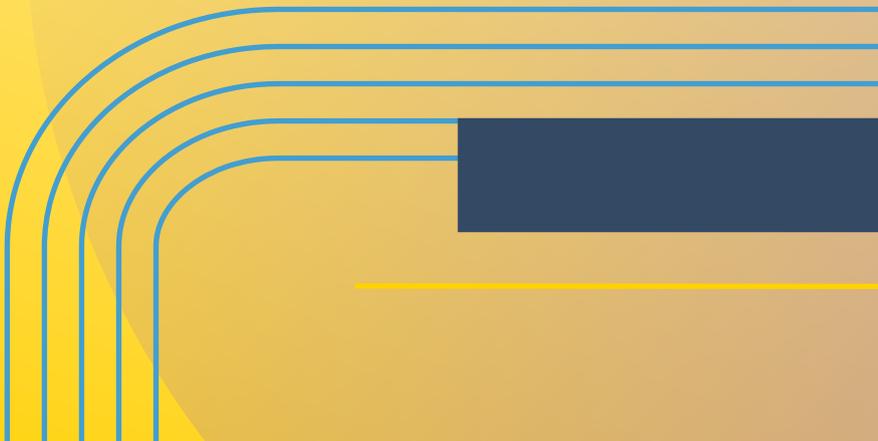
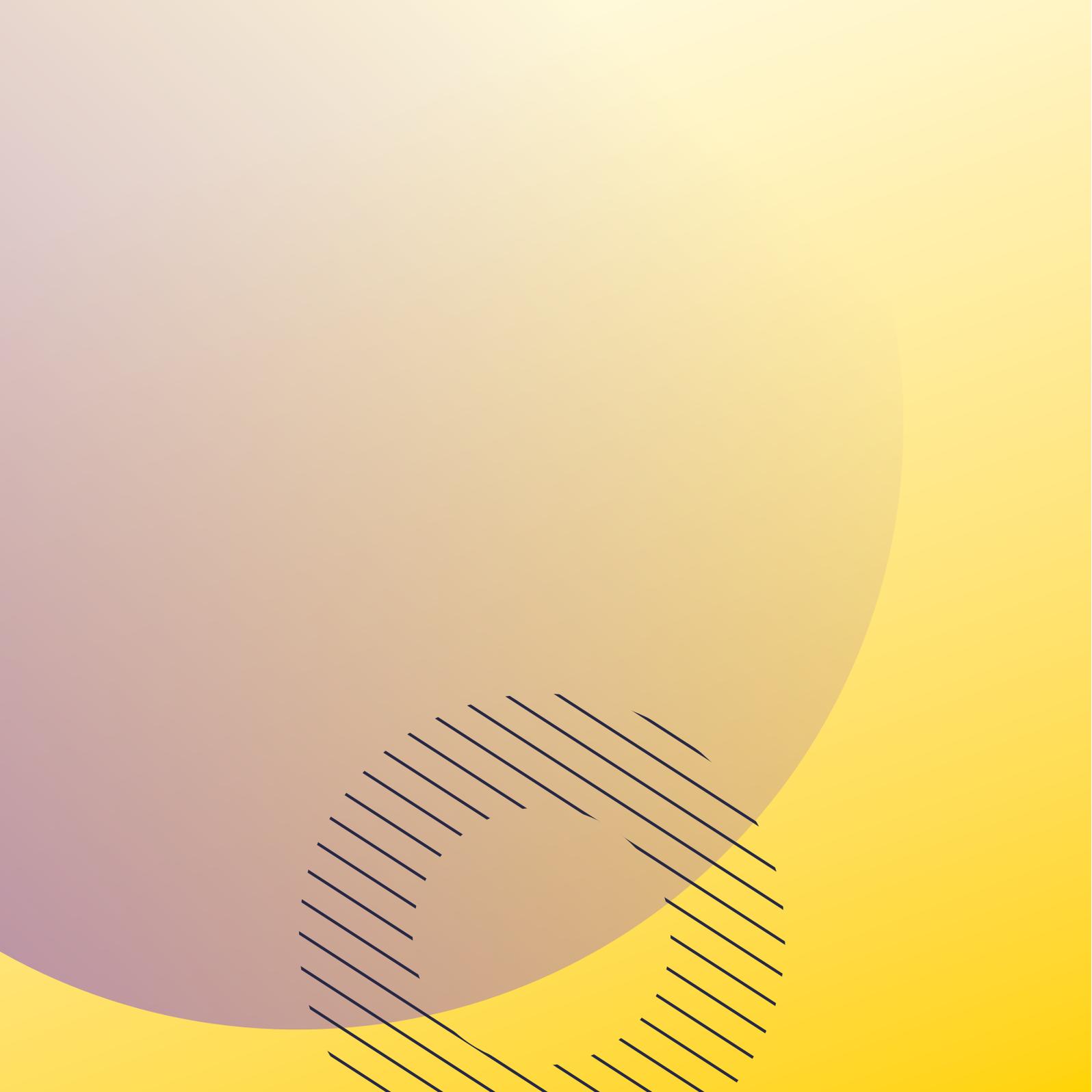


HANDELSKRAFT 2025

HIGH FIVE





HANDELSKRAFT 2025

HIGH FIVE

The image features a complex abstract design. On the left, a vertical green bar contains the word 'HIGH' in large, dark blue, sans-serif capital letters. To the right of this, there are several overlapping shapes: a purple triangle, a blue shape with concentric red and pink circles, a large blue shape with an orange bottom section, and a green shape with a white interior. Below these, there are green L-shaped blocks of varying sizes. In the top right, a light blue grid contains a 4x4 pattern of dark blue dots. The bottom right features a large yellow rectangle containing text, and a light blue shape with a purple outline and a yellow outline. The background is white with a light gray grid.

HIGH

The first day after the move. A fresh start. There you are – in a new house, in a different apartment. On day 1, you are exhausted, but full of motivation – for the bigger space, the new opportunities. You have ideas. Which colours to paint the walls, where to place the furniture. From the first day, you are ready to make the most of the fresh start – with everything it entails.

*STILL DAY ONE

Arriving in a new home, there is only one first day. Not in e-commerce. Whether it is about arriving, settling or growing – every day is »Day One«. Every day is a new beginning. Sounds strange, but it is true. Even after 31 years of e-commerce, over three decades after the launch of Amazon; even 28 years after Jeff Bezos spoke the famous words »It's still Day One«. Even after five challenging economic years, with perseverance taking precedence over the »Day One« philosophy of bold new starts.

Despite every challenge, most e-commerce companies have not ended up in Bezos' »Day Two« – in »stagnation«, »irrelevance« or even »excruciating, painful decline« – which can be attributed to the nature of the industry.¹ Because if there is one constant in e-commerce, it is change. At its very core, digital business demands that its innovators remain just as adaptable, just as energised, just as driven as they were on day 1 of their founding, on day 1 of their leap into the digital market.





What defines the nature of e-commerce in 2025? Where do these drivers of constant change come from? Who is driving and who is being driven? These are questions that occupy the e-commerce world year after year – especially when businesses are confronted with economic challenges. Past crises have proven that, now more than ever, »stagnation« can quickly end in »excruciating, painful decline«. Companies that embrace the »Still Day One« mindset – that explore new ways to reach their customers, re-evaluate their existing systems and invest wisely – are the ones that persevere.

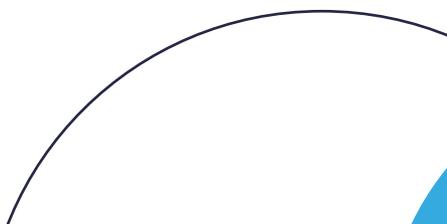
»Still Day One« – the idea of constant new beginnings – does not mean reinventing everything you have built over the years every single day. It means taking pride in what has gone well, no matter the circumstances, and celebrating those successes with a high five. A gesture that symbolises positivity like no other. Decision-makers who embrace and embody this high-five mentality will find it easier to stay aligned with the »Still Day One« narrative – seeing new beginnings as

an inherent part of their unique e-commerce journey and turning them into a consistent driver of success.

»High Five« also means appreciating change. Celebrating yourself and everyone who contributes to new beginnings, growth and success with a high five.

For 19 years, we have been helping companies such as BADER, Würth, KIPP, hessnatur, hagebau and Ottobock adapt their existing strategies to new customer expectations, evolve their system architectures to meet current and future demands and create success stories worthy of countless high fives.

We are thankful for these high fives. Because every day, our exchanges with experts from the digital business world help us leverage new trends at dotSource – and every day, we share these in numerous publications and webinars, on the Handelskraft blog, through Digital.Business.Talk, at the Handelskraft Conference and in our annual Trend Book.





**Frank
Ertel**

**Christian Otto
Grötsch**

**Janine
Bohnenberg**

**Christian
Malik**

dotSource Management



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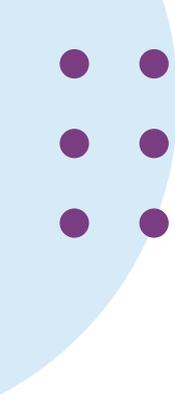
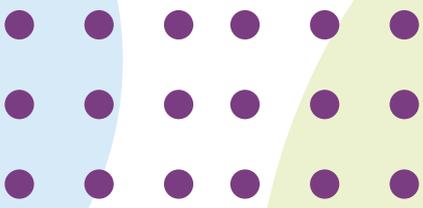
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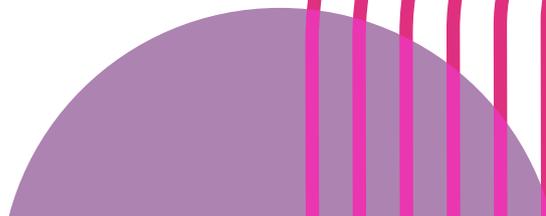
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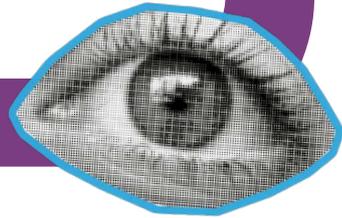
AI is revolutionising traditional marketing strategies, unexpected industries and entire markets.





HIGH FIVE FOR DIGITAL CLARITY

2019–2024: The German Mittelstand – small and medium-sized enterprises that form the backbone of the country’s economy – faces rising costs, supply chain disruptions and labour shortages. However, research from past economic crises shows that companies that focus solely on cutting back during challenging times recover from recessions much more slowly.² To ensure long-term competitiveness, targeted investments remain essential. This requires bravery, intelligent strategies and, above all, digital clarity. Clarity on which processes not only help companies navigate a crisis but also pay off in the long term.

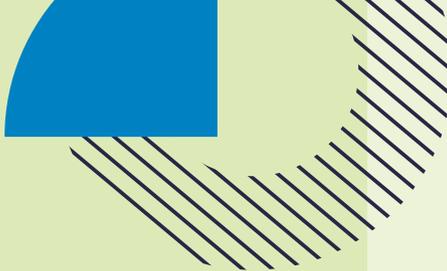


Despite all of the political turbulence since November 2024, the German economy's long-term outlook remains optimistic. By the end of 2025, economic growth of nearly one per cent is anticipated³ – and inflation is projected to ease from 2.2 per cent in 2024 to 2 per cent.⁴ Companies such as Conmetall Meister and Röchling, which have remained optimistic despite sinking consumer demand and challenging economic

conditions in recent years and have maintained digital clarity in their system architecture, processes and e-commerce initiatives, are now being rewarded. They are the role models to look up to in 2025 and beyond.

This is because they have:

- **STRENGTHENED THEIR BUSINESS THROUGH PROCESS AUTOMATION.**
- **TAILORED THEIR OFFERINGS AND INVESTED IN PERSONALISATION.**
- **CREATED NEW SERVICES FOR CUSTOMERS.**
- **REFINED DIGITAL COMPETENCIES ACROSS ALL DEPARTMENTS.**



Not everything developed during challenging business years needs to stay. Strategies that are necessary for survival can stand in the way when it is time to soar.

In a business context, the first step is to identify what you already have. Which – maybe even unexpected – skills your employees have. Which systems are in use and what their purpose is. What your teams know about their target audience and whether they harness that knowledge to its full extent.

Afterwards, you can clean things up. Existing resources and processes should be documented for future decision-making. Anything not abso-

lutely necessary can go – be it an unused licence or a routine task that can be handled by a system. What remains should be used diligently. Companies need to ensure that teams are familiar with existing processes and systems and can work with them as efficiently as possible.

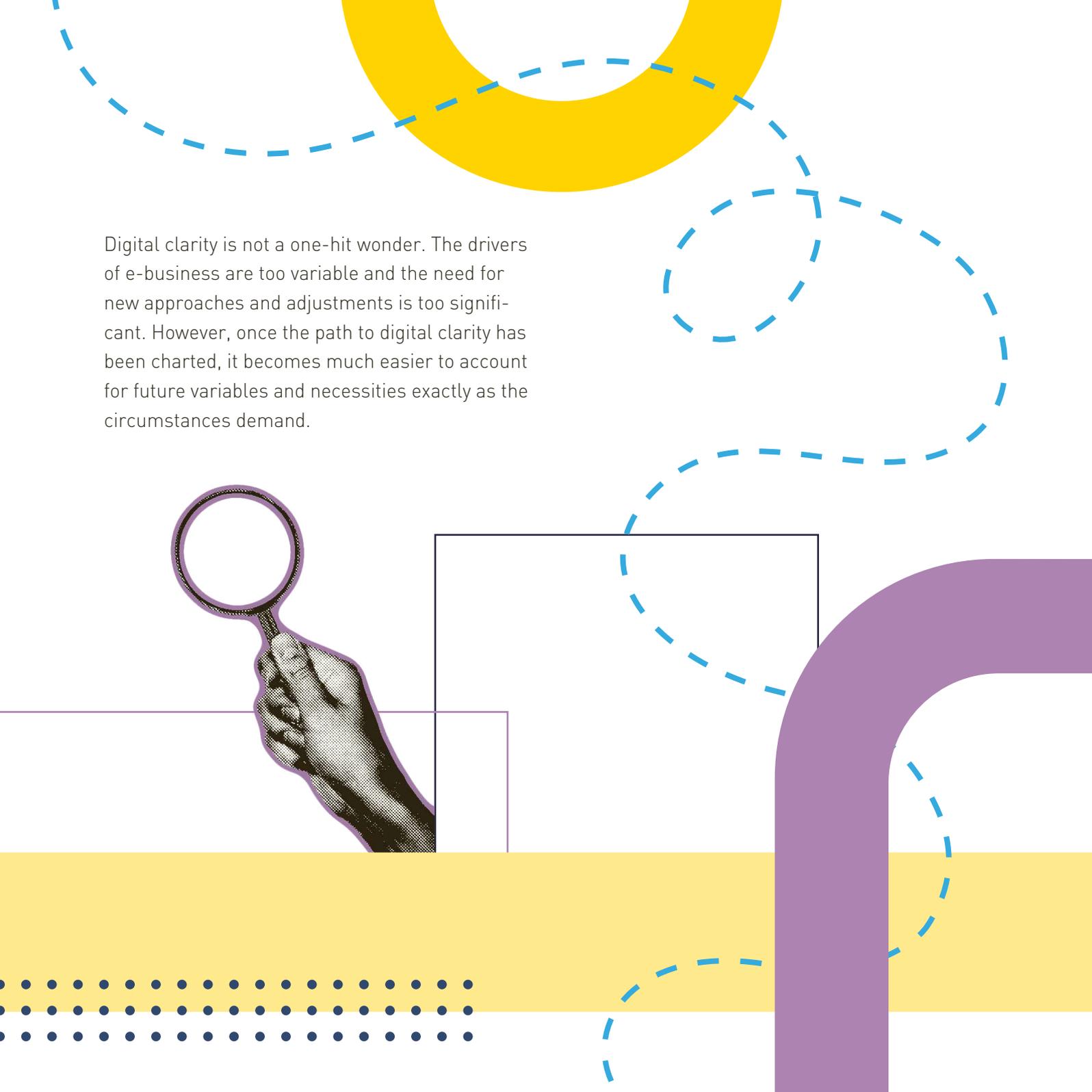
Once these matters have been addressed, companies can continue to optimise. Automation, particularly through the use of artificial intelligence (AI), is often the means of choice. However, it should never be a means to an end. In some cases, other digital solutions may better align with a company's specific needs or challenges.



*** DIGITAL CLARITY IS NOT
A ONE-HIT WONDER**



Digital clarity is not a one-hit wonder. The drivers of e-business are too variable and the need for new approaches and adjustments is too significant. However, once the path to digital clarity has been charted, it becomes much easier to account for future variables and necessities exactly as the circumstances demand.



HIGH FIVE FOR E-COMMERCE

LOOKING BACK TO MOVE FORWARD

»It's still Day One in e-commerce«. This is not only a belief that Bezos held in the nineties, but one that continues to inspire the most successful e-commerce businesses to this day. Take eBay, for example: What began as the customer-to-customer marketplace »AuctionWeb« in 1995 is now a lucrative platform for brands, retailers and manufacturers, enabling founders like Sophia Amoruso to write the first chapter of their own e-commerce success stories.

In 2006, the American businesswoman opened an eBay account for vintage fashion. However, this was just the beginning: She actively connected with her followers over MySpace, took part in discussions and informed about new products. In doing so, she laid the groundwork for social media marketing, a new business concept that her community loved – so much that, just two years later, she was able to launch her online shop »Nasty Gal«. This not only proved to be the fastest-growing shop of its kind, but an e-commerce business worth millions of dollars.

Ten years after its start on eBay, »Nasty Gal« went bankrupt. However, Sophia's »Still Day One« mindset shined through. Rather than giving up, she remained optimistic and continued to work hard for her success. Her new business idea: turning her own story into a brand called »Girlboss« – bestselling book, Netflix series, online portal girlboss.com included. Today, she is a speaker, consultant and investor for the next generation of start-ups.⁵

E-commerce is an ever-changing field. Being successful means capitalising on these constant changes – whether they come from within the industry or are caused by external factors. To understand the current state of e-commerce in Germany and worldwide, what its future might look like and how to find or solidify one's place in this segment, we need to step back and examine the 30-year history of e-commerce.

1995

E-commerce is in its infancy. One year earlier, the very first Internet transaction – the sale of a CD – took place. Ambitious young companies like Amazon and eBay looking to benefit from the Internet are taking up their operations. At the same time, less than 20 per cent of German households own a computer.⁶ Trust and security concerns as well as Internet access represent significant hurdles to e-commerce.

2000

The recently founded online marketplace Alibaba is gaining traction in China. Meanwhile, American retail giant Walmart launches its online shop in the United States. The release of Google AdWords (later: Google Ads) marks the beginning of the age of online advertising.⁷ E-commerce is also building momentum in Germany, with B2C revenue surpassing one billion euros for the first time.⁸ Between the dot-com bubble and significant improvements in e-commerce infrastructure, there is uncertainty, but also a strong innovative spirit on the digital market.





2005

E-commerce is like a child who has just learned to walk but is ready to run. After nearly collapsing around the turn of the millennium, Amazon repositions itself as a »marketplace« and evolves into the market leader. In 2007, Amazon introduces Prime – and with it express shipping at all times.⁹ Meanwhile, in Germany, mail order giants transform into online players like otto.de and tchibo.de, helping e-commerce revenue multiply sixfold to 6.4 billion euros.⁸ At the same time, the very first video is uploaded to a new streaming platform called YouTube. The foundation for the digital agency dotSource is being laid.

2010

E-commerce goes mainstream. New security measures such as two-factor authentication are becoming commonplace in online shops. The first iPhone is three years old and the App Store's app of the day is the brand new photo app Instagram. The foundations of what will come to be known as mobile commerce and social commerce are being laid. While just over half of Germans had access to the Internet at home five years earlier, the figure is now up to 80 per cent. B2C e-commerce revenue surpasses 20 billion euros.⁸



2015

Mobile commerce is booming. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest are integrating advertising and shopping features. Alongside Amazon and otto.de, Zalando emerges as a dominant player on the German e-commerce market, which is now generating nearly 40 billion euros in annual revenue. Payment methods like Apple Pay and Google Wallet are gradually gaining traction. Traditional retailers are increasingly investing in their online presence to stay competitive, with consumer expectations for seamless and engaging digital shopping experiences continuing to rise.

