



E-book

Together we see
infinite opportunities.

The *impact* of digital
on your business.



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1. Introduction: infinite opportunities



Customers today expect a flawless digital user experience in all their interactions with your brand. From your online shop to your vacancies: a consistent brand experience is indispensable. But digitalisation starts from within. The entire business should be imbued with this digital mindset. Only then can you take the right steps in the different domains.

And if you are venturing out in the digital world, it is important to be up to speed and seek high-quality advice. With the right approach to your internal processes and your external touchpoints you are putting your company in pole position today for tomorrow's race.

Digitalisation brings infinite opportunities, which help tackle four important challenges:

- Building a future-proof company
- Growing brand recognition
- Developing a digital ecosystem
- Accelerating growth, based on insights

In this e-book, we take a closer look at these challenges and take you through what *infinite opportunities* means to us today, and which opportunities this vision can create for your brand or organisation.

Pieter Janssens
CEO iO

2. Building a *future-proof* company

Companies want to be relevant not only today, but even more so tomorrow. By working on new, innovative products and services, and improving existing processes and organisations, we ensure that they remain future-proof.

Today, the internet is the place to be for (potential) customers who want to find information about products and services. A meagre or, even worse, a bad online presence or user experience can be enough to make them reject a brand entirely. Today's internet consists of invisible APIs & microservices, and expressions in hundreds of touchpoints, including chatbots, voice assistants, (web) apps, etc.

“Digital transformation is not a technological challenge, it is a change of culture.”

The focus of digital transformation is not on where society is going, but on where it stands today. Customers have developed a zero-tolerance attitude towards digital mistakes and interact with brands in different ways. Digitalisation helps companies respond to these high demands – and even take it one step further. It is about an organisation as a whole, from the internal processes to the corporate culture.

Many people are not digitally literate enough to keep up with the evolutions in our society. That is why we have made ‘digital inclusion for all’ one of our most important social goals. We not only want to use our knowledge and capital to grow our business, but also to help build a community where everyone is up to digital speed. At iO we are always open to discuss our social impact with other companies and organisations. This way, we contribute to a better future together.



“Digital business is more than ever
a strategic *extension* of a company's
existing products and services.
Before, during and after the purchase.”

Real *transformation* is about creating added value

Many companies still think that digitalisation simply means setting up an online shop. But the benefit of true digitalisation lies in the smaller, smart ideas that make the customer's life easier or provide added value in another way. Especially in a B2B context, an online shop needs to be more than just that. It should be a service portal customers fall in love with and an extension of the processes used by the sales and account teams every day.

IT and marketing must work very closely together and involve all other stakeholders in the company in the transformation. Digitalisation can be quite complex. A few years ago, there was a clear market evolution in which companies would choose huge platforms, all-in systems that took care of the CMS as well as the online shop, marketing automation and dozens of other tasks.

Since 2019, we notice that this trend has been reversed (and exponentially so in 2020) and the giant platforms are once again being exchanged for an architecture and ecosystem of specialist tools, which communicate with each other through a layer of microservices.

Maintaining different tools instead of one large platform may not sound very logical. Nevertheless, in practice there are many advantages:

- The specialist tools behave like "little speedboats", each with their own product owners. This way, every individual component is very manoeuvrable.
- The ownership of certain tasks and objectives is returned to the departments.
- IT departments are no longer a bottleneck for maintenance, changes and expansions.
- Specialist tools provide room for experimentation. Adjustments can be made quickly in response to results, without affecting the rest of the ecosystem.
- By using a microservices architecture, specialist tools can be relatively easily inserted or extracted into the ecosystem without having a major impact on business critical platforms.

→ In short: this approach ensures efficiency gains throughout the organisation and creates space to respond quickly to a rapidly changing digital world.

