WHITEPAPER

Marketing and digitisation for budget 2025

16 tips to make your budget smarter.

In this whitepaper

Introduction

Autumn tradition: that email from your CEO or management with ‘2025 Budget’ in the subject line. So, it’s time to zoom out and look at the bigger picture: think about ambitions and ideas for next year. But how should I organise my budget for that? This list will help you get started. Think of it as a tool to lift you out of your day-to-day operations and focus on the near future. With our 16 tips your budget for 2025 will be completed in no time.

Good luck.

Note: when we talk about a marketing budget in this document, we mean it in the broad sense of the word. If we talk about a marketing budget, it can also include activities such as digitisation, digital transformation, innovation, e-commerce, and platforms, etc.

Tip 1

Base your *budgets* on a plan

This might seem obvious, but we think it's still worth mentioning:
"You can't set up a marketing/digitisation budget (and plan) if you don't know where your company wants to go"

There are many possible reasons why organisations might lack an annual plan. The organisation has a short-term focus and lives from campaign to campaign, there is cultural resistance, there is no vision among management, there is a lack of resources and so on.

However: a well thought-out and structured plan is incredibly valuable.
After all, it acts as a compass that guides and optimises the organisation. Benefits include:

- → **Direction & focus:** A plan gives future (marketing) activities clear direction and focus. It helps to set goals, priorities, and strategies that the (marketing) team will work on.
- → **Strategic planning:** Allows CMOs and marketing managers to think strategically about long-term goals and the course marketing efforts should take to achieve those goals.
- → **Coordination & collaboration:** A (marketing) plan makes coordination and cooperation within the (marketing) team and between different departments easier. Everyone involved understands the goals and priorities, which helps to keep the message and approach consistent.
- → **Resource allocation:** An annual plan helps effectively allocate resources — such as budget, staff, and time — to various initiatives. This minimises waste of resources and maximises ROI.
- → **Measurable goals:** A marketing plan sets measurable goals: sales figures, lead generation, brand awareness. It makes it possible to track and evaluate performance so that you can make adjustments over the course of the year.
- → **Risk management:** A good plan includes risk analysis and possible countermeasures. These enable you to proactively tackle potential obstacles and challenges.
- → **Long-term vision:** A plan helps to look beyond the daily tasks and short term. It encourages a long-term vision and a more strategic approach to marketing.
- → **Stakeholder communication:** A detailed plan can serve as a means of communication to other departments, management, and even external stakeholders. It helps to keep everyone on the same page when it comes to goals and strategies.
- → **Efficiency:** With a good plan, managers can manage the workload and priorities for the team more efficiently. It prevents last-minute decisions and improvisation.
- → **Innovation:** Although a plan provides structure, it can also provide room for innovation. Setting goals and strategies can stimulate creativity in coming up with new campaigns, initiatives, and approaches.
- → **Better relationship management:** A marketing plan can help identify audiences and develop targeted marketing efforts to build and strengthen relationships with customers.
- → **Continuous learning:** Creating a plan forces you to do research, analyse market trends, and look at competitors. This contributes to continuous learning and understanding of the market.

It’s clear: a plan makes your job a lot easier. Determine your goals for the coming year and translate them into tactics to achieve those objectives. Do you focus on content marketing, social media, and influencers, do you go for (online or offline?) advertisements, and so on? **Only after you have mapped out your objectives and tactics can you effectively determine your budgets.**

In addition to your ‘regular’ marketing activities, are there any plans or ambitions that require a special mention in your budgets? A (second phase of a) digital transformation process, an innovation process, an customer experience development, a catch-up in the field of data, the launch of a new product or service or a rebranding? Good preparation is half the battle.

Tip: Marketing, digitisation and everything that comes with it can be complex. The strategists of iO are ready to help you with this. From an overarching brand and communication strategy to a very niche e-commerce or digital strategy.

Customer experience, a cost, or a revenue?

Chances are that ‘customer satisfaction’ is one of the objectives on your list. But is customer experience too? After all, a good customer experience contributes to customer satisfaction. That extra mile in terms of customer experience contributes to better results, including higher turnover. So how far do you go with providing excellent service to your customers? Have you already mapped out all the obstacles or what irritates your customers? Because don’t forget the other side of the coin: a terrible customer experience can also cost you revenue.

Watch Steven Van Belleghem here

STEVEN VAN BELLEGHEM
CX thoughtleader, partner & strategic advisor

Tip 2

Map the health of your *ecosystem*

Will 2024 be the year to replace certain systems?
Is there a new version of the CMS that your website uses?
Is your e-commerce platform reaching its capacity?
Maybe a tool doesn't quite do what you hoped for?
And is the software used still secure?