2020

The economic world enters the new decade full of hope (hello, Golden Twenties!). But what starts out glittering turns out not to be so golden. Only e-commerce benefits. Months of store closures, contact restrictions and quarantine regulations force commerce even further into the digital realm. Especially older generations see a surge in first-time online buyers. Huge investments in digital infrastructure are necessary to support this sudden growth. New logistical challenges arise – and they are met by the increasing range of same-day and contactless delivery options. New direct-to-consumer (D2C) brands emerge and bypass traditional retail entirely. These uncertain times are a true driver of innovation and take e-commerce to new heights.



2025

Back to the present. After five years of economic stagnation, political uncertainty and unusually rapid e-commerce growth, the situation is expected to stabilise by the end of the year. While B2C revenue growth is slowing down, it still reached a new record high in Germany in 2024, exceeding 88 billion euros. At the same time, the B2B e-commerce market is growing substantially. New forms of commerce – whether social, gamified or fair – are particularly popular among younger generations. AI has the potential to make an impact on nearly every digital process. Additionally, regulations at both federal and EU level, along with new laws, help shape the future of e-commerce. All these factors indicate a period of stable growth beginning in the second half of the year.

Modern e-commerce is thirty. Like many thirty-year-olds, he is old enough to know what works, but young enough to keep changing. He might not always know where the next step will take him, but he knows that he will continue his journey – full of optimism for the future, regardless of geopolitical developments and economic fluctuations. Full of optimism for the next five years – and the five after that and the five after that.



E-COMMERCE IS HERE TO STAY



E-commerce is always evolving. In recent years, the changes have been so monumental, the growth – driven by crises – so exponential, that moving at a normal pace can almost feel like moving backwards. However, e-commerce is by no means in decline.

In the years leading up to 2022 – both before and during the pandemic – global e-commerce revenue grew by more than 20 per cent annually for several years.¹⁰ While this type of growth might not be sustainable in the long term, it created enough momentum to avoid dipping into negative figures, even during the recent economic slump.





In 2023 and 2024, annual growth settled at around nine per cent – a more stable trajectory that, according to forecasts, is expected to continue in the coming years, even after a difficult start to 2025.¹⁰

The ability to shop online has become an everyday convenience, with nine out of ten Germans making use of e-commerce platforms. Both order frequency and average order value are increasing.¹¹ The question is no longer whether you have an online shop; it is about the shopping experience you offer. Quick, secure, reliable, optimised for mobile devices. Entertaining, inspiring and bonus points if it comes with environmental or societal benefits.

One thing is clear: E-commerce is here to stay. With a three per cent share of the total gross domestic product and 1.3 million employees across Germany, e-commerce remains a key pillar of the country's economy, extending far beyond traditional B2C models.¹² Both B2B players and hybrid merchants – serving business customers and consumers alike – stand to benefit from the global reach of e-commerce.

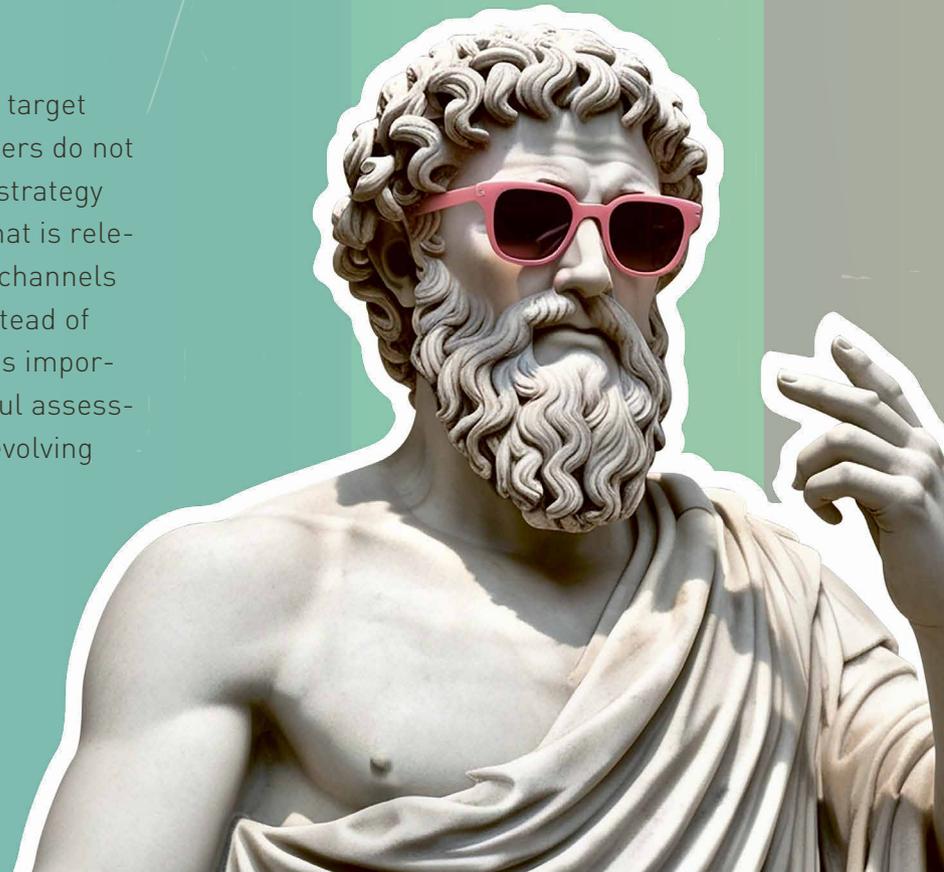
DECODING THE COMMERCE CODE

E-commerce. Social commerce. Collaborative commerce. Cooperative commerce. Re-commerce. Rental commerce. As a B2B, B2C, D2C, B2E or C2B model.

Nowadays, every business model comes with its own prefix or abbreviation. And it feels like the list grows longer every day – a clear indication that more specialised business models are indispensable when it comes to meeting highly specific customer needs.

This can undoubtedly be confusing.

Clarity comes to those who keep their target audience in mind at all times. Customers do not want to be bombarded by every sales strategy on every channel. They want to see what is relevant to them and be reached through channels they already use. This means that, instead of jumping on every commerce trend, it is important to take a step back, make a careful assessment and find your place in the ever-evolving world of e-business.



SHEIN & TEMU – HERE TO STAY?

Marketplaces account for more than half of all website traffic in e-commerce.¹¹ Foreign platforms in particular are becoming increasingly influential – led by Chinese giants like SHEIN and Temu. The latter saw an impressive 50 per cent surge in traffic in 2024 compared to the previous year.¹³

These platforms are known for their wide product range at incredibly low prices, with new items and deals added daily. However, they are also associated with questionable production practices. Despite this, 24 per cent of German consumers feel comfortable shopping on these marketplaces, as both awareness and usage of these platforms continue to grow significantly in the country.¹⁴ Low prices are likely to be the key factor driving SHEIN's and Temu's success, with users stating affordability as their main purchasing motivation.¹⁵

These platforms reach customers where they already are: online and in apps. Customers are addressed directly and targeted with relevant content based on comprehensive

user behaviour data gathered across desktop websites, apps, marketing and e-mail campaigns. Countless multimedia and immersive elements serve as lures, promising benefits such as exclusive discounts.¹⁶

Can European providers still compete with this? Especially when there is a stricter focus on production conditions and sustainability in Europe – driven by developments like the Supply Chain Act – while they lack the economies of scale associated with the logistics networks of these marketplaces?

Yes, they can – by consciously setting themselves apart from the abundance of offerings provided by their Chinese competitors and focusing on the essentials. By prioritising quality, originality and digital clarity.

Clarity about their own offerings and targeted marketing efforts, but also clarity for potential and existing customers. After all, more is not always better for everyone: While some may be enticed by flashy percentage wheels, others find such sensory overload off-putting. Ultimately, as always, it will be the consumers who decide which business model and marketing strategy will succeed – and, more importantly, endure. Considering the growing awareness of European consumers, sustainable business practices are more important than ever. The boom in re-commerce is just one sign of the countertrend to cheap products from China.

Even though low prices are tempting, they are neither the only nor the decisive factor when it

comes to purchasing decisions.

Focusing on the essentials is key. However, this does not exempt European providers from reflecting on their concepts and, if necessary, rethinking them – in short: staying innovative. Being innovative, in turn, does not mean trying to emulate SHEIN or Temu.

MediaMarkt demonstrates that innovation does not have to be overwhelming. The company's refurbished product range includes used and reconditioned smartphones, tablets and laptops, but also refrigerators and dishwashers, all available at a fraction of their original price – and, of course, online as well as offline. The bargains customers score are not only good for their wallets, but also for the environment.



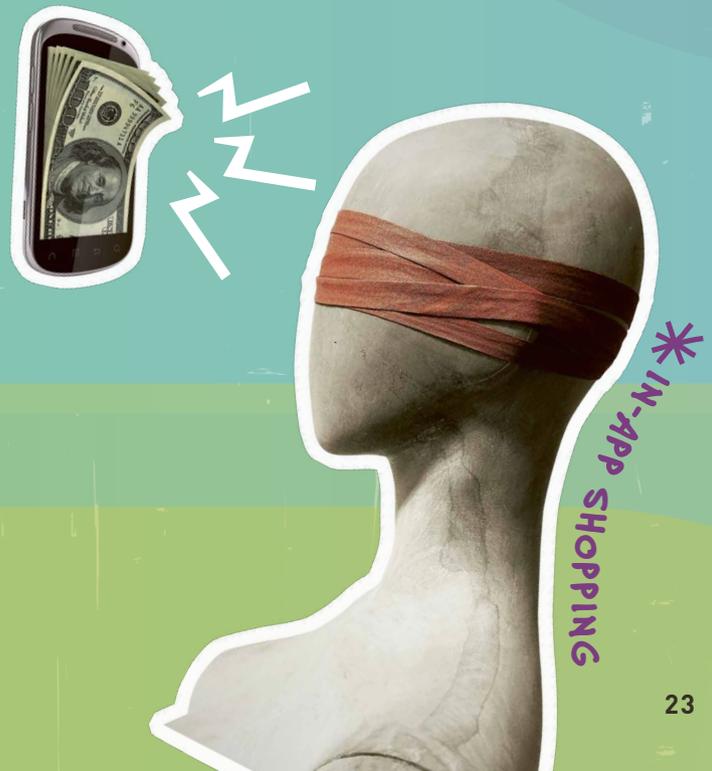
#TIKTOKMADEMEBUYIT

Over eight million posts under the hashtag #TikTokMadeMeBuyIt prove that platforms like TikTok are far more than just a social network. The social media giant has become a driving force in commerce, leveraging its infamous algorithm to deliver hyper-personalised content to its one billion users.

On TikTok Shop, the user journey is flipped on its head. Instead of visiting an online shop to fulfil a specific need, TikTok sparks new desires – desires that, thanks to its built-in shopping feature, can be turned into purchases with just a few clicks.

Unlike earlier attempts to integrate shopping features into social media platforms – just think of Facebook and Instagram Shopping, which faded from the digital landscape soon after their launch – today’s approaches are far more sophisticated and, as a result, significantly more successful. TikTok’s algorithm, for

instance, delivers highly personalised product recommendations – and purchases can be completed without ever leaving the app. Additionally, TikTok sellers reach an audience that welcomes them with open arms: Generation Z (born between 1996 and 2010) grew up with concepts like mobile and social commerce and is therefore much more familiar with in-app shopping than Facebook users were just five years ago.





In regions where TikTok Shop has been available for a longer period of time, the feature has seen significant success. In the first year after its launch in the UK, TikTok users there purchased an average of ten items through the platform. For Generation Z alone, that number was as high as 19.¹⁷ Scaled to the UK's 23 million TikTok users, this translates to between 230 and 450 million products sold annually – without any additional advertising costs. Users primarily buy products in the »Beauty & Personal Care« and clothing categories – incidentally, these are two of the largest and fastest-growing e-commerce markets in Germany as well.¹⁸

However, there are countermovements to buying more, faster and at lower prices: buying consciously, fair and collectively. This is where business models like cooperative commerce, collaborative commerce and re-commerce come in.

RE-COMMERCE – THE BUSINESS OF SECOND CHANCES

The sustainability movement is also injecting e-commerce trends with new energy. This is reflected by the growing popularity of re-commerce trends over the past few years. Re-commerce describes e-commerce revolving around »pre-loved« items – a term that not only includes second-hand goods, but also products with minor cosmetic flaws or opened packaging that are reintroduced into the market.

Specialised platforms like refurbished for electronics, Vinted for clothing and momox for books, along with marketplaces such as Kleinanzeigen and Facebook Marketplace, are all thriving thanks to the growing demand for

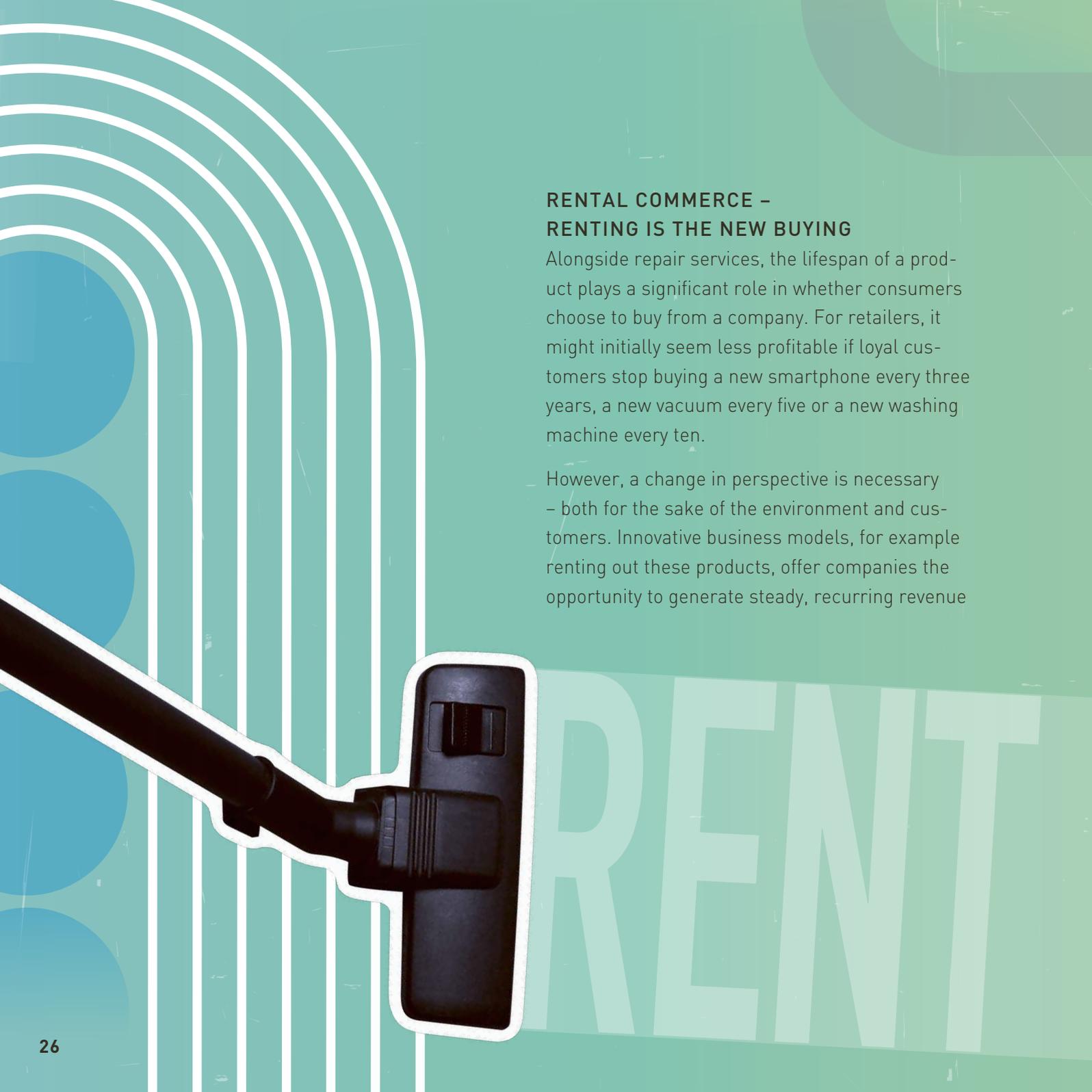
sustainable products. For instance, vinted.co.uk recorded an impressive 80 per cent growth rate in 2024, making it the fastest-growing UK website in the »Fashion and Apparel« category.¹²

Established retailers are also increasingly entering the re-commerce market. Outdoor brands like Patagonia and The North Face have launched their own second-hand product lines with »Worn Wear« and »Renewed«.¹⁹ These programmes allow customers to sell their used items back to the company, where they are professionally repaired, cleaned and resold in the online shop at a significant discount.

In addition to these new product lines, more retailers are offering repair services. This trend is not just about staying relevant – it is also about staying compliant. With the EU's upcoming »Right to Repair« initiative, consumers will soon have the legal right to request repair services for defective products. Companies that are already offering these services now stand to gain a competitive edge.



#RIGHTTOREPAIR



RENTAL COMMERCE - RENTING IS THE NEW BUYING

Alongside repair services, the lifespan of a product plays a significant role in whether consumers choose to buy from a company. For retailers, it might initially seem less profitable if loyal customers stop buying a new smartphone every three years, a new vacuum every five or a new washing machine every ten.

However, a change in perspective is necessary – both for the sake of the environment and customers. Innovative business models, for example renting out these products, offer companies the opportunity to generate steady, recurring revenue

from high-quality goods. Moreover, this approach lowers the barrier for consumers to commit to a device. Ideally, they become loyal rental customers. Platforms like Grover and BlueMovement powered by Bosch already allow users to rent the latest tech products and household appliances for a highly flexible period of time.²⁰

This business model is also gaining traction in other industries. For instance, OBI rents out all kinds of tools, equipment and machinery – and the drugstore chain dm has expanded its services to include carpet cleaner rentals.²¹

Rental commerce is also becoming more widespread in B2B. Global construction technology company Hilti, for example, offers its fleet customers the option to rent a wide range of specialised tools.²² For the Nuremberg-based company rentem, this business model forms the core of its operations. The company rents out construction machinery and specialised equipment such as aerial work platforms, forklifts, commercial vehicles and containers for industrial use.²³ This provides businesses with cost-efficient and flexible access to high-quality equipment – without the hassle of maintenance or storage.

DON'T BUY

COOPERATIVE COMMERCE – ACHIEVING MORE TOGETHER

As the name suggests, cooperative commerce is all about cooperation between individuals who share resources, profits and risks. This joint effort helps them reduce costs and improve efficiency, with customers benefitting from a wider product range.

A great example of this is EDEKA's »Heimat-liebe« product line, which features goods from local farmers and producers, available in brick-and-mortar stores. By scanning a QR code on the packaging, customers can trace the exact origin of their food. This approach not only supports the local economy, but also makes it easier for customers to choose regional products and reduce their environmental impact – truly a win-win-win situation.

COLLABORATIVE COMMERCE – EVEN GIANTS HAVE ROOM TO GROW

As a similar, but not identical model to cooperative commerce, collaborative commerce (c-commerce) focuses on jointly optimising various business areas through digital technologies. For instance, many car manufacturers collaborate with their suppliers during product development to shorten timelines and bring innovative technologies to market faster.

A standout example of c-commerce is the supply chain integration achieved by American retail giants Walmart and Procter & Gamble. Through a shared platform, they exchange real-time data on inventory levels, sales figures and delivery times, enabling them to streamline inventory management together.²⁴

Ultimately, all these models aim to ensure that as many stakeholders as possible – whether businesses or customers – benefit. By doing so, costs, effort and environmental impact are reduced. This deserves high fives all around.



HIGH FIVE!