Increased efficiency thanks to smart digital solutions

A good example of an online platform as an extension for the sales team is provided by our customer High Demand Brands, the exclusive distributor of various A-brands in shoes, fashion and sports. It is typical for their sector that collections have to be ordered in advance. That's why, in addition to a traditional online shop with lots of extras, we developed a tool for them that greatly simplified and automated the ordering of these new collections.

Product selections are predefined in the system based on historical data. Suggestions for products and quantities to be ordered appear automatically. In principle, all the customer has to do is confirm the proposed order, although in practice it mainly gives the sales team room to efficiently go over the offer with the customer. The increase in the number of digital orders is significant, resulting in significant efficiency gains for the entire company.



The API economy

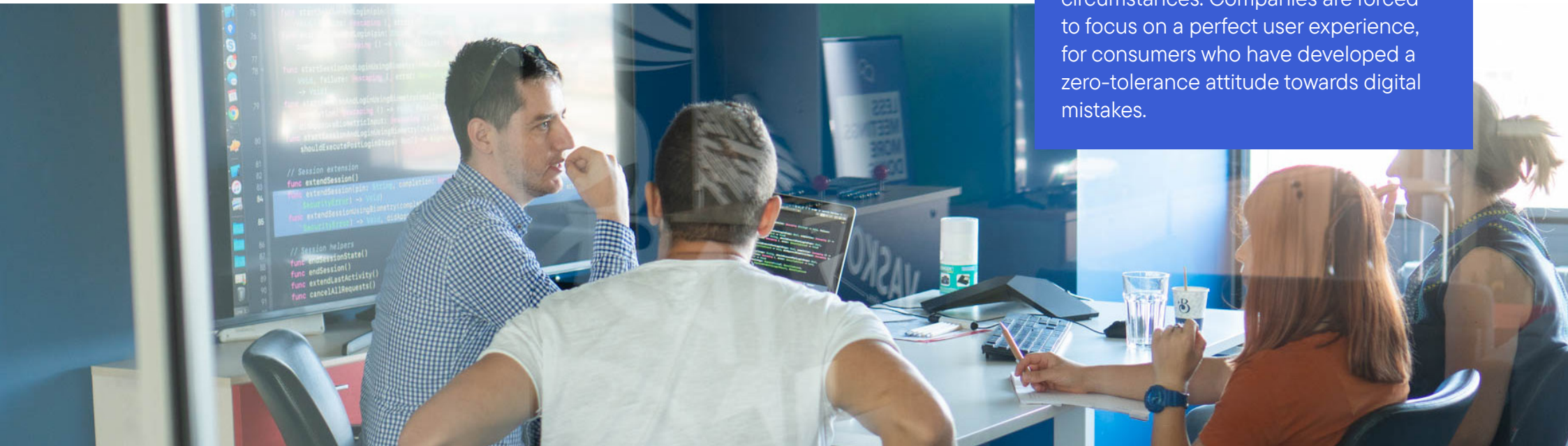
It could be a chicken-and-egg situation, but as microservices become more and more integrated, we see the emergence of a real 'API economy culture'. Platforms can simply plug into external APIs, from very simple VAT number validation (or even better: automatic data entry based on a VAT number), over security (e.g. with itsme® or two-step authentication) to loading entire external datasets that contribute to your customers' user experience on the platform.

More and more companies are opening up data feeds and APIs (secured, obviously) to their customers and suppliers.

Sometimes it is just an automatic exchange of product information between customer and supplier, but also automatically placing orders or passing on drop shipments can now be fully automated by means of APIs.

A microservice architecture also contributes to another trend. The difference between a website and an app is getting smaller and smaller. **Websites are increasingly behaving like an (installable) mobile app or PWA.** Progressive web apps (PWA) are often based on a headless approach to a web project, which in turn starts from a microservice approach.

Digital leaders easily adapt to changing circumstances. Companies are forced to focus on a perfect user experience, for consumers who have developed a zero-tolerance attitude towards digital mistakes.



E-learning and challenges in a *knowledge economy*

Belgium and the Netherlands are typical examples of knowledge economies. Constant training and keeping up to date is important for people and companies alike if they want to stay ahead. There are quite some important challenges and opportunities in this area as well.

