


CTRL+SHIFT

AI IMPLEMENTATION PLAYBOOK


FROM EXPLORATION TO LASTING IMPACT



Built for the leaders
implementing AI to solve
real business problems.

iodigital.com





Everyone has started. Very few have landed.

Every week I talk with leaders who are taking important steps in AI, and still feel like they're slightly out of sync with where they should be. The pilots are running, the roadmaps are in place, the tools are already paid for. And yet, the gap between what AI promised and what it's actually delivering seems to keep stretching rather than closing.

What's striking is that this is rarely a technology issue. The stack is usually there. The capability is there. The problem sits somewhere else entirely: in the lack of clarity about where AI genuinely creates value across the customer journey, what needs to change in the way the organisation works, and what it really takes to build something that holds up once it leaves the lab and meets reality at scale.

The organisations that are making real progress don't tend to begin with big ambitions. They start with an honest question about where they actually are today. This playbook is designed to help you ask that question for your organisation.



Pieter Janssens
CEO, IO

SHIFT 01

AI STRATEGY & DIRECTION

From AI ambition to a strategy that delivers results

SHIFT 02

AI-DRIVEN EXPERIENCES

From static touchpoints to intelligent interfaces

SHIFT 03

AI GROWTH ENGINE

From reactive marketing to accelerating AI growth

SHIFT 04

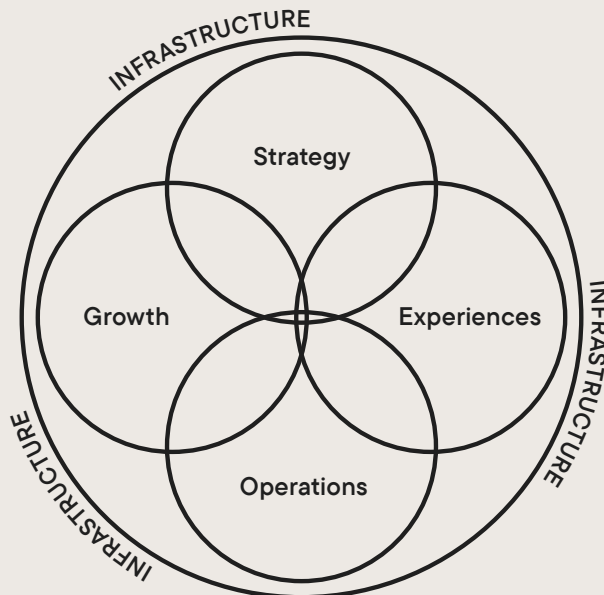
AI-AUGMENTED OPERATIONS

From manual processes to AI-powered business

SHIFT 05

AI INFRASTRUCTURE

From scattered tools to a governed AI foundation

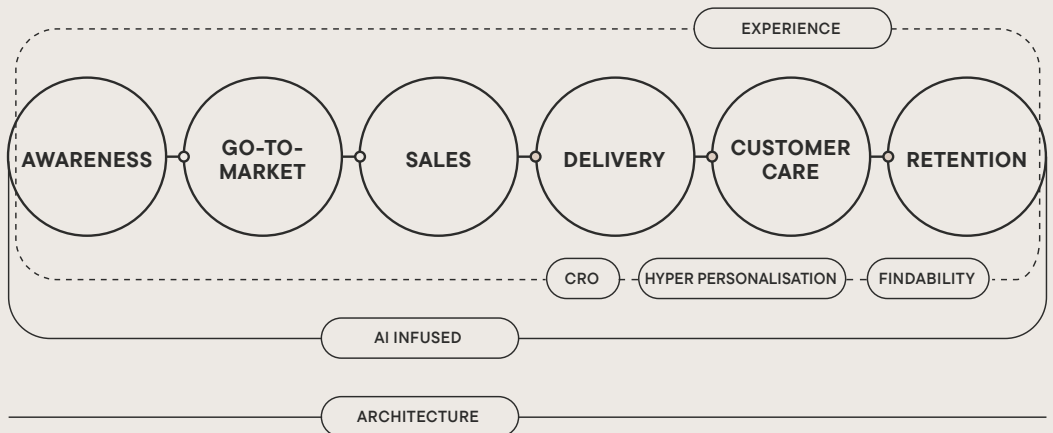


WHAT TO CTRL+SHIFT?

