

LEAP FORWARD TREND REPORT

Customer experience & innovation trends in 2024

forward 24

INTRODUCTION

Forward 2024: A human-centered approach to navigating change

As the pace of innovation and societal shifts quickens, our ability to adapt and transform is paramount. The future can be filled with either obstacles or opportunities depending on how prepared we all are to connect and innovate through a human-centred approach.

The world is increasingly volatile and surprising. As seen through global shifts in resources, technology and climate. Where for example AI-driven solutions not only serve as tools but as partners towards growth and development. As we witness all these changes it's important to stop and consider how they impact our approach to business, governance, and societal wellbeing.

At Leap Forward, we're committed to leveraging new technologies while maintaining a human-centred focus in everything we do. In other words, human-centricity will always be at the heart of our organisation. While we strive to create solutions that cater to the majority, we are acutely aware of the importance of not overlooking any minority. We design for complex audiences, doing our best to ensure everyone is included and heard. In doing so, we aim to spark change that is both inclusive and impactful.

Offering a wide range of services presents us with both unique challenges and opportunities, and from those we gain invaluable insights that further inform our strategies and solutions. In 'Forward 2024', we delve into these insights with a co-creative lens, drawing inspiration from Belgian industry leaders and innovators. Our intention in all of this is to inspire you and help create a sustainable, inclusive, and deeply human-centric future.

Hans
Founder at Leap Forward



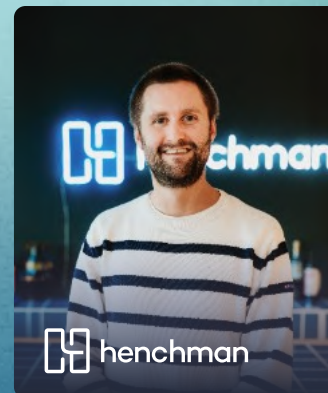


Our vision

At Leap Forward we believe in the process and benefits of co-creation. That's why we created this report with the help of eight industry experts from leading Belgian companies, and invited them to share their perspectives on emerging trends that will shape the next few years. We want to shed light on what's happening in the Belgian context and share insights across various industries and sectors.

Our core mission is to design experiences that positively impact people's lives. That's another reason we co-created this report with leading industry experts. Collectively, these contributors embody the key to successful business: addressing real customer needs and innovating for a specific purpose, rather than simply for the sake of it.

Want to learn more about Leap Forward?
Visit leapforward.be



Who are they?

Each organisation represented in this report brings a unique perspective and expertise to the table. These companies are not just leaders in their respective fields; they are catalysts for change, driving innovation, sustainability, and well-being across sectors.



Henchman is a legal tech company that revolutionizes the way legal professionals work through AI.



Alan is a health insurance company that redefines healthcare by focusing on user-friendly services.



NMBS/SNCB is Belgium's national railway operator, focussing on improving connectivity, sustainability, and customer experience in public transportation.



VVSG stands for the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities. It acts as a support network and advocacy group, representing local governments in Flanders



Aquafin plays a crucial role in ensuring water quality for future generations, focusing on innovative and sustainable water solutions.



Bebat leads in the collection and recycling of used batteries and accumulators in Belgium. They focus on conserving resources and protecting the environment.



In4Care is a non-profit organization that fosters innovation in healthcare. They focus on improving patient care and healthcare efficiency.



Helan is a wellbeing-group, major health insurance fund and provider of family care services in Belgium.

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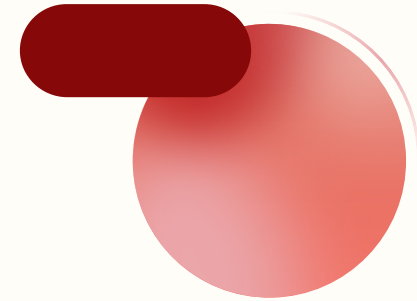
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Human Centricity: Solving Real Needs



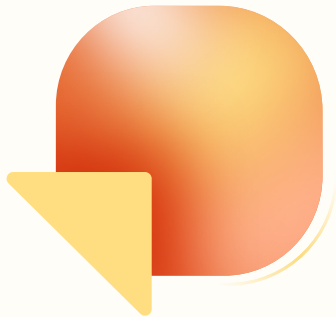
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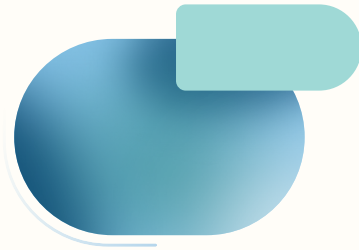
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CHAPTER 1

Human Centricity: Solving Real Needs

INTRODUCTION

50 years ago, a select few industry titans served a global customer base. 20 years ago, manufacturing giants were the only companies that relied on automation. Just 2 years ago, the idea of getting artificial intelligence to write a first draft of your company's annual report was pure fantasy.

The business landscape has evolved beyond belief over the past decade alone. Yet at its core, running a successful business rests on an age-old principle: solving human problems.

Human-centricity has always been, and always will be, the most pivotal business philosophy — whether you operate a laundromat, design agency, or software business.





Human-Centered Design in Business

Great products don't emerge out of thin air—they're created to address specific human problems, concerns, or desires. That's why we believe so strongly in involving end users directly in the development process.

Reverse engineering is the key to user-centered design. Once you know what customers want (or even better, need), you can create a product that solves this specific problem.



Our approach focuses on addressing customers' genuine pain points. It's about understanding their everyday challenges and tailoring our solutions accordingly.

JORN VANYACKER - CO-CEO HENCHMAN



Circular economy

SEARCHING TRENDS

Think tanks such as the Ellen MacArthur foundation are helping businesses to embrace the circular economy, a business model without waste or pollution that keeps products and materials in use, and regenerates natural systems. In December 2019, the EU unveiled the European Green Deal, an ambitious plan to transform the EU's economy into a fair, sustainable, and prosperous one. This strategic framework further builds on the EU's circular economy plans.

Ask yourself: Can we apply circular principles to our organisation?



Case: Belgijn heeft 19651 jaar 50% of the normal water needed to make a pair of denim pants.

700k

-55%

new jobs for Europe targeted result
lastest green deal 2020 commitment
"Source: Ellen MacArthur Foundation"

Chose your own way of working

SEARCHING TRENDS

Work is expected to continue to grow according to a forecasted daily on world work in Europe 2020. They also will be crucial for policy makers and social partners to reach agreements on the ideal conditions of hybrid work.

Hybrid working is expected to continue to grow according to a forecasted daily on world work in Europe 2020. They also will be crucial for policy makers and social partners to reach agreements on the ideal conditions of hybrid work.



Case: Urban development and infrastructure in the city of Amsterdam. The city is planning to build a new district with a focus on sustainable living and working.

