

Everyone Has AI. Why Should Anyone Choose You?

Companion Guide

Everyone Has AI. Why Should Anyone Choose You?

Meet Magento Deutschland 2026 - Nicole Mentzen, Head of Marketing, maxcluster

This guide combines the presentation slides with the context, examples and reasoning behind them. It is designed to be useful both as a follow-up for attendees and as a standalone read.

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AI has moved from an emerging technology to an everyday business tool at remarkable speed. Marketing teams use it for research, writing, visual production, analysis, campaign development and increasingly for building working tools and applications.

This creates an interesting competitive problem. If almost every company has access to similar AI capabilities, access to the technology itself cannot remain a meaningful differentiator.

The central question is therefore not "How can we use AI better than everyone else?" It is: When execution becomes easier, faster and cheaper for everyone, what becomes more valuable - and what still gives customers a reason to choose one company over another?

I was wrong.

I was wrong.

When generative AI first became broadly available, I underestimated how much it would change my own work.

I expected it to be useful for clearly defined tasks: research, summarising information, drafting text or improving efficiency. I did not expect it to become deeply integrated into the way I develop ideas, challenge assumptions, structure concepts or make decisions.

Today, AI is part of my daily work and that of my marketing team. I use it as a research tool, writing assistant and increasingly as a sparring partner. One unexpected result is how well an AI system can adapt to an individual's working and writing style after extensive use.

That experience fundamentally changed my view of what AI can and cannot do.

Our AI transformation wasn't a transformation. It became a habit.

THE EXPECTATION

AI TRANSFORMATION

Synergy! → Disruption! → Paradigm shift!
→ Game-changer!

THE REALITY

Research → Content →
Images → Sparring →
Tools → ...

Again tomorrow. And the day after.

Our AI transformation wasn't a transformation. It became a habit.

There was no large AI transformation programme at maxcluster. No task force suddenly redesigned the marketing organisation. There was no moment when we announced that we were becoming an "AI-first" marketing team.

Adoption happened incrementally. We started using AI for research. Then for content. Then for images. It became a sparring partner for ideas and concepts. Eventually, we started using AI to help us create tools and applications.

Each successful use case led to a simple question: What else could we do with this?

That iterative approach turned out to be more important than a formal transformation programme. AI gradually became embedded in normal workflows. Meaningful AI adoption can begin with repeated experimentation, learning and the willingness to expand successful use cases.

We built this with AI.

Real tools. Real assets.



We built this with AI.

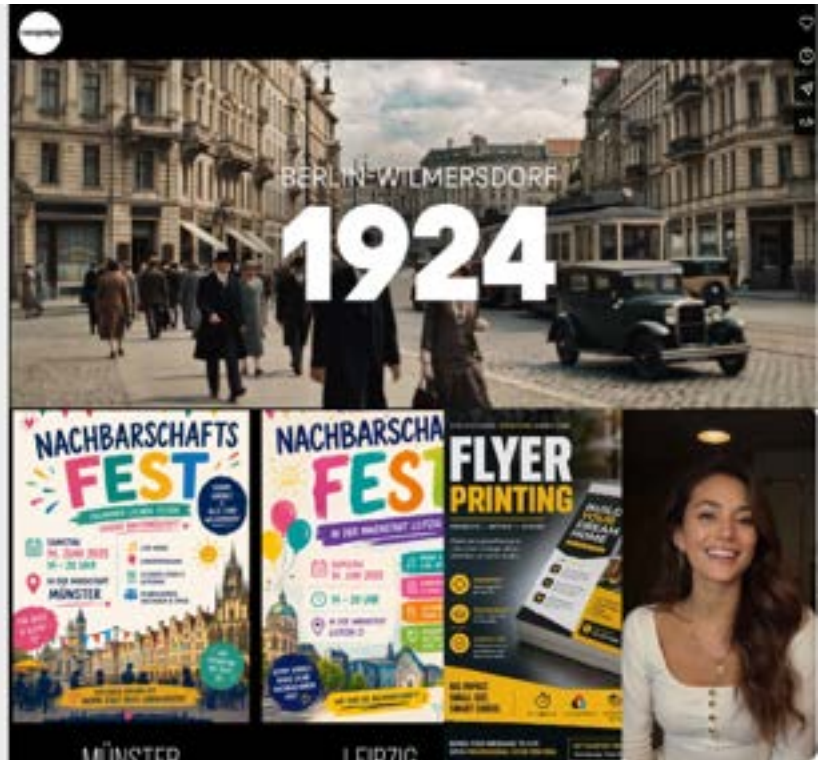
One example is maxcluster's Total Cost of Ownership calculator. The tool was created to help agencies make the real cost structure of an e-commerce project more transparent to their customers.

