

AUMA KNOWLEDGE

# Study

Trade fairs in the age of AI:  
On the threshold between  
experiment and integration

## FOREWORD

# At the threshold between experiment and integration

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Artificial Intelligence, or AI for short, is transforming the trade fair industry: step by step, but with increasing speed. What sounded like science fiction just a few years ago is already part of the everyday working life of many players today: text and image generators support marketing departments, chatbots assist visitors with guidance and data-based analyses optimise the planning, implementation and evaluation of trade fair appearances.

The trade fair industry thus stands at the threshold between experiment and integration. This is precisely where this study begins.

With "Trade fairs in the age of AI: On the threshold between experiment and integration", AUMA and Prognos AG are presenting a situational analysis with a forward-looking perspective. The investigation shows where the industry stands in 2025, which applications are already being successfully used and which development paths will gain in importance in the coming years. The fundamental components are a comprehensive industry survey, technological trend analysis and expert discussions. The result is a varied picture: The trade fair industry in Germany is approaching AI with openness, pragmatism and a clear focus on commercial added value – it sees far more opportunities than risks.

By 2025, 70 per cent of trade fair organisers will already be using AI-supported tools, primarily for text generation, chatbots and data-based analyses. Particularly high potential is seen in the areas of personalised visitor guidance, intelligent success measuring and marketing automation. The study identifies 79 specific AI application fields and arranges them according to potential and their degree of technological maturity, which in turn serves as the central dimension for determining the stage of adoption. This creates a clear picture: The technology has become widespread across the industry, yet its strategic, value-driven use is still in its infancy.

However, people remain at the centre of all developments. AI cannot replace personal interactions, but it can help prepare for them, consolidate them and serve as an extension to them. It helps make content more relevant, processes more efficient and contact more targeted. It thus enhances the central value proposition of the trade fair industry: facilitating business through personal encounters.

The trade fair of the future will not become more technical as a result, but more personal: smartly organised, offering personalised experiences, evaluated in a more data-driven manner and, at the same time, characterised by direct encounters and genuine trust.

With this study, AUMA would like to stimulate discussion concerning the transition of the trade fair industry towards the use of smart technologies and to provide guidance for exhibitors, event organisers and visitors alike. The publication views itself as a compass in a time when technology and encounters are connecting in new ways. The future is AI-driven, but the trade fair remains human and cannot be replaced by AI.

This publication is the English-language short version of the study. The complete German version is available for download here: <https://www.auma.de/fileadmin/publikationen/auma-studie-messen-im-zeitalter-von-ki.pdf>.

## STUDY BACKGROUND

# Executive Summary



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Artificial Intelligence, or AI for short, is viewed by trade fair organisers as the central development that will most strongly change the trade fair industry in Germany by 2030. The starting point for the use of AI in practice is knowledge about possible AI application fields as well as their potential and the effort involved. The aim of this study is to provide guidance in a complex and dynamically growing AI landscape and to identify future development paths.

The study is divided into three parts.

Part 1 presents the findings from surveys conducted among event organisers, exhibitors and visitors. It can be deduced that the trade fair sector is on the verge of widespread acceptance, in which AI becomes a standard feature of the trade fair experience. This is evident not only in the AI affinity of visitors and exhibitors. It is also reflected in the use of AI in the working areas of trade fair organisers. AI is already widespread today, is growing increasingly and will be used in many further areas of application in the coming years. In 2025, 70 per cent of those surveyed state that they use AI applications within their personal workspace. Compared with the survey in the AUMA Organiser Outlook in 2024, this represents an increase of 14 percentage points. It is apparent here that usage still frequently focuses on individual work areas – in particular support when producing texts and within the context of chatbots and virtual assistants.

AI is clearly viewed within the trade fair industry as an opportunity. 72 per cent of those surveyed view the technology with an opportunity-oriented mindset. Fewer than four per cent view AI as more of a risk. Alongside financial strength, available personnel capacity plays a decisive role in the use of AI.

Consequently, it is primarily large trade fair organisers who see major opportunities at present. Nevertheless, AI is also increasingly seen as a challenge. Three quarters of respondents see challenges in the integration of AI applications and processes that will influence the trade fair sector in the near future. In the AUMA Organiser Outlook 2024/2025, this figure was just under half. The identification of relevant use cases is seen as the central challenge.