35%

48%

of companies that have implemented hybrid working
of companies that have implemented hybrid working
Source: "Hybrid Working 2020"

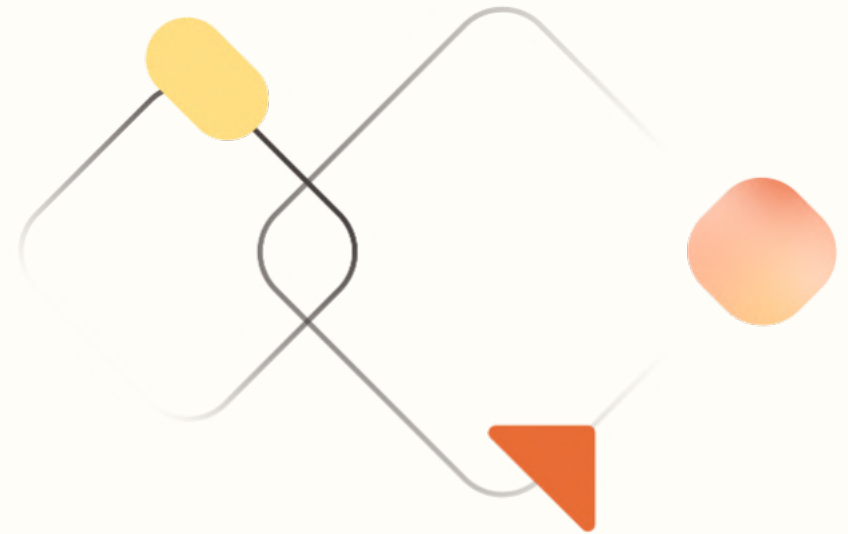
A clear vision on trends and stakeholder insights for Woningpas

“We constantly iterate our processes based on customer feedback. It's crucial to adapt quickly to their changing needs and expectations.”

JOERI STAESSEN (FORMER INNOVATION DIRECTOR AT HELAN)

When it comes to innovation, the question that every business should be asking is: “Are we fixing a real client problem?” Solutions developed without an intimate understanding of the client's issues risk being misaligned with their actual needs.

Maarten Raemdonck from Aquafin highlights this, noting, “Innovation is not just about technology; it's about making a tangible difference in people's lives. It's about understanding and addressing the real-world challenges they face.”



In marketing, adopting a human-centric approach requires that marketers engage with customers to validate business's narratives. It's about creating marketing strategies and messages that resonate deeply with the target audience. As **Jorn Vanysacker from Henchman** suggests, “Our marketing efforts are always in conversation with our customer base. We validate our narratives through their feedback, ensuring our messaging hits the right note.”

EXPERT VIEW

Evelien Hesters

Strategy Lead

Four ways to involve your user

1. Early in the Concept Development or Innovation Stage

Engage users in creative workshops where they can share their experiences and contribute ideas. This can be done through brainstorming sessions or focus groups, ensuring that the user's input and opinions are instrumental in the concept's inception.

2. Involving the User in Marketing

Implement feedback mechanisms, such as surveys or A/B tests, to gather insights about user perceptions and experiences. Use this data to tailor marketing strategies, ensuring that your messaging resonates with the audience's actual needs and preferences.



User testing Toyota's cockpit
experience with advanced driving
simulators



3. Involving the User in Product Development

Invite users to interact with prototypes of your product. Observe their behaviour and gather feedback to refine and adjust the product's features. This hands-on approach ensures that the final product is not only functional but also user-friendly and appealing.

4. Involving the User in Service Optimization

Observe users when interacting with your service or collaborate with users to map out their journey, identifying pain points and opportunities for improvement. This method provides valuable insights into the user's experience, enabling service adjustments that enhance satisfaction and loyalty.

The Rise of As-a-Service Models in B2B & B2G

As-a-service models, which focus on making life easier for customers by providing specific services on demand, are becoming more popular across all kinds of businesses. This approach is a great example of putting people first in how companies operate. While these models are already well-known in the consumer world, we're starting to see them grow in the business world too, including within government agencies. Governments often struggle to keep and attract skilled workers, especially when experienced staff retire, leaving a gap in knowledge and skills. This situation creates a perfect opportunity for service providers like Aquafin to step in and offer solutions that help government organizations by filling these gaps and making their operations smoother.



Innovating ideas for Aquafin Impact Makers

This trend is not just about outsourcing services; it's about creating a symbiotic relationship where service providers like Aquafin become an integral part of their client's success story, filling in critical gaps with expertise and innovation.

Maarten Raemdonck further underscores this trend, observing, “In our industry, the as-a-service model allows for greater adaptability and responsiveness to client needs. It’s a more dynamic way of working that aligns closely with the evolving expectations of our stakeholders.”



There's no better way to confirm whether you're effectively solving a problem than by presenting your solution to end-users, or at least assessing the extent of the problem.

**MAARTEN RAEMDONCK - HEAD OF
INNOVATION AT AQUAFIN**

EXPERT VIEW

Stina Vanhoof

Service Design Lead

In my journey through the evolving landscape of human-centricity, I've witnessed a profound shift from a focus on users to a broader, more inclusive human approach. Taking the whole context into account, even beyond the human aspect. Recognising our planet as a key stakeholder is not just a trend; it's a necessity for our collective future. I see many governments and businesses, especially startups and scale-ups, valuing long-term sustainability and social narratives more than ever.

As a designer, I find myself deeply involved in strategic discussions about the long-term impacts of our decisions. Our challenge lies in embracing diversity and inclusion, ensuring we reduce inequality and don't exclude people from participating in society. Designing universally effective solutions requires a delicate balance between desirable simplicity and necessary complexity, catering to the majority while also acknowledging and providing for the minority. It's about making thoughtful, inclusive decisions that resonate with our human-centric philosophy.





KEY TAKEAWAY

Embracing Human-Centricity

At the heart of every successful venture lies a deep understanding and consideration of human needs and behaviors. Whether it's through user-centered design, employee engagement, or customer experiences, placing humans at the center is paramount.



CHAPTER 2

AI as an Enabler



INTRODUCTION

It may seem paradoxical, but technology can often be a key enabler of human-centricity — provided you use the right tools in the right way. Technology like artificial intelligence is already having a profound impact on both the business landscape and society at large.

Many modern technological developments are bringing people closer together rather than creating a barrier between them. They facilitate easier interactions, greater understanding and better user experiences. While it's true that different generations may face unique challenges or engage with technology in varied ways, the collective move towards becoming more adaptable to technological changes is driving innovation and its widespread adoption.



AI as a Companion, Not a Replacement

Abbas Mahmud of NMBS expertly summarizes the nuanced role of AI in contemporary business settings. He notes, "While AI streamlines processes and offers unprecedented analytical capabilities, it's crucial to remember it's a complement to human intelligence, not a substitute."

This sentiment echoes a broader industry perspective where AI is seen as augmenting human capabilities rather than replacing them. Therefore, integrating AI is less about displacement and more about enhancement. It's not a substitute for humans, it's a way for them to boost efficiency and improve decision-making.



"Technology is a powerful tool, but it's human creativity and ingenuity that really drive innovation. Our goal is to leverage technology to enhance our services and improve the customer journey."

**ABBAS MAHMUD, INNOVATION PROJECT
MANAGER AND FACILITATOR AT NMBS**



Stills from “Once Upon A.I.” - an experiment featuring 15 A.I. algorithms that were given a text by Yuval Noah Harari and were asked to create visuals accordingly. This film is the result of this close creation between man and machine. This fully AI-generated short movie was the first of it's kind and was launched at the Love Tomorrow Conference in 2022, with Yuval Noah Harari as keynote speaker.