What makes the example relevant is not the calculator itself. It is how the distance between an idea and a working marketing asset has changed.

In the past, an idea for an interactive tool would quickly have raised questions about development resources, budget, agencies and project capacity. AI dramatically reduces that barrier.

Marketing teams can increasingly move beyond producing communication about products and start creating useful tools around them. That expands the role - and potential - of marketing.

**AI expands
what we
can do.**



AI expands what we can do.

The same development is visible in visual production. maxcluster does not have an in-house graphic designer. Traditionally, this meant relying heavily on external design resources.

Generative AI changes this equation. People with deep domain knowledge can now participate much more directly in visual and creative production, even when design is not their professional discipline.

This leads to an important distinction: AI does not only make existing expertise more productive. It expands what people are capable of doing.

However, expanded capability also creates a new challenge: being able to produce something does not automatically mean being able to judge whether it is good.

Everyone else has AI too.

79%

of German marketing teams already use AI.

Source: Salesforce State of Marketing 2026

What happens when everybody does?

Everyone else has AI too.

The competitive advantage created by AI access is likely to be temporary. According to Salesforce's State of Marketing 2026, 79% of surveyed German marketing teams use AI.

That means many capabilities that initially felt exceptional are rapidly becoming standard. Research becomes easier. Content becomes easier to produce. Visuals, landing pages, campaigns, concepts and increasingly software tools become easier to create.

This changes the strategic question. Instead of asking "How can we use AI?", companies increasingly need to ask: What happens when everybody can?

If your competitive advantage can be recreated with a prompt, was it ever a competitive advantage?

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AI is reducing the cost of execution. Ideas can be tested faster, smaller teams gain capabilities that previously required specialists, and experimentation becomes significantly cheaper.

But it also means that execution itself becomes easier to imitate. A competitor can analyse your website, content, messaging and campaigns. AI can help them reproduce formats, concepts and communication patterns very quickly.

This creates an uncomfortable but useful strategic question: If your competitive advantage can be recreated with a prompt, was it ever really a competitive advantage?

The objective should not simply be to become better at producing things with AI. It should be to invest in advantages that are harder to reproduce.

Welcome to the Age of Average.

A LOVINGLY FAMILIAR LINKEDIN POST



"In today's rapidly evolving landscape..."

"Here are my 5 key takeaways..."

"But here's the thing..."

"Agree?"