Focus on where it hurts in your organisation

Our view is that AI has the power to improve experience at every stage of the customer journey. Not one touchpoint. Not one department. From the moment a customer first encounters your brand, through awareness, go-to-market, sales, delivery, customer care and retention. Every stage. Every handoff. The entire journey.

The five shifts in this playbook are designed to help you close that gap. Each one tackles a different part of the journey. Together, they form a single implementation path – one that helps technology and commercial leaders work from the same plan.



[Discover more](#)

SHIFTO1

AI STRATEGY & DIRECTION

From AI ambition to a strategy that delivers results

**Define what's worth
building. Where AI
creates real value.**

Self check:

- When you say 'AI strategy', do you mean a specific plan or a collection of ideas?
- Have you assessed your AI maturity across data, infrastructure, team capability and process?
- Do you have a phased AI roadmap with delivery milestones and not just a strategy deck?
- Are your brand guidelines machine-readable so that an AI model can execute against them?
- Can you measure ROI on your current AI investments?

If you answered “no” to three or more questions, your AI strategy is still not something you can execute.

CTRL

your AI strategy

The gap between AI ambition and AI delivery is rarely a technology problem. It's a matter of clarity. Most organisations realise they need to act. Very few know where to start, or how to tell whether it's actually working. The organisations closing that gap have stopped treating AI as a technology initiative and started treating it as a business capability. That shift in mindset is where implementation really begins.

AI strategy without delivery capability is a wish list. The starting point is not ambition. It is an honest assessment of where you are.

SHIFT

from strategy documents to AI that delivers

Which business challenge costs your organisation the most right now? And what would it take to address it with AI?

Start where AI creates real business value. Focus on revenue, efficiency and experience – not what looks technically impressive. Prove it before you build it. Validate with working prototypes that are fast, lean, and designed to learn quickly.

“The hardest part of AI implementation is not the technology. It is agreeing on what success looks like before you start building.”



Christopher Falkman
AI Strategy Lead, iO

How to get your organisation moving

Assess where you are

Before you can make the shift, you need an honest picture of where you stand. An AI maturity assessment across five dimensions (data, infrastructure, team capability, process and strategy) gives you that baseline. Not a generic benchmark. One that reflects your business reality.

Prioritise what matters most

Not every AI opportunity is worth pursuing. A prioritised use case map ranks opportunities by business value and feasibility. It tells you where to start and what to stop. The goal is a shortlist of validated use cases, not a long list of possibilities.

Build a roadmap you can actually execute

Connect AI ambitions to delivery milestones. Phase the investment. Define what success looks like at each stage so your board can verify progress next quarter.

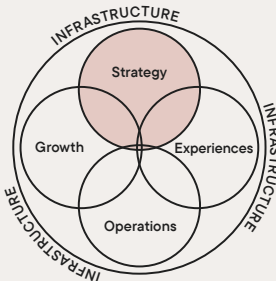
Make your brand AI-ready

Brand guidelines were written for humans. AI needs structure: explicit rules, defined tokens and machine-readable logic. If your brand system cannot be used by AI tools, your content quality and consistency will suffer at scale.

Bring your people with you

Technology rarely fails. Adoption does. Sustainable AI adoption takes role-specific enablement, ongoing support and visible leadership commitment. What AI means for a content strategist is not the same as what it means for a data engineer.

[Discover more about AI Strategy](#)



How iO can help

- AI adoption & enablement
- AI maturity assessment
- AI rapid prototyping
- AI-ready brand systems
- AI strategy & architecture consulting

Get inspired

This is what CTRL+SHIFT looks like in practice. Not a pilot. Not a proof of concept. A real organisation, a real problem, and a result that changed how they work.



Husqvarna AI-Ready Brand Systems

Husqvarna needed to make AI work across their entire content operation. Consistently, at scale, across markets. Working in close partnership, we built an AI content workflow that cut creation time by 75% and reduced audit work by 85%.





SHIFT

AI-DRIVEN EXPERIENCES

From static touchpoints to **intelligent interfaces**

Build experiences that adapt, converse and act upon the behaviour of your customers.