Partnering with 'AKA De Mensen' & 'NoComputer'



AI's Role in Drawing Future Generational Talent

AI doesn't just unlock new levels of operational efficiency — it also plays a key role in attracting future talent. **Jorn Vanysacker from Henschman** views AI as a magnet for the new generation.

"Innovative technologies like AI are what excite and draw in younger talent, who are eager to work at the cutting edge."

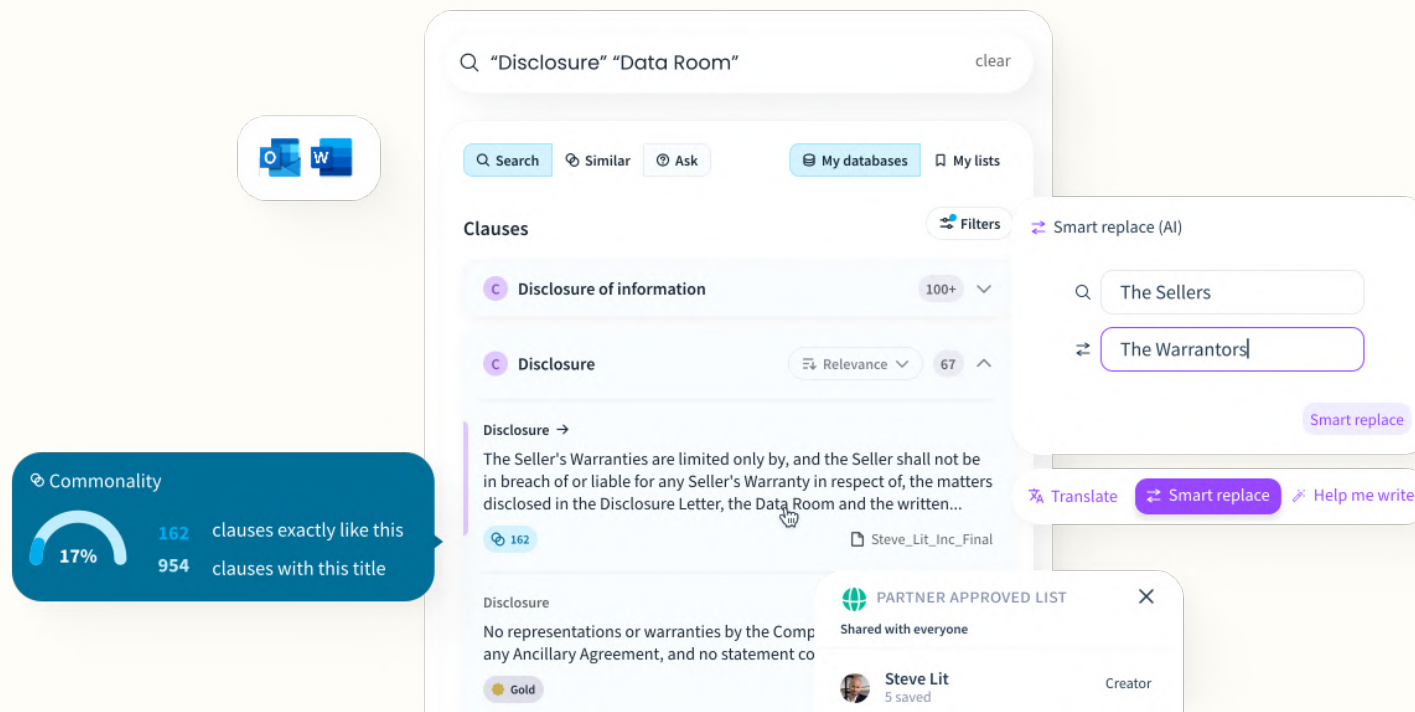
JORN VANYSACKER, CO-CEO & FOUNDER OF HENCHMAN

By embracing new technologies, companies gain a dual benefit: increased performance and more successful talent acquisition. This creates a flywheel effect, as recruiting the best possible talent further enhances the company's operations.

For example legal firms that adopt AI-driven tools like Henschman are positioning themselves to attract future generations of talent effectively. Henschman demonstrates how the integration of advanced technology can streamline complex processes, such as contract drafting and negotiation, making these firms appealing workplaces for young professionals eager to engage with the latest innovations.

With Henschman, legal teams have instant access to a comprehensive knowledge base, centralizing all previously written clauses and definitions and integrating seamlessly into their workflow.

Legal firms leveraging tools like Henschman not only enhance their operational efficiency but also become magnets for technologically savvy talent, who prioritize working in environments that embrace technological advancement.





EXPERT VIEW

Wouter Vandersyppe

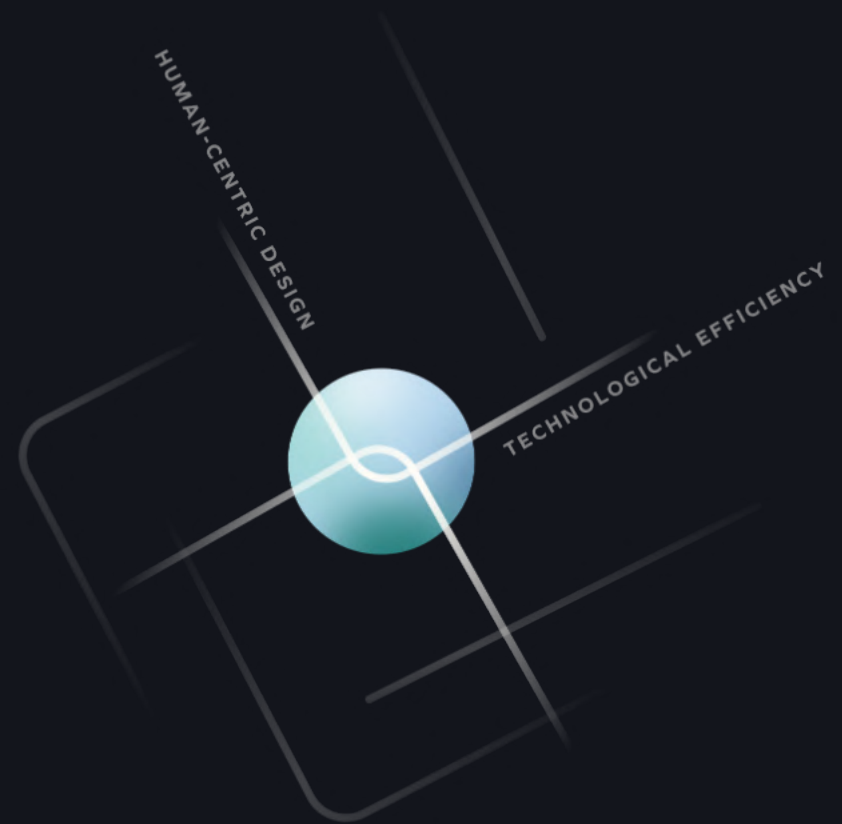
Technology Lead

In the ever-changing world of technology, my focus remains centred on the potent combination of technology and human ingenuity. AI, in my opinion, is not just a technological leap but a new catalyst for inclusive digital transformation. It's fascinating to observe how AI is already levelling the playing field, bringing even the non-early adopters into the fold of digital progress.