Books are not the fastest medium when you want to keep up with digital trends. The classroom model is not equally suitable for everyone, and since 2020 it is no longer the preferred model. YouTube is a good source of how-to videos, but in a business context it has just a tad too little value or credibility.

E-learning and blended learning (in which offline and online learning methods are combined) are proven efficient methods to educate students and employees in a targeted and effective way. It is not only easier to keep teaching material up to date, it can also be fully tailored to the target group, using the right educational methods.

Large fragments of text are replaced by a combination of videos (interactive or not), interactive 3D models, intermediate quizzes and so on. Based on the progress of the 'student' (and a virtual engine filled with

big data and smart algorithms), the content can be customised and the learning speed can either be faster or slower. The student/employee can take up the subject matter at his own pace, where and when it suits him best. With better results and more involvement as a result.

In many sectors and companies, a minimum of annual training (or proof of knowledge) is required. LMSs monitor the progress of education and can generate certificates or evidence where necessary. When the (reliably measured) evidence of progress in e-learning is insufficient and exams are needed, you can now rely on online examination systems.

Current technologies and algorithms go to great lengths to detect and signal 'abnormal behaviour'. The LMS is the bridge between the e-learning platform, the examination system (whether or not integrated in the

e-learning platform) and internal HR platforms. All this preferably fully integrated into existing, secured online systems such as the intranet or extranet where the user regularly logs on to.

One of our customers, a large international facilities company, trains cleaners using VR technology. Cleaners are presented with a hotel room in VR and learn what is expected of them in a fun way. More efficient, measurable and cheaper than having to book a hotel room for a whole day for a training course.

We see similar applications in VR (virtual reality) and AR (augmented reality) to test knowledge of safety procedures in realistic environments (replacing a questionnaire on paper), or to train people in complex and hazardous industrial environments (e.g. the chemical industry).



5G opens new *perspectives*

Another new technology, 5G, is mainly seen as the future for connected smart devices (IoT, Internet of Things), self-driving cars, etcetera. You might have seen the footage from China, where miners simply operate large excavators with joysticks behind their computer screen instead of going into dirty and dangerous mines, thanks to the 5G connection between their computers and the machines. Easy access to screens and unlimited connectivity open up many new perspectives, initiatives and pilot projects.

In recent years, many companies have done their homework, redrawn internal processes and renewed or adapted IT systems to prepare them for real, visible, (digital) transformation.

Collaborations between customer and supplier are improved, run more efficiently and are even partly (or fully) automated. Communication is smoother, sales processes are faster and less prone to errors. In short, the relationship between customer and supplier is strengthened by the use of digital tools, which also increases the loyalty aspect.

3. Growing brand *recognition*

Every company wants to stand out in a highly competitive market. They want to stand out creatively with their brand, appeal to the right target groups, build campaigns and in doing so increase their brand awareness. So, how to stay relevant as a brand for the high demanding customer?



In developing a consistent customer experience, the focus is often on adding new functionalities and touchpoints as a result of service design. But it is also important not to lose sight of the brand experience.

It is our conviction that keeping your eye on the horizon helps you in your professional life. With insights from experts, opinion leaders, visionaries and pragmatists we provide inspiration and practical solutions that really work.

Uncertain times provide opportunities for people who are ready to think ahead and who can count on a partner to offer them a perspective of what is and what is to come.