LOOK LEFT, LOOK RIGHT: OPPORTUNITIES ARE EVERYWHERE

- HOW UP TO DATE IS YOUR E-COMMERCE STRATEGY?**
- HOW OFTEN DO YOU RE-EVALUATE YOUR BUSINESS CONCEPT?**
- ARE YOU AND YOUR PRODUCTS DISCOVERABLE ON SOCIAL MEDIA?**
- WHAT IS HOLDING YOU BACK FROM PROFITABLE PARTNERSHIPS?**
- WHEN WILL YOU MAKE RETURNED ITEMS AVAILABLE AS PRE-LOVED PRODUCTS?**
- WHICH OF YOUR PRODUCTS COULD BE A GOOD FIT FOR A SHARING MODEL?**

HIGH FIVE FOR DIGITAL APPROACHES

* NEW AVENUES FOR TRADITIONAL COMMERCE VIRTUES

»If I were to launch a new brand today, my primary goal would be to develop it from a consumer's perspective. I would ask myself: What do I need that does not yet exist? What would make something that already exists even better for me?«

Donna Darthuizen | Expert on Future E-Commerce and Former
Vice President Fashion, Sport & Beauty | OTTO GmbH & Co. KG

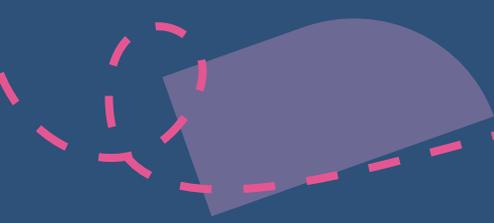
Consumers expect to be able to access information about products and services quickly and conveniently. By now, this should be clear to all companies. These days, one thing is needed more than ever: relevance. Companies can achieve relevance through modern approaches, high-quality content and the right balance between artificial and real intelligence.

The answers to the question of what makes a brand successful in 2025 are as diverse as the expectations of users. However, one thing is certain: Brands also need a »Still Day One« mindset and the right tools to accommodate this level of diversity and the constant change in e-commerce.

»Keep the focus on consumers« – this maxim is as old as e-commerce itself. In times of abundance of information, products, brands and platforms, companies that stick to the tried and tested maxim while adapting their approaches to current developments are the ones in a position to celebrate with a high five. In 2025, it is therefore worth rethinking the choice of channels and considering new target audiences. Nowadays, social media is more than just a place to look at pictures and videos. YouTube is more than just a video platform. It is a social media network and the second largest search engine in the world behind Google.²⁵ TikTok and Instagram are increasingly turning into search engines as well, with the younger generation in particular

emerging as a powerful purchasing force. However, another generation – the baby boomers (born between 1950 and 1964) – can also open up new opportunities for companies, making them a lucrative target audience. As long as they are addressed via the right channels – and not just through print materials. Baby boomers are very active on social media too.²⁶ They are one of the most underestimated target audiences. This makes it extremely profitable for companies to combine digital approaches and traditional media such as print, thereby catering to both preferences – regardless of which generation their target audience belongs to.





* AUTHENTICITY

Modern analytics tools, future-proof tracking methods and networked systems provide digital clarity about which products are performing well, which ones should be removed from the assortment, which target audiences remain relevant or are no longer a good fit and what they expect from brands.

A big high five goes to brands that impress with unique experiences instead of prices. With authenticity instead of mere self-promotion. With a genuine sense of responsibility instead of greenwashing. It all starts with creative content – and goes far beyond multi-channel approaches characterised by consistent experiences.

One third of baby boomers use their smartphones to visit social media platforms such as Facebook, X or Instagram every day.²⁶

Around **50%** of 55- to 75-year-olds prefer print media to digital alternatives.²⁶

Almost **half** of 16- to 34-year-olds opt for social media channels when conducting brand research.²⁷

55% of TikTok users have bought something from a brand after seeing its products on the app.²⁸

No matter which approach brands take, what is certain is that today's consumers:

- make very conscious purchasing decisions,
- no longer only use Google to search for products and services,
- are increasingly drawn to purchases through emotional content,
- attach great importance to the life cycle of products and
- highly value the sustainability underpinning business models.

SHARPEN YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF TARGET AUDIENCES

This makes it all the more important for brands to gain digital clarity about:

- WHO THEIR TARGET AUDIENCE IS.
- WHAT THEY ARE INTERESTED IN.
- HOW THEY SEARCH.
- HOW THEY MAKE PURCHASES.

BETTER DATA, BETTER APPROACHES

Consumers have high expectations. Competitors offer a wide range of products. Before companies can base all their decisions on the individual needs, expectations and preferences of their customers, they need to get to know them.

73% of customers take it for granted that companies know their individual needs and expectations.²⁹

In B2B, **89%** of customers are more likely to make a purchase if companies demonstrate an understanding of their needs.²⁹

Well over **half** of consumers even expect companies to anticipate their needs.²⁹

For brands to become and remain their target audience's first choice, they need to analyse their needs comprehensively – and store this information centrally, for example in a customer data platform (CDP).



CUSTOMER DATA PLATFORM

With every click on the Internet, users leave traces. Likes on Instagram, product pages visited, time spent on websites – all these interactions provide valuable insights into users' interests and needs. With the right system for managing customer data, companies can make the most of this information.

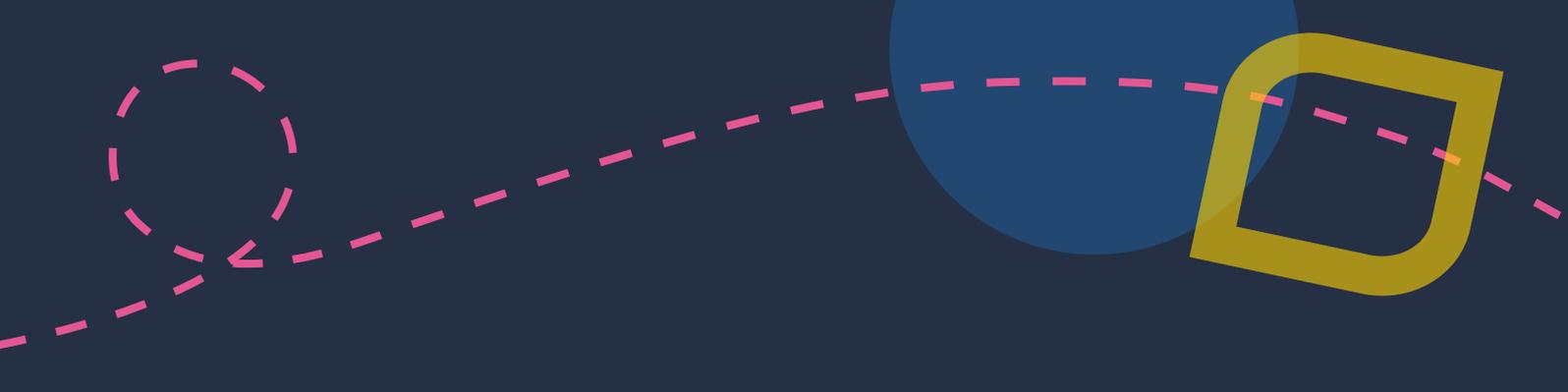
Most companies consolidate their customer data in one or even several customer relationship management (CRM) tools and also use a marketing automation solution for lead nurturing, i.e. a targeted customer approach across various channels.

With the increasing number of touchpoints, a CDP can bridge the gap between the two systems and bring together existing data effectively. Both first-party data, for example names, addresses and phone numbers, and third-party data, including website and social media activities, are combined in real time.³⁰ This results in comprehensive customer profiles that serve as the basis for a user-centric approach.

By mapping complex customer journeys, a CDP as a database is interesting for both B2B and B2C companies. Many solutions, for example the CDP from Salesforce or Adobe, make it possible to establish a logic for accounts and contacts.³¹



»CUSTOMER DATA
PLATFORM«
WHITE PAPER



As a result, multiple contacts can be assigned to one account, i.e. one company. This is extremely important given that contacts may change or be responsible for different departments. Moreover, the option of analysing at account level helps identify those who are highly promising prospects.³²

These contacts can then be targeted with personalised content based on activity monitoring. For example, if a CDP recognises that someone from a relevant company is searching for a specific manual online, this information can be forwarded to the service department via a CRM system.

Through the use of a CDP, customer satisfaction increases by a factor of **9.1** per year.³³

Companies with a customer-oriented strategy see a **2.9-fold** increase in yearly revenue growth.³³

In the coming years, around **50%** of C-level executives surveyed are planning to increase their CDP budgets by **25%** on average.³³

A CDP is ideal for companies that want to:

- ❑ move away from a traditional channel-based approach in marketing towards a more modern, audience-centric one.
- ❑ reduce losses due to non-selective marketing through intelligently personalised campaigns.
- ❑ achieve a high level of data quality.
- ❑ use clean, analysable and segmented data to better engage and inspire people.
- ❑ offer an optimised customer experience.

While a CDP focuses on retaining existing customers, a data management platform makes it easier to acquire new ones. Besides first-party data from CRM tools, this solution collects second- and third-party data pertaining to anonymous users and segments these individuals accordingly. This data is then used for retargeting, making it possible, for example, to reach users who have left an online shop without completing a purchase. Previously viewed items, possibly even from their shopping cart, are displayed to these »almost-customers« via targeted campaigns across various channels. This is a highly personalised way of bringing products back to mind and converting interested prospects into customers.

* RETARGETING FOR »ALMOST-CUSTOMERS«

SERVER-SIDE TRACKING VS CLIENT-SIDE TRACKING

How successful was the pay-per-click campaign? Did the increased Google Ads budget really lead to more purchases? These questions can be answered by analysing interactions, customer journeys and conversions. However, these must first be tracked – a task that is becoming increasingly difficult. Tracking preventions, which are integrated into many browsers nowadays, feature special data protection mechanisms that diminish data quality and make it almost impossible to identify users once a certain period of time has passed – sometimes seven days, sometimes just one.

Due to the severe restrictions regarding client-side tracking, it is more difficult for companies to analyse user interactions, deliver personalised content and measure the success of their marketing campaigns. However, there is an alternative to client-side tracking: server-side tracking.

»DATA DRIVEN
MARKETING«
WHITE PAPER



SERVER-SIDE TRACKING IS THE FUTURE

NO SECURITY WITHOUT DATA SOVEREIGNTY

Client-side cookies are usually stored directly in users' browsers. Once placed, user data is transferred to third-party servers such as Google Analytics – but only if there are no tracking preventions in place.

As the name suggests, server-side tracking involves cookies being stored on the server side so that they are unaffected by browsers' tracking preventions and can collect data over a longer period of time. Furthermore, data sovereignty lies with the company, as all data is initially transferred to an intermediary server. This additional layer provides greater control and security, enabling the company to decide exactly which data is passed on to which third-party providers.

If companies rely solely on client-side tracking, ad blockers and tracking preventions lead to a reduction in both the quantity and quality of the data collected.

While data protection mechanisms make client-side tracking more difficult, they have minimal to no impact on server-side tracking. Regardless of the type of tracking, however, users must first consent to the processing of their data via a consent banner.³⁴

NO FOCUS ON CUSTOMERS WITHOUT DATA CONSISTENCY

A user clicks on an advertisement, is directed to an online shop, selects a product and adds it to the shopping cart. He wants to give it some more thought and puts the purchase on hold for the moment. After five days, he finally decides to buy the product and returns to the online shop.

If the online shop operator relies on client-side tracking, the user data has already been deleted by the second contact due to the tracking preventions integrated into the browser, as more than 24 hours have passed. Consequently, the analytics tool is unable to identify the customer and incorrectly labels him as a new user. This means that the purchase cannot be attributed to the advertisement originally clicked on.

With server-side tracking, data is retained for a long period of time.³⁵ The online shop operator can not only confirm that it is the same user making the conversion, but also attribute the purchase to a specific advertising campaign and thus track the customer journey across multiple channels.

The challenge is that server-side tracking requires more technical expertise. Companies need servers. Whether locally or in the cloud – not only do these servers have to be paid for, but they also need to be installed and maintained. Moreover, stricter tracking preventions, the further development of ad blockers and legal changes call for timely adjustments to the tracking set-up.

37% of users worldwide have an ad blocker installed.³⁶

Server-side tracking can increase conversions by up to **29%**.³⁷

DIGITAL APPROACHES – THERE ARE NO LIMITS

»You have young women coming in, screaming ›Hooray!‹ and ›Hey!‹ – just like back in the day when the Beatles were around.«³⁸

Günter Harnecker | Bookseller

Young people no longer read books. Older people do not know anything about the digital world. Brands that still fall victim to these stereotypes are missing out on a wealth of potential. There are countless ways of accessing information, products and services – and they are available to everyone.

Yes, young people have a different relationship to digital hardware and software, as they are introduced to it from an early age.

Yes, older people tend to be digitally socialised at a later stage of life. They often have to learn how to use digital hardware and software.

But no matter which age group you want to reach, the need for digital approaches is not a question of age.

YES, WE SCAN

REWE SCAN&GO

One company that already uses a well-thought-out mix of approaches for both young and old is the REWE Group. At the end of 2020, REWE introduced a self-checkout concept for the first time.³⁹ It has been continuously developed ever since. Customers can now use »Scan&Go« to scan products themselves and pay at an express checkout.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, there are still staffed checkouts so that customers can choose how they want to pay. The supermarket chain's target audience consists of people of all age groups.⁴¹ As a result, customers' habits and expectations vary greatly – as does the way they use modern technology. By providing both options, customers can decide for themselves whether they want to interact with an employee or go with the self-checkout.

* SCAN&GO =
SCAN PRODUCTS YOURSELF + PAY
AT AN EXPRESS CHECKOUT + GO

REWE PICK&GO

With a pilot project in Cologne, REWE is even going one step further. »Pick&Go« instead of »Scan&Go« is the name of the game at the fully automated just-walk-out store for the digitally savvy target audience. If you want to shop at REWE Pick&Go, all you need is the app of the same name. Select your preferred payment method, walk in, scan the QR code, fill your shopping bag and walk out. No checkout. No additional scanners.

This is made possible by more than 400 cameras and weight sensors on the shelves, tracking what is taken out or put back and scanning skeletal features instead of faces at check-in (when scanning the QR code). How tall is the customer? How long are his arms?

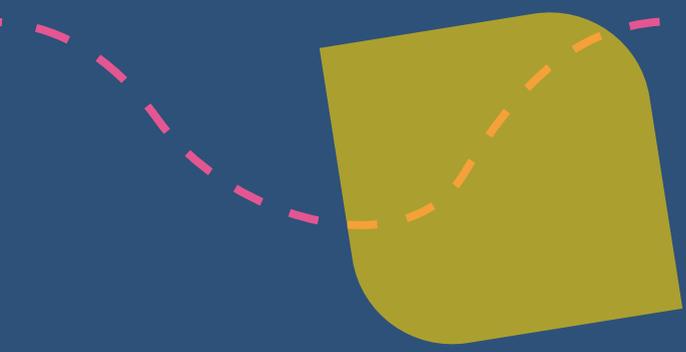


Skeleton, shopping list, behaviour in front of the shelves. When does the customer hesitate? Which items does he put back? All this information is stored in the REWE cloud. The underlying technology comes from the Israeli company Trigo Vision. After just 100 seconds and with 94 per cent certainty, the algorithms can identify a customer based on this data.

An approach that pays off. For companies that want to offer their target audience modern shopping experiences – regardless of whether this group of people grew up with digital tools or first had to learn how to use them.

Zippin, a US-based start-up and market leader for cashierless retail solutions, reports that it has:

- saved customers 229,000 hours of waiting time at checkouts.
- helped its partners increase sales by up to 50 per cent while reducing labour costs by up to 20 per cent.⁴²



* PICK&GO =
CHECK IN USING AN APP
+ FILL YOUR SHOPPING BAG + GO



YES, WE PRINT

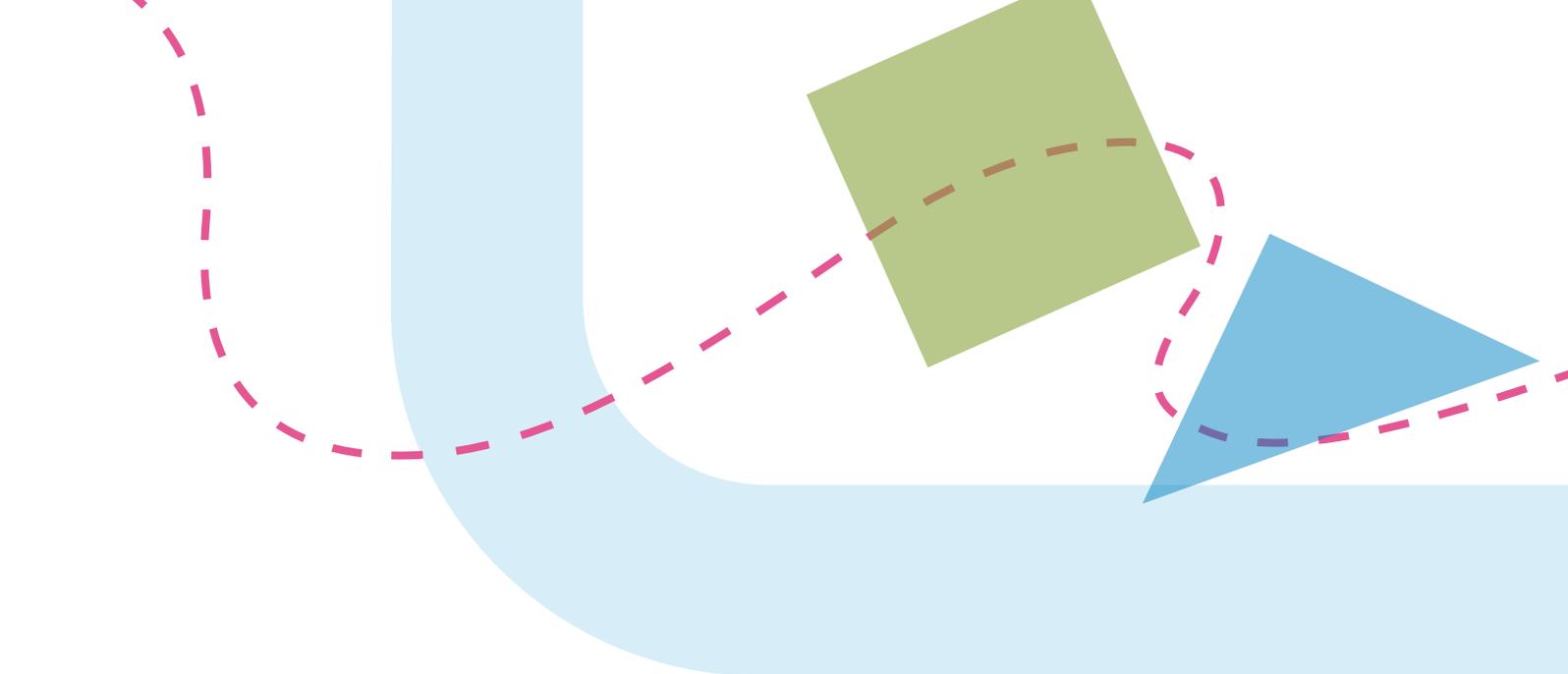
Many consumers still value print materials. While digital advertisements, online catalogues and newsletters can be closed with a simple click, print products create tangible experiences.

A flyer in your favourite magazine, a brochure containing seasonal offerings, a letter with discount vouchers – all of these create a feeling of exclusivity and round off even the most modern digital experience with a physical touchpoint.

The combination of tools such as a product information management (PIM) system with a PIM-to-print solution makes it easier for companies to offer a high-quality print product, helping them save time and ensure accurate and consistent content.

PIM FOR PRINT AT WALTER AG

Product catalogues still play an important role, especially in industry. This is also true for Walter AG. The company's portfolio comprises over 40,000 products. In an economy that demands ever greater efficiency, it is simply impractical to manually transfer all the product information to the catalogue template. The solution: »PIM for Print«. With Stibo Systems Enterprise Platform (STEP), Walter AG can make existing product data available to the external print:suite platform. This allows the company to create product catalogues in over 20 languages – containing up to 2,500 pages – with minimal effort. Country-specific data in industry-standard formats can also be retrieved with ease.



DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY – LEGALLY REQUIRED, PRACTICALLY IMPLEMENTED

People want to move freely in both the analogue and digital worlds.

