

The human touch in times of technology

How can human intelligence and empathy amplify the impact of technology? 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. The more digital our world becomes, the greater the need for real human connection as a counterbalance.

The human touch in times of technology

More and more repetitive tasks are shifting to algorithms and AI. Processes are being optimised at scale through automation. It may seem paradoxical but this technological rise is making the human factor more important than ever. Companies no longer distinguish themselves through technology or efficiency alone, but also through the experience and well-being of their employees. Employee experience and social and mental well-being are becoming the new standards in sustainable value creation.

TRUST IS BUILT BY PEOPLE

The autonomous lift was introduced in the 1950s. It was an innovative breakthrough but the general public didn't trust the new contraption. Enter the lift operator: someone who welcomed passengers and pressed the right button for them. From that moment, everyone accepted and embraced the lift. The story illustrates that innovation only works when a human layer of trust is added. Right now our companies need 'lift operators' to make a comeback: people who don't replace technology but make it human.



“WHO ARE THE ELEVATOR OPERATORS IN YOUR COMPANY?”

TECHNOLOGY WORKS BETTER WITH HUMANITY

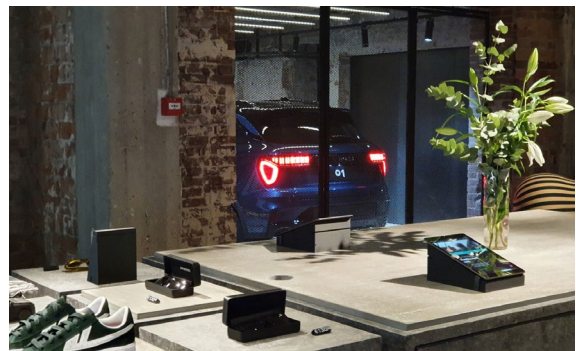
Research by Fittinsider clearly demonstrates this. One group of participants tried to lose weight using an AI model alone. Another group used the same model but with support from a personal coach. The second group lost 75 percent more weight. The difference was not in the technology but in the human guidance that motivated,

added nuance and provided context. Technology is powerful but it only gains real value when combined with human intelligence and empathy.



THE REVIVAL OF PHYSICAL EXPERIENCE

Even in retail we see the same paradox. No one can match Amazon's scale but Generation Z is increasingly choosing the 'old-fashioned' in-store experience: hyper-physical spaces where they can smell and feel products and genuinely meet people and brands. Think of the clubhouses of Lynk & Co, where customers not only configure a car but become part of a community. Technology may be efficient but it is the human experience that creates brand value and builds loyalty.



KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR BUSINESS LEADERS

- Technology only succeeds when you add a human layer of trust.
- Employee experience and well-being are not peripheral but central drivers of value creation.
- Human guidance strengthens technology and makes outcomes more sustainable.
- Hyper-physical experiences show that even in a digital world, the demand for real encounters is growing.

"At BDO we use technology to strengthen people, not to replace them. AI and automation increase our efficiency but it is the human factor — listening, thinking along and truly understanding clients — that sets us apart. Technology supports our work but it is the human touch that builds trust and makes the difference in every collaboration."

Peter Van Laer, CEO BDO Belgium

