

Data as raw material

How can you extract meaningful insights and real value from the vast amounts of data you collect? This is one of the key themes explored in our Trend Report. In this report, BDO looks ahead to 2030 together with trendwatcher Tom Palmaerts. We show how Belgian companies can shape the future with agility and confidence. Relevant data and a clear data strategy form the foundation for turning AI ambitions into reality.

Data as raw material

Companies are sitting on mountains of data but they can't seem to decide what to do with it. The question is no longer how much data you possess but how valuable, reliable and ethically usable it is.

"The challenge lies in determining which data is strategically important and how it can contribute to insight and value creation. A strong data strategy doesn't start with technology but with choices. First you need to define precisely which data generates genuine value and only then align your processes and systems accordingly. Smart data is better than large volumes of data. Without a solid data foundation and a deliberate data strategy, digital or AI ambitions remain vulnerable. This eliminates all progress and you end up with static instead of results."

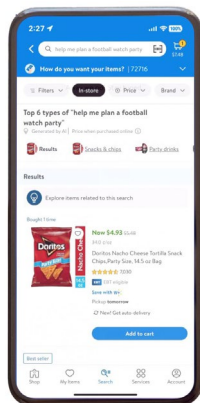
Peter Van Laer, CEO BDO Belgium

FROM GOLD TO RAW MATERIAL

Data is not the new gold but rather a new raw material. Gold has inherent value, data doesn't. True value is created by analysing, interpreting and placing data in the right context.

More and more often, analyses are carried out by AI. Efficient as this may be, it also makes organisations vulnerable because the quality of the insights depends entirely on the quality of the input: garbage in, garbage out. Poor data inevitably leads to erroneous conclusions, even without taking into account the hallucinations AI models exhibit..

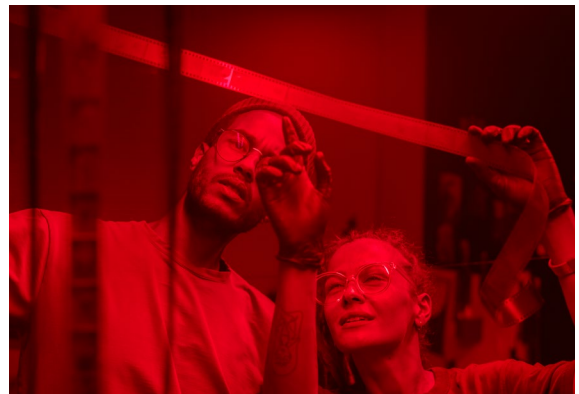
American supermarket giant **Walmart** sets a fine example of how to use data in a thoughtful manner. Their 'Assistant App' uses operational data to help employees with daily customer questions. Five years after its launch, the app has 900,000 weekly users and processes more than three million questions per day. This means that at Walmart, data doesn't just enhance efficiency but also the experience in the workplace.



DARK DATA

Data that is collected but never used again is called dark data. We all have dark data: old photos on your smartphone, documents stored in the cloud but you can't remember why you are keeping them... The same phenomenon occurs in companies on an industrial scale.

This digital storage is not harmless. Worldwide an estimated **1.3 trillion gigabytes of dark data** is generated every single day. This data consumes massive amounts of energy in data centres, often without any purpose. Meanwhile their invisible environmental cost is greater than that of the aviation industry. This is why the call for data minimalism is growing: only collect what you need, use what you collect and delete data that no longer has any value.



ETHICAL DATA

Pressure is also increasing on the ethical front. In the summer of 2025, **WeTransfer** came under fire after users discovered that the new terms of use allowed the company to train AI models with files that users share via the platform. Heavy criticism ensued and the clause was removed. The incident made it painfully clear how sensitive data ownership is and how quickly trust can evaporate.

Companies should think carefully about the data they collect from customers, employees and processes. Not only because legislation requires it but because transparency about data is as important today as financial reliability.