That is why companies need to take accessibility into account when devising and designing digital offerings. From the 28th of June 2025, this will even become mandatory in German B2C with the Act to Strengthen Accessibility (Barrierefreiheitsstärkungsgesetz, BFSG).

Digital accessibility goes far beyond purely visual aspects and should therefore be considered holistically in front-end development, design and content creation. To ensure that people using assistive technology such as screen-reading devices can consume all types of content on websites, apps and other channels, various criteria need to be met.

CHECKLIST FOR INCLUSIVE DESIGN

- ☐ **Fonts are sufficiently large, especially for control elements.**
- ☐ **Informative and functional images have a meaningful alt attribute.**
- ☐ **Text on images is avoided.**
- ☐ **Moving images can be paused.**
- ☐ **Videos contain accurate subtitles and an audio description.**
- ☐ **Links and their targets are clearly defined.**
- ☐ **Links stand out from the body text, for example through underlining.**
- ☐ **Headings are organised logically (<h1>, <h2>, <h3>, etc.).**

Ultimately, addressing the individual needs and requirements of users pays off twice. By taking these criteria into account, digital experiences can be significantly improved not only for people living with impairments, but for all users.

It is important to focus on long-term solutions instead of relying on supposed quick wins such as accessibility overlays.

As all-in-one tools, these overlays promise to make websites accessible by simply implementing a plug-in. In practice, however, they actually compromise accessibility rather than improving it, for example by hindering the functionality of screen readers.⁴³



»ACCESSIBILITY«
AUDIT

»If AI understands what you want, why waste time visiting a search engine or shopping on Amazon?«⁴⁴

Bill Gates

SEARCHING AND FINDING

HEY, GOOGLE CHATGPT

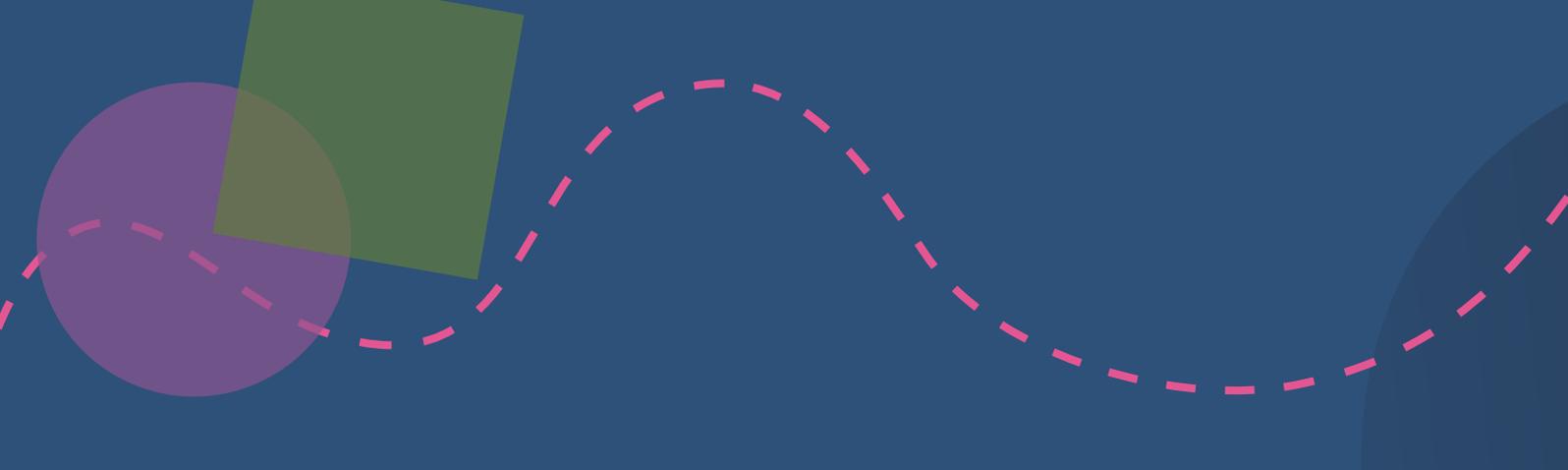
Considering the latest developments, Bill Gates' theory may well have become reality by this point. The rapid growth of ChatGPT shows the great interest people have in the AI-based chatbot, which provides understandable and relevant information in a conversational format. Within just two months of its launch, the platform surpassed 100 million active users.⁴⁵

Google's CEO Sundar Pichai, meanwhile, declared a »code red« in December 2022. The reason for this was the fear of the impossible – Google could lose its pole position in terms of providing information.

However, it is not ChatGPT itself that is a cause for concern, but rather the prospect of losing ground in the field of conversational search. This technology enables users to interact with

search engines and chatbots in a completely new way, for example by asking questions in natural language and refining answers through targeted follow-up prompts.

At the beginning of the search engine era, it took precise keywords to get the best search results. Today, a single prompt is enough for chatbots to reliably explain Einstein's theory of relativity. Unlike in the past, however, users do not have to click through results pages – they receive all the relevant information in the form of AI output without having to do any research themselves.



With this in mind, the start-up Perplexity AI is deliberately trying to set itself apart from conventional search engines. Instead of delivering countless search results, the company, which was founded in summer 2022, offers a chatbot that gathers accurate and trustworthy information. Not only does this tool provide specific sources for all queries, but it also suggests related topics and helpful follow-up questions. Bezos believes that this search engine will take e-commerce and cloud services to the next level. The founder of Amazon is just one of many prominent supporters of Perplexity AI.⁴⁶

To avoid falling behind, Google focuses on various measures such as constant updates, its chatbot Gemini (formerly Bard) and Google AI Overview (formerly SGE).

Google AI Overview is an attempt to integrate an AI language model directly into Google's search engine and answer specific queries via AI output. Spread glue on pizza, eat stones or cook spaghetti with petrol – initial recommendations made by the model resulted in extremely bad press upon its launch in the USA.

* CONVENTIONAL SEARCH ENGINES + CHATBOTS

This was due to the erroneous source material used, with Google classifying satirical websites and Reddit threads, for example, as trustworthy. As a result, another problem emerged: Google turned into a content publisher, thereby becoming responsible for the quality of the content. If users do not trust the content, Google runs the risk of losing its reputation. Due to data protection and quality concerns, the roll-out of Google AI Overview in Europe is yet to be announced. Nevertheless, it is bound to happen at some point.⁴⁷

Microsoft's search engine Bing, by contrast, has been offering such an additional service in the form of AI-generated answers since 2023.⁴⁸ The Bing chatbot is integrated directly into the search engine's sidebar and can be used for summaries, product comparisons and inspiration. Initially, the breakthrough of this AI-based chatbot was also hampered by inappropriate advice. Microsoft's solution: limiting the number of questions to five per session. This way, the majority of users receive their desired answer without the chatbot getting out of hand.⁴⁹

SEO, GAIO – OPTIMISATION IS KEY

However, the trend towards generative search has consequences not only for search engines, but also for companies. They need to rethink the way they approach digital content. Along with search engine optimisation (SEO), generative AI optimisation (GAIO) is becoming the focus of day-to-day content creation and revision work.

This mainly affects companies that want to be found through search queries already triggering featured snippets. Featured snippets are prominently placed answer boxes that appear at the top of results pages. In contrast to AI Overview, however, these answers are not generated using AI – instead, an excerpt from a suitable results page is copied. Given the similarities between the two features and initial findings from the launch in the USA, the SEO scene is certain that AI Overview will replace the current featured snippets in the future.

If companies want to trigger featured snippets or make it into the AI Overview sources, they need to:

- **ensure that their content is ranked in the top 10.**
- **use structured data so that Google can access their content more easily.**
- **align their content with search intent and present it concisely.**
- **prioritise answers over landing pages when creating their content.**

This provides companies with the necessary foundation. Whether it leads to the desired response from Google, however, is a question of probabilities. The same applies to GAIO, for example when it comes to ChatGPT or Microsoft Copilot.

If you want chatbots to include your company in AI output for relevant search queries, you need positive mentions in the source material. This requires marketers to do good PR work on the Internet. Content marketing turns into PR. If other sources link to your website, this also boosts rankings on conventional search engines.

Approximately **1.5** billion visits per month bear witness to ChatGPT's global prominence.⁵⁰

In 2022, around **57** million people used ChatGPT, surging to 100 million by January 2023.⁵⁰

COMMUNITY FAVOURITES AS A KEY TO SUCCESS

Influencers have turned into opinion leaders – they not only shape purchasing behaviour, they dictate it. Communities and user-generated content have become crucial to business success. »Insta made me buy it« has risen in popularity and is now a familiar slogan, especially among the younger generation.

On TikTok, product reviews posted by unpaid users under the hashtag #TikTokMadeMeBuyIt evoke needs that can be satisfied with just one click using the built-in TikTok Shop feature.

Via digital opinion leadership, BookTokers are reigniting the trend of reading physical books.

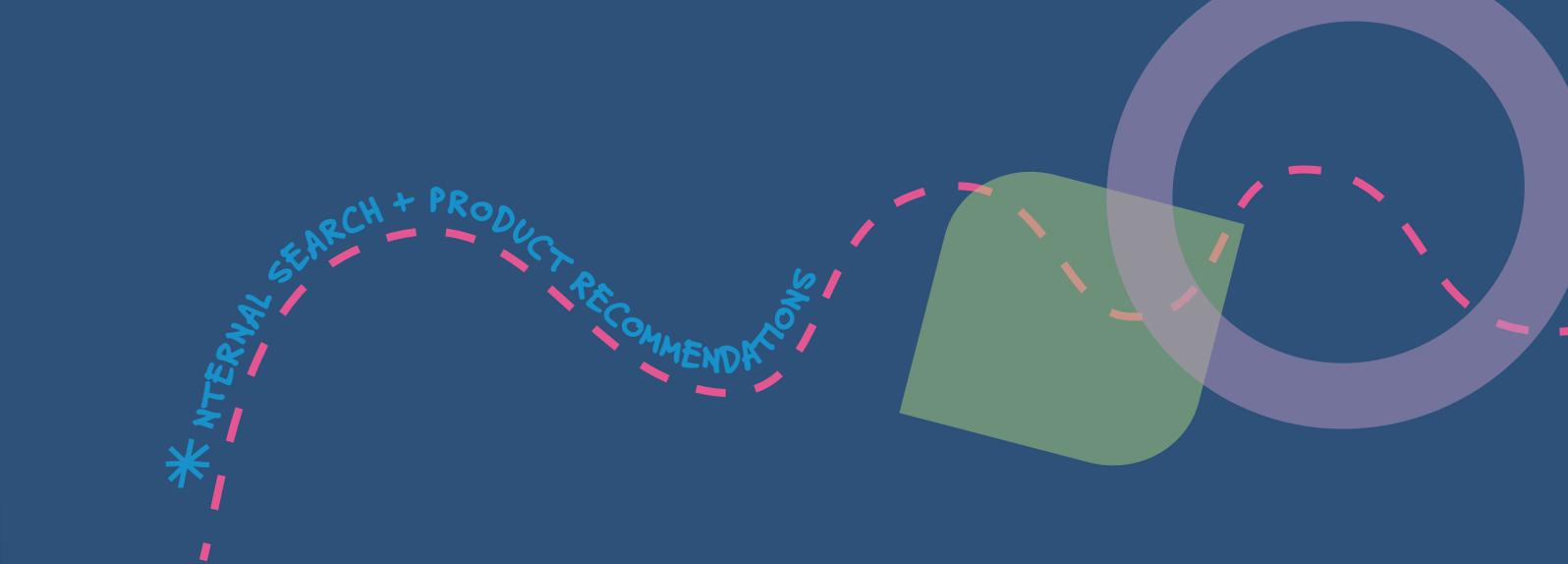
Not only do they post videos recommending books on TikTok, but they also build a lifestyle around it – and create new ways of engaging with a supposedly outdated product. Books are going viral, with the hype even being reflected in brick-and-mortar stores: More and more young people are buying books again. Previously unknown authors such as Ali Hazelwood are becoming famous overnight – and digital book reviews are propelling their works to bestseller status.³⁸

This trend shows how powerful social media and communities on these platforms are. Any product can be transformed into a digital success story and any target audience can be inspired – all it takes is the right content on the right channels.

Consequently, it comes as no surprise that social networks are increasingly being used to search for brands and products. For this reason, companies should not only have an in-depth understanding of social media users, but also be familiar with the platforms' algorithms and the platforms themselves. This is the only way for marketing teams to make sure that relevant and creative content is found by users.

In 2023, TikTok Shop generated record sales, amounting to **17.5** billion US dollars in the USA and **7.5** billion US dollars in the UK.⁵¹

By 2024, TikTok Shop is expected to reach sales of **20** billion and **10** billion US dollars in the USA and UK respectively.⁵¹



* INTERNAL SEARCH + PRODUCT RECOMMENDATIONS

SEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS AT BADER

Even outside of social media, companies can evoke needs via their online shop. Suitable product discovery tools allow users to quickly find what they are looking for and provide them with personalised recommendations, encouraging them to make a purchase.

BRUNO BADER GmbH + Co. KG has two product discovery tools at its disposal. Besides FactFinder for an optimised internal search function, the mail order company uses prudsys' recommendation engine. Thanks to the solution's AI-based algorithm, BADER is able to deliver personalised product recommendations at various touchpoints. Recommendations

are displayed according to certain rules. These rules relate, for example, to products that are frequently bought together or categories that users browse particularly often.

Benefits of search and recommendation tools⁵²:

- Increased conversion rates
- More relevant recommendations
- Faster load times when it comes to search results
- Easy-to-use search function with a clear layout

AI IS NOT A PANACEA

Opinion leaders and community sentiment are not the only factors that are part of today's influencer marketing and thus shape the behaviour of social media users. Virtual influencers and AI clones are also becoming increasingly involved in the world of content creators on Instagram, TikTok and the like. As is so often the case, Chinese platforms such as Taobao, Kuaishou and Douyin (TikTok's sister app) are leading the way. On these platforms, real influencers are already using AI clones during shopping live streams. According to Silicon Intelligence, all it takes to create such a clone is a one-minute video of the person to be cloned. The Chinese company, headquartered in Nanjing, offers specialised AI solutions for commercial scenarios in the field of speech and image recognition. In 2023, Silicon Intelligence created a total of 400,000 AI clones.⁵³

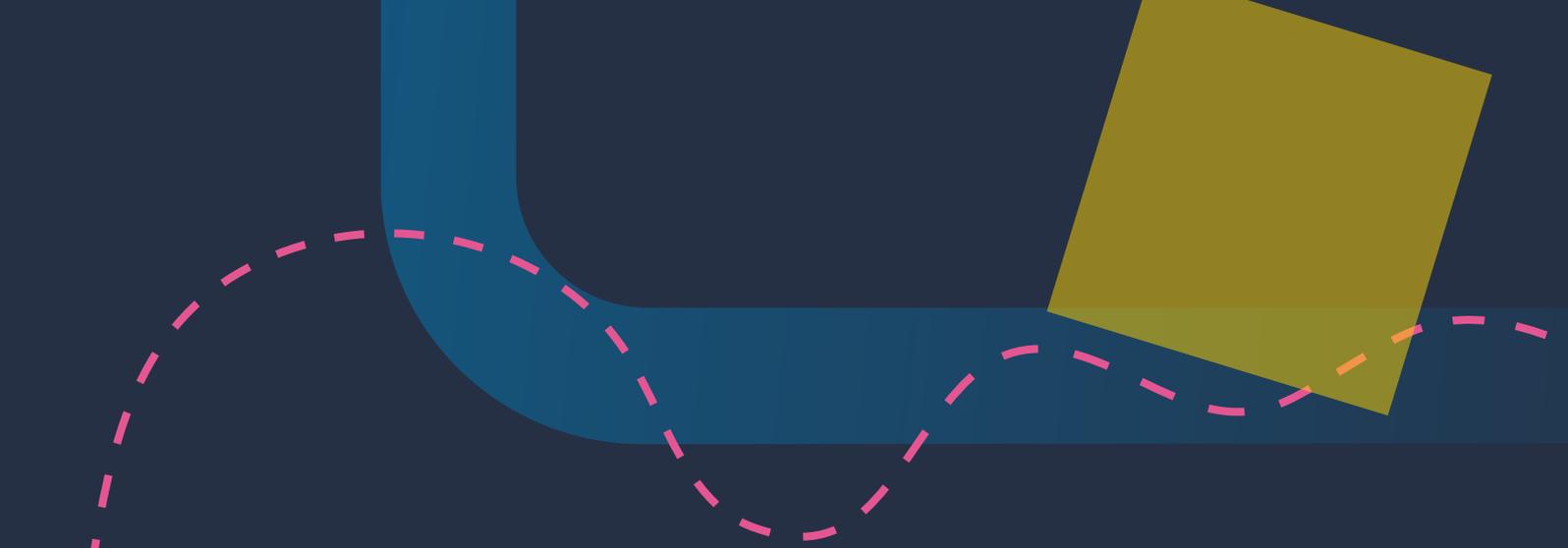
AI clones may well be a lucrative and inexpensive alternative for brands, especially when they perform in live streams at night. However, they do not deliver what the majority of European consumers want: the human touch.⁵⁴ Over 70 per cent of consumers even expect generative AI to have a negative impact on social channels, primarily due to the rapidly increasing spread of fake news.⁵⁵

As a result, brands are at a critical turning point – be it because of their presence on social media or their services before, during and after a purchase. According to Gartner, a perceived decline in the quality of social media networks caused by the increased adoption of AI will push 50 per cent of consumers to significantly limit their use of major platforms by 2025.⁵⁵

* HUMAN TOUCH

»AI«
WHITE PAPER





Given the relevance of social media in search and purchasing behaviour, this can have devastating consequences for a brand.

One brand that takes a clear stance against automatically generated content in advertising and marketing is Dove. With its »Real Beauty« campaign, the cosmetics company has stood for natural beauty in all its facets for twenty years. Regardless of body size, skin colour, blemishes, age or origin – with the choice of protagonists and the storylines featured in the commercials, Dove has positioned itself as a strong advocate for more reality. The cosmetics company remains true to its principles by launching the global »The Code« campaign in 2024, announcing that it will completely refrain

from using AI-generated images of women – contrary to the trend that the brand itself predicts: Dove expects 90 per cent of all images on social media to be generated or at least edited with AI by 2025.⁵⁶

This raises a key question:

AI OR NO AI?

For brands, there is simply no universal answer. Instead, those responsible should ask themselves the following question, just as they do when dealing with (potential) customers:

WHERE AND WHEN DOES MY PORTFOLIO CREATE REAL ADDED VALUE FOR CUSTOMERS?



If the integration of AI, whether in the form of a chatbot or a virtual influencer, does not bring any benefits – be it simpler processes, faster issue resolution or more personalised experiences – it does not make sense to stick to it in the long term.

For brands, AI clarity is all about making decisions in the interests of their customers and communicating these clearly – either in favour of using AI, resulting in constantly available services, or against it to ensure authentic content.

By 2026, 60 per cent of CMOs will adopt measures such as content authenticity technology, enhanced monitoring and brand-endorsed user-generated content to protect their brands from deception and potential customer loss.⁵⁵

Those who are transparent about their AI usage, as Dove, have a competitive edge. This is because transparency creates trust. By contrast, companies that rely solely on automation when creating content – for the sheer sake of efficiency – may face a loss of trust.