It's a good time to look at the technology and tools you use in your ecosystem so that you know which possible investments are necessary in the near future.

Need a platform & tooling audit or an technologie & security audit? Our experts are here to help.

Got more questions? Is your knowledge of your target group less than razor sharp? We can help you with market research or a general digital maturity audit.

Remember cybersecurity

Information security was already a priority, but this will only increase in 2024. Digitisation increases our digital dependence. And the more dependent we are, the greater the risks and consequences of mistakes. Hackers are constantly looking for vulnerabilities in business-critical applications to steal data, carry out ransomware attacks, exploit IT infrastructure or disrupt the continuity of services at their targets via DDOS attacks.

Security should not be an afterthought; it should be high on the agenda. Not only because a proactive approach is always better than a reactive one, but also because investments at an early stage are always less expensive than investments that you are forced to make if security problems occur in later phases. This can result in reputational damage, financial damage, compliance problems and the loss of customer confidence.

Start with risk management: talk to the CEO and the lead of every process in the organisation (IT, HR, Finance, etc.). Jointly map: “Where are the risks for us?”

Tip 3

Take stock of your expenses

When you are making an overview of your actual expenses, it is useful to start by looking at your current (marketing) expenses are / were. Now is the perfect time to critically assess certain expenditures and shift budgets where necessary.

Ask yourself the following questions:

→ What is the total budget for spending for this year?

→ What goals were set for the past year?

→ Which marketing channels were used?

→ What were the best, and the worst performing (sales &) marketing initiatives?

→ How many leads/customers/customer retention/revenue/profit has been realised this year?

→ Are there trends in the performance of specific initiatives?

→ How did the results compare to the marketing goals?

→ What lessons have been learned?

→ What are the recommendations for improvement?

Itemise your costs fully:

→ Advertising costs (online and offline)
   » **Tip:** split these by channel (SEA, social media ads, magazine ads, YouTube ads)
   » **Tip:** Make a distinction between campaigns and branding.
→ Content creation (copywriting, photography, video, graphic design)
→ Marketing tools & licences (think of Mailing tools, Automation tools, Analytics tools, Social Media tools, A / B testing tools)
→ Events (fairs and exhibition stands, events)
→ Sponsorship
→ Promotional material (printed matter such as brochures, name cards, flyers, ... but also gadgets & merchandise)
→ Partnerships (e.g., influencer marketing)
→ PR
→ Website (hosting, development and maintenance, optimisations such as SEO & CRO)
→ Research, market research and data analysis

Tip 4

Calculate the execution of tasks and *working time budget*

Of course, include the costs of your team FTEs.
Time to expand your team? Include the cost of your extra FTEs in your calculation.

Tip: Make your work count. Your organisation may not be sufficiently aware of how much work a particular task requires. Therefore, calculate the time for content & asset creation. *For example: 1 social media post takes xxx time on copywriting (including validation & revisions), xxx on visual asset creation and xxx time on effectively posting across different channels.*
Another example is placing a new blog or page on the website. Think of copywriting, revisions, translations, visuals, webmaster, and SEO optimisation.

Map that data: Set up a plan of x social media posts or x new website pages per month to get an idea of the required FTE capacity (internal or external).

Tip 5

Budget support from freelancers & partner agencies

Marketing and digitisation are very diverse. It’s challenging to have all the skills and expertise on your team.

Make an estimate of which expertise you need to hire externally – whether it concerns hands-on execution or strategic management – with freelancers or agencies such as iO.

By the way, did you know that iO also offers consultancy services where our colleagues work as a full or part-time extension of your team?

Let the specialist be the specialist

You would think that all the specialists in your organisation have a lot of knowledge and insights to share. But an expert doesn't make a writer, and maybe that's not a great use of their time. Because although the majority of people nowadays are convinced of the power of content marketing, from a business perspective it also comes at a price. For example, writing one blog post takes an average of 4 to 12 hours. Multiply that by your colleague/authors hourly rate and then calculate the investment in time and money. Are you busy? Are your colleagues busy? Is the ghost-writer's hourly rate lower than you or your colleagues hourly? Then outsource the content creation.

Of course, this reasoning also applies to other, often specialist, tasks such as performance marketing, webmaster, SEO optimisations.

