the developments in the digital industry throughout the year, conduct in-depth research, challenge each other and fine-tune articles, trend book chapters, conference agendas as well as podcast topics down to the last detail in order to open up new digital horizons for companies.

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