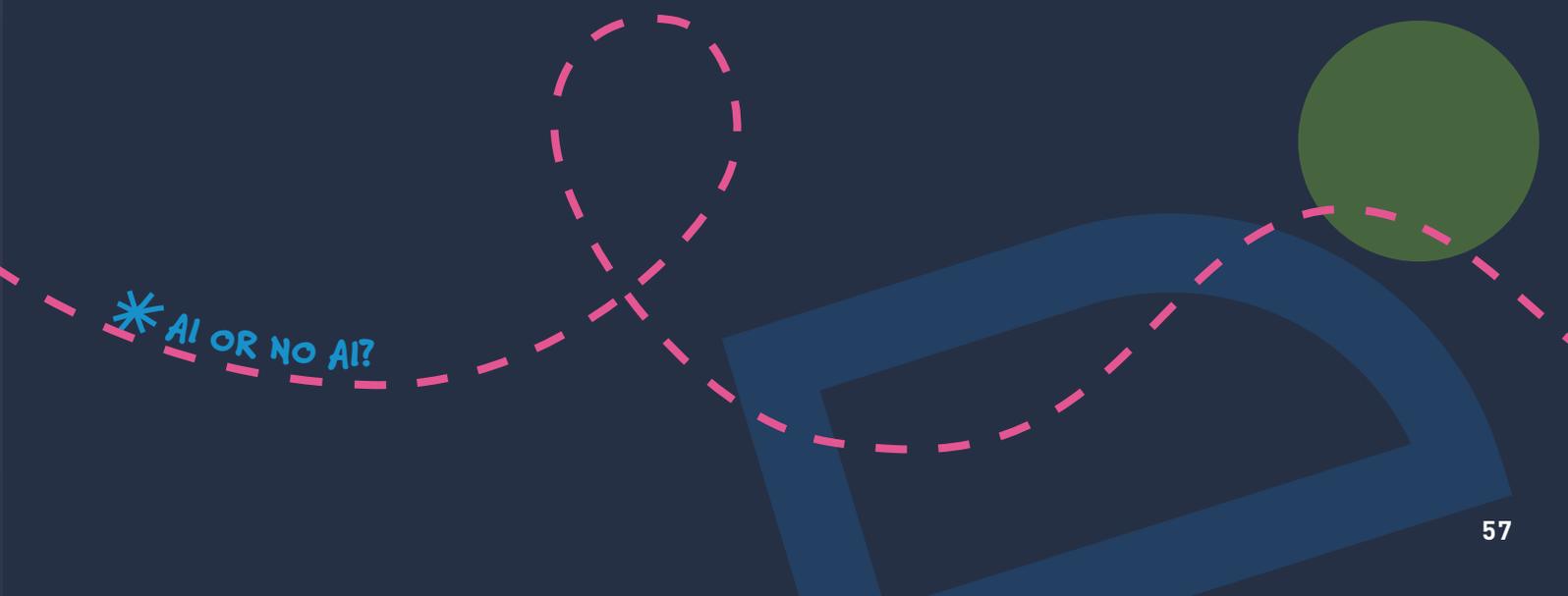
It is expected that **20%** of brands will differentiate themselves from the competition by not using AI in their business and products.⁵⁵

The same goes for brands that claim to use AI just because it is trendy – despite not working with AI at all. This phenomenon is known as AI washing.

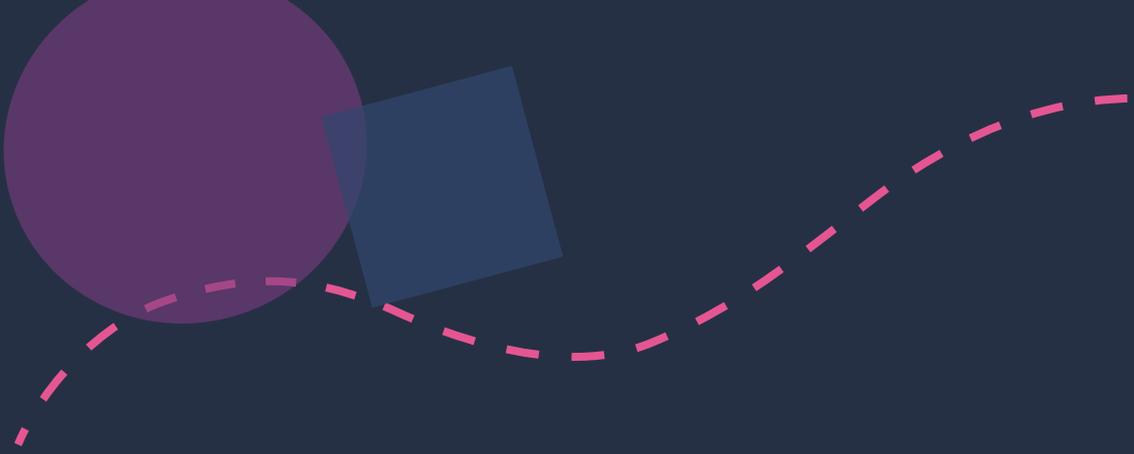
Companies that only use automatically generated content to engage existing customers need to make sure that their brand voice and identity remain intact. Long-standing customers have become accustomed to brands and their communication. They appreciate honest

and creative input from actual content creators. If this content is no longer authentic, companies may lose the trust of their customers.

If a company sends a newsletter to its target audience, they may not realise that the content was generated by a machine. What they do notice, however, is the lack of emotion. In other words: The newsletter does not convey the sense of excitement usually found in marketing texts.

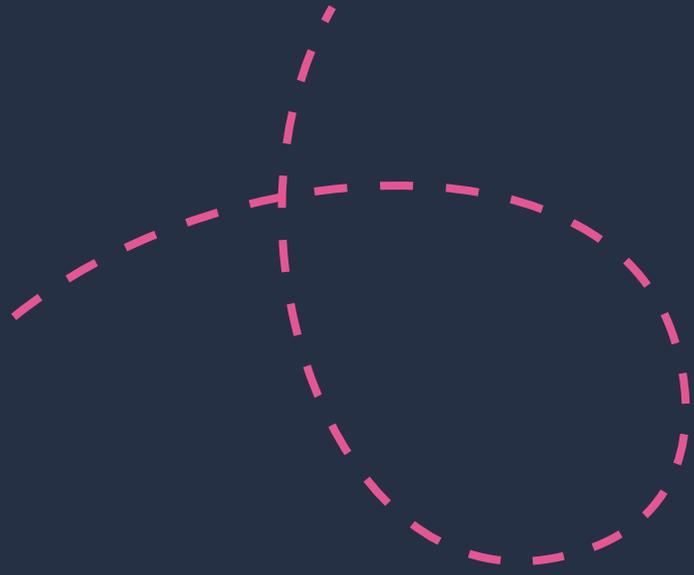


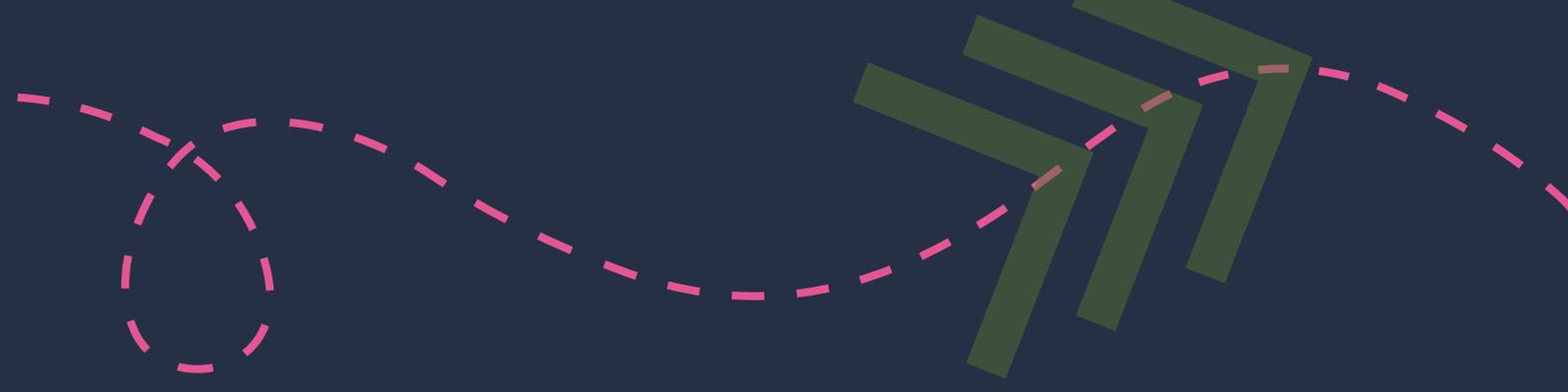
* AI OR NO AI?



There are already solutions that promise to detect AI-generated texts. One of them is the open source AI tool from the Nuremberg-based start-up Genaios.⁵⁷ Users can install the AI detector as a browser plug-in or web app. If they receive a newsletter, for example, they can not only see which text passages have been generated by AI, but also identify the tool used to do so. Genaios' success rate in detecting AI-generated texts is currently over 90 per cent.⁵⁸

Furthermore, it is important to note that the output of ChatGPT is only as good as the prompt itself. This should not be a surprise to any company in 2025 – just like the following things:

- Prompting may deliver content faster than independent research. However, this type of content can easily leave a negative impression on those who actually end up consuming it.
 - AI output is only well received if it bears close resemblance to the human skills displayed by content creators.
 - People want to read original, well-thought-out content. Yet AI-generated content is often based on a format that quickly becomes redundant.
- 



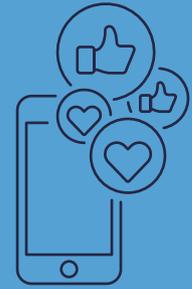
If companies still want to use AI for generating content that is crucial to business success and relevant to existing customers, they should:

- train content creators to become prompt engineers.**
- opt for the latest paid version of ChatGPT.**
- set up individual author profiles as part of their enterprise account.**
- see prompts as a starting point rather than an end point – as a guide rather than a rule, as a tool rather than a mouthpiece.**
- always have human employees approve this type of content before sending it to customers.**

»Generative AI is typically not suited for contexts where empathy, moral judgement and deep understanding of human nuances are crucial.«⁵⁹

Saurabh Daga | Associate Project Manager of Disruptive Tech | GlobalData

DIGITAL EXPERTISE ACROSS ALL CHANNELS



Social Media

On our social media channels Instagram, Facebook, X, LinkedIn and TikTok, 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 5,000 followers on a daily basis.



Digital.Business.Talk.

Digital business for your ears – trends, analyses, industry knowledge, technology insights and, most importantly, everything straight forward. Digital.Business.Talk. keeps podcast listeners in the know, whether they are on the road, in the office or at home – they can always get the information they need.



YouTube Channel

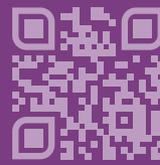
On our YouTube channel, you can get insights into dotSource projects and events. In addition, our digital experts at »dotSource Research«, »KI-News« and »Cloud-News« explain the basics for success in e-business in easy-to-understand videos





Webinars

Whether it is digital strategies 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.



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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 share our insights and ideas with over 7,000 feed readers.



Handelskraft Conference

Digital business is full of trends. Since 2016, attendees of the Handelskraft Conference have been discussing how companies can turn these trends into innovations. In spectacular locations, there is plenty of room for dialogue on real challenges and proven solutions. Since 2024, we have been presenting the Digital Business Award at the conference, honouring companies that use digital solutions to contribute to society as a whole.



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Clear. Easy to understand. Practical. Our publications such as trend books, white papers, success stories, cheat sheets 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.



RETHINKING TRIED-AND-TESTED APPROACHES

Customers do not necessarily stay with a company forever – quite the opposite. Once they are convinced of the quality of a company's products and services, they expect the same standards in the future – and not only that: They also want their love brands to constantly evolve. Companies can achieve this by:

- embracing loyalty management as an essential part of successful customer retention.
- aligning marketing content with the individual needs of their customers.
- using stories and visual content to stay in people's minds.

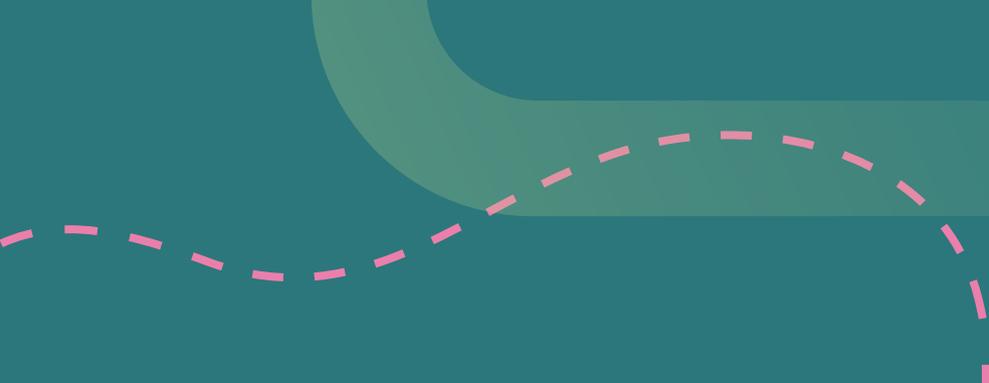
* EXISTING CUSTOMERS = WORTH THEIR WEIGHT IN GOLD

RETENTION MARKETING

Even without AI, retention marketing is one of the most important elements of business success – especially during challenging economic times, with:

- raw materials becoming more expensive.
- production costs skyrocketing.
- the prices of final products rising.
- the risk of switching to a cheaper provider increasing.

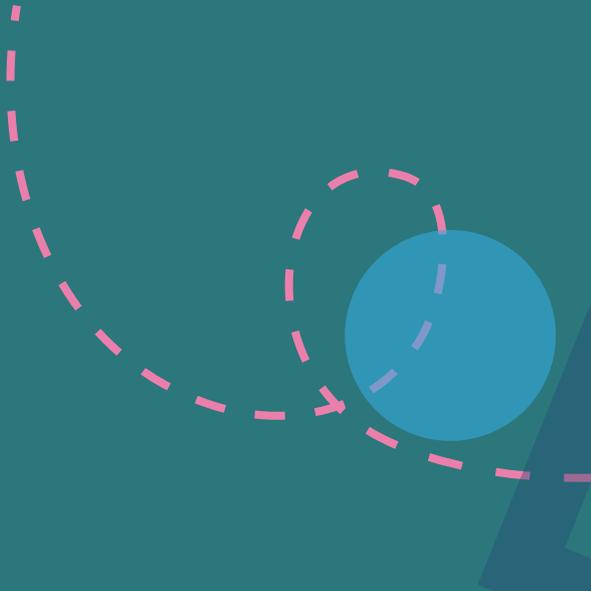
Now more than ever, it is vital to retain loyal customers, turn them into fans who make repeat purchases and guide them along their customer journey more effectively – through carefully curated content and digital offerings that only they receive. Companies need to provide them with content that proactively and transparently communicates delivery delays and price increases, combined with personalised promotions to show them that they are exceptionally valuable. Additionally, offerings that let them know that their concerns are understood, shared and taken seriously are of crucial importance.



Good reasons to focus on retention marketing:

- **It is 6 to 7 times more expensive to acquire a new customer than it is to retain an existing one.⁶⁰**
- **A 5 per cent increase in customer retention can boost a company's revenue by up to 95 per cent.⁶⁰**
- **Loyal customers are less sensitive to price, buy more frequently than new ones and give valuable feedback for further brand development. They also share positive experiences, are more receptive to cross-selling and upselling and thus provide companies with a solid financial basis.⁶¹**

Loyalty programmes, for example, are an effective retention marketing method, showing customers that they are highly valued. By joining such a programme, customers are informed of exclusive discounts and promotions earlier than others and gain access to special events. They can even collect loyalty points for every purchase, which they can then redeem for further discounts or products. These strategic measures encourage existing customers to make additional purchases, allowing companies to secure recurring revenue as soon as a customer signs up for a subscription, for example.



RETENTION MARKETING AT VILLEROY & BOCH

Villeroy & Boch also successfully uses a loyalty programme to retain its customers in the long term. Via the »Salesforce Loyalty Management« module, the premium brand for ceramic products brings together all relevant data in a CRM system – a scalable solution that not only comes with many useful out-of-the-box functionalities like templates and promotion options, but also makes it possible to extend the loyalty programme to other countries and target audiences in the future.

Loyalty programme members are divided into »Select«, »Premium« and »Excellent« tiers, which allows for a targeted and differentiated customer approach.

Depending on the number and volume of purchases, specialist craftspeople can ascend and descend through the tiers and exchange their accumulated points for a wide range of services. These include benefits that go beyond a traditional rewards system, for example website services and support in terms of social media optimisation.

Villeroy & Boch's sales activities are also supported, with sales representatives being automatically notified of upcoming tier upgrades and downgrades. They can proactively use this information to further improve customer communication and strengthen cross-selling and upselling.

No matter which retention marketing methods companies choose – one element should never be missing: personalisation.



PROGRAMMATIC * ADVERTISING



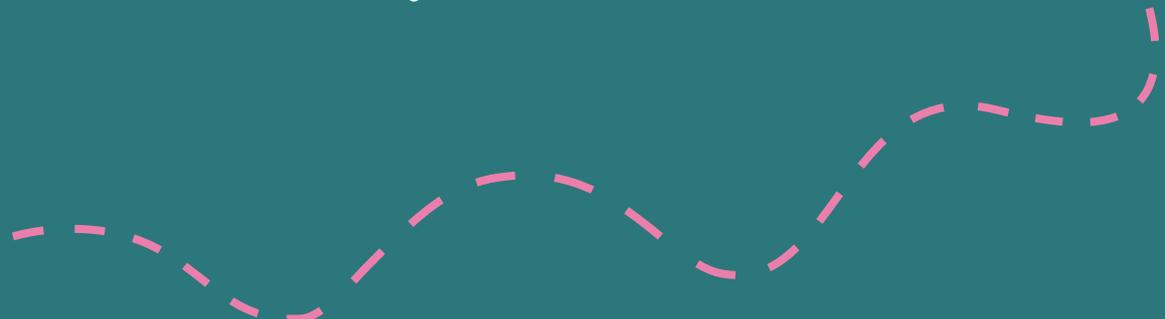
EVERYTHING IS POSSIBLE, PERSONALISATION IS NECESSARY

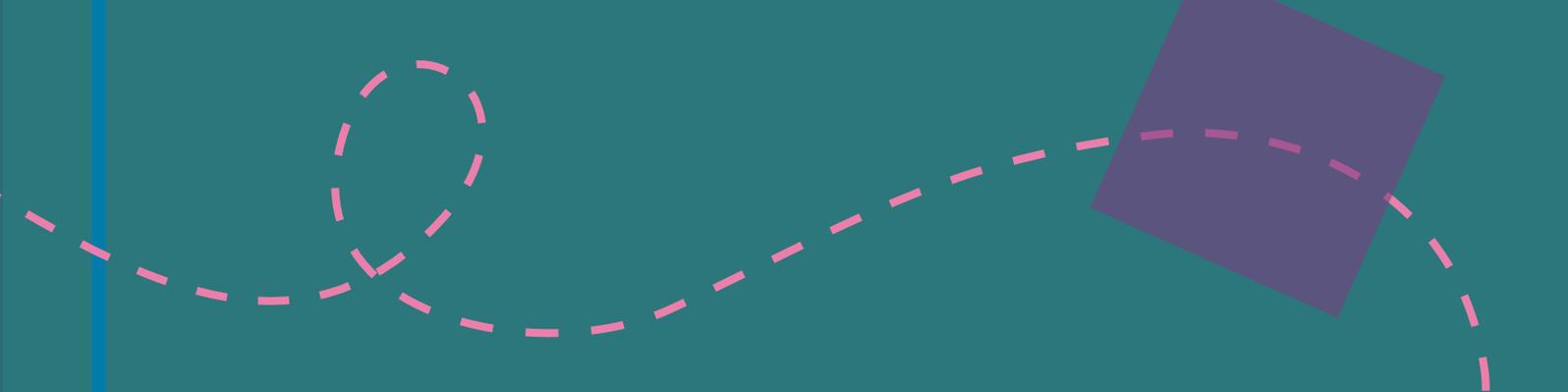
Today's customers have unique expectations – be it in B2B due to company-specific requirements or in B2C due to diverse interests and preferences. Knowing what target audiences need is essential in a business context – and offering personalised products and services is a crucial success factor. Deutsche Bahn and the B2B company Röchling show how to put target audience understanding into practice.