Self check:

- Can your customers get a relevant, contextual answer on your website without navigating a menu?
- Does your personalisation go beyond returning-visitor segments and last-purchase recommendations?
- If an AI agent searched for your product or service today, would it find structured, machine-readable information?
- Are your digital experiences engineered for production conditions or still closer to demo quality?
- Do your conversational interfaces connect to live product data, CRM and knowledge bases?

If you answered “no” to three or more questions, your experience gap might be wider than you’d think.

CTRL

your customer
experience

For twenty years, we've trained humans to understand machines. AI turns that around 180°: now the machine understands the human. Customer expectations are being reshaped faster than most brands can keep up with their websites.

When AI agents become the interface – searching, comparing and transacting on behalf of users – will your brand still be discoverable? Will your products still be easy to buy? Will your services still be accessible?

SHIFT

from static
touchpoints to
interfaces that
adapt

Every organisation we work with has a conversational AI on the roadmap. Very few have one that works reliably in production.

The gap between a working prototype and a production-grade experience is where most AI projects disappear.

“The interface landscape is shifting. For twenty years we designed for clicks. Now we need to design for conversations and for agents acting on behalf of users. The brands that understand this early will be the ones that remain visible.”



Raymond Mulwijk
Group AI Director, iO

How to get your organisation moving

Find out where your gaps are

Start with an agent-readiness audit: is your ecosystem discoverable and actionable for AI agents? Search for your own product in ChatGPT or Perplexity. What shows up? Make that your starting point.

Identify the highest-impact touchpoint

Not every touchpoint needs to be reimaged at once. Identify where customers drop off, get stuck or fail to find what they need. That is where conversational AI delivers the fastest return.

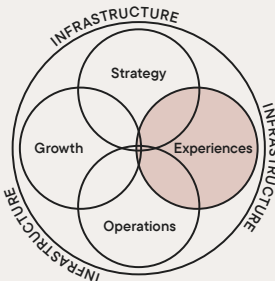
Brief for production, not for demos

Most AI experience projects fail because they are scoped as prototypes rather than production systems. Brief for observability, latency management and compliance from the start. Make sure it connects to live data, CRM and knowledge bases. The deliverable is a system that holds up in production, not just in a demo.

Build for agents, not just for humans

The customer journey increasingly starts with an AI agent acting on behalf of a user. Your digital ecosystem needs to be discoverable, actionable and structured for both. This isn't some future consideration. It's a current gap for most organisations.

Discover more about AI-Driven experience



How iO can help

- Adaptive & generative UI
- Agent experiences
- Agentic commerce
- AI engineering
- AI personalisation
- Conversational AI

Get inspired

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Locaties.nl

AI search that connects people to the right place

Locaties.nl is a search platform that connects people with venues for events, weddings and meetings across the Netherlands. Finding the right location quickly is at the heart of the experience. Over a three-year partnership, we built a hybrid AI search that combines semantic and keyword-based search, smart autocomplete, and AI-generated review summaries. This helps visitors find the best results without having to read every detail. The platform now serves millions of pages across 2,000 venues and scales across multiple languages.

SHIFT TO 3

AI GROWTH ENGINE

From reactive marketing to accelerating AI growth

Use AI to accelerate marketing, content and sales.

Self check:

- Is your brand cited in AI-generated answers such as ChatGPT, Perplexity and Google AI Overviews?
- Can you produce a campaign for all your markets at the cost of producing it for just one?
- Is the time between marketing signal and sales conversation under 24 hours?
- Do you have a content pipeline that runs from brief to published without manual bottlenecks at every stage?
- Are you activating personalisation across paid channels and not just owned?
- Are you using AI for lead generation, lead qualification and CRM enrichment?

If you answered “no” to three or more questions, your competitors are likely already building an advantage you’ll have to catch up with.

CTRL

your growth engine

Marketing teams are sitting on an untapped growth engine. The question is not whether AI can generate content, personalise ads and predict intent. It can. The question is whether your organisation has the infrastructure to accelerate those capabilities.

AI-powered growth goes beyond content. Signal-based lead generation, CRM enrichment and pipeline acceleration all compress timelines and sharpen targeting. AI continuously monitors the market, picking up signals like hiring surges, leadership changes, funding rounds and other buying triggers. It turns them into sales-ready leads, complete with contacts and a suggested conversation angle. Sales walks into conversations prepared. That's not automation. That's growth getting smarter.