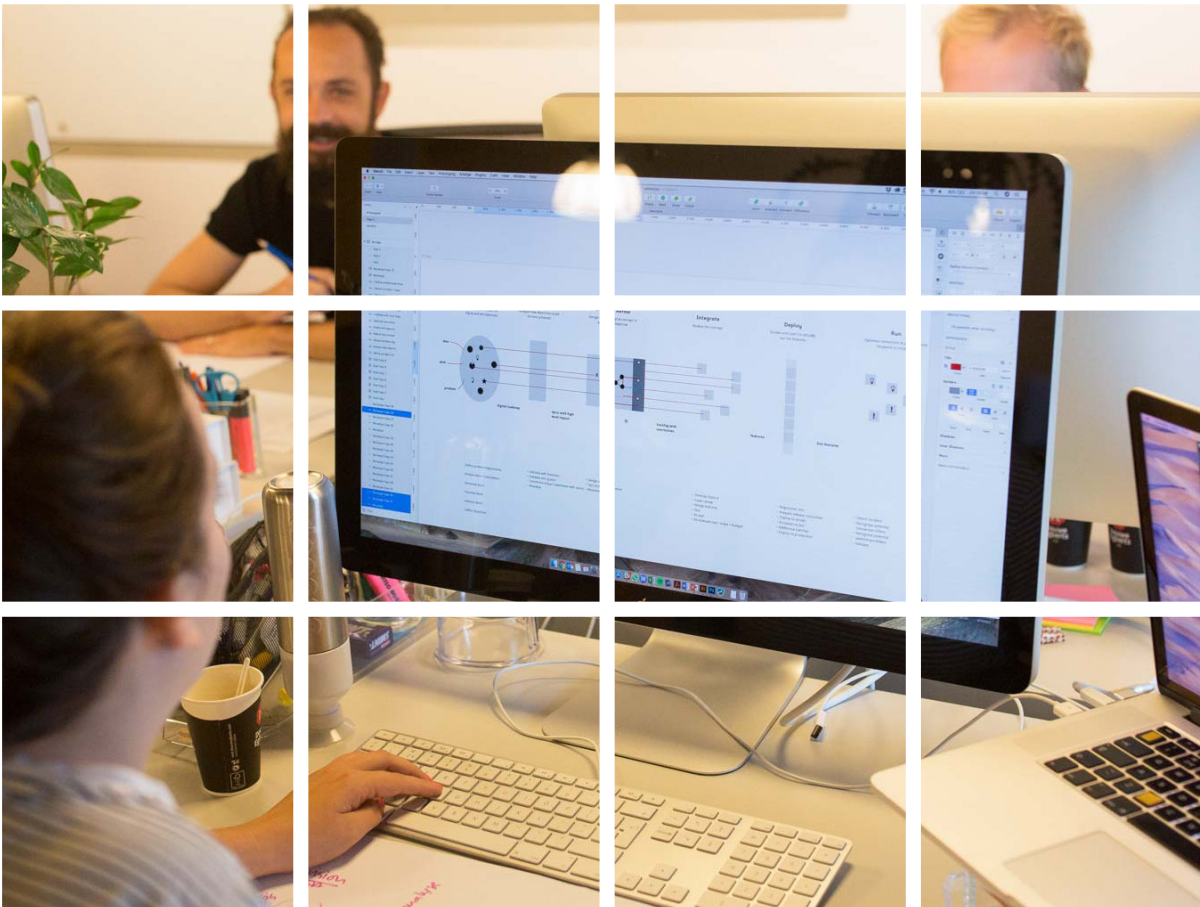
All touchpoints which the customer will at some point interact with, must have the same style and tone-of-voice. Whether it's the website, the app, in-store kiosks and other (digital or otherwise) touchpoints, the contact should always feel the same for the user.

But the brand experience, and therefore the consistent customer experience, is even more than that. Brand and design specialists now speak of 'the brand is the UX'. Freely translated: **the brand experience and customer experience merge into each other.**

Brands used to appear mainly in commercials on TV, radio or the printed press. Now that the user interacts with these brands in more ways than ever before, the brand experience actually sneaks in through different touchpoints. User experience and brand experience are increasingly merging.

“While branding has been around since people began buying and trading goods, the definition has evolved in the Digital Age. Consumers now have a wider range of *interaction* with companies and *greater choice* in product selection. Today, a brand is the holistic sum of customers’ experiences, composed of visual, tonal and behavioral brand components, many of which are *shaped* by interaction design.”