The true power of AI, I believe, lies in its ability to unearth insights from data – insights that are too intricate for human analysis. But this doesn't mean AI is a replacement for human intellect; rather, it's a tool that can further enhance our decision-making processes. The challenge and opportunity for us lies in creating interfaces that are exceptionally intuitive, ensuring that even those not native to the digital world can harness the benefits of AI and digital solutions seamlessly.

However, amidst this wave of digitisation, it's crucial to remember that the core of our existence isn't digital. The basics of our lives – our homes, our energy management – are realms waiting to be transformed. Here, the human-centered approach is paramount. Technology is pushing the boundaries of what's possible, capturing more data, and offering deeper insights. But with great power comes great responsibility - it's imperative to remain vigilant about who captures this data and why.

As we stand at the intersection of technological efficiency and human-centric design, the role of AI is unequivocally clear - to create opportunity. The only potential danger I see in artificial intelligence is the misuse of it by humans. Companies must not only understand the capabilities of AI but also their duty to keep people engaged and active in society. After all, humans are the fabric of society, and businesses are threads in this fabric, working together to weave a future where technology enables, not overshadows, the human experience.



KEY TAKEAWAY

Leveraging Digital Transformation

Technology, particularly AI, is a potent enabler. However, its adoption should be thoughtful, enhancing rather than replacing human capabilities. If you embrace AI and use it well, you will attract tech-savvy younger generations to your organisation.



CHAPTER 3

How to Stay Relevant for Your Customers

INTRODUCTION

10 years ago, marketing automation, data analytics, and customer segmentation capabilities were revolutionary. Now, they're the norm.

Companies of all sizes — from solopreneurs to industry giants — use these technologies within their marketing operations. Marketers must therefore find new ways to raise awareness and build trust.

In this section, we explain how they can do this by reorienting toward narrative-centred content, customer engagement, and creative differentiation.





Tactification of Marketing

In recent years, the marketing landscape has undergone a notable shift towards a more tactical approach. However, industry leaders are recognising the need to return to foundational principles, such as adopting strategic narratives and carving out a distinctive identity in an increasingly crowded marketplace.

“A brand's narrative is its soul. It's not just what we tell our customers; it's who we are, woven into every interaction and experience we provide.”

DRIES VAN DEN BRANDE, MARKETING MANAGER AT ALAN

Back to the Core

In recent years, we've witnessed an evolution towards more tactical approaches in marketing, where there's an increased focus on specific tactics and short-term actions over long-term strategies. It involves prioritising immediate, often measurable activities like social media campaigns, pay-per-click advertising, and other direct-response strategies, which sometimes can overshadow a brand's core message. Reflecting on and reconnecting with the foundational narratives and core promises will help companies to remain relevant and resonate with their target audience

Having a coherent brand story isn't just a nice-to-have peripheral element — it should be the guiding principle that dictates every aspect of a company's marketing. Consider Nike, for example. Everything the brand produces reinforces their 'Just Do It' ideology. It's crystal clear what the company stands for: an unwavering commitment to determination and athletic excellence, even in the face of adversity.



Co-creating compelling brand stories



In recent years, there has been a real movement towards the tactification of marketing. We're dealing with a generation of marketers who have been raised on Google, Meta, Hubspot—where we mostly start from channels and tactics. This means many marketers have forgotten the most important part of marketing: their messaging, their brand's story. It's vital to get your message right. I'm happy to say we've managed to do that at Alan, which isn't to be under-appreciated given we only launched 3 years ago

**DRIES VAN DEN BRANDE, MARKETING
MANAGER AT ALAN**

That's why Dries highlights the importance of a compelling narrative that is consistently threaded through all communications and touchpoints, but is flexible at the same time. **Your story will need to adapt depending on the target audience you are talking to but also the context you are in.**

For example, during times of economic recession and high unemployment, company messaging often focuses on stability, security and affordability. Retailers may emphasise value products and services while technology companies highlight productivity solutions to help clients operate more efficiently.

In contrast, when the economy is strong, disposable income is high and unemployment is low, messaging tends to focus more on aspirational and indulgent positioning. Luxury brands highlight premium features and experiences while consumer goods brands associate their products more closely with enjoyment, leisure and pampering yourself.

While the foundational essence of the brand remains, the choice of which specific attributes and benefits to emphasise at any given communication will change based on the external landscape and mindset of target consumers during different periods.

As with new product development, companies must directly engage with customers to validate and refine their marketing narrative. This ensures the messaging is relevant and resonates with their target audience.



Our brand strategy is designed to resonate with a broad and diverse audience, striking a balance between familiarity and a commitment to sustainability as our guiding principle. Authenticity and consistency are our long-term pillars. We act as vigilant gatekeepers, carefully considering what truly resonates with our brand before integrating it.

**NELE PEETERS, MARKETING DIRECTOR AT
BEBAT**



EXPERT VIEW

Jan Van Lysebettens

Creative Lead

A brand, at its essence, is the feeling people get when they think about your company. Capturing this feeling is a challenge, but once you've nailed it through strategic workshops and co-creation, decisions flow more naturally. This leads to a robust branding system that can adapt across various applications, ensuring consistency and recognisability.

Brands today have more opportunities to stand out, thanks to the plethora of channels, platforms and methods available to reach niche audiences. The landscape may be more fragmented, but this also means it's easier to make your mark if you know your target group and how to engage them.

Another important part of any successful brand - always dare to be different. It's not about being different for the sake of it, but your services and entire brand experience should reflect this ethos, ensuring a cohesive and authentic interaction with your audience. In essence, the key to successful branding lies in being true to your core values and consistently conveying them across all touchpoints.





As part of a brand refresh for healthcare company Alan, DesignStudio has created a fluffy digital mascot that's designed to make people feel good.

Daring to Be Different

Standing out in a crowded market requires unique positioning. Brands must dare to differentiate themselves from the competition, not just in their offerings but also in how they communicate their narrative.

Branding and creativity remain central to the marketing mix. However, their role is evolving. Instead of mere aesthetic appeal, they are now pivotal in storytelling, conveying the brand's ethos, and creating an emotional connection with the audience.

EXPERT VIEW

Lieselot Huysman

Marketing Lead

I approach marketing with the goal of creating a genuine connection with the audience, rather than chasing numbers or trends. To achieve this I try to delve into the real experiences and needs of our customers and their customers, rather than just knowing them superficially. This approach guides our agency's marketing efforts and the marketing services we carry out, ensuring they resonate and provide true value.

While the latest trends in content automation and data gathering are crucial to efficient marketing operations and making informed decisions, they shouldn't overshadow the importance of qualitative insights, genuine expertise, and human creativity. It's tempting to focus only on performance and growth targets or to automate your entire content creation process as in today's marketing landscape. You can, but in my experience authenticity and a consistent narrative set a brand apart more than anything else.



Looking ahead to 2024 and beyond, exploring new channels and technologies remains important, but it should be done very mindfully, aligning with the brand's core values and overarching narrative every step of the way.

Striking a balance between data-driven insights and a deep understanding of your audience, complemented by professional (external) expertise, is crucial for creating informed and impactful marketing initiatives.