SHIFT

from reactive campaigns to growth that gets smarter

The shift is not from manual to automated. It's from campaigns that reset every quarter to a growth engine that learns and improves with every cycle.

The organisations building that engine now will be the hardest to catch up with later.

"AI does not deliver rankings. It delivers judgement. Within that judgement, some brands are present while most are not. The question is no longer whether you rank high enough. It is whether AI understands your brand well enough to recommend it."



Clarissa Filius
Domain Lead SEO, iO

How to get your organisation moving

Find out if your brand is visible where it matters

Run a GEO scan. For most organisations the result is a wake-up call. Structured content, authoritative sourcing and citation-ready formatting are the starting point to close the gap.

Break through the production ceiling

If your content team is the bottleneck, AI can take that pressure off. Brand-trained models help you create on-brand content at scale, across markets and channels. What used to take weeks can now be produced and rolled out across markets in a fraction of the time.

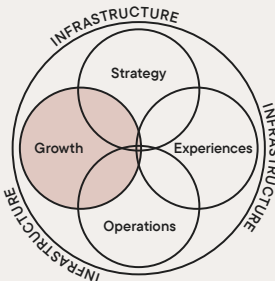
Close the gap between signal and conversation

The time between a marketing signal and a sales conversation should be measured in hours, not days. AI collapses that gap through lead qualification, routing and follow-up in near-real time.

Brief for a growth engine, not a set of tools

The deliverable is not a collection of AI tools. It is a growth engine that gets smarter with every campaign cycle. Brief for a content factory pipeline from ideation to publication. Brief for personalisation across paid channels. Brief for predictive analytics that allocates budget where it delivers most.

Discover more about AI Growth engine



How iO can help

- AI audience & marketing intelligence
- AI content factory
- AI creative studio
- AI lead generation & CRM
- Generative Engine Optimisation
- Marketing & sales AI automation
- Personalisation at scale

Get inspired

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Enexis AI Smart Search for millions of Dutch households

Enexis manages the electricity and gas network across large parts of the Netherlands. Their website is the first stop for millions of users during outages and connection requests. Standard search returned dense, technical documents when users needed one clear answer. We built AI Smart Search that delivers direct answers first and translates technical content into plain language.



SHIFT 04

AI-AUGMENTED OPERATIONS

From manual processes to AI-powered business

Replace manual workflows with AI that acts, decides and scales.

Self check:

- Are you using the AI capabilities already built into your platform stack such as your CMS, DAM and commerce platform?
- Can your teams access ERP, CRM or SAP data through natural language without specialist training?
- Does your workflow automation handle the exceptions, or just the predictable 80%?
- Do you have AI agents that execute multi-step tasks, or just chatbots that answer questions?
- Is your operational AI governed on one platform, or scattered across independent tools?

If you answered “no” to three or more questions, you’re still spending time and money on work that AI could already be handling.

CTRL

your operations

On one side are your business processes: the internal workflows, approvals, reporting and integrations that consume time and team capacity. The other side is aimed at the customer: support and self-service. The interactions that shape customer experience and influence whether people stay or leave. Both are ready for AI transformation, but they require different approaches.

Most automation projects fail because they're built as rigid scripts. They work as long as everything goes to plan — and break as soon as it doesn't. Agentic AI is different. It can adapt, handle exceptions, make decisions in context and escalate when needed.

The biggest gains don't come from making existing processes run faster. They come from rethinking those processes around what AI can do. Not by adding AI to your workflow, but redesigning the workflow around AI.

SHIFT

from manual processes to AI that acts

Which operational process costs your organisation the most time every week? And what would it mean to remove that burden entirely?

The answer is rarely 'another tool'. It's usually about getting more value from the tools you already have and identifying where AI can take care of work that doesn't necessarily need a human touch.

“The organisations we see making the biggest operational gains are not the ones with the most AI tools. They are the ones that stopped accumulating tools and started building an operational AI layer connected to the systems where work actually happens.”



Tim Elsen
COO, iO

How to get your organisation moving

Start with what you already have

Before investing in new tools, audit your existing platform stack. Most organisations are paying for AI features already built into their CMS, DAM and commerce platform. Activate those before buying anything new.