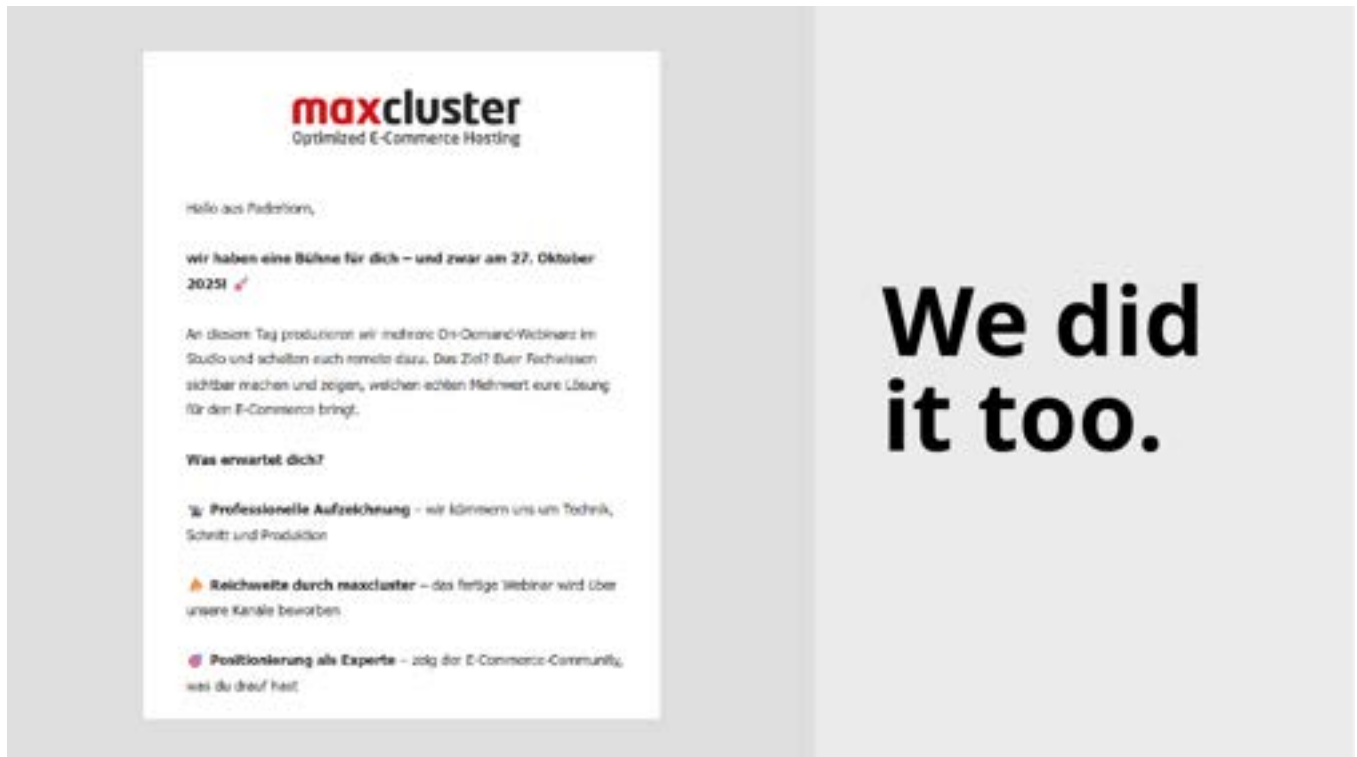
Welcome to the Age of Average.

One visible consequence of widespread generative AI is the increasing similarity of content. LinkedIn provides an obvious example: posts with similar structures, phrases, hooks and formatting appear constantly.

The problem is not that this content is necessarily bad. It is often correct, professional, structured and easy to consume.

The problem is that good-enough execution is becoming abundant. When everyone can create polished content, polish alone becomes less valuable as a differentiator.

The result is an "Age of Average": an enormous amount of competent content that is increasingly difficult to attribute to any particular company or person.



We did it too.

This is not criticism from the outside. We experienced exactly the same problem ourselves.

During our early adoption of generative AI, some maxcluster newsletters relied too heavily on AI-generated copy. There was nothing obviously wrong with them. They were correct, structured and professional. But they lacked something important: maxcluster.

The solution was not to stop using AI. It was to change the balance between AI and human contribution.

The fix wasn't less AI. It was more of us. AI remained part of the production process, but the expertise, context, opinions and personality needed to come from the organisation and its people.

Better technology doesn't automatically create better marketing.

79%

use AI

76%

still run mostly generic
campaigns

German marketers, Salesforce State of Marketing 2026

Better technology doesn't automatically create better marketing.

The gap between AI adoption and differentiated marketing is significant. The Salesforce data used in the presentation shows 79% AI adoption among surveyed German marketing teams, while 76% say they still mostly run generic campaigns.

This illustrates an important principle: Better production technology does not automatically result in better marketing.

AI can improve speed and execution. But technology alone does not decide which customer matters, which problem deserves attention, which message is relevant or what evidence will create credibility.

Those are questions of strategy, expertise and judgment.

But can it do marketing?

But can it do marketing?

Modern AI can perform an extraordinary range of marketing tasks. It can create landing pages, newsletters, personas, campaign concepts, competitive analyses, whitepapers, images and increasingly even functional applications.

That makes it tempting to equate the ability to produce marketing assets with the ability to do marketing.

But marketing begins before production. The more interesting question is not whether AI can create a landing page. It is whether we understand why that landing page should exist in the first place.

Marketing starts with questions.