3

KEY TAKEAWAY

Revisiting Marketing Fundamentals

Marketing is shifting back to basics, prioritising strong narratives and authentic connections with customers. In a world cluttered with information, a clear, compelling story is what sets brands apart.

CHAPTER 4

Sustainability as a Consumer Need

INTRODUCTION

Sustainability is no longer a niche preference but a global imperative. Aside from reducing their carbon footprint, businesses will also find themselves aligning with consumers' values by committing to sustainable practices, helping them win over market share from less principled competitors as a result.

But that's not all. Sustainability-conscious businesses are able to craft a brand identity that appeals to a purpose-driven workforce. They become the preferred choice for new generations of talent who increasingly consider a company's environmental ethos as much as its benefit package.



Green Technologies and Eco-friendly Practices

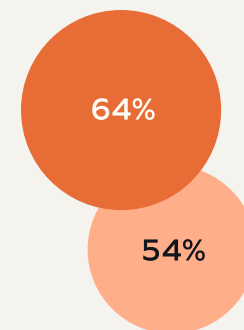
Today's consumers are more conscious of sustainable practices than their predecessors. For example, the [EIB climate survey](#) shows that 72% of Belgian consumers are in favour of labelling all food products with their climate footprint to help them minimise their own environmental impact.

Businesses today are urged to innovate in green technologies and adopt eco-friendly practices as a core strategy, not just a compliance measure. In this vein, **Nele Peeters of Bebat** speaks about the transformative approach they are pioneering. "At Bebat, we're committed to making an impact by not just facilitating, but actively encouraging and simplifying the process of battery recycling for everyone. It's about creating a sustainable future where convenience meets responsibility."

"Sustainability is no longer a nice-to-have, it's a must-have. Our clients are increasingly demanding eco-friendly solutions."

JOERI STAESSEN, INNOVATION DIRECTOR AT HELAN

This emphasises the shift towards making sustainability an accessible choice for all, and ensuring that eco-friendly practices are not just available but are also straightforward and convenient for every consumer.



64% of Belgians indicate that they would like to change their own consumption habits to be more sustainable.

Research performed by [InSites Consulting](#) in 2020.

54% expect companies to help them live more sustainably.

Research by Dr. Gino Verleye and Wim Vermeulen

Source: From the book "[Speak up now. Marketing in times of climate crises.](#)"

EXPERT VIEW

Laurens Somers

UX Research lead

I'm currently involved in a European Horizon project focusing on sustainable construction and renovation - the DEMO-blog project. The goal of the project is to ensure that Europe's building stock becomes more sustainable, drawing lessons from initiatives like Flanders' Woningpas.

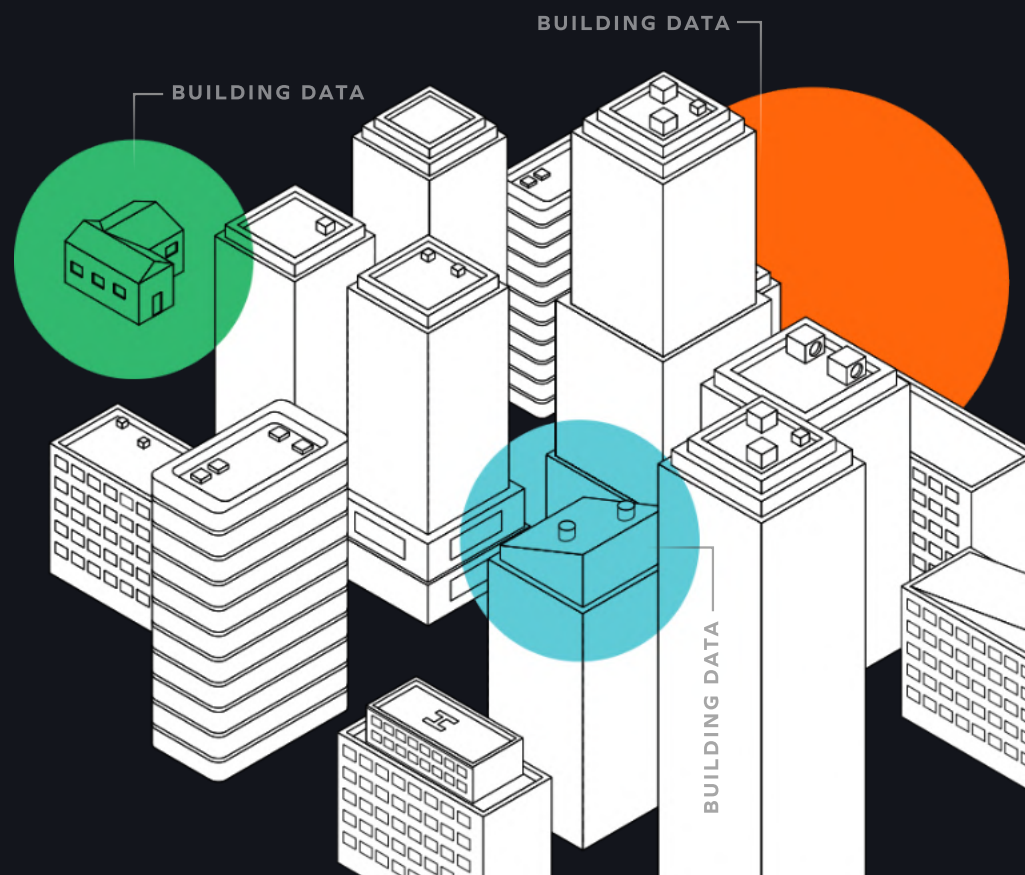
It's evident that the regulatory top-down push from both regional and European levels is driving this transition towards sustainability. Our primary objective is to make this journey as user-friendly as possible for all citizens. We believe that the impending energy transition should be approached in a manner that empowers people, making options for participation as clear and accessible as possible.

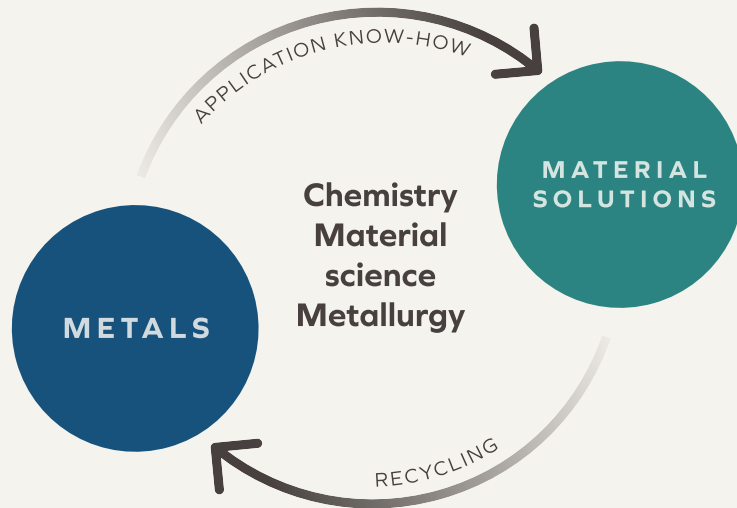


The CAPSA platform is a prime example of this approach in action. Designed for non-experts, this application supports the decarbonisation roadmap for large buildings, particularly social housing projects. It stands out by providing clear cost implications for renovation options, a crucial aspect for social housing associations.