Tip 6

Don't miss the *AI boat*

AI is gaining ground at a rapid pace. In almost every sector. Companies that are not yet experimenting with AI in 2025 will be hopelessly behind. So it's high time to put pilot projects with AI and test sessions with AI tools at the top of your priority and budget list.

Make the right decisions faster

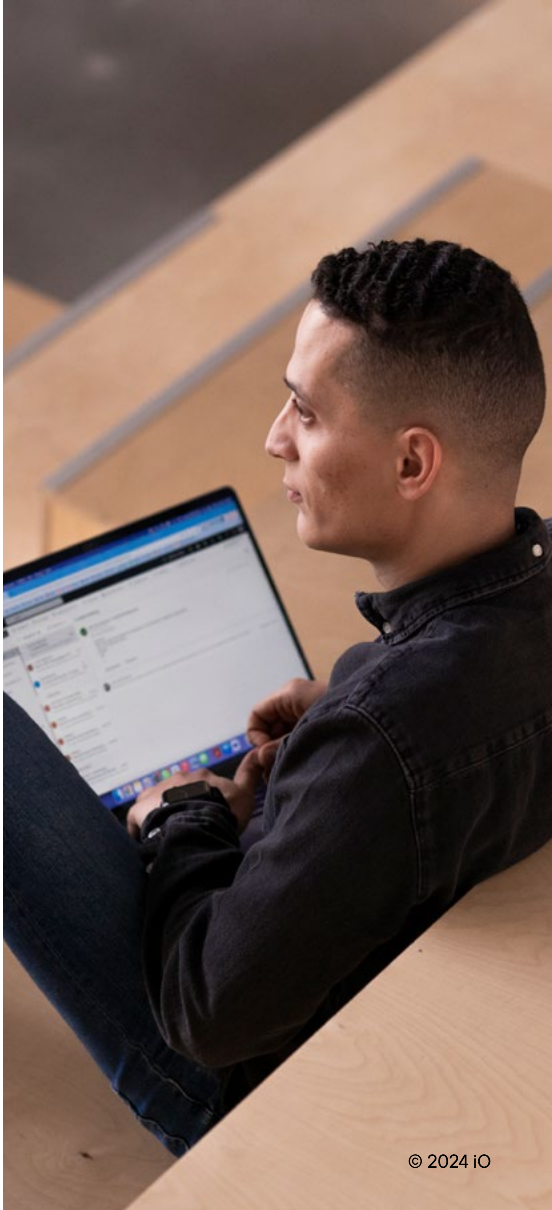
AI can process and analyze enormous amounts of data at lightning speed. This gives you as a company a head start in making crucial decisions, whether it concerns customer behavior, inventory management or marketing strategy. Companies that embrace AI can often spot important trends before they become mainstream.

Boost your efficiency

With well-chosen AI tools, you can automate many time-consuming, repetitive tasks. Strengthen your customer service with smart chatbots or use AI specifically to analyze your customer data. If you outsource this kind of work to AI tools, you can better concentrate on what is really important: more efficient cost distribution, better productivity and stronger growth.

Provide a sufficient budget

Have you determined how and where you want to use AI in 2025? Then certainly do not view server capacity, tooling and pilot projects purely as costs. You are investing in a future in which your company not only continues to exist, but also has a greater chance of flourishing. Dare to experiment, and in this way discover how AI can change your sector. Why wait for others to take your place in the market? Take the first step and budget today.



Tip 7

Think of social media as a *paid channel*

Did you include the time spent making a social post in point 4? Well done, but did you also take the promotion of the post into account in your budget?

Given that organic reach is very low these days, paid promotions can be an excellent way to present your message to a larger audience. By promoting strategically selected posts, you can increase your visibility and reach your target audience effectively.

So, devote some of your promotional budget to the posts that you produce.

But what happens when you combine this factor with the power of employee advocacy? The result is a powerful synergy that has the potential to strengthen your brand identity and exponentially increase your reach on social media.

By combining employee advocacy with paid promotions, you leverage the authentic influence of your employees and the scope of paid promotions to create an impactful social media presence.

Remember employee advocacy

Have you ever considered using your employees as influencers? By focusing on employee advocacy, you can achieve a much larger organic reach than if you only communicate through your company’s accounts.

Employee advocacy goes beyond your employee’s enthusiasm. It requires a conscious activation of their role as brand ambassadors.

For example, initiate internal social media training where you teach employees how to create and share engaging content. Give them concrete examples and encourage them to ask questions and interact with their network.