HYPER-PERSONALISATION AT DEUTSCHE BAHN

As part of its »No Need to Fly« marketing campaign, Deutsche Bahn (DB) relied on programmatic advertising, i.e. automatically delivering content based on algorithms.⁶²

The company wanted to convince people to travel by train within Germany instead of taking long and, above all, expensive flights. To achieve this, DB analysed the search behaviour of users when planning trips and pinpointed the most popular international destinations. Using photos of these locations, a custom algorithm searched for similar regions within Germany. The company then compiled a list of travel enthusiasts based on Facebook user data. With the help of geotargeting, the location of these users and the nearest airport were identified. Afterwards, the algorithm compared the price of flights to exotic destinations with the price of train journeys to lookalike locations in Germany – in real time.



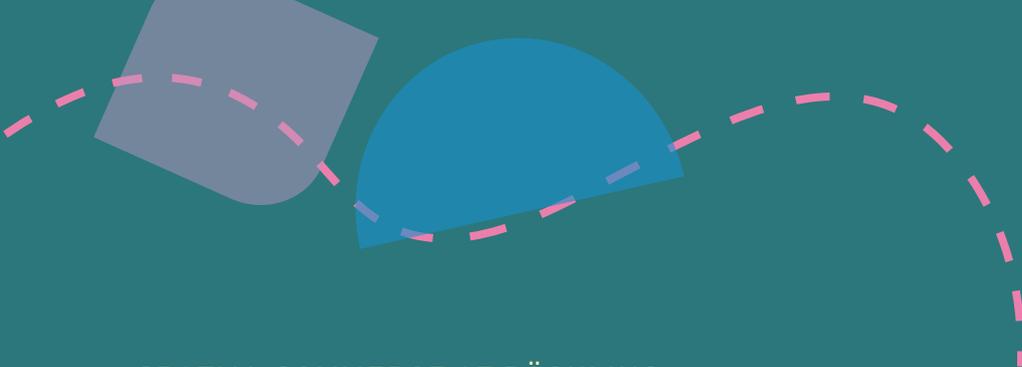


It was only thanks to Facebook's direct involvement in this campaign and strict compliance with GDPR regulations that such a highly personalised campaign was even possible in Europe.⁶³

Saving money while getting to know new places – a strong need among DB's target audience, which the company successfully recognised and focused on: The campaign led to a 24 per cent boost in revenue.⁶⁴

DB's marketing team presents users with targeted offerings that are relevant to them – without them having to do any research. This is a prime example of how hyper-personalised offerings can help a company reach its target audience at an early stage and influence their purchasing decisions accordingly.

59% of customers who have experienced personalisation believe that it has a noticeable influence on their purchasing behaviour.⁶⁵



SPATIAL COMMERCE AT RÖCHLING

It is not only the delivery of content, but also the products themselves that can be highly personalised. This is particularly relevant in B2B, as products usually consist of several components. Moreover, different companies have different requirements for final products.

Spatial commerce enables customers to experience such complex products in a virtual environment before ordering them. This approach uses advanced technology such as augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR) and 3D modelling. Combined with a product configurator, ordering processes can be significantly improved.⁶⁶

In its online shop, the plastics manufacturer Röchling Industrial Lahnstein SE & Co. KG offers customers an innovative cut-to-size calculator. They can use this tool to obtain materials in the specific dimensions they need

for their products. In real time, a 3D preview shows the selected shape, exact proportions and colour of the cut-to-size parts. Even complex shapes such as hexagons and octagons can be realised. As an additional service, Röchling offers the option of using a QR code to return to an order at any time and refine the configuration.⁶⁷

With this tool and the 3D product visualisation, Röchling has expanded its range of services while reducing the likelihood of incorrect orders.

»RÖCHLING«
SUCCESS STORY



Product presentation using AR technology increases conversion rates by **250%**⁶⁸

Almost **80%** of B2B companies are convinced that the use of product configurators will give them a significant competitive edge in the long term.⁶⁹

A product configurator can speed up the ordering process for B2B customers by up to **80%**⁷⁰

EMOTIONAL MARKETING

Most purchasing decisions are made unconsciously and are almost always driven by emotions – even if customers justify them rationally. This type of behaviour has been scientifically proven. Findings from brain research show that purchasing motives can be traced back to the emotional system. What this means for brands is that they need to emotionalise products and services.⁷¹ Those who have opened their hearts to a company are also more willing to open their wallets – more than just once. Brands can foster this level of loyalty primarily through emotional marketing.

»[...] when and what we buy is mainly determined by our emotions and not by rational principles.«⁷²

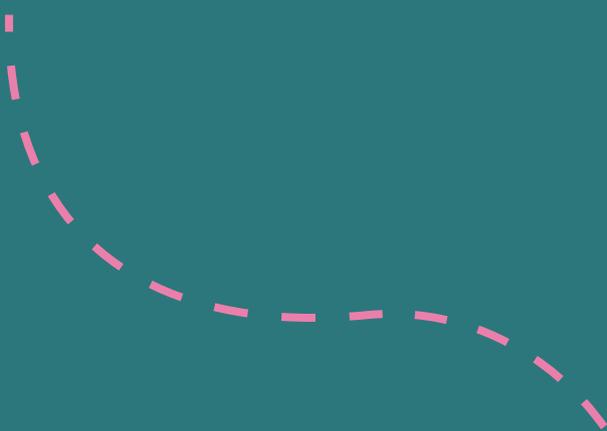
Dr. Hans-Georg Häusel |
Psychologist | Brain Researcher



TEAG'S DIFFERENT KIND OF BRAND AMBASSADOR

TEAG creates emotional value with the help of its brand mascot »HuBÄRt«. At trade fairs and events, he makes an appearance as a real-life teddy bear for family photos. »HuBÄRt« has his own Instagram account and acts as a mouthpiece for the energy service provider. There are several benefits to having a soft toy mascot as a brand ambassador: a greater sense of personality, increased approachability and a stronger emotional appeal. »HuBÄRt« explains topics related to the energy industry in an entertaining and engaging way so that everyone can understand them. Furthermore, he takes on different roles – that of a gardener, a cook and a traveller – so that everyone can identify with him. All of this helps TEAG establish a closer bond with its target audience.

Other companies have also recognised how valuable emotional marketing can be – just think of EDEKA's heart-warming annual Christmas advertisement or captivating messages such as Dove's »Real Beauty« campaign. Brands that succeed in evoking emotions strengthen their bond with customers and are rewarded with enhanced loyalty and increased sales.



»TEAG«
SUCCESS
STORY

THE POWER OF VISUAL STORYTELLING

Authentic and high-quality video content, regardless of the platform, generates more customer loyalty than generic sales pitches delivered via purely text-based posts. Instead of relying on slogans such as »I am your expert for ...« and ordinary selfies, companies should focus on storytelling – and stories are best told through audiovisual formats. This does not make text-based content any less valuable. However, high-quality copywriting paired with compelling images is essential. Consumer electronics manufacturer Samsung, discounter LIDL and telecommunications provider Deutsche Telekom – the top 3 brands on YouTube in 2023 – show just how influential unique campaign videos can be.

What did these three brands do right? Throughout the year, they published a wide range of different campaign assets, styles and formats, resulting in multiple appearances on the YouTube Ads Leaderboard, which ranks the most creative commercials each month. On top of that, their campaigns are characterised by the courage to try something new, take a clear stance and communicate with their target audience on an equal footing. In other words: They tell users' stories instead of trying to make a name for themselves. YouTube also confirms that these aspects significantly contribute to the success of brands and their video marketing.⁷³

* ON AN EQUAL FOOTING
WITH TARGET AUDIENCES

AUTHENTICITY INSTEAD OF NAME-DROPPING AT VILLEROY & BOCH

Samsung and LIDL work with celebrity brand ambassadors as well. However, not every company can afford the likes of Helene Fischer or Joko and Klaas. A celebrity bonus can certainly also be a reach bonus, but even a comparatively unknown video protagonist can trigger similar effects with the right story. Ville, Roy and Boch from »Hart, aber Sanitär – Deutschlands schrägste Bad-Comedy« (playing on the title of the German political talk show »hart aber fair«) are the best example of this.⁷⁴ The YouTube comedy format shows the three plumbers, professionals, friends

and fellow sufferers – as they call themselves – making fun of typical situations along the customer journey at Villeroy & Boch. Everyday challenges faced by the brand are portrayed in an exaggerated and very humorous way. These clips highlight how important it is to keep the focus on each customer's unique needs. In addition, they make Villeroy & Boch more approachable – as a brand that does not take itself too seriously, stands for superior quality, embodies tradition, understands its customers and is trustworthy.⁷⁵

Companies can boost the success of their YouTube content by:

- posting videos regularly and over a longer period of time.
- opting for a variety of format lengths (long-form videos, shorts and live content).
- featuring stories from their customers' lives.
- communicating authentically with their target audience.
- working with brand ambassadors representing modern values.

91% of online customers want to see more videos from brands.⁷⁶

89% of online customers state that watching a video has convinced them to buy a product or service.⁷⁶



NO MORE »WE HAVE ALWAYS DONE IT THAT WAY«

- DOES YOUR CHANNEL STRATEGY STILL CATER TO THE NEEDS OF YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE?**
- HOW WELL PREPARED ARE YOU FOR THE ACT TO STRENGTHEN ACCESSIBILITY COMING INTO FORCE ON THE 28TH OF JUNE 2025?**
- IS YOUR CONTENT STRUCTURED ENOUGH FOR SEARCH ENGINES AND CHATBOTS?**
- HOW MUCH DO YOU INVEST IN RELATIONSHIPS WITH EXISTING CUSTOMERS?**
- DOES YOUR COMPANY OFFER AN AUDIOVISUAL EXPERIENCE?**

HIGH FIVE FOR SUCCESSFUL COMPANIES

BayWa

HEIDELBERG

hessnatur

FUJIFILM



WÜRTH



Röchling

Angst+Pfister



Kipp



ottobock.

TEAG

axel springer

LEIPZIGER
MESSE

Netto
Digital

KRONES

ROSE

hagebau

Schneider

TROX[®] TECHNIK
The art of handling air

Messe
Düsseldorf

YOU CAN FIND MORE
SUCCESS STORIES HERE



PROMISING APPROACHES IN UNEXPECTED INDUSTRIES AND MARKETS

AI AND THE TRADITIONAL 4Ps

There is hardly a trend or measure for building, maintaining or strengthening customer loyalty that does not involve AI in some way. This is because AI is fundamentally changing consumers' search and purchasing behaviour as well as the ways of interacting with target audiences and customers – and will continue to do so. While the automation of processes is already a common AI use case for some industries, this

capability is opening up previously unimaginable opportunities in others. These notably include digital latecomers, where excessive manual effort, tedious paperwork, lengthy processing times and extremely strict data security regulations are not just part of daily business, but the essence of it.⁷⁷

Just think of FRAUKE – short for »Frankfurter Urteils-Konfigurator Elektronisch« (Frankfurt Electronic Judgement Configurator): As a pilot project, the AI-based assistance system from IBM handles mass proceedings related to air passenger rights at the Frankfurt District Court. Since more than 10,000 cases arise in this field every year, the benefit of automated processing is obvious – a benefit that few people would otherwise associate with legal proceedings: swiftness. FRAUKE offers judgement proposals based on past decisions, which significantly reduces the processing time in the preparation of judgements while considerably increasing the satisfaction of passengers travelling via Frankfurt Airport.⁷⁸

The insurance industry is also well on its way to replacing relics of the past with efficient, future-proof processes. Whether claims settlement, customer service or fraud detection: AI is transforming the traditional 4Ps of marketing (product, price, place and promotion) in this industry and holds the potential to create completely new business models.

Almost **half** of judges in leadership positions expect the use of AI tools to substantially change the justice system in the long term.⁷⁹

40% of German insurance companies actively use AI in their processes.⁸⁰

44% are planning to implement it.⁸⁰

PRODUCT

AI makes it possible to create dynamic insurance products that are perfectly tailored to customers' needs and risks. With Allianz Business System, Allianz has developed its own AI-based platform. It uses AI and machine learning to offer personalised insurance policies, thereby greatly contributing to the diversification of Allianz's range of products. By analysing customer data and behavioural patterns in real time, risks can be assessed more accurately, with insurance policies being adapted accordingly.⁸¹

PRICE

Dynamic products need dynamic prices. In the insurance industry, AI and predictive analytics are also revolutionising pricing strategies by predicting claims and optimising premium structures based on this information. Additionally, more accurate risk assessments lead to higher profit margins.

HUK-COBURG offers telematics insurance products as well. Drivers can access driving data collected by a sensor in their car via an app, enabling them to improve their driving style. Policyholders are rewarded with discounts on car insurance and lower premiums. HUK-COBURG has already sold more than 500,000 telematics insurance products. To take things one step further, the insurance company has established a data analytics department that analyses customers' driving data with the help of AI models. Machine learning is intended to improve the accuracy of assessments and make telematics insurance products even more attractive to safe drivers.⁸²

PLACE

Consumers are increasingly willing to take out insurance online. Companies such as AXA, which use AI-based platforms to offer their insurance products online and via mobile apps, not only make it easier to purchase insurance policies, but also facilitate the reporting of claims.⁸³ This in turn allows for faster processing times and reduced administrative costs. Moreover, policyholders can use self-service AI tools such as »Maya« from Lemonade to find out which insurance product is most suitable for them. All users have to do is answer a few questions about their living situation and past claims. The constant availability of such chatbots helps them save time and make the right choice.⁸⁴

PROMOTION

AI is also transforming the way insurance companies advertise their products. With the help of AI, Progressive Insurance, a US-based insurance group, analyses customer data and behaviour to create targeted marketing campaigns, taking into account information from social media, customer conversations and its CRM system.

By leveraging AI-powered predictive analytics tools, insurance companies like Progressive Insurance can maximise the efficiency of their advertising efforts and significantly increase their return on advertising spend. Furthermore, the AI-based personalisation of advertising content makes it possible to target potential customers more effectively, resulting in higher conversion rates and enhanced customer loyalty.⁸⁵

THE NICHE ADVANTAGE

AI MADE IN GERMANY?

Although a lot is happening in the field of AI, one question remains unanswered: Is Germany capable of becoming a hotspot for AI development? As things stand, most of the big players and leading systems are from the USA and China – yet again. There are ongoing discussions about whether the »German debacle« could repeat itself, as was the case with the emergence of the Internet, the rise of digital companies and the boom in solar power: Ideas, prototypes and technologies were developed in Germany, but only became business models in other countries.

Nobody wants to miss the AI train. The federal states of Baden-Wuerttemberg, Bavaria and Berlin are already on board. There are currently a total of 16 AI competence centres in Germany. With its generative AI solution called Luminous, the start-up Aleph Alpha aims to offer companies and public authorities a self-contained language model tailored to their needs – a promising project that has also been criticised. It has a highly ambitious goal: relieving the burden on German bureaucracy.

However, one pioneer does not make a hot-spot for AI development. Nevertheless, there is great potential for Germany to become an AI powerhouse, especially in niche markets such as the automotive industry, which is heavily dependent on innovative chip design. In places where demand is high, companies are more likely to engage in research and receive funding. Once again, Baden-Wuerttemberg is

among the pioneering regions here. In other words: Progress in AI development is set to continue in the coming years, but it will be limited to certain regions. That being said, the overall potential for Germany as a business location is tremendous. After all, it will primarily be the many small and medium-sized enterprises that will benefit from AI products and services made in Germany.⁸⁶



- WHICH RELICS OF THE PAST CAN YOU REPLACE WITH AI-OPTIMISED PROCESSES?**
- WHICH AI PROJECTS CAN YOU SUPPORT IN YOUR REGION?**

HIGH FIVE FOR ORGANISED SYSTEMS

»BETTER SAFE THAN SORRY« VS »LESS IS MORE«

* Keep an
overview

Maximalism versus minimalism – two opposing trends that influence not only interior design and fashion, but also the digital business landscape. The following principle holds true throughout: When we lose track of what we have or do not know how to make the most of it, we quickly become overwhelmed. At the same time, having too little can limit our options and unnecessarily complicate things.

This applies to both private and professional life. In a business context, the tension between these two maxims is evident when it comes to selecting systems. Many companies, under increasing

pressure to boost efficiency, tend to implement more and more tools. This often leads to situations in which employees and even management struggle to understand which systems are in place and how they can actually streamline workflows.

By contrast, other companies shy away from investing in new solutions due to tight budgets, relying on a single system for multiple use cases. These legacy solutions, while familiar, tend to lack transparency and complicate existing processes for business users.

Nearly **90%** of European companies do not fully utilise their investments in enterprise software.⁸⁷

For **36%**, the root cause of this is the lack of usefulness of certain features.⁸⁷

One of **four** companies want more comprehensive training to enhance tool effectiveness.⁸⁷

In private settings, this disorganisation might still be manageable. In a business context, however, clear structures are critical to success. Companies that maintain an overview of their digital infrastructure can:

- **ensure long-term flexibility.**
- **set budgets more accurately.**
- **systematically minimise additional costs.**
- **permanently guarantee data security.**
- **significantly reduce system downtime.**
- **make workflows more efficient.**
- **strategically enhance customer experiences.**

40% of companies see complex organisational structures as a cause for inefficiency.⁸⁸

Instead of rushing into digitalisation under pressure, companies should strategically evaluate which technologies provide the most value for their business. Before selecting tools for specific use cases, decision-makers should have a clear understanding of the systems currently in use, how they interact and what additional features they offer.

THREE STEPS TO DIGITAL CLARITY

Step 1: Identify

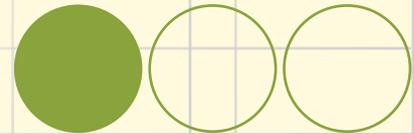
- Which systems and licences does our company already work with?
- Which tools and features do our teams actually use?
- What dependencies exist between our systems?

Step 2: Organise

- Do our teams use existing systems to their full potential?
- How can we ensure that those responsible know every useful feature of our systems?
- Can our existing systems meet growing demands?
- Should we cancel licences for unused tools and systems?

Step 3: Optimise

- Are all our existing systems up to date?
- Which use cases can we improve through automation?
- Should we migrate from existing systems to a new solution or implement additional tools?



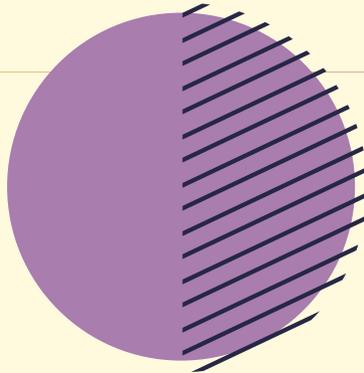
STEP 1: IDENTIFY – KNOW WHAT YOU HAVE

Only when companies have a clear understanding of which systems or licences are in use can they effectively evaluate whether investing in new solutions is worthwhile for certain use cases. Sometimes, an existing system can be used in a different way or expanded. This helps IT decision-makers prevent uncontrolled growth of their system landscape and ensures that tools are not left fully or partially unused.



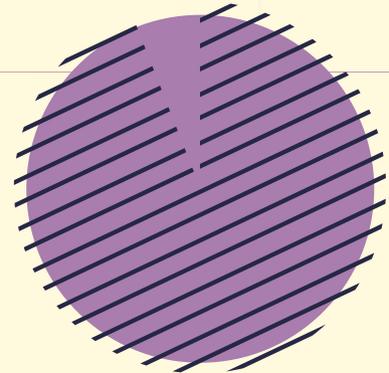
Half

of all companies worldwide have installed software or licenced software-as-a-service (SaaS) applications that they do not use.⁸⁹



95%

of IT decision-makers do not have a comprehensive overview of all software licences used throughout their company.⁸⁹



Companies that address these knowledge gaps can:

- identify cost pitfalls more easily.
- mitigate risks at an early stage.
- ensure full compliance with regulations.
- adapt flexibly to challenges.
- gradually automate processes.
- significantly reduce employee overload.

A data-driven system analysis provides a clear overview of existing tools and their interdependencies. This enables IT teams to uncover optimisation opportunities throughout the system landscape. By evaluating the requirements and processes across all departments, they can assess IT applications based on their value and effectiveness.

A system architecture diagram, consisting of symbols and lines that map out existing tools and their interdependencies, provides an initial overview. IT decision-makers and product owners in projects can create this diagram using collaboration platforms like Miro or Confluence.⁹⁰ By working together to manage and update the information, teams ensure that everyone stays up to date. When planning new digital projects, the diagram can help account for critical system requirements early in the process.