- Who exactly are we talking to?
- Why are they here?
- What problem are they trying to solve?
- What do they already know?
- What objections do they have?
- What proof will they believe?
- What should happen next?

AI can help answer the questions.
Someone still has to know which questions matter.

Marketing starts with questions.

A simple prompt such as "Create a landing page for managed Magento hosting" will now produce a reasonably professional result.

But before creating that page, a marketer should ask: Who exactly are we talking to? Why are they here? What problem are they trying to solve? What do they already know? What objections do they have? What evidence will they believe? What should happen next?

AI can help answer every one of these questions. It can analyse information, identify patterns, challenge assumptions and propose alternatives.

But someone still needs sufficient expertise to determine which questions matter. This is where human judgment becomes increasingly important rather than less important.

AI expands capability. Expertise improves judgment.

The better AI gets, the more important it becomes to know what good looks like.

AI expands capability.

The relationship between AI and expertise is more nuanced than "AI versus humans."

AI genuinely allows people to operate outside their traditional areas of expertise. A marketer can create visuals without being a designer. A junior developer can generate sophisticated code. A business professional can build a prototype without being a software engineer.

But the further someone moves into a field they do not understand, the harder it becomes to evaluate the quality of the result. A senior developer can assess whether generated code is maintainable and secure. An experienced architect understands the consequences of a proposed architecture. An experienced marketer can judge whether a campaign is solving the right problem.

AI expands capability. Expertise improves judgment. As AI output becomes more sophisticated, knowing what good looks like becomes more important, not less.

My job changed too.

**AI doesn't reduce the need for judgment.
It increases it.**

My job changed too.

This development also changes leadership. Early AI discussions focused heavily on productivity: How can we create more? How can we create it faster? How can smaller teams increase output?

Those questions still matter, but they are becoming less interesting as production itself becomes easier.

The leadership challenge increasingly becomes one of judgment. Teams need to understand why they are producing something, whether an AI-generated result is genuinely good and whether the activity deserves resources at all.

Sometimes the best decision is: We don't need to produce this at all.

AI therefore does not reduce the need for judgment. It increases it.

Who is your ideal customer?
EVERYONE.

Who is your ideal customer?

AI cannot solve a positioning problem that an organisation has never confronted.

In our work with e-commerce agencies, positioning is a recurring topic. A surprisingly common initial answer to the question "Who is your ideal customer?" is effectively: Everyone.

But after only a few questions, that broad positioning usually becomes much more specific. Certain company sizes are a better fit. Certain project complexities play to the agency's strengths. Certain business models, technologies or customer challenges match its experience particularly well.

The differentiation already exists. It simply has not yet been articulated.

AI can sharpen your positioning. It can't manufacture your difference.

"We build Magento shops."

AI can sharpen your positioning. It can't manufacture your difference.

AI is very useful during positioning work. It can challenge assumptions, compare alternatives, identify generic language and help turn vague ideas into more precise statements.

But it cannot create genuine differentiation out of nothing. The substance has to come from the organisation: its customers, projects, expertise, experience, capabilities and point of view.

A generic statement such as "We build Magento shops" becomes useful only when the organisation understands which Magento shops, for whom, under which circumstances and why it is particularly good at solving those problems.

AI can sharpen your positioning. It can't manufacture your difference.



FROM

If AI makes content production abundant, marketing's role needs to evolve. The goal can no longer simply be to produce more content.

One of marketing's most important functions becomes finding expertise inside the organisation and making it visible outside the organisation.

Developers know things. Support teams know things. Sales teams repeatedly hear customer questions. Projects generate lessons. Customers provide evidence. Specialists develop opinions based on years of experience.

Marketing should turn that knowledge into useful, credible communication. This is the shift from content production to expertise distribution.

“We are Magento experts.”

Prove it.

CASES DATA EXPERIENCE OPINIONS PEOPLE

“We are Magento experts.”

Claiming expertise is easy. Proving it is harder.

As AI makes polished communication easier, unsupported claims become even less valuable. Companies therefore need evidence.

Cases show what has actually been achieved. Data makes results tangible. Experience demonstrates learning accumulated through real work. Opinions reveal judgment and point of view. People make expertise identifiable and credible.