A design system as a digital style library



A design system can be seen as an interactive translation of the house style guide. It contains all the digital elements that make a brand shine through in different touchpoints. Think for example of fonts, the layout of buttons on websites and in apps, but also styles of transitions, animations and interactive elements. Digital platforms such as websites, apps and kiosks, automatically plug into this library of elements so that changes are immediately active everywhere.

Employer branding: *recruitment and retention of talent*

In order to continue to grow, it is essential to keep talent on board and to attract the best new recruits. If a company also wants to remain at the head of the pack in terms of HR, then the right digital approach is indispensable.

How potential employees come into contact with the company of their dreams has changed dramatically. Successful HR departments stand out from the crowd with a strong recruitment strategy on various channels. Initiatives such as Google for Jobs will change the recruitment playing field again.

This evolution makes the HR strategy a bit more complex, because companies have to make the right choices in the available channels, from recruiters & headhunters to paying LinkedIn

subscriptions and a job site optimised for Google for Jobs. The advantage: you can achieve better results thanks to the extreme flexibility and measurability of these digital technologies. Finding the right candidates is one thing, convincing them to choose you is another one entirely.

People today also attach great importance to the social impact that companies have. So – not only in the context of HR – highlight the steps your organisation takes in the area of corporate social responsibility (CSR).



4. Developing a digital *ecosystem*

Digital ecosystems are increasingly at the heart of organisations. This requires robust systems in solid technologies. Systems that companies can scale, link with other systems, continuously improve and easily expand, with the end users always at the centre.

Digitalisation ensures that companies have everything they need to provide an optimal customer experience. Today and tomorrow. It doesn't really matter what you want to call this transformation. It's about how the entire company needs to be imbued with this mindset, and about making specific adjustments to operations.

Zero tolerance for digital mistakes

With their excellent online services in the past, digital pioneers have created a zero-tolerance attitude for digital mistakes among their customers.

As users, we no longer accept that the website of a public transport company is temporarily inaccessible or that the app displays incorrect schedules of trains, trams and buses. We no longer accept that companies and stores do not have their offer online, and we also want to be able to check the stock status in real time. We no longer accept that we can't track our online orders with track&trace up to our doorstep.

But this zero-tolerance attitude has also become a major challenge in B2B. B2B customers are also ordinary B2C users when they get home, and they expect the same in their professional lives. They want online self-service portals to place (re)orders and download invoices and they expect access to a database where they can find technical product sheets, 3D drawings and commercial images when they need it.

Whether B2B or B2C, customers want to be able to complete their customer journey smoothly and without obstacles.

“Digitalisation is about a unified customer experience, online and offline.”

User and business *expectations*

Meeting the expectations of users does not have to be difficult. For example, take an average website or online shop. A user expects it to:

- be user-friendly
- work flawlessly
- be found easily via search engines
- be complete
- be easy to navigate, making it possible to reach the right page with a maximum of 3 clicks
- meet the user's top tasks
- comply with the law (e.g. GDPR, cookies, economic legislation ...)
- look nice
- be available in the language of the user
- be up to date and topical

However, the same website must also meet the (justified) requirements of internal stakeholders. For them, the website also needs to:

- be interactive
- be provided with marketing automation
- measure and report everything correctly
- be provided with A/B testing and conversion optimisation
- be connected to internal systems such as ERP, CRM, PIM ...
- offer possibilities for personalisation, if at all possible



And we haven't even talked about the **internal battle between different departments**, about what should be above the fold on the homepage.

A zero-tolerance attitude towards digital mistakes is where it all starts, but it is actually part of a greater expectation: **a unified and flawless customer experience**. This is the field where winners stand out from the rest.