Explicit dashboard and reporting tools provide even greater transparency by delivering real-time insights into system performance. These tools allow IT teams to identify inefficiencies in software usage and pinpoint potential issues at an early stage. This eliminates the need for other departments to independently document their system usage behaviour and report it back to IT staff.

STEP 2: REFLECT – FOCUS ON WHAT IS IMPORTANT

In times of great political and economic uncertainty, companies have to cut costs or justify investments with the prospect of revenue generation.



» E-COMMERCE«
WHITEPAPER

»Increasing cost pressures are a significant challenge for many businesses, driven by rising energy and raw material prices, low order volumes and waning consumer optimism.«⁹¹

Constantin Gall | Head of Strategy and Transactions | EY

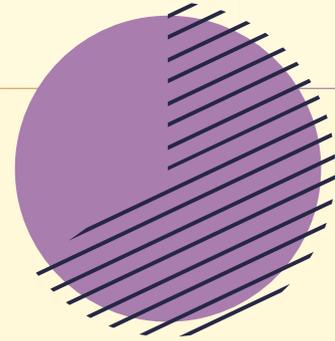
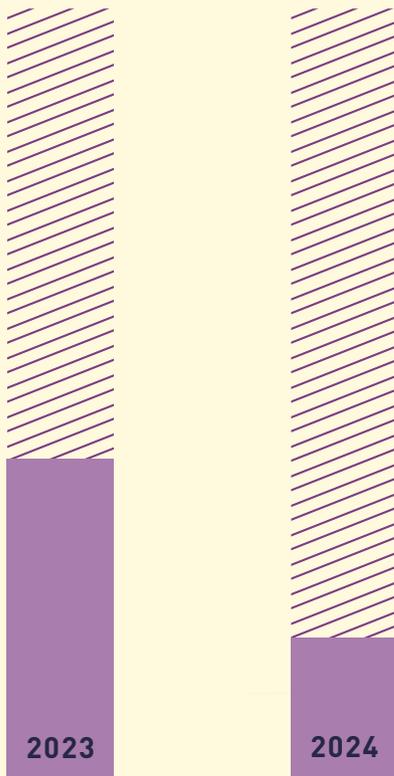
Almost **60%** of companies have considered the high production and labour costs to be an urgent problem for three years.⁹²

Around **one third** of retailers see lowering operating costs as a top priority.⁹³

37% of companies refrain from investing to avoid going into or increasing their debt.⁹¹

Nevertheless, it is important not to lose sight of long-term growth trends, as the decline in inflation signals a gradual economic recovery.⁹⁴

Only **24%** of CEOs perceive inflation as a major threat – compared to 40% in 2023.⁹⁵



67% of German CEOs expect an increase in global economic growth.⁹⁵

Companies that begin preparing for this recovery now, making strategic, well-thought-out investments, can gain an edge over their competitors when the time comes. To achieve this, they need to ensure that their system components remain as flexible and scalable as possible, allowing them to respond quickly to market changes.

The combination of intense cost pressures and the need to prepare for future developments is driving more businesses to move away from expensive and rigid licencing models.



ALL-IN-ONE SYSTEMS HAVE THEIR LIMITS

Cost-effective entry-level solutions, which are also easier to implement, may seem like a viable alternative, especially for companies operating within tight budget constraints. These e-commerce platforms provide basic functionalities that enable businesses to get started in e-commerce without extensive expertise. However, they are ill-suited for more complex e-commerce scenarios and migration processes.

As customer expectations evolve, businesses grow and other developments arise, standard solutions inevitably require adjustments. This often leads to the initially affordable alternative incurring unexpected costs, for example through the use of additional interfaces.

In addition, all-in-one systems often lack the security measures and maintenance features required for a solid system landscape.⁹⁶ Therefore, unless it is a market test, companies should – even under cost pressure – prioritise future-proof systems that are suitable for their own specific use cases.

B2B CUSTOMER SERVICE PORTAL AT BHS CORRUGATED

For the implementation of its own customer service portal, BHS Corrugated Maschinen- und Anlagenbau GmbH decided against a new, specialised software solution with an expensive licence. Instead, the service portal is an in-house development as part of the existing e-commerce system, integrated into SAP Service Cloud. This allows the portal to directly access information related to the machinery of each B2B customer, ensuring a modern service process. Rather than describing problems verbally over the phone, BHS customers can now independently create tickets and track the progress of resolution on the platform.⁹⁷





CONTENT MEETS COMMERCE AT ANGST+PFISTER

With a composable approach – the individual combination of independent solutions – companies can set up a cost-effective, scalable and secure infrastructure. This strategy helps them focus on the components they truly need for their processes at any given moment. Furthermore, it establishes a technological foundation that can easily be expanded as the company grows.

Angst+Pfister, a Swiss group specialising in high-quality, sophisticated industrial products, brings together Adobe Commerce and the content management system (CMS) from Magnolia. This combination can not only be seamlessly integrated into the company's existing system landscape, but also ensures convenient shopping experiences for B2B customers. Features include up-to-date delivery times, dynamically calculated prices and a product customisation tool for items that are otherwise unavailable for purchase in the online shop.⁹⁸

Thanks to the new architecture and its modularity, the modernised online shop helps reduce further development costs, as it comes with cutting-edge features and provides the necessary scalability.

Benefits of a composable approach:

- Powerful and flexible system architecture
- Reduced employee workload
- Minimal costs
- Short release cycles



* Specific requirements call for tailored solutions

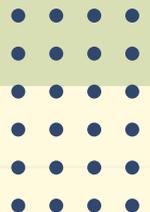
SOLUTIONS FOR EVERY INDUSTRY

Solutions tailored to industry-specific requirements are becoming increasingly attractive. SAP, for example, focuses on specialised tools for asset and contract management as well as enterprise resource planning (ERP). The US-based software company Salesforce, by contrast, offers industry-specific Commerce Clouds. These solutions cater to the unique needs of industries such as automotive, energy and utilities or financial services.

Pre-configured solution packages like these can be implemented much faster and with minimal customisation.⁹⁹ They are particularly well

suited when the goal is to manage as many core processes as possible using a single solution. One example is the energy provider Mainova, which has automated numerous internal workflows using Salesforce Energy Cloud.

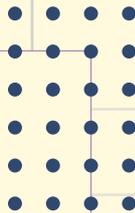
That being said, industry-specific solutions are not always the answer for every business within a given industry. If a company has highly specialised requirements, it may be more practical to opt for the standard version of a cloud solution and develop custom features to meet unique needs.



CUSTOM SALES SOLUTION FOR ENVIA THERM'S NEW BUSINESS MODEL

envia THERM GmbH is not only an energy provider but has also developed its own software solution for the energy industry called »connect enlight«. This system automates the transmission of data and measurements to energy service providers and enables remote metre reading.

The online distribution of this tool is a unique use case that cannot be covered by Salesforce's industry-specific solution, as many of the features included in that offering would not be used at all.



»ENVIA THERM«
SUCCESS STORY

That is why the energy service provider uses Salesforce Sales Cloud and tailors the system to meet its specific requirements. Thanks to its advanced contact and opportunity management capabilities, the sales process for »connect enlight« becomes much more efficient. For instance, envia THERM employees can better prioritise leads through automated categorisation and assignment as well as real-time notifications.¹⁰⁰

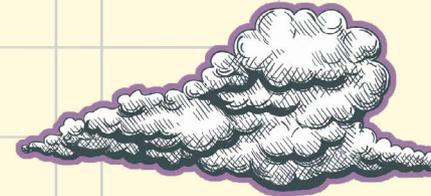


MANY CLOUDS, ONE SKY

An increasing number of system providers now offer their solutions exclusively as cloud-based versions. For instance, software giant SAP will discontinue support for its on-premises e-commerce system in 2026. This leaves SAP customers with two options: a cloud migration to the future-proof SAP Commerce Cloud or the evaluation of other e-commerce solutions.¹⁰¹

In some cases, however, companies do not need all the features a cloud portfolio offers, which is why they are increasingly opting for individual SaaS solutions. With this software model, businesses can flexibly subscribe to cloud-based applications accessible through the Internet. Pricing options often include subscription models or pay-as-you-use arrangements.

»KWS« SUCCESS STORY



MULTICLOUD SOLUTION AT KWS

KWS, one of the world's leading plant breeding companies, has already incorporated Salesforce Marketing Cloud and Sales Cloud into its system landscape.

For its entry into e-commerce, the company has also opted for a solution from Salesforce: B2B Commerce Cloud.

SaaS applications are experiencing growth rates like no other software model.
A growth rate of **18.9%** was projected for 2024.¹⁰²



To ensure seamless data exchange between the cloud solutions and other systems, KWS uses Microsoft's business intelligence tool. By integrating these systems, the seed company benefits from new opportunities for personalised customer engagement and lead generation. Tracking customer behaviour in the online shop allows KWS to deliver product recommendations and service offerings tailored to individual customer needs. This significantly enhances the consulting services available to farmers.

Hosting the online shop in the cloud not only makes it more reliable and flexible with regard to future adjustments but also enables more resource-efficient processes. This approach reduces long-term energy costs compared to on-premises IT hosting.

CLOUD-BASED SOFTWARE NEEDS GOOD FRAMEWORKS

Cloud solutions are only cost efficient if companies effectively manage their resource usage. Unexpected expenses, for example exceeding bandwidth limits or expanding storage, can quickly lead to budget overruns.

It is essential to keep a close eye on all the different solutions – not only for cost control but also for security purposes. When migrating existing on-premises applications to the cloud, a structured approach and the use of proven methodologies are key.

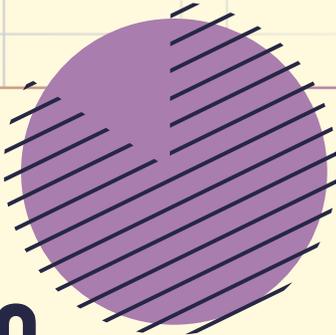
A cloud adoption framework can serve as a valuable guide in this process. The framework provides best practices, tools and checklists that allow cloud architects to better align various technologies and ensure their continued operation.¹⁰³

CLOUD, BUT SECURE!

One approach that explicitly targets the security of cloud applications is the use of a cloud-native application protection platform (CNAPP). This solution brings together multiple security measures to enhance the protection of processes and data managed in the cloud. CNAPPs are particularly beneficial for companies employing a multi-cloud strategy, combining cloud services from multiple public or private cloud providers.¹⁰⁴

Additional benefits of a CNAPP¹⁰⁴:

- **Prioritised view of potential threats**
- **Automated recommendations to reduce security risks**
- **Centralised monitoring of data governance and compliance**
- **Improved collaboration between security and development teams (DevSecOps)**
- **Enhanced visibility through the consolidation of security solutions**



Nearly **80%** of executives view cloud technology as a tool to reduce uncertainties within their organisation and mitigate risks.¹⁰⁵



»CLOUD SERVICES«
BEST PRACTICES

 Take a look at security directives

CYBER RESILIENCE IS EVERYONE'S BUSINESS

Cyber security is not just crucial to companies themselves. As players within the economic ecosystem, security vulnerabilities can also put customers, suppliers and employees at risk. Stricter regulations are raising awareness of the far-reaching consequences of business activities and demanding the implementation of specific measures.

The updated Network and Information Security Directive (NIS-2), for example, requires companies to report cyber attacks and thoroughly educate their teams about the associated risks.¹⁰⁶

Risk Management Measures for Preventing and Handling Security Incidents¹⁰⁷:

- IMPLEMENT FRAMEWORKS AND PROCEDURES FOR ANALYSING RISKS AND MANAGING SECURITY INCIDENTS**
- ASSESS THE IT SECURITY OF DIRECT SUPPLIERS AND SERVICE PROVIDERS FOR VULNERABILITIES**
- OFFER TRAINING COURSES ON CYBER SECURITY**
- ESTABLISH PROTOCOLS FOR THE USE OF CRYPTOGRAPHY**
- INTEGRATE MULTI-FACTOR AUTHENTICATION SOLUTIONS**

SUSTAINABLE DATA MANAGEMENT

New legislation is increasingly requiring companies to disclose and advance their sustainability-related measures.

These new regulations include the following:

- The German Supply Chain Due Diligence Act, which has applied to all companies with more than 1,000 employees since 2024¹⁰⁸
- The Right to Repair legislation, obliging manufacturers to offer spare parts and repair services from 2026¹⁰⁹
- The Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (in short: CSRD), which will apply to an increasing number of companies over the next three years¹¹⁰
- The Digital Product Passport (DPP), currently in the planning stage but set to become mandatory by 2027¹¹¹
- Industry-specific regulations such as the European Database on Medical Devices (in short: EUDAMED)¹¹²

Companies that know their systems and how they work have an advantage when it comes to meeting additional regulations. They can automate the collection of data from various tools and bring it together effectively.

If a **PIM system** is already in place, for example, it can store critical information such as the ingredients of specific products, which can then be used for risk assessment. Similarly, a **digital asset management (DAM) solution** can house essential assets like supplier certificates or reports, which are regularly reviewed and updated through predefined workflows. This approach ensures smooth operations, especially for companies collaborating with numerous business partners.





SUPPLIER-FRIENDLY ONBOARDING AT LAMPENWELT

With a dedicated onboarding tool, Lampenwelt GmbH aims to streamline the data management process for its numerous product suppliers. Internally, the company already ensures that all critical information related to its more than 50,000 products is complete and up to date by using mandatory fields.¹¹³



»LAMPENWELT« SUCCESS STORY



USEFUL ADD-ON SERVICES AT ANALYTIK JENA

The measuring technology manufacturer Analytik Jena benefits from the Stibo Systems solution »STEP«, a combination of PIM and MDM software. This system consolidates all critical information and assets related to product and service data from the ERP tool and product life cycle management solution. For customers from industry and research, relevant product attributes such as environmental standards can be defined. Additionally, information on associated training courses and seminars as well as accessories and spare parts is directly linked to products. This way, Analytik Jena not only optimises internal workflows but, more importantly, enhances shopping experiences for B2B customers.¹¹⁴



DPP = Digital Product Pass

TRANSPARENT PRODUCT COMMUNICATION AT PÖPPELMANN

While the **DPP** is not yet mandatory, it already serves as an effective solution for companies aiming to map their supply chain and present it to the outside world. Moreover, there is still time for businesses to explore various tools for implementation and identify the best solution for their needs.

Pöppelmann, a leading German manufacturer in the plastics processing industry, is currently conducting a pilot project to implement the DPP using the R-Cycle solution. For this, the company obtains data from Contentserv's PIM system and the ERP tool Microsoft Navision. As a result, the plastics manufacturer positions itself as a clear industry leader in terms of product transparency.

Companies that already document product information transparently benefit from:

- increased sales due to greater trust in their products.
- more efficient supply chains through consistent documentation.
- sustainable production, thereby aligning with the principles of corporate social responsibility (CSR).¹¹⁵

THE PURCHASE BUTTON IS ONLY THE BEGINNING

For **three quarters** of consumers, delivery time is the deciding factor in selecting a shipping provider.¹¹⁶

44% of all B2C online shoppers worldwide are willing to pay more for faster delivery.⁹³

In a study, **81%** of international retailers and brands confirmed that demand for resource-efficient fulfilment is increasing.⁹³





PARTNERSHIP FOR FAST DELIVERIES BY MEDIAMARKTSATURN

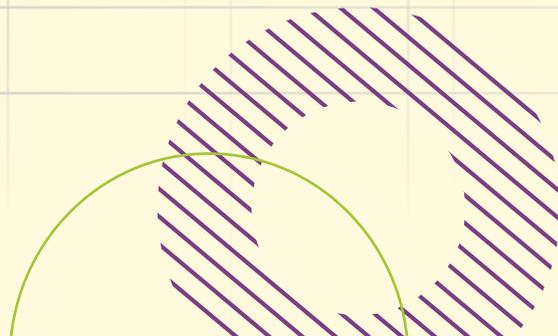
Fast delivery offers businesses a significant competitive edge. It is no surprise that MediaMarktSaturn, Germany's leading electronics retailer, has partnered with ride-hailing and delivery service Uber since April 2024.

This collaboration allows customers to have their tech orders from mediamarkt.de or saturn.de delivered via »immediate delivery« within 90 minutes.¹¹⁷ Not only does the speed of delivery appeal to customers, but the shorter, more sustainable routes from nearby stores also make this delivery option an environmentally friendly choice. After all, many consumers expect their orders to be delivered as sustainably as possible.

Additional digital tools manage the processes that take place after customers have placed an order, enabling businesses to meet these seemingly conflicting demands effectively.

ORDER MANAGEMENT AT SONDERPREIS BAUMARKT

It is possible to integrate the required functionalities into an existing online shop. However, this can be a time-consuming and costly undertaking when it comes to complex delivery scenarios. The German DIY chain Sonderpreis Baumarkt used the end of life of Shopware 5 as an opportunity to reassess its existing infrastructure and associated processes. Ultimately, the company decided to implement a separate **order management system (OMS)**.¹¹⁸





With an OMS, the company can keep track of stock levels in its over 300 stores – regardless of the e-commerce solution. Furthermore, all orders placed by customers – whether via the online shop or marketplaces – are fully processed. The solution acts as an interface between the shop system and the ERP tool.

This unified inventory management allows the company to optimise deliveries. For instance, a large order can be shipped from a single warehouse based on product availability instead of being split into multiple smaller shipments from different locations.

In addition, all returns are automatically recorded in the OMS, allowing service staff to handle them efficiently and manage refunds directly from the system – either through cash returns or vouchers.

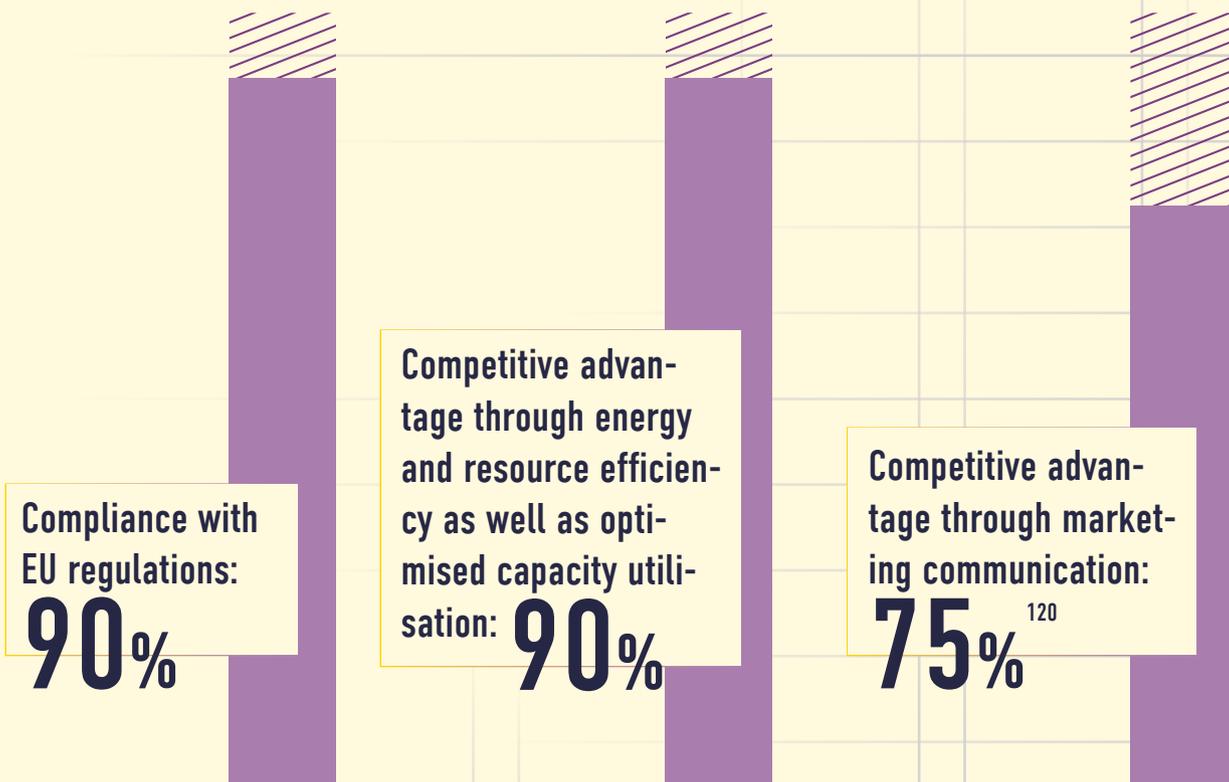
With an OMS, companies can:

- offer flexible shipping and delivery options.
- automatically check stock availability.
- set up a self-service portal for shipment tracking, delivery adjustments and returns.
- respond quickly to customer enquiries, as all information is managed centrally.¹¹⁹

STREAMLINING FOR LONG-TERM SUCCESS

Clearly structured system architectures, streamlined processes and well-defined responsibilities can help save resources and reduce costs. But that is not all: When companies have optimised their processes and systems, they are even better equipped to meet legal and societal requirements as part of their CSR efforts.

