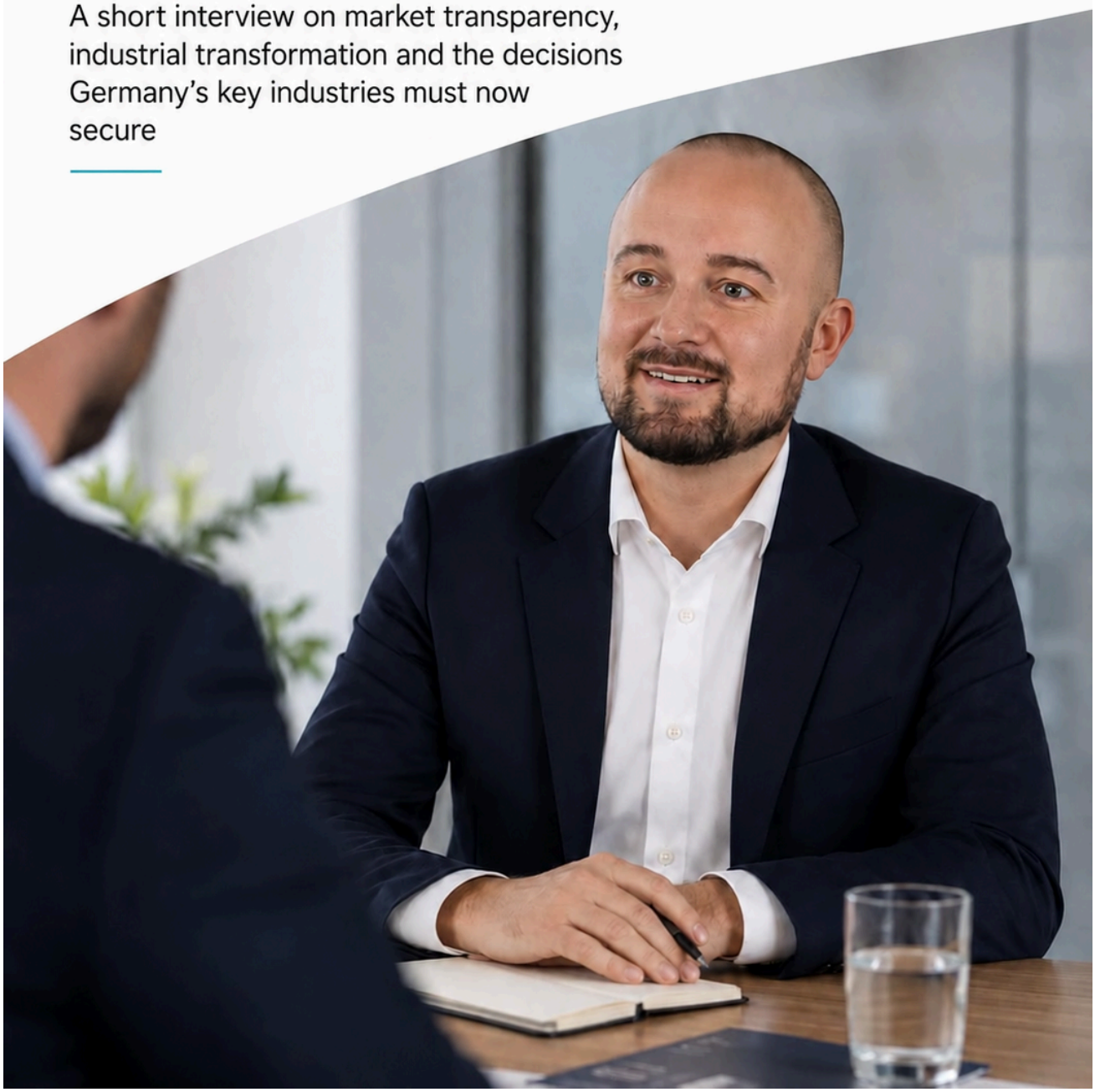
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Interview

Industrial markets in transition: Why strategic decisions need more than AI

A short interview on market transparency, industrial transformation and the decisions Germany's key industries must now secure



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Interview with Rickmer Görner

Head of Industry | DTO – B2B Research & Strategies

In this interview, Rickmer Görner explains why companies in industrial markets must make particularly careful decisions right now. Amid geopolitical shifts, accelerating technology, investment pressure and increasingly opaque B2B markets, relying solely on readily available information is no longer enough. What is needed is a perspective that combines data, experience, market insight and validation into a reliable overall picture.

"AI brings speed and structure. But in industrial markets, sound decisions emerge only when hypotheses are tested against market knowledge, expert perspectives and primary information."

Question: Why is this issue particularly relevant to industrial companies right now?

Answer: Many industrial markets face an unusually complex set of pressures. On one side, the need to transform is growing: companies must digitalise, decarbonise, make supply chains more resilient and safeguard their competitiveness. On the other, conditions are becoming more complex rather than simpler. Markets are fragmenting, technology cycles are shortening, and political frameworks are changing investment decisions, sometimes at remarkable speed. This is therefore a decisive moment: some companies will merely observe developments, while others will interpret them rigorously and turn them into intelligent decisions.