- In this challenge the digital aspect has quite a substantive, yet not overall, share. The obvious, digital examples are again numerous.
- The self-service environment of your energy supplier, where you can not only download your bills, but also manage your monthly advance payments.
- Online checking of available stock of a certain product in different branches of a store.
- Detailed tracking of your online order, including live tracking of the parcel service until the parcel is on your doorstep.
- The presence of a live chat or online customer support that can really help you in the short time.

Digitalisation, however, is about the bigger picture, **it also includes the offline customer experience**. Therefore, in a transformation process, operational business procedures often require to be adjusted or even completely reworked in order to guarantee smooth operations in all areas.

Picking up an online order in a certain time slot should go fast and smooth and should not take more than a few minutes. In-store purchases have to be added to my online loyalty card. And vice versa. Just like your online and offline shopping history should not be two separate things. Again, these examples are the minimum a customer expects.





A continuous *conversation* with customers

In recent years, the focus of many customer services has shifted from telephone contact to support via social media. Customers increasingly expect brands to be present (almost) everywhere.

All those extra channels don't have to be a major attack on the workload of the customer service department. Technologies such as chatbots are now developed to a point where they can handle first-line questions completely independently, also in Flemish and Dutch.

Voice assistants such as in Google Home, Apple HomePod or new Sonos devices are not common practice yet, but the time is ripe to start cautious experiments and stay ahead of the competition.

Promising *new* technologies

In the meantime, promising technologies from a few years ago are now really becoming usable. JavaScript-based 3D engines provide fantastic 3D options in the web browser, complemented by virtual reality and augmented reality. This opens up many possibilities for online visual configurators and product configurators (e.g. garden greenhouses, drawers, furniture ...).

Also progressive web apps (PWAs), the technology that allows **websites to work as an app** on mobile devices, continues to gain popularity and is increasingly replacing expensive app development. For example, offline use, push notifications and 'app-like' behaviour (e.g. the fact that pages do not need to be refreshed to display new content) are now also possible with responsive websites.

As mentioned earlier, there are also **new channels that bring new opportunities**.

Besides Facebook Shops and the opportunities on marketplaces like Bol.com and Amazon, we see other **interesting trends emerging** for retailers.

Live e-commerce, a kind of interactive shopping channel or TellSell via a livestream on the internet, was already extremely popular in Asia and is now also gaining popularity in the United States due to, for example, the efforts made by Amazon Live.

When deploying new technologies the most important thing is to make sure that **value is added for the user**. A good example is the Coolblue app. If you want to buy a new TV, the model you are interested in can be positioned live on your own TV stand via augmented reality. Are you in doubt about the right size? The visualization in your own living room, by means of the app, helps you choose.

The *benefits* of a 100% digital order intake

Many B2B companies aspire to have a 100% digital order intake. Not by offering all kinds of incentives and discounts for those who order online, but by making the platform so simple and user-friendly that customers no longer want to order in any other way.

For example, **High Demand Brands' online platform** is full of small, logical functionalities that create great added value for their customers, yet are lacking in most B2B online shops. Datafeeds of all products are available in the most common formats so that High Demand Brands' customers can easily add products to their own B2C online shops.

Technical data sheets and media files can be downloaded automatically per order with the click of a button. An integrated chat tool ensures that the customer remains in constant contact with his representative.

All in all, striving for a 100% digital order intake has nothing but advantages:

- Customer services and sales reps are relieved of repetitive tasks and can free up time for truly valuable customer relationships and help;
- Efficiency gains in various areas, and thus more profit in the end;
- Self-service gives the customer more freedom;
- Fewer wrong orders (wrong manual entry by employees);
- Higher speed (lead time of orders, processing of administration ...);
- Automation of the production and logistics process;
- ...

Online platforms: *scalable* and more *reliable* than ever

Thanks to the cloud evolution, the applications we build are **faster, more reliable and more scalable than ever**. Cloud technology goes beyond simply 'hosting' your applications and platforms. Thanks to the cloud, cutting-edge technology such as machine learning, artificial recognition, automatic document organisation based on content and dozens of other smart algorithms are now within reach of just about all businesses.