Looking ahead, the need for climate adaptation and sustainable policy is undeniable. However, we must be careful to not overlook users while forming these policies. Our added value lies in introducing the right solutions to the market, ensuring they are desirable, user-friendly, accessible, and inclusive. As we embark on pilot projects in 2024, our focus is on proactive government initiatives that connect citizens with local energy communities in order to foster a collaborative, sustainable future.

The objective of Demo-BLog is to enhance Digital Building Logbooks located in Europe with the aim of promoting decarbonisation and the circular economy.





Umicore's circular business model focuses on protecting nature's precious resources while creating materials for a better life.

Sustainable Business Models

Implementing sustainability into your core strategy can enhance efficiency, reduce waste, and improve your brand's reputation, all of which contributes to a robust bottom line. It creates a virtuous cycle which ensures the business thrives for generations.

By adopting sustainable business models, companies can position themselves as forward-thinking players in the modern economy. Consider Patagonia's pledge to move toward 100% renewable and recycled raw materials, or Belgian mining giant Umicore's closed loop recycling process at its factory in Hoboken.



Patagonia's pledge to move toward 100% renewable and recycled raw materials

Purpose Is Power in Attracting Talent

The benefits of a sustainable approach also extend into talent acquisition. Today's workforce, especially younger generations, are not just looking for a job — they are seeking purposeful work that aligns with their values. 70% of Belgians aged 20-29 say the climate impact of prospective employers is an important factor when job hunting. 24% go so far as to say it's a top priority (source: [EIB Climate survey](#)).

Companies like Aquafin are setting an example by integrating environmental initiatives and sustainability goals into their core mission. As **Maarten Raemdonck from Aquafin** states, the company's environmental initiatives are not just about meeting regulatory requirement ethos. It's a much broader approach they're taking.

The result? It's an attractive place for talent who want to make a real difference in the world.



“We focus on creating a sustainable water environment not just for today, but for future generations. It's about going beyond compliance and genuinely contributing to a greener future.”

MAARTEN RAEMDONCK, HEAD OF
INNOVATION AT AQUAFIN



EXPERT VIEW

Fien Vanderbeke

Service designer

Inclusivity is paramount in the transition towards a sustainable future. Ensuring that no one is left behind is, once again, not just an option but a necessity.

Recently, while working on a pilot project for the city of Eeklo around inclusive and accessible sustainability, this belief was put to the test. With its significant collection of wind turbines, Eeklo was looking for ways all their residents could gain from this local renewable energy. The idea was a cooperative model that allowed citizens to buy shares and benefit from reduced energy costs. However, recognising that not everyone could afford a 250-euro share, Eeklo took steps to ensure inclusivity. This goes beyond the realm of financial support - it's a matter of accessibility. By offering financial and administrative assistance, they are making green energy accessible to the less privileged and embodying true inclusive sustainability.



However, the journey wasn't without challenges. Bridging the divide between social needs and technical sectors like construction and energy is a daunting task. The call for an inclusive energy transition is loud and clear, but shaping this ambition into tangible actions is challenging. Differences in legal structures, business models, and market conditions demand innovative thinking and cross-departmental collaboration.

Sharing successful practices and adaptable strategies is vital for progress. But the core of the energy transition challenge lies in forging innovative models that span across sectors. The green transition must be a tide that lifts all boats, making the sustainable future we envision a reality for everyone.

4

KEY TAKEAWAY

Committing to Sustainability

As environmental concerns become central to consumer choices, businesses are incentivised to adopt green technologies, eco-friendly practices, and sustainable business models. This commitment also plays a crucial role in attracting talent.



CHAPTER 5

Health and Wellbeing Revolution

INTRODUCTION

People today are overwhelmed with information about their health. When we buy food from a supermarket, we're confronted with labels telling us exactly how many calories it contains. When we switch on the news, we're confronted with stories about the dangers of spending too much time on social media.

There's no shortage of information about the impact of poor habits on both our physical and mental health. So, is it any surprise that consumers are more health conscious than ever?





Innovations in Healthcare

The healthcare industry is witnessing a surge in innovation, driven by the need for more efficient, accessible, and personalised care. Nico De Fauw from In4Care highlights how the emergence of digital health tools and telemedicine is reshaping patient experiences and healthcare delivery. His insights emphasise the growing integration of technology in healthcare, offering new possibilities for prevention, diagnosis, and treatment.



Our ambition as a Western country must always be to provide our sick with the fastest, highest quality care possible. Given that the current system won't suffice, we need to ensure fewer people enter the system, meaning we indeed must focus more on prevention."

NICO DE FAUW
DIRECTOR AT IN4CARE



2024

Formulier DVR

Een kind krijgen

RSZ-Sprint 4 - design MVP 2024

"Ik val uit met ziekte"

Personeelsbestand

- Link met RSZ MVP versie 2024
- Sprint 1: 2024
 - Formulier DVR
 - "Een kind krijgen"
 - "Ik val uit met ziekte"
 - Sprint 2: 2024
 - Formulier DVR
 - "Een kind krijgen"
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 - "Een kind krijgen"
 - "Ik val uit met ziekte"

The Rise of Health-Conscious Consumers

Today's consumers are more informed and proactive about their health than ever before. **Joeri Staessen, formerly of Helan**, points out this shift, noting an increased consumer demand for products and services that support a healthier lifestyle. This trend reflects a broader societal move towards wellbeing and prevention, with individuals seeking ways to enhance their well-being in daily life.

Reduction in consumption of products in past 12 months



McKinsey
& Company

<https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/consumer-packaged-goods/our-insights/hungry-and-confused-the-winding-road-to-conscious-eating>



Health in All Businesses

The phrase “health is wealth” applies to business like never before, with health playing an increasingly prominent role in how companies across various sectors approach their products and services. According to **Dries van den Brande**, Alan exemplifies this through its mission of being a 'health partner', rather than just a health insurance provider.

This trend underscores a holistic approach to health. Businesses recognise the value of integrating health and wellbeing into their core offerings. In an age where health is one of the consumers’ main priorities, it makes sense for it to be one of every companies’ top priorities too.



"Helan is making the transition from a transactional role to a service-providing one. Our higher ambition is not just to be a large health insurance fund with side activities but to become a Wellbeing-group that succeeds in serving people's overall wellbeing, offering solutions in all possible aspects."

JOERI STAESSEN
FORMER INNOVATION DIRECTOR AT HELAN

Joeri Staessen, with his experience as a former innovation director at Helan, provides valuable insights into this trend. He believes companies must acknowledge and address their customers' and employees' health and wellbeing needs. Not only does this demonstrate empathy, it also boosts loyalty. You feel like a company has your best interests at heart if it cares about your health and wellbeing. This fosters a culture of well-being both within an organisation and in its interactions with customers.

These perspectives highlight the current revolution in health and wellbeing. Innovations in healthcare, heightened consumer awareness, and the growing role of companies in promoting health are converging to reshape business strategy. And, more generally, society at large.



EXPERT VIEW

Mark Venter

Creative Lead

With a growing societal interest in health and wellbeing, healthcare campaigns are opening up interesting new narrative opportunities to connect with audiences.