SO DATA IS NOT A NUGGET OF GOLD
BUT A RAW MATERIAL THAT COMPANIES
MUST EXTRACT WITH CARE.

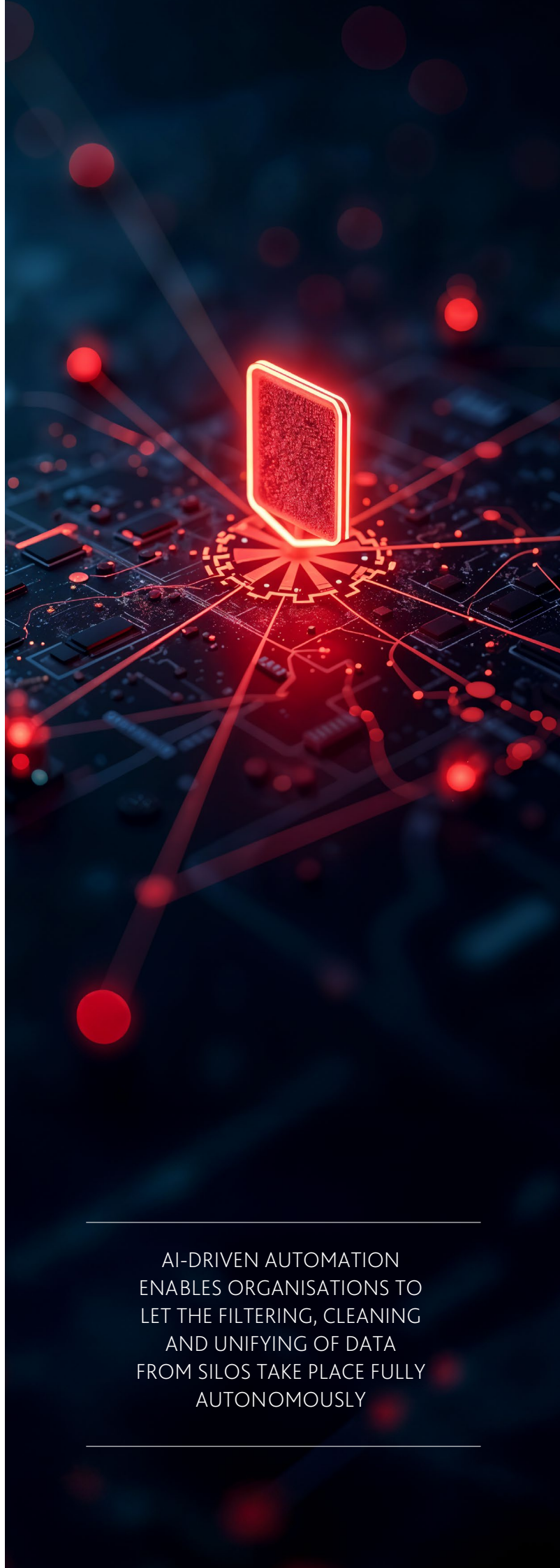
The Belgian company **Robovision** demonstrate how it's done. Their drones help farmers analyse crops, allowing them to reduce herbicide use by up to **80%**. Smart data use makes agriculture future-proof and more sustainable.



"The problem is not that companies have too little data but that it is often not relevant enough. Many organisations collect everything, without a clear purpose or direction. As a result, many organisations today struggle with the same structural weakness: poor data quality. Data is scattered across silos, systems don't connect properly and processes are insufficiently standardised.

This is why the concept of the autonomous enterprise is becoming increasingly relevant: **AI-driven automation enables organisations to let the filtering, cleaning and unifying of data from silos take place fully autonomously.** The systems themselves detect which information is relevant, they harmonise inconsistencies and integrate data in real time. This way the foundation of reliable, high-quality data is no longer a manual process but a continuously self-improving flow. This makes companies more agile, more efficient and far better prepared to derive real value from their digital and AI initiatives."

Jan Vermeersch, Partner Digital Advisory
BDO Belgium



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