Instead of repeatedly telling customers "we are experts," marketing should create opportunities for customers to reach that conclusion themselves.

Don't just claim expertise. Make it observable.

“Without all of this, you'd be much more interchangeable.”

[INSERT PARTNER DAY PHOTO]

Expertise alone does not explain why customers choose and remain with companies. Relationships matter as well.

At maxcluster's Partner Day, agencies spend time with the people they normally work with remotely: discussing technology, business challenges, opportunities and the realities of running e-commerce projects.

One piece of partner feedback was particularly memorable. Paraphrased, the message was: maxcluster does many things differently, but without the Partner Day, partner marketing and the relationships surrounding the service, the company would be much more interchangeable.

The partner was not talking primarily about a feature or technical specification. They were describing the value created around the service through relationships and repeated interaction.

And then something went wrong.

"If there was something we needed to know, you would tell us."

Trust is built when nothing is wrong.
Its value becomes visible when something is.

And then something went wrong.

The importance of those relationships became particularly visible around the same period, when maxcluster experienced a technical incident.

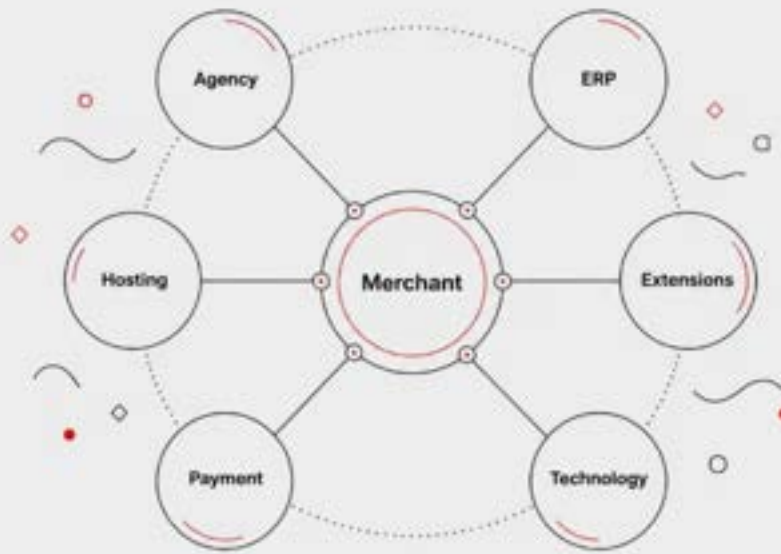
Trust does not make an incident acceptable. A provider's responsibility remains to prevent incidents where possible, resolve them quickly and communicate transparently.

But the reaction from partners revealed something important. The sentiment was essentially: "If there was something we needed to know, you would tell us."

That trust was not created during the incident. It had been accumulated beforehand through many smaller interactions, communication and experiences.

Trust is built when nothing is wrong. Its value becomes visible when something is.

Relationships become part of the product



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This is particularly relevant in ecosystem businesses such as e-commerce. A merchant's experience may depend on an agency, hosting provider, payment provider, ERP provider, extension vendors and technology platforms.

No single company controls the entire experience.

When those companies know and trust one another, problems can be solved differently. People know whom to contact. Context does not need to be rebuilt from zero. Teams can communicate directly rather than spending time deciding who is responsible.

The customer does not experience individual company org charts. They experience whether the companies involved can work together.

In that sense, relationships become part of the product itself.

Some advantages compound over time

EXPERTISE

EXPERIENCE

RELATIONSHIPS

REPUTATION

Some advantages compound over time.

AI makes many capabilities easier to copy quickly. But other advantages are built cumulatively.

Expertise develops through years of solving real problems. Experience comes from projects, decisions, successes and failures. Relationships are created through repeated interactions between people. Reputation emerges from what customers, partners and the wider market conclude from those experiences.

These assets can be supported and amplified by AI. But they cannot be created instantly by prompting a model.

Their value comes partly from the fact that they have a history. This makes them increasingly important in an environment where many execution capabilities are becoming commoditised.

TRUST

Trust isn't something you claim.
It's something other people conclude.

TRUST

Expertise, experience, relationships and reputation contribute to something particularly valuable: trust.

Trust should not be understood as a marketing claim. A company cannot simply declare itself trustworthy.