Map the manual work

Identify the processes that consume the most time while adding the least value. These are often the best candidates for AI automation. Focus on predictable, repetitive tasks that AI can handle reliably, freeing your teams to spend more time on work that requires human judgement, creativity and expertise.

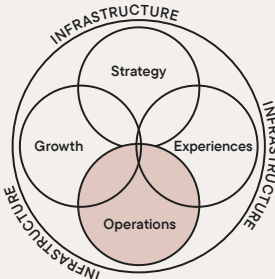
Build an operational AI layer, not a collection of tools

The goal isn't another AI tool. It's creating an AI layer that sits across your business. Think natural-language access to ERP, CRM and SAP. Agents that can execute multi-step tasks. Workflow automation that handles exceptions, not just the predictable cases. That's where AI starts creating real operational impact.

Establish governance before you scale

Fragmented AI tools create fragmented governance. Before scaling, consolidate onto one platform with shared standards, security controls and compliance built in. One platform. Multiple models. Shared governance.

Discover more about AI-Augmented operations



How iO can help

- Agentic AI development
- AI assistants & coworkers
- AI in your stack
- AI workflow automation
- Customer care & self-service AI

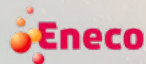
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Eneco AI-native operations for faster end-to-end delivery

Eneco is one of the largest energy companies in the Netherlands and Belgium. Every handoff in their delivery chain costs the company precious time, and those delays accumulated across every project. In partnership with their team, we compressed the front end of the chain. Alignment that previously took 90 days now takes less than 24 hours. Administrative overhead dropped by 75%. The result: 20–30% faster end-to-end delivery, without adding people or budget.



SHIFT 05

AI INFRASTRUCTURE

From scattered tools to a governed AI foundation

Governed foundation. Multi-LLM, EU AI Act compliant.

Self check:

- Are you building on a deliberate platform, or slowly accumulating disconnected AI dependencies?
- Do your AI agents have access to accurate, current and well-structured context from your business systems?
- Is your AI connected to CRM, ERP, CMS and BI through a governed orchestration layer?
- Have you classified your AI systems against EU AI Act risk categories?
- Could you switch AI model providers without rebuilding your stack?

If you answered “no” to three or more questions, your AI foundation is a risk, rather than an asset.

CTRL

Every shift in this playbook depends on what sits underneath it. Strategy needs a platform to execute on. Experiences need infrastructure that handles real-time AI at scale. Operations need integration with the systems where work happens. Growth needs creative infrastructure and data pipelines.

It's not about which AI tools to buy. It's about whether your AI environment is something you control, or something that controls you.

SHIFT

from fragmented tools to a foundation you control

The platform layer should allow you to work across Azure AI Foundry, AWS Bedrock and Google Vertex. If your strategy only works with one provider, it's not a strategy – it's a dependency.

Building that foundation also means building it responsibly. Most organisations treat the EU AI Act as a legal deadline. The ones moving fastest treat it as a design principle. When compliance is built into your platform from the start, it becomes part of how you operate rather than something you scramble to prove.

**“You don't have an AI problem.
You have an AI orchestration problem.”**



Steven Van Duyse
Strategy Director, iO

How to get your organisation moving

Understand what you are building on

Before adding more AI, map what you already have. Most AI environments grow faster than they are governed. A platform architecture review gives you a clear picture of where you are and what it would take to make your AI environment something you control.

Get the context layer right

Your AI is only as good as what it knows. RAG and context engineering aren't technical details – they're strategic capabilities. Most agents today still operate on incomplete or outdated context. Clean data products, reliable pipelines and accurate, well-structured information are what everything else depends on.

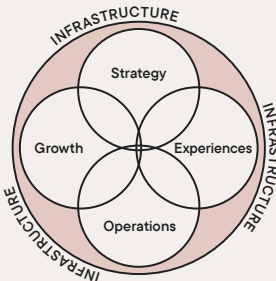
Build the orchestration layer

Building an agent is the easy part. Connecting it to CRM, ERP, DAM and CMS is where most projects stall. An orchestration layer connects models to actions, securely and at scale.