Thanks to that high reliability and employability (even in Dutch), companies can now make data analyses that used to be out of reach, or automate tasks that contribute to efficiency gains. You don't have to program new algorithms or develop machine learning yourself. The major cloud providers such as Google, Microsoft and Amazon offer pre-programmed algorithms and intelligence that allow you to get started almost immediately.

Imagine, for example, video recognition with artificial intelligence, which can ensure that apples and pears are sorted automatically. **Artificial intelligence will not easily replace people, but it will replace certain tasks.**



5. Accelerating *growth* based on insights

By making smart use of data and standing out with creative concepts, content and campaigns, at every step of the marketing funnel, companies can grow smartly and thus achieve their business goals.

With Infinite Opportunities, we want to communicate a clear vision on how companies today can provide answers to tomorrow's questions.

It is a vision of a world in which technology helps brands and organisations to simplify their operations, from internal processes to external communication. To make sure they can create powerful, meaningful experiences that make everyone's life more enjoyable. Including ours. People expect companies to make the right choices.

One of the fastest evolving branches of transformation is undoubtedly marketing. The basis of a good marketing plan lies in a sophisticated marketing strategy, with well-defined budgets and a well-considered choice of measurement points and parameters.

Digital *experimentation* helps innovation

A good marketer dedicates part of his marketing budget each year to experimentation with new channels. Online marketing is more accessible, but also more measurable than ever. The risks are therefore rather low. Experimenting and measuring are best practices among digital leaders.

This is the only way to discover which less obvious Pinterest ads, spots on Spotify or prerolls on YouTube (the largest and cheapest television channel in Belgium in terms of advertising) turn out to be a direct hit for your strategy.

Is it still wise to send the printed catalogue to our customers by post? Do we still have to do that ad in that magazine? Or do we still have to give a large part of our marketing budget to that fair stand? Today, those questions can be answered with hard facts.



Digital alternatives cause *budget shifts*

A specific example: trade fairs. They were cancelled because of the corona crisis, a perfect moment to review that often quite large budget. At a trade fair, companies invest several tens of thousands of euros (or more) to get in touch with at most a few thousand potentially interested customers in a few days, at one particular location. This results in barely a few hundred contact details, and every ten or so metres the potential customers are addressed by a different competitor.

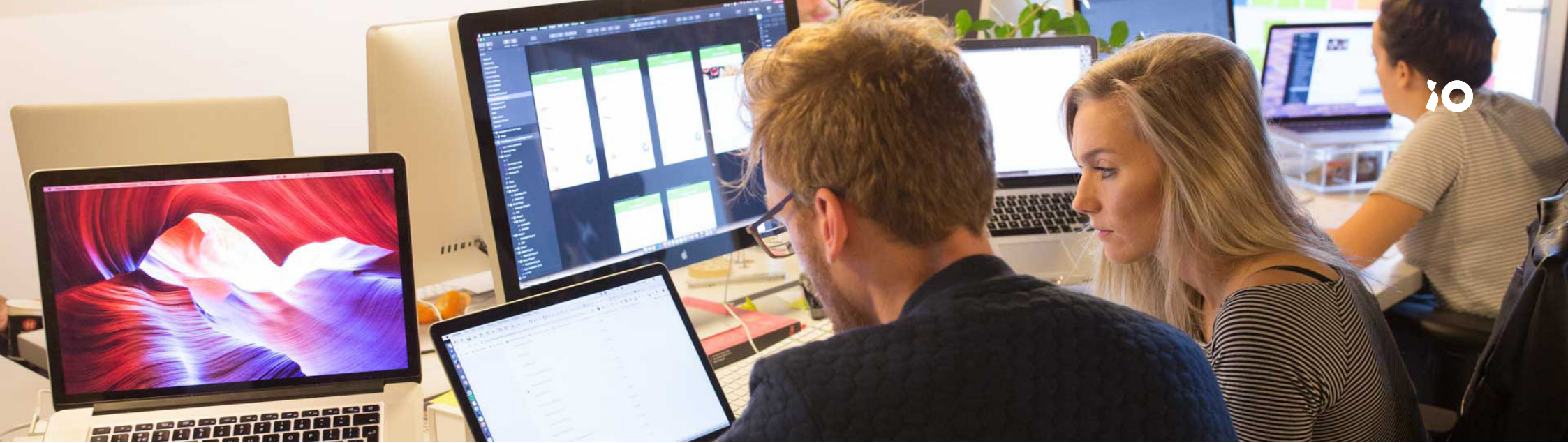
Companies could also invest that amount to get in touch with a multiple of those potentially interested, spread over a whole year and in the global regions that are important to their business. They can feed each of those contacts with useful information and build a constructive relationship with them thanks to remarketing.