Trust is an outcome of repeated evidence and experience. Customers see expertise demonstrated. They experience delivery. Relationships survive difficult situations. Reputation confirms - or contradicts - what marketing promises.

Over time, people reach their own conclusion.

Trust isn't something you claim. It's something other people conclude.

EXPERTISE → MARKETING → EXPERIENCE → RELATIONSHIPS → TRUST

EXPERTISE

Know something worth knowing.

MARKETING

Make it visible.

EXPERIENCE

Prove it.

RELATIONSHIPS

Make it personal.

TRUST

Become harder to replace.

EXPERTISE → MARKETING → EXPERIENCE → RELATIONSHIPS → TRUST

The core idea can be summarised as a simple progression.

Expertise - Know something worth knowing. Competitive differentiation needs substance.

Marketing - Make it visible. Expertise that remains invisible cannot influence customer perception.

Experience - Prove it. Claims become credible through actual delivery, evidence and customer experience.

Relationships - Make it personal. Repeated interactions add context and resilience that transactional communication cannot easily reproduce.

Trust - Become harder to replace. Trust can become one of the reasons customers choose a company, recommend it and remain with it.

The objective is not to become impossible to copy. It is to become harder to replace.

Okay Nicole. What should I actually do on Monday?

- What do you know from experience, not from the internet?
- What can you prove that competitors can only claim?
- Does your marketing show your expertise, or just describe your services?
- Who trusts you enough to recommend you?

Okay Nicole. What should I actually do on Monday?

Concepts such as expertise, differentiation and trust only matter if they translate into action.

A practical starting point is to ask four questions:

1. What do you know from experience, not from the internet? Identify knowledge created by your own projects, customers, mistakes and successes.
2. What can you prove that competitors can only claim? Look for cases, results, data and concrete experiences that support your positioning.
3. Does your marketing show your expertise, or just describe your services? Review your website, social content, newsletters and sales materials.
4. Who trusts you enough to recommend you? Relationships, partnerships and customer advocacy can be strategic assets.

None of this requires a large marketing department. Start with what is already real.

If AI could copy all of your marketing tomorrow
What would still make
customers choose you?

If AI could copy all of your marketing tomorrow...

This is a useful thought experiment for evaluating differentiation.

Imagine that tomorrow a competitor could reproduce your website, messaging, content formats, campaigns, visual style and marketing processes. With generative AI, this scenario is becoming less hypothetical.

Then ask: What would still make customers choose you?

The answer reveals where the more durable sources of differentiation may exist. Ideally, the answer is not simply a feature, campaign or claim. It is something rooted more deeply in expertise, experience, relationships, reputation and trust.

BECOME HARDER TO REPLACE.

BECOME HARDER TO REPLACE.

The conclusion is not that companies should use less AI. They should use it extensively.

AI can make teams faster. It can improve research. It can challenge thinking. It can remove production barriers and allow people to build things that previously required resources they did not have.

But access to AI should not be confused with competitive advantage.

AI expands capability. Expertise improves judgment. Marketing makes expertise visible. Relationships build trust.

Together, those elements can make a company harder to replace.



[INSERT PARTNER DAY PHOTO]

The Partner Day image represents the human side of the argument.

Technology can scale production and automate processes, but relationships accumulate through real interactions: conversations, shared experiences, solving problems together and understanding how other people work.

For maxcluster, the partner ecosystem is therefore more than a distribution channel. It is part of how value is created for customers.

The image is also a reminder that some of the most valuable competitive assets may not sit inside a product, platform or technology stack. They can exist between people and between companies.

Give people a reason to
choose you that can't be
generated with a prompt.

Give people a reason to choose you that can't be generated with a prompt.

The most important question is not whether your organisation should use AI. It should.

The more important strategic question is: What are you building that becomes more valuable when everyone has AI?

Expertise developed through real work. Experience accumulated through projects. Relationships built through repeated interaction. Reputation earned through delivery. Trust created over time.

AI can help companies communicate, amplify and scale all of these. But AI alone does not create the history behind them.

So use AI to become faster and more capable. At the same time, invest deliberately in the things that are harder to copy and harder to replace.

Give people a reason to choose you that can't be generated with a prompt.