Even simpler is the ‘recommended posts’ function on LinkedIn. This feature allows employees to easily share relevant and suggested content from the marcom team with their network.

The result? An army of employees who not only promote your brand, but also increase its visibility and credibility. This contributes to building a strong brand identity and greater organic reach on social media.

Tip 8

Do more with *the same*

The current economic situation forces companies to look more closely at budgets, including for marketing and digitisation.

It is quite possible that your focus next year will be on getting more ROI from the same (advertising) budget. Marketing Mix Modelling can provide some of the answers to that challenge.

Tip: our colleague Tim has written an opinion piece about how to determine your annual budgets.

Marketing Mix Modelling

What was the impact of your marketing activities over the past three years?
Which initiative, which effort, contributed the most to your goals?

With Marketing Mix Modelling (MMM) you carry out an audit of the marketing investments you have made over the past three years. You look at campaigns you have run and analyse the impact they had, but also assess the value of media buying.

Based on statistical analysis, Marketing Mix Modelling quantifies the effectiveness of advertisements and predicts the future impact of different marketing tactics. This gives you a better idea of how your available marketing budget can be used most effectively.

Read our whitepaper on MMM →

Tip 9

Improve your existing investments & efforts

Marketers solve puzzles every day. But have you taken the time to look back and optimise your existing items so that you have more ROI on your previously made investments?

Consider freeing up resources next year for things like:

CRO & A/B testing

Got a lot of visitors to your site or webshop? That's great. With some small interventions, and the detection and removal of certain obstacles, you will gain a few percent extra conversion on your forms or sales. Request your free CRO audit now.

Scripting

The world is connected with APIs.
At iO, we love marketing technology. We like to make systems smarter by feeding them with extra data and triggers. This means less manual follow-up and potential for errors. Not to mention AI. Think, for example, of performance marketing with extensive automated bidding strategies.

Marketing & sales automatisation

Every self-respecting marketing & sales team has now set up a marketing automation & CRM tool. But are you already getting the most out of your platform? Do you get the most out of all available data? Are there new triggers and flows you can set up?

SEO optimalisation

Maybe that top position in Google is easier to take than you expected?

Performance marketing audit

How long has it been since you had a thorough assessment of your performance marketing results? Are you bidding on the right things, and is the price you pay competitive? A media & performance audit can provide useful new insights.

The withdrawal of marketing cookies: calculate the impact on your turnover and visitors

After the success of ad blockers, major players such as Apple and numerous browsers have also upgraded their (default) privacy settings to protect user privacy. This evolution will continue with the withdrawal of third-party cookies.

Use our calculator to estimate the potential loss of sales and website visitors. You will also receive tailor-made advice on the next steps to take to limit the loss.

Calculate the impact with the calculator →

Tip 10

Bring sales and marketing closer with *shared budgets*

You can't align Sales/Marketing fully if both teams have separate budgets. An aligned collaboration between Sales & Marketing is often determined purely by processes, agreements, and targets.

However, budgets are rarely aligned, so you still get silos, different reporting, and different priorities. When you aim for a RevOps-based operation (cfr. Revenue Operations, a method that aims to maximise your company's revenue potential through clearer, more transparent, and efficient processes and collaboration between departments), it is difficult in practice to continue working with separate budgets.

That is why a (at least partially) shared budget between Sales & Marketing is essential.

It is an important condition to evolve into one team, with one shared set of targets and one central approach. Moreover, it helps to make decisions much easier in the context of results and budgets.

Tip 11

Implement *new KPI’S*

Most sales teams can quote metrics like “Number of Deals” or “Deal Stage Weighting” perfectly. But that’s just the basics. Many organisations lack clear metrics to gain a clear understanding of revenue streams and existing customers renewal processes. Therefore: implement the metrics below in your organisation.

Sales velocity - the ‘speed’ at which deals move through your Sales Funnel. A higher Sales velocity is one of the best indicators of a good sales operation.

Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC) - the cost of acquiring a new customer. Can be calculated in your marketing and presales activities. Too often CAC is seen as ‘Ad Spend’, and that is a gross miscalculation.

Customer Retention Cost (CRC) - the cost of retaining an existing customer. Too often seen as a service charge. Many of your existing customers also interact with your marketing campaigns. Calculate it.

Account Health Score (AHS) - a metric used to measure the ‘health’ of an account or customer. If you work as a company on renewing customers or long-term relationships, make sure you know what behaviour gives rise to negative feelings and a potential churn

Forecasting Accuracy - the ability of an organisation to accurately predict future deal streams based on historical data and trends. Essential for capacity planning and estimating turnover.