For example, Helan's 'See My Pain' initiative we worked on alongside Famous Grey and AKA De Mensen. Unlike health issues that have a visible impact on one's body or physical abilities, mental illness is for the most part a completely unseen sickness, which makes it very difficult to understand.

This insight, combined with a touch of innovation, formed the campaign concept - visualising the experience of mental illness using generative AI. Three participants with various psychological disorders sat with a psychologist to try and put into words their most personal experiences and insights, which we then shaped into prompts for Midjourney, a text-to-image AI model. The resulting images served to open up a broader discussion around mental wellbeing, acceptance and understanding.

Using AI to translate mental health
issues into a visual language for
'See my pain' for Helan -
partnering with
'AKA De Mensen' & 'FamousGrey'



This project sought not only to shed light on the complexities of mental health, but also to emphasise the importance of understanding and empathy. It marks a step towards a future where health and wellbeing campaigns transcend product promotion and resonate on a deeper, more human level of social connection and community. It's about crafting experiences that touch the heart, stir the mind, and ignite a conversation that's long overdue.

5 KEY TAKEAWAY

Prioritising Health and Wellbeing

The expanding role of businesses in health and wellbeing signifies a broader responsibility and opportunity. Companies are now expected to contribute positively to the overall well-being of their stakeholders.

CHAPTER 6

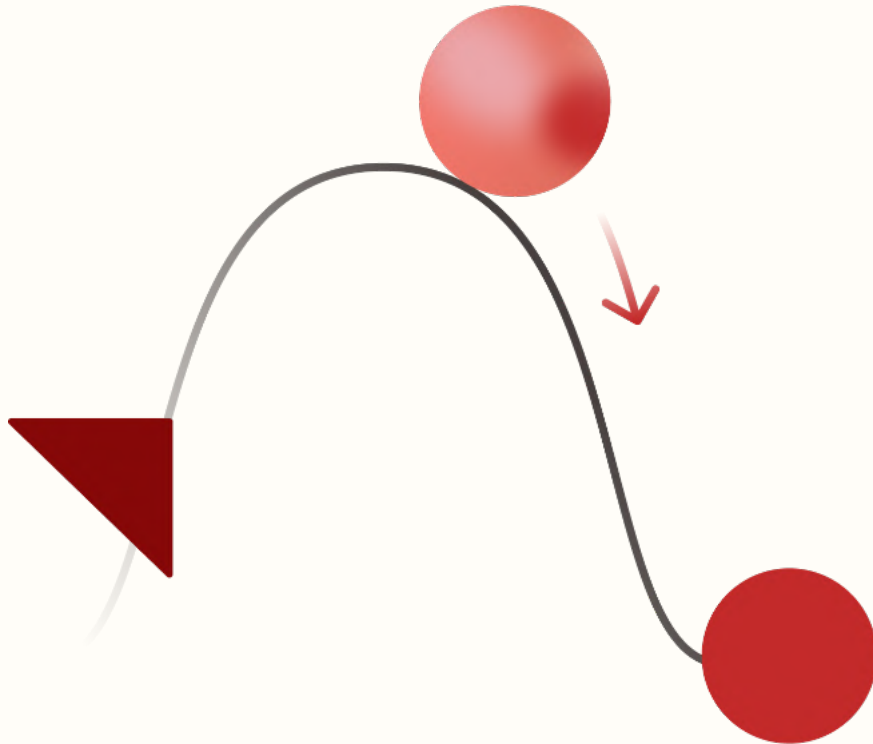
Strategies to Deal With These Trends

The Entrepreneur DNA and How to Foster a Culture of Innovation

The pace of change has never been this fast, yet it will surely never be this slow again. Revolutionary technologies like AI and VR are reshaping how consumers behave, what they think, and their expectations. Companies can't afford to stand still. They need to nurture an 'Entrepreneur DNA' and cultivate a culture of innovation, as **Maarten Raemdonck from Aquafin** emphasises, "Innovation at Aquafin is not just about embracing new technologies; it's about cultivating a mindset of continual improvement and adaptability within the organisation."

Why Innovation is More Important Than Ever (The System is Evolving)

We're entering a new era of business. Innovative systems, models, and technologies are disrupting traditional ways of operating. **Nele Peeters of Bebat** echoes this sentiment, stating; "We're at a tipping point of technological innovation, with the market for electrification booming. This shift is driving us to innovate more aggressively in order to meet the recycling needs of tomorrow."



EXPERT VIEW

Cedric Kamp

Service Innovation lead

As a facilitator fostering innovation within organisations, I strongly believe that the key to transformative progress lies in decentralising innovation. It's about evolving from isolated innovation cells to embracing innovation as a collective endeavour, integral to the entire organisation's ethos.

From my own observations, companies are increasingly aligning innovation goals with broader business objectives. This positive shift ensures innovation isn't just a buzzword but a tangible, impactful part of the company's trajectory. It's crucial to recognise that innovation extends beyond generating ideas; it encompasses nurturing and realising these ideas through training, coaching, and a supportive ecosystem.



Creating a culture that celebrates innovation is vital. This can be achieved through organisation-wide challenges that encourage participation from all, regardless of their job title or role. Recognising and rewarding not just the successes but also the valuable learnings from failures can significantly contribute to a culture that truly values innovation.

However, it's also important to acknowledge that innovation isn't for everyone. Identifying and nurturing a community of individuals who show a genuine interest and aptitude for innovation can lead to more meaningful and impactful outcomes.

As we look towards 2024 and beyond, I anticipate organisations will increasingly strive to be client-obsessed, innovating based on demand rather than technology-pushes. In this journey, the role of external consultants and leadership support can be pivotal in overcoming challenges and fostering an environment where innovation thrives not just in big leaps but also in small, meaningful steps.



We Need Out-the-Box Thinkers

To succeed in this radical new era, you need to adopt novel approaches. Companies can't navigate tomorrow's world using yesterday's methods or systems. Out-the-box thinkers will play a vital role in identifying and capitalising on new opportunities, driving innovation, and keeping businesses ahead of the curve. Embrace individuals who see things differently and act creatively. They might be the key to your company's future.

7 tips for stimulating out of the box thinking:

- 1 Create a safe space for ideas and creativity
- 2 Diversify the team and include people with diverse backgrounds and skill sets
- 3 Stimulate a culture of innovation, learning and an openness to experiment
- 4 Implement innovation processes and 'Fail Fast' policies
- 5 Organise innovation challenges or hackathons outside of the daily tasks
- 6 Look outside of the own organisation and follow up on trends
- 7 Involve customers in the innovation process



"Innovation is not just about new ideas; it's about changing our mindset and being open to evolve. It's about creating an environment where every voice is heard and every idea is considered."

JOERI STAESSEN,
FORMER INNOVATION DIRECTOR AT HELAN

Create a Culture That Rewards Risk-Taking

By fostering a 'dare to fail' mentality, organisations make it easier for their employees to push the boundaries of what's possible and take bold new steps into the unknown. Innovative ideas won't always succeed. However, the only guaranteed route to failure is never attempting anything new. Encourage calculated risk-taking, because it allows groundbreaking ideas to surface without the fear of failure.

