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Understanding Emerging Topics in Industry: What Decision-Makers Need to Know Now

A brief interview on dynamic markets, AI, networks and genuine value creation

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Interview with Kai Wichelmann

Senior Manager | B2B Research & Strategies

In this interview, Kai Wichelmann explains why companies should not merely observe emerging topics in industry, but assess them systematically. Dynamic conditions, new technologies and changing customer requirements create market opportunities that only become visible through robust interpretation. The interview shows why genuine insights, networks and expert knowledge are essential for forward-looking decisions.

“Emerging topics are not identified through yesterday’s data, but through signals that are only just appearing in markets, networks and customer projects.”

Question: Why should decision-makers address emerging industry topics right now?

Answer: Many markets are changing faster than is initially visible. Energy prices, new regulation, skills shortages, cyber risk and pressure for greater efficiency are continuously changing the rules. The goal is not to collect another trend slide. It is to understand which topics create real value: Where do customers save time, cost or energy? Where is new demand emerging? And where does a technical topic become a concrete market?

Question: What makes a strong emerging-topics analysis better than conventional trend monitoring?

Answer: Trend monitoring often says that a topic is becoming visible. A strong analysis asks who it matters to, who will pay for it and when it will become relevant. This is where the real insight lies. Industrial AI, digital twins, predictive maintenance and energy-efficient production may sound like broad buzzwords. The decisive question is whether they translate into specific applications, budgets and purchasing decisions.

Question: Which topics are currently attracting particular attention?

Answer: The strongest topics are those that solve several problems at once. OT cybersecurity protects plants and production. Energy efficiency reduces cost and supports sustainability goals. Robotics and automation help address skills shortages. Digital twins and predictive maintenance make assets more predictable. Supply-chain resilience is also gaining importance because supply chains are no longer as stable as many companies once assumed.

“AI often recognises what is already well documented. Experts and networks detect earlier when a topic is genuinely gaining traction in practice.”

Question: Why is AI-only research insufficient for emerging topics?

Answer: AI is a strong starting point. It organises known sources, identifies patterns and helps teams ask the right questions more quickly. But it has limits. If a topic has not yet been widely published, clearly described or entered into databases, AI will struggle to identify it as an emerging issue. Early signals often arise in customer conversations, pilot projects, supplier networks and among industry insiders. Experience, dialogue and market know-how therefore remain essential.

Question: Can you give an example of how an emerging topic becomes a real market topic?

Answer: Consider OT cybersecurity. On paper, it initially sounds like an IT topic. In industry, however, it concerns production assets, downtime risk, insurability, regulation and the question of which function controls the budget. Only when these factors are understood does it become clear which target customers are relevant, which providers are well positioned and where gaps remain in the market.

Question: What role do market size, competition and target customers play?

Answer: A very significant one. Emerging topics only become tangible when they are translated into markets. How large is the potential? Which customer groups face real pressure? How many providers already exist? Who are the strong specialists and who is entering from adjacent fields? Which companies are interested but not yet ready to buy? These questions transform a trend into a robust basis for decisions.

Question: How can emerging topics be prioritised without losing focus?

Answer: A simple but clear framework is needed. How great is the customer value? How quickly can the topic be implemented? Is there regulatory pressure? How intense is the competition? Does the topic fit the company's own capabilities? Not every exciting topic is automatically an attractive market. Sometimes a small, specific use case creates more value than a broad buzzword.

Question: What is the importance of interviews, networks and insider knowledge in this process?

Answer: They provide the reality check. Conversations often reveal what no study contains: which issues genuinely concern customers, which budgets are being shifted, which providers are considered credible and which solutions sound modern but do not yet work in day-to-day operations. This knowledge helps companies do more than describe trends; it enables them to interpret trends correctly.

Question: What is your most important message for decision-makers?

Answer: Emerging topics should not be treated as a list of buzzwords. What matters is which topics create genuine value and where they develop into concrete markets. AI can add considerable speed, but it does not replace direct market observation, conversations with people or experience from projects. Strong decisions combine data, AI, expert knowledge and insights from networks.

From interview to decision: B2B Research & Strategies helps companies identify emerging industry topics, assess market potential and translate the findings into robust growth and investment decisions.

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Interviewee

Kai Wichelmann

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Kai Wichelmann has been a Senior Manager at DTO since 2015. He holds a degree in business psychology and specialises in project management and the long-term implementation of strategies for medium-sized companies. His expertise includes brand and image analysis and the development of digitalisation and sustainability strategies that strengthen competitiveness and sustainable growth.