Experiment with your budget distribution

Don’t do the same thing every year, but experiment and look for channels or ideas that can work for you and your business.

A good guideline to follow is the 70-20-10 rule. Use this as a benchmark:

→ 70% of your budget goes to strategies that you know work well

→ 20% of your budget goes to new strategies to help you grow

→ 10% of your budget goes to experimental strategies

Experimentation is the key differentiator for successful brands.

If every competitor has access to the same channels and all campaigns are fully optimised automatically, it becomes difficult to distinguish yourself without experimenting. Experimentation, and originality, is essential if you want to stand out. Make it an indispensable part of your organisation's mindset and skill set.

For emerging brands, experimentation is often the catalyst. As organisations grow, the willingness to take risks decreases. When decisions have more impact, people often prefer to adopt a cautious approach. That is why courage plays a crucial role, both for the creative person and for the manager who has to dare to choose an out-of-the-box idea. If you don't dare to take risks, you will be stuck in the familiar and safe - and sooner or later you'll be overtaken by a brand that does dare to experiment.

Tip 13

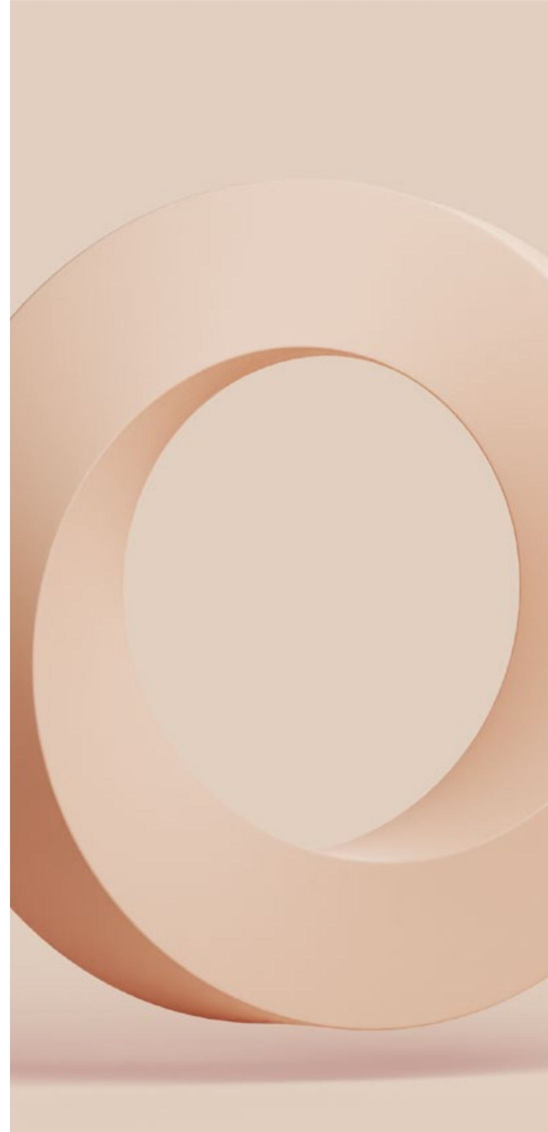
Educate and get *inspired* at conferences

Marketing and the digital world are constantly evolving.

Don't forget to provide a budget for you and your team to retrain next year and attend interesting conferences such as our own Congres content marketing & web editing or one of the many other events that iO organises.

You can always contact iO for tailor-made training. A deep dive into SEO, SEA, social media, or something else? Our experts are happy to bring a training tailored to your needs to your office.

Tip: subscribe to our newsletter to stay informed of new events.



Tip 14

Usa a *strong template*

Sometimes it's easier not to start from scratch.

For example, you can download templates from the website of our marketing automation partner HubSpot that will help you to fill in your budgets.

This template contains 8 different templates in which you can create a budget for content marketing, paid advertising, branding & creative, website design or events.

Tip 15

Use *insights* instead of data

Reading tip – Data & Intelligence: no place for emotion in the boardroom

Have you done your homework? A detailed calculation sheet, a tidy presentation? Well done, we're proud of you.

But wait. Are you sure that you are going into that meeting prepared and armed with a good story? Is your plea substantiated with data or insights? Be prepared and make sure there is no room for doubt in the boardroom during your presentation.

Organisations often have large amounts of data available but have no insights. You can gain insights based on data, like many organisations. But how do you market those insights, internally and externally? What is the value of your company data?