EXPERT VIEW

Yalanka Mariën

Service & strategy designer

I firmly believe in the transformative power of future scenario planning, or foresighting, as a crucial component of strategic decision-making. Future insights are complementary to user and stakeholder insights. Unfortunately, most organisations struggle to integrate these insights (or activities) into their planning. Time constraints often push this essential activity on to the back burner, yet the ability to prioritise and understand trends is vital.

Future scenario planning is about more than just acknowledging trends; it's about understanding their potential impact and making them a tangible part of your innovation strategy. This approach should not only consider consumer trends but also global shifts. It's about creating a dynamic, iterative strategy that remains alive to the context and events shaping our world. This strategy should be revisited annually, ensuring it remains relevant and responsive to intensifying or waning trends.





Dealing with unpredictability often requires a mindset shift. Scenario planning isn't about predicting the future accurately; it's about preparing your organisation to respond with agility and resilience. This practice should become a staple in annual planning, moving away from arbitrary metrics towards a more comprehensive understanding of potential futures and how to respond to change.

Finally, it's crucial not to underestimate the capacity of our teams to contribute to planning for the future. Employees are often more adaptable and capable than we might expect. Fostering a culture that acknowledges this can lead to a more empowered, proactive, and future-ready organisation.

Collaborative Networks and Partnerships

Collaboration is more important than ever in this uncertain and fast-changing era. By combining cross-sector expertise and building collaborative ecosystems, companies can open up valuable new avenues for innovation.

"I always say, somewhat jokingly, that if you gather safety experts around the table, you'll get safety solutions; if you gather social workers, you'll arrive at social work solutions. However, in certain situations, you'll likely need those varied perspectives to craft a comprehensive response. That's the approach we're currently taking with local governments. At VVSG we stimulate the formation of these networks by providing support and training, but our goal is to set up more experiments in collaboration with local governments."

PETER COUSAERT, VVSG



"Collaboration is the key to unlocking true innovation. When we combine our strengths and perspectives, we create solutions that are not only effective but also inclusive and sustainable."

PETER COUSAERT,
HEAD OF 'SAMENLEVEN & BELEVEN' AT VVSG

Leverage Cross-Sector Collaborations to Unlock Innovation

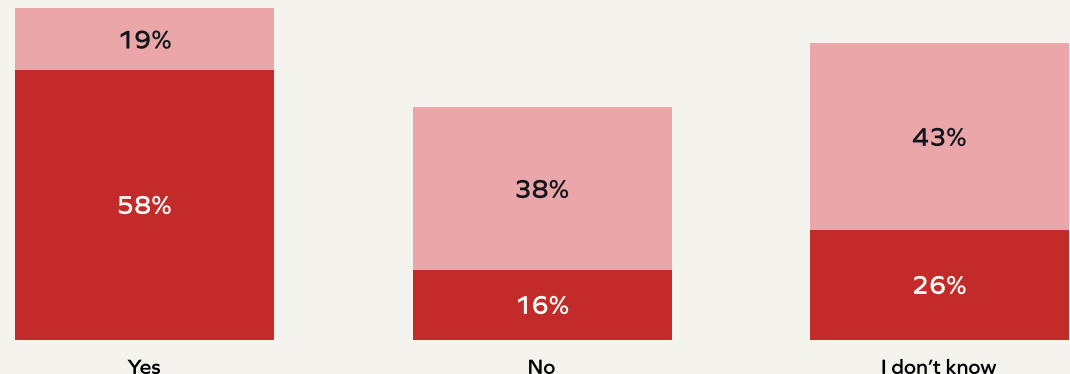
Cross-sector collaborations are key to a better, more profitable and beneficial future for all. Consider the recent partnerships between telecommunications and healthcare industries. Telehealth services have significantly enhanced healthcare and improved patient experiences and outcomes. This serves as the perfect example of how combining cross-sector expertise can unlock groundbreaking solutions.

Adopting a collective approach, where different sectors work together towards a unified goal, represents a strategic pivot to more inclusive and impactful problem-solving. These types of collaborations deliver tangible benefits for all involved. They accelerate technological innovation, open up new business opportunities, and most importantly, address urgent societal needs.

Does your healthcare provider offer telehealth services?

■ Pre-Pandemic
■ Currently

<https://www.singlecare.com/blog/telehealth-survey/>



Building Effective Ecosystems for Innovation:

DARE TO GO BEYOND YOUR CORE OFFERING

Companies are increasingly recognising the value of looking beyond their core offerings to explore new markets and opportunities. This exploration is not about diluting their primary focus but about enriching and expanding their impact on a broader scale.

Amazon is a notable example. Originally an online bookstore, it's now the world's largest e-commerce site. Its web services (AWS) provides the infrastructure to power much of the internet, while it also owns one of the world's largest online streaming platforms (Amazon Prime Video).

By building effective ecosystems that support innovation, businesses can discover new avenues for growth, often in areas they hadn't previously considered. This strategy involves a willingness to embrace change, take calculated risks, and think long-term.

In summary, the future of business is increasingly collaborative. Embracing this shift towards collective action and building effective ecosystems for innovation can unlock new potentials and drive meaningful change. This approach is crucial for businesses looking to remain relevant and impactful in a rapidly evolving world.

Conclusion

As we conclude this exploration of emerging trends and strategies in "Forward 2024," it's evident that the landscape for businesses, in Belgium as in many other countries, is undergoing a transformative shift. The insights gleaned from industry leaders demonstrate the importance to adapt, innovate, and lead with foresight in this dynamic environment.

The trends we've discussed — from human-centric approaches and digital transformation to the pivotal role of marketing narratives, sustainability, and health & wellbeing — are not just isolated phenomena. They represent a combination of forces reshaping the business world. Each trend, be it technological advancements like AI or shifts in consumer consciousness towards sustainability and health, demands a strategic response.



KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR BUSINESS LEADERS:

1. Embracing Human-Centricity

At the heart of every successful venture lies a deep understanding and consideration of human needs and behaviours. Whether it's through user-centred design, employee engagement, or customer experiences, placing humans at the centre is paramount.

2. Leveraging Digital Transformation

Technology, particularly AI, is a potent enabler. However, its adoption should be thoughtful, enhancing rather than replacing human capabilities. If you embrace AI and use it well, you can improve your internal workflows, external service offerings, and attract tech-savvy younger generations to your organisation.

3. Revisiting Marketing Fundamentals

Marketing is shifting back to basics, prioritising storytelling, strong narratives and authentic connections with customers. In a world cluttered with information, a clear, compelling story can set a brand apart.

4. Committing to Sustainability

As environmental concerns become central to consumer choices, businesses must integrate green technologies, eco-friendly practices, and sustainable business models. This commitment also plays a crucial role in attracting talent.

5. Prioritising Health and wellbeing

The expanding role of businesses in health and wellbeing signifies a broader responsibility and opportunity. Companies are now expected to contribute positively to the overall well-being of their stakeholders. Recognising this shift can only benefit organisations.

6. Adopting Agile Strategies

The ability to adapt quickly to emerging trends, foster a culture of innovation, and build collaborative networks is vital. Businesses need to be agile, open to partnerships, and ready to explore beyond their core offerings.

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