Treat compliance as architecture

The EU AI Act is not a future concern. It is a current requirement for organisations operating in Europe. Risk classification, conformity assessments, technical documentation and bias detection are all manageable when built into the platform from the start. Compliance by design moves faster than compliance by deadline.

[Discover more about AI Infrastructure](#)



How iO can help

- AI orchestration
- AI platforms & foundations
- EU AI Act technical compliance
- RAG & context engineering

Get inspired

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MieleX Enterprise AI infrastructure in 18 weeks

MieleX needed a structured path from AI experiments to production infrastructure meeting Miele's requirements for security, management and scalability. We delivered an 18-week AI Acceleration Programme, from a 3-day hackathon to a custom Azure AI Foundry fully owned by MieleX.

Miele

AI infrastructure is a strategic choice. One platform built to support it.

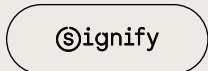
There is no single right answer for AI infrastructure. Finding the right architecture depends on your existing stack, your scale, your compliance requirements, and how much control you want to keep. We help organisations find the right setup for their context. Whether it's building on hyperscaler platforms, integrating an orchestration layer, or adopting a purpose-built AI platform.

For organisations that want a governed, ready-to-deploy AI platform they can run themselves, we've built Bonzai. It's a proven option for teams that need to move fast without giving up control.

iO Bonzai is built around three layers: a secure, branded AI assistant for teams (Chat), an orchestration layer that connects AI to your data, tools and workflows (Connect), and ready-made AI agents for marketing and operations (Apps).

ISO 27001 certified, aligned with the EU AI Act, EU-only data processing, and no vendor lock-in.

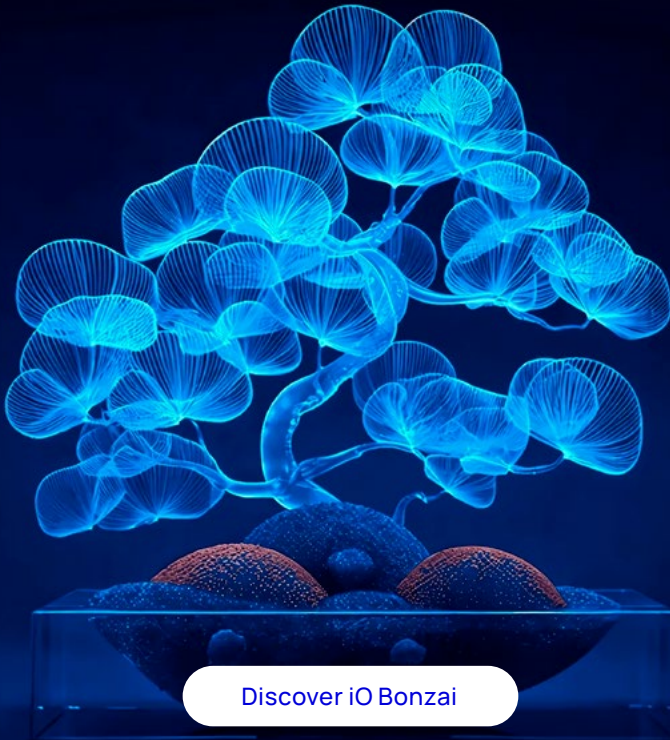
Trusted by:



“The next phase of AI is not smarter, but more mature. Organisations that need a governed platform to support that maturity: that’s exactly who Bonzai is built for.”



Sofie Boon
Product Growth Manager, iO



The shift starts with the right partner

AI NATIVE. HUMAN DRIVEN. SEAMLESSLY BLENDED.

We are one of Europe's leading AI-native marketing & technology partners.
We blend strategy, content, marketing and technology to help organisations
make the shift from ambition to implementation.



2,000+ EXPERTS | 20+ YEARS | 95% CLIENT LOYALTY | 12 CAMPUSES

iodigital.com | business@iodigital.com

io is one of Europe's leading digital agencies and home of ambitious people, organisations and brands. Since 2005, we deliver marketing that performs, content that connects, and platforms that scale – all seamlessly integrated across data, media, AI, infrastructure and digital operations. With more than 2,000 experts across 12 campuses in Belgium, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, and Bulgaria, we help brands such as Audi, Brussels Airport, Efteling, Philips, and AkzoNobel to transform their digital experiences.