Companies often see the potential of their data but often don't look beyond the insights they gain. However, overviews and dashboards alone will not give you an edge on your competition.

They give you insights that you can translate into turnover and a fixed income stream. That's when insights actually gain value.

Data is vital to demonstrate whether an initiative is working or will work well. But why initiatives fail and what needs to be radically changed is a discussion that is still often based on nothing more than gut feeling in many companies.

By using data and especially insights to extract emotion, gut feelings and biases from discussions, decision-making about innovation becomes more effective. A data-driven organisation can make informed decisions in the short term and grow successfully in a competitive market in the long term.

→ **Data** is raw factual data.

→ **Information** is the processed and organised form of data, for example when customer responses are converted into structured data.

→ **Insights** go a step further than information: they are valuable observations and conclusions that can be derived from the collected information. For example, patterns, trends, hidden connections, or substantiated predictions about the future.

→ These insights have **business value**: based on this, strategic decisions and targeted actions can be taken

iO is ready to help you in this phase. Contact us for more information.

Tip 16

Measure, adjust and *continuously evaluate*

Of course, a marketing plan or budget is not set in stone.

Review the performance of your different channels and budgets regularly, (monthly, or at least quarterly). Make adjustments where necessary.

Tip: create regular event in your agenda.

Interpreting data correctly can be a challenge. iO has a team of data scientists to help you with dashboarding and visualisation to make your data transparent, but also with the correct attribution of certain data, datamodeling and much more.

Conclusion

These 16 tips will make your budgeting exercise a lot easier.

Finally, we would like to give you some tips that you can use to encourage stakeholder buy-in:

→ **Clear objectives & goals:** Start by clearly setting out your marketing plan and its objectives and goals. Show how these align with overall business goals and how achieving them will contribute to the company's success.

→ **Be clear and concise:** Make sure your presentation is clear and to the point. Use concrete examples to illustrate your points. After all, you want the board to see the value of your plan.

→ **Data-driven insights:** Support your plan with data and insights. Present this information in a structured and visual way.

→ **Show ROI:** It's all about return on investment. How will your plan contribute to the growth of the company? Try to make this as concrete as possible.

→ **Segmentation & audience:** Explain how your plan identifies specific audience segments and how you'll tailor your marketing strategies to their unique needs. This demonstrates a customer-centric approach and a focus on personalised experiences.

→ **Competitive advantage:** Show how your plan will give the company a competitive edge. Highlight what sets your strategies apart from the competition and how your approach leverages the organisation's strengths.

→ **Innovation & creativity:** Highlight innovative or creative elements in your plan and how these elements will capture the public's attention and set the company apart from competitors.

→ **Budget allocation:** Clearly explain how the budget is allocated to each aspect of your plan. Explain how resources are distributed and how you've prioritised initiatives based on their potential impact.

→ **Involve them in the process:** Make your management board part of your thought process. Why did you make certain decisions? What alternatives have you considered?

→ **Name the risks:** Every plan has its risks. By proactively naming them and showing how you intend to manage them, you show that you have thoroughly thought through your plan.

- → **Team Collaboration:** Emphasise how your marketing team will collaborate with other departments and foster a cohesive approach that aligns with the organisation's overall strategy.
- → **Feedback & input:** Show that you've sought input and feedback from key stakeholders so that your plan considers different perspectives and needs.
- → **Adaptability:** Show that your plan is adaptable and responsive to changes in the market. Emphasise your willingness to change course if necessary and your commitment to continuous optimisation.
- → **Visual aids:** Use visual aids such as charts, diagrams, and visual mock-ups to make your presentation engaging and easier to understand.
- → **End with a strong call-to-action:** WWhat do you want the board to do after your presentation? Be specific and ask them directly.

We are here to help. Contact us: business@iodigital.com

Feedback, comments, tips?
We'd love to hear what you think about our 15 tips. Do you have any suggestions or tips that will improve this document? We would love to hear from you, email us at marcom@iodigital.com!

We help you grow

Digital transformation offers opportunities. We help you recognise them and take full advantage of them, so that your brand and business flourish.

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iO is a *blended agency*. We bring together talent in marketing, technology, content, strategy and creation. With the belief that '**experience is everything**', we help our clients offer their target group a rich and relevant brand experience. In this way, we have already helped strong brands such as Audi, Brussels Airport, Efteling, Eneco, Fiberklaar and Worldline grow.

iO was founded in 2005 and operates locally and internationally on behalf of companies, organisations and governments from our various campuses in Belgium, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark and Bulgaria.

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