Question: Many companies now rely heavily on AI for research and analysis. Why is that not enough on its own?

Answer: AI is undoubtedly a very powerful tool. It can structure information, evaluate known sources faster, formulate initial hypotheses and reveal patterns at a speed that would once have been hard to imagine. But industrial markets are shaped by more than public information. Relevant pricing mechanisms, informal competitive dynamics, actual purchasing criteria, partner structures and barriers to implementation often lie beneath the visible surface. This is precisely where AI reaches its limits. It primarily processes what is available, rather than automatically identifying what really matters for a particular strategic decision.

Question: What does this mean for making strategic decisions more robust?

Answer: Companies need to validate their decisions more thoroughly. When entering new markets, restructuring product portfolios, relocating production capacity or investing in new technologies, they should systematically test assumptions rather than simply finding them plausible. In practice, this means combining secondary data, competitor monitoring, internal experience, customer perspectives and expert interviews. Only by bringing these together can individual pieces of information become a picture that remains trustworthy even in uncertain times.

Question: Which trends are currently having the strongest impact on Germany's key industries?

Answer: Several developments overlap. In the automotive industry, the focus is on electrification, software-defined vehicles, cost pressure, new competitors from China and the reorganisation of supply chains. Machinery and plant engineering is strongly influenced by automation, service models, data-driven value creation and the challenge of identifying growth opportunities despite subdued investment in many markets. Chemicals, materials and basic industrial sectors are grappling with energy and location issues, decarbonisation pathways and new regulatory requirements. Across industries, there are also skills shortages, geopolitical risks, sourcing strategies, reshoring and nearshoring, and the ability to integrate AI into processes productively and responsibly.

Question: Which decisions do companies in these industries need to consider particularly carefully now?

Answer: Many current decisions have a distinctly long-term impact. They concern which technologies to invest in, which markets to prioritise, where partnerships or acquisitions are worthwhile, which customer and application segments will remain attractive, and how resilient the business model is to regulatory or geopolitical shifts. In the automotive industry, this includes platform and software questions as well as a company's role in future value networks. In mechanical engineering, the question is often which offerings should evolve further towards solutions, services or digital business models. Above all stands a fundamental question: which investments actually improve competitiveness, and which merely look promising on paper?

Question: Where do you see the greatest risks when companies base decisions too heavily on AI-generated insights?

Answer: The danger is less about spectacular mistakes than a false sense of certainty. AI answers often seem coherent, elegant and complete, even when their underlying basis is simplified or incomplete. This is particularly sensitive in industrial niche markets. Small differences in sales, applications, certification, service capabilities or regional networks can determine success or failure. When these nuances remain invisible, decisions may appear formally plausible while failing to reflect real market conditions.

Question: What role do expert perspectives and primary research play in this environment?

Answer: They act as a corrective to the mere availability of information. Experts help interpret market dynamics, reveal unwritten rules and put developments into perspective: something that looks significant on paper may matter less in practice, or vice versa. Primary research also brings in voices that are not properly represented in any database: customers, sales partners, industry insiders, former decision-makers and technical specialists. Particularly in opaque industrial markets, this creates the depth of understanding that rigorous strategy work requires.

Question: Does that mean AI tends to be overrated in industrial analysis?

Answer: Not necessarily. I would say it is often misunderstood. AI is very strong at accelerating work, providing structure and offering orientation. But it does not automatically replace judgement. The real value emerges when companies use AI as part of a rigorous decision-making process: as a tool rather than the final authority. That combination is its strength. AI opens up possibilities; expert knowledge and market validation help ensure that we do not lose our way.

Question: What should decision-makers in Germany's key industries pay particular attention to over the coming months?

Answer: They should ask not only which trends attract attention, but which are truly sustainable. The key is to assess their own market position realistically, prioritise investments more rigorously and consider signals from customers, competitors, technology and regulation together. Companies that clearly identify where they will create value in future, which risks are manageable and which partnerships will make strategic sense can gain a real advantage. Especially in turbulent times, strategic clarity is a competitive advantage, rather than a luxury.

Question: What is your most important closing message?

Answer: In industrial markets, success does not automatically go to whoever has the most data, but to whoever can interpret uncertainty better. Good decisions emerge when speed and care come together: when digital tools, market intelligence and human experience work in concert. Anyone seeking to invest, transform or enter new markets today should therefore ask not only what seems possible, but what can be supported by reliable evidence.

From interview to decision: DTO helps companies analyse industrial markets rigorously, incorporate expert perspectives and support strategic decisions with reliable market and competitive intelligence.

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Interview partner



Rickmer Görner

Head of Industry | DTO – B2B Research & Strategies

Rickmer Görner leads DTO's Industry division and supports companies with market analyses, competitive assessments and strategic questions in complex B2B markets. His focus is on interpreting industrial transformation, validating strategic hypotheses and combining data, expert knowledge and practical market perspectives.