Companies regard the following as key drivers for implementing sustainable practices:



»Sustainability is currently one of the key issues across all industries - and IT is the critical lever for social and environmental transformation.«¹²⁰

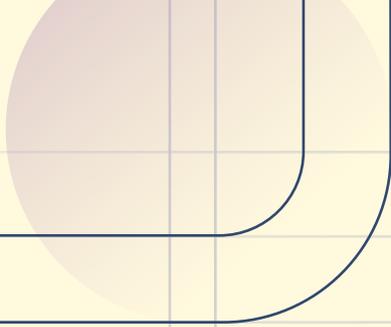
David Nogales | CIO |
Merck Life Science

By streamlining processes and systems, companies can:

- better assess the impact of their actions on society and the environment.
- meet the expectations of customers, employees and investors.
- consistently document sustainability measures.
- significantly reduce the carbon footprint of their software.
- substantially lower IT operating costs.¹²¹

More than **half** of all companies (53%) see rising customer expectations regarding sustainability as an opportunity for their business models.¹²²

Cloud migrations can reduce CO₂ emissions by **59** million tonnes per year, which is equivalent to taking 22 million cars off the road.¹²³



STEP 3: OPTIMISE – DEVELOP WHAT ADDS VALUE

Changing customer expectations, more efficient processes and long-term cost reductions are reason enough to invest in expanding system landscapes.

Instead of embracing digitalisation for the sake of it or simply following what other companies are doing, businesses should carefully evaluate which tools truly:

- MAKE WORK EASIER FOR EMPLOYEES.**
- ACCELERATE PROCESSES.**
- ENHANCE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES.¹²⁴**



HAPPY EMPLOYEES, HAPPY CUSTOMERS

The quality of work carried out by teams is crucial to customer satisfaction. That is why it is essential to support them in making the best use of their skills. Small tools can help accelerate repetitive tasks, reduce dependencies and visualise complex relationships.

EDGE DELIVERY SERVICES

There are often numerous process steps between content creation and the launch of a website. This is because content teams work across different documents and systems throughout the process. They draft text in a word processor, potentially transfer it to a DAM tool and then manually add the content to the back end of a CMS.¹²⁵

* Identify process
optimisation measures

With Edge Delivery Services integrated into Adobe Experience Manager, website managers can directly fill new pages using content from Microsoft Word or Google Docs. Headings, images and font elements are transferred from the original source.¹²⁶

Instead of spending valuable resources on manual content management, content teams can focus on what really matters: creating high-quality content.



PRODUCT INTEGRATION VIA APIS

For content managers to be able to make quick adjustments, they need to retrieve data from various solutions via the CMS and bring it together effectively.

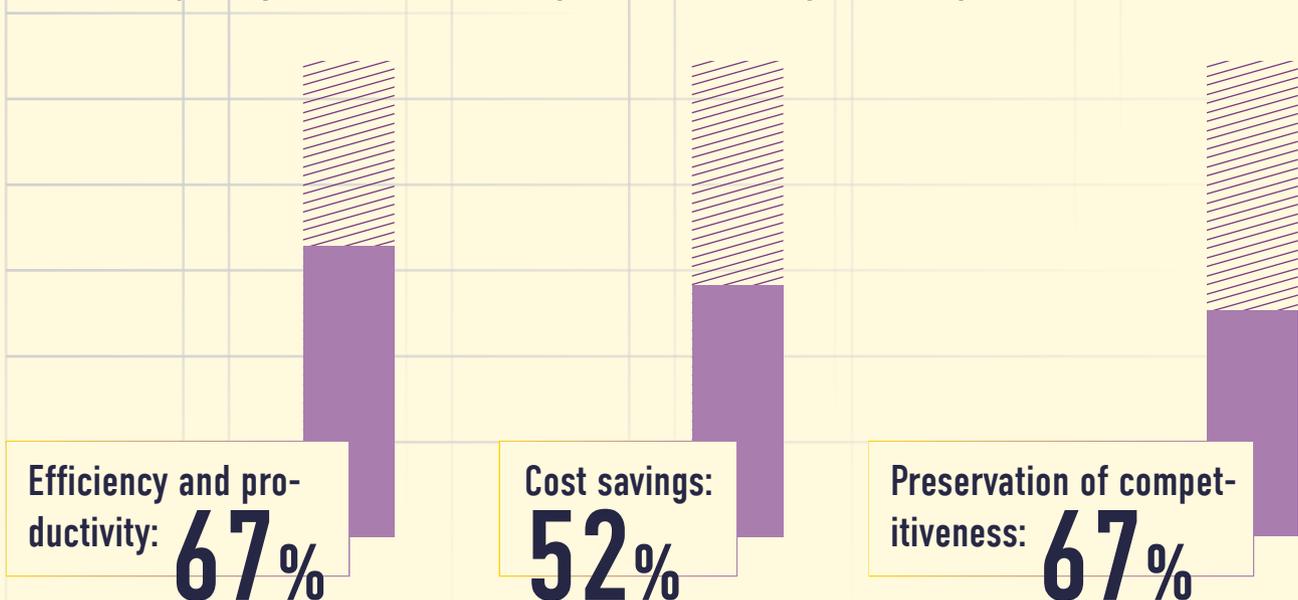
If an editor wants to add a slider or a list of new products to a product category page, for example, this can be done seamlessly using the Magnolia JavaScript Framework and the JavaScript UI module. This also allows for the integration of external tools, which in this case would be an e-commerce system.

VISUAL SITEMAP

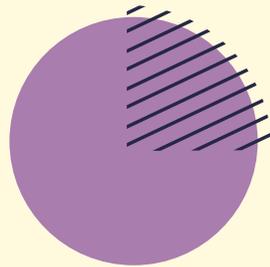
It is essential to have clear structures – not only throughout the system landscape, but also with regard to individual solutions. A prime example of this are sitemaps in a CMS, which typically represent a website’s pages and subpages using a tree structure. As a company’s service offerings expand, the website – and consequently the sitemap – become more complex, making it harder for content teams to maintain an overview.

A visual sitemap provides a graphical representation of a website’s structure, simplifying editorial planning. Content creators can, for example, create new pages and link them directly from the sitemap.

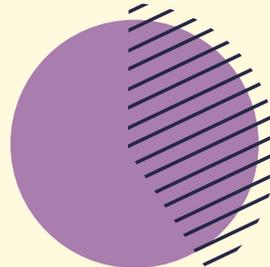
Reasons why companies want to change their marketing technologies¹²⁷:



How regularly companies assess their marketing technologies for potential updates¹²⁷:



At least quarterly: **25%**



At least yearly: **40%**

Challenges in the implementation or exchange of marketing tools¹²⁷:



50% cite budget limitations.



41% cite complexity of integration.



39% cite delays in implementation.



ORGANISED SYSTEMS BENEFIT EVERYONE

- DO YOU FULLY UTILISE ALL THE TOOLS, FEATURES AND LICENCES YOU PAY FOR?
- WILL YOUR E-COMMERCE SOLUTION CONTINUE TO MEET YOUR HIGHLY SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS IN THE FUTURE?
- ARE THERE ANY DEVELOPMENTS COMING FROM YOUR SYSTEM PROVIDER THAT YOU NEED TO PREPARE FOR NOW?
- DO YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TOOLSET TO COMPLY WITH LEGAL REQUIREMENTS?
- ARE YOU AWARE THAT A STREAMLINED SYSTEM ARCHITECTURE AND EFFICIENT PROCESSES CAN ALSO HELP REDUCE NEGATIVE IMPACT ON THE ENVIRONMENT?

HIGH FIVE FOR STRONG PARTNERS

TECHNOLOGY PARTNERS

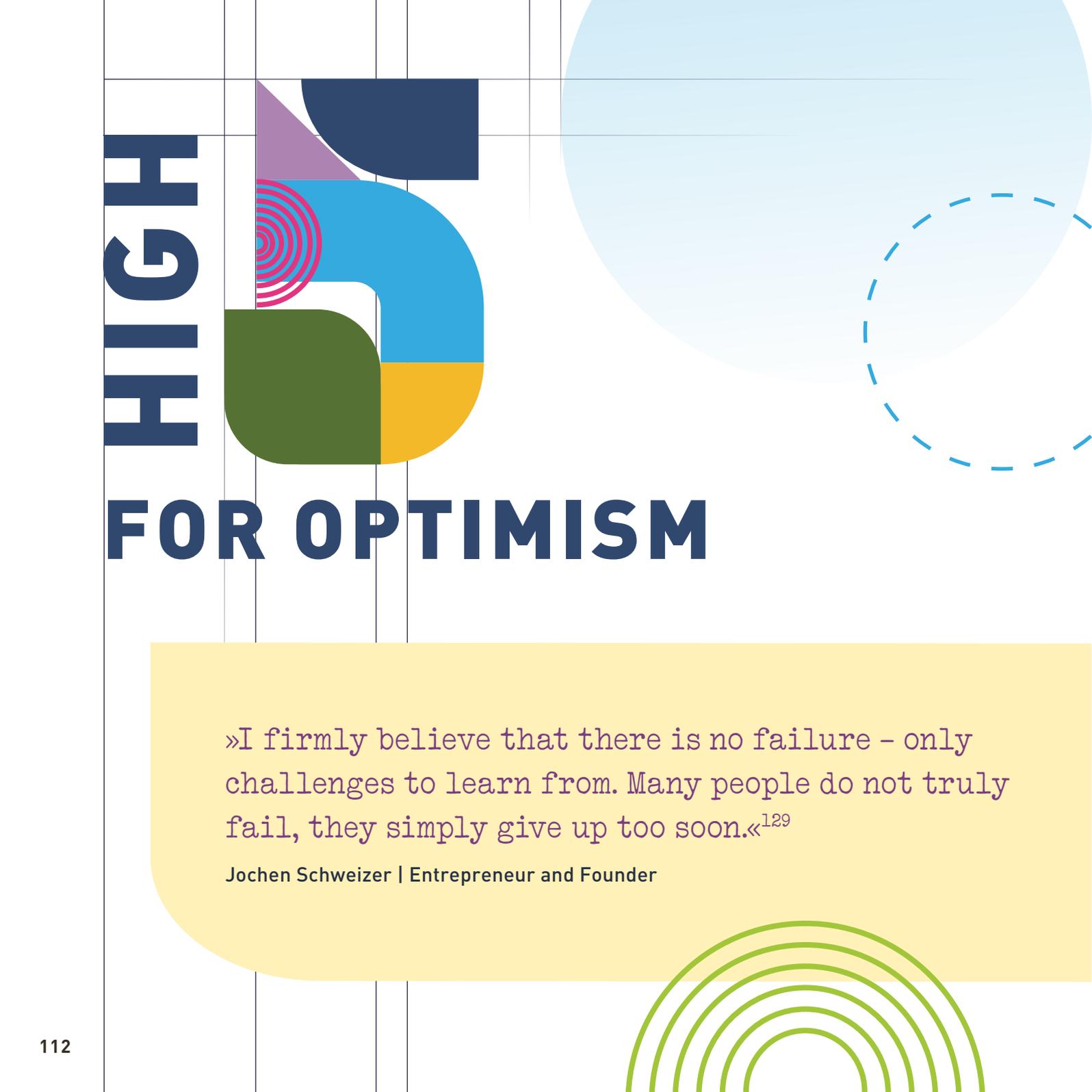


NETWORK PARTNERS



EDUCATION PARTNERS



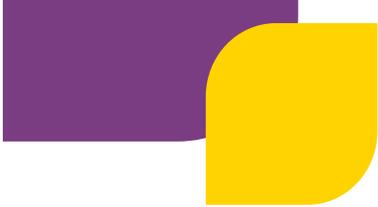


HIGH

FOR OPTIMISM

»I firmly believe that there is no failure - only challenges to learn from. Many people do not truly fail, they simply give up too soon.«¹²⁹

Jochen Schweizer | Entrepreneur and Founder



Optimism above all. A possible title for the success story of Jochen Schweizer. In 2004, he attempted to turn his passion for extreme sports into a business model, selling experiences as giftable products.¹³⁰ However, investors were not convinced – a setback Schweizer drew motivation from.¹²⁹ With the experience portal jochen-schweizer.de, he took his business idea to the digital world. Carefully curated and personalised offerings, which were also made available in store and via retail partners, helped Schweizer build a unique and strong brand. Even the COVID-19 pandemic, which seemed to leave the business model with no chance of success and caused significant revenue losses, did not slow him down. He once again demonstrated a »Still Day One« mindset, remaining optimistic and innovative rather than simply accepting the situation, waiting it out or giving up. Within a short time, Schweizer expanded his offerings to include digital experiences such as virtual cooking classes and online workshops. **131**

Jochen Schweizer transformed revolutionary ideas into a successful digital business. Not only because he believed in himself and his concepts as an entrepreneur, but also because he mastered the fundamental principles of successful e-commerce. He creates consistent, seamless and personalised experiences for online shoppers. He is committed to strong partnerships and benefits from collaborations. He continuously reassesses which tools, process steps and measures are truly necessary. This approach provides him with digital clarity over his brand empire, helping him understand customer expectations and strengthen his market position.

Business leaders who, like Jochen Schweizer, embrace these measures deserve many high fives. This is because they master even the most challenging business years, build resilience continuously and never lose their innovative spirit – be it in 2025, 2030 or 2035.

DIGITAL SUCCESS FROM THE FIRST IDEA – OUR INTEGRAL PROJECT APPROACH



Developing perspectives together
Digital Consulting & Agile Principles



Selecting solutions
Requirements Analysis & Assessment



Implementing digital projects
Individually & According to Agile Principles

**Data-driven process
optimisation**
AI & Automation



User-centred brand design
Web Design, UX Design &
Brand Experience



**Measurably increased
reach**
Digital Marketing



**Automatically distributed
content**
CMS & DXP





Making digital business scalable

Cloud Services, iPaaS & API Management



Expanding practical knowledge

Digital Business School & AI Seminars



**Data-driven
decision-making**

BI & Data Science



**Centrally
managed data**

PIM, MDM & DAM



**Digitally managed
customer relationships**

CRM, Sales & Service



**Increased sales across
all channels**

E-Commerce & Mobile Apps



**Personalised
user experiences**

Marketing Automation



ABOUT dotSource®

dotSource transforms companies into digital champions.

The owner-run company 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, conversion optimisation and operation in the cloud to AI consulting. 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.

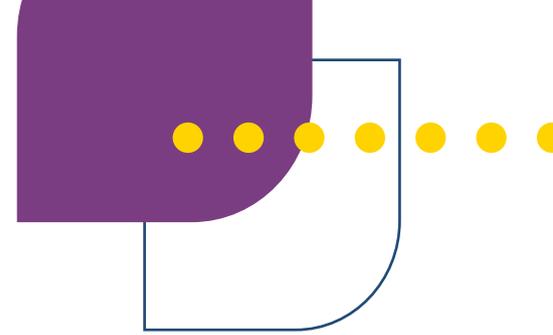
When it comes to collaboration, dotSource relies on New Work, integral planning and agile methodologies such as Scrum and design thinking. More than 500 digital natives see themselves as partners of their clients, taking into account individual requirements and living

up to the dotSource vision of »Digital Success Right from the Start«. Companies like BADER, hessnatur, BOGNER, 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 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 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 brought them behind the microphones of our »Handelskraft Digital.Business.Talk.« podcast. This is because the digital world is hybrid and agile: New technologies replace yesterday's hype, user behaviour and thus the expectations regarding digital experi-

ences change anew with every digital advancement. 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 to open up new digital horizons for companies.

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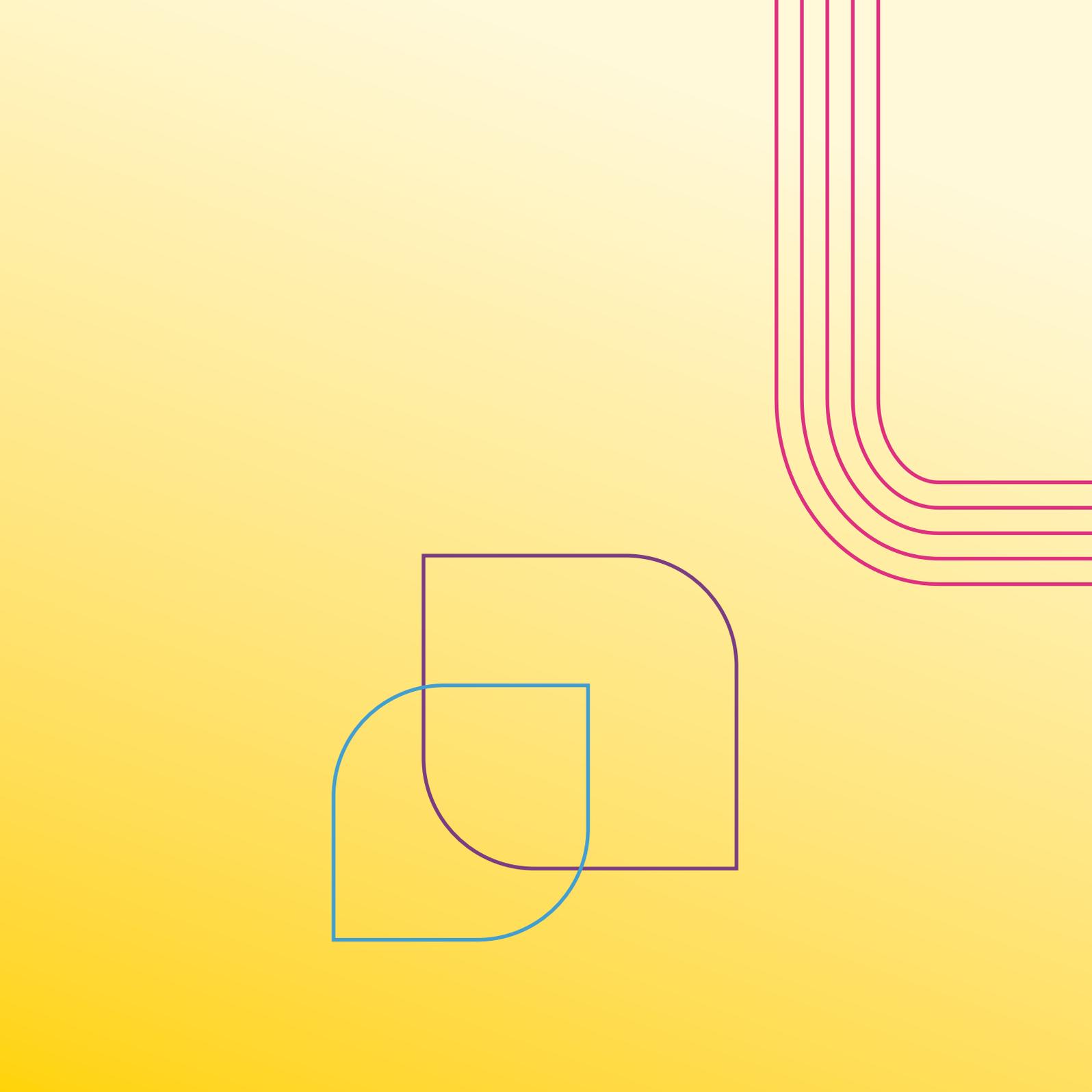
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