Fairs have not necessarily lost their use, but it is about the choice between a one-shot and an always-on strategy. Investing in a solid online presence with extensive product information, an extreme user experience and state-of-the art marketing technology setup will never be the wrong choice.

The importance of *storing data* the right way

Remarkably few companies today succeed in storing the right data in a structured and workable way and are able to actually do something valuable with it. A comprehensive Customer Data Platform (CDP) helps organisations to get a complete picture of their customers so that they can offer them a hyper-personalised service. A nice goal, but only a handful of companies are ready to take this step.

Do marketing specialists look at the right figures and do the decision makers interpret the (often complex) reports correctly? After all, the impact of erroneous conclusions is incalculable, not to mention the resulting suboptimal marketing budgets.



Audiences and channels

It is a basic rule in marketing: go where your target group is. And that target group isn't sitting still. Two years ago, TikTok, Twitch or WhatsApp For Business did not appear in any marketing plans. That is why it is important to experiment regularly to see how your target group moves.

Today is an excellent time to look – with an open mind – at which channels are available and which fit within your business context. Not many companies use the full potential of Google My Business. In the near future another shopping functionality will be added to Facebook, which will allow people to make online purchases without quitting Facebook.

YouTube is the second most used search engine in Belgium, after Google. It is also a very interesting advertising channel with different options at relatively low costs. Advertising on Spotify is an affordable alternative to radio advertising with specific targeting possibilities. Besides, podcasts are very popular. They are an ideal channel to share knowledge and build a relationship with your target audience.

6. Conclusion

In 2020-2021, the world was turned upside down, with one clear trend: digital leaders easily adapt to changing circumstances. Companies are forced to focus on a perfect user experience, for consumers who have developed a zero-tolerance attitude towards a less than perfect digital experience.

Digitalisation has an impact on the entire operation of companies. From external touchpoints via sales and marketing over internal processes to the HR policy. Marketing and IT must work together more than ever, supported by a strong strategy. Those who invested in this in the past can easily adapt when the playing field changes. If you look further ahead, you will lead the dance.

If you go about digitalisation with a solid plan, you will soon reap the fruits. Your operations become more efficient and your employees get more satisfaction from their job and become ambassadors of your brand. Thanks to high-quality and targeted data collection, you can predict what your customers need before they even know it. This is how you build tomorrow's user experience today, with a reassuring edge over your competitors.

Let's talk.

Get in touch

- Talk to an expert
- Discuss your ambitions
- Discover new opportunities

Contact us at info@iodigital.com →

We are **iO**: a growing team of experts providing end-to-end services for communication and digital transformation. Thinking big, working local. On strategy, creation, content, marketing and technology. In close collaboration with our customers to strengthen their brands, improve their digital systems and secure their future-proof growth.

We don't just help clients achieve their business goals. Together, we explore and exploit the *endless possibilities* offered by markets in a constant state of flux.

The springboard for that vision is talent. Our campuses in the Benelux, Sweden and Bulgaria are our breeding ground for innovation, creating an environment that gives talent the space and stimulus it needs to germinate, develop and flourish.

Because the time to work on tomorrow's *infinite opportunities* is today.

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