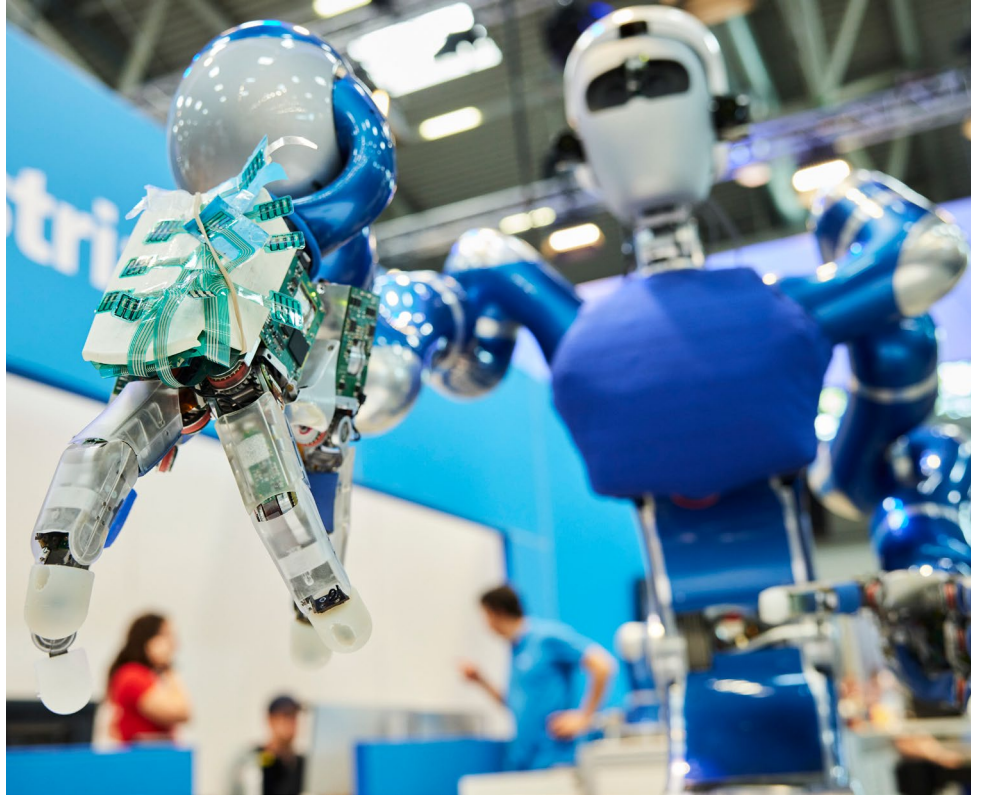
Part 2 identifies, evaluates and classifies 79 AI application fields. The study defines AI application fields as functions that are fulfilled in the context of trade fairs. One example is content and text generation, which is increasingly AI-supported. The application fields with the highest potential-effort ratio are those closest to the customer – e.g. from the areas of "Visitor Management" and "Marketing". In contrast, many of the AI application fields classified as "Important Projects" operate primarily in the background. Overall, potential-effort matrices identify 10 "Quick Wins" and 17 "Important Projects". The classification encourages a critical review of the concrete benefit-cost ratio and conscious prioritisation. Taken as a whole, the analysis results provide a comprehensive, application-oriented information base.

Assessments comparing potential vs effort/expenditure are supplemented with adaptation stages. They provide orientation regarding the technical maturity and market prevalence of the individual application fields. Specifically, the study classifies the AI application fields into the categories "Act" (17 application fields), "Prepare" (51) and "Observe" (11). A technology radar shows: The "Act" category primarily contains "Quick Wins" (6) as well as "Important Projects" (7). This means that from the overall analysis, a clear prioritisation recommendation can be derived. Consistent with this is the fact that a number of these priority application fields – particularly from the marketing sector – are already established in the trade fair business.

Part 3 looks at trade fairs in a world that is increasingly driven by AI. Based on the previous study findings, four future scenarios are developed. The future scenarios differ in the extent to which AI operates in the background, within fixed limitations, or assumes a visible and disruptive role at the centre of new business models. In doing so, they emphasise selected aspects respectively:

1. Trade Fairs as Data Islands – Local AI as an efficiency booster
2. Experience Trade Fair 4.0 – Playground for the senses
3. AI Platform & App Marketplace – Trade fair as ecosystem operator
4. Always-On Hybrid Platform – Trade fair as a permanent, networked platform.





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The future scenarios are intended to stimulate thought and reflect on possible developments from different perspectives. Future scenarios provide conceptual frameworks – they accentuate, inspire, sensitise and thus provide orientation. In doing so, they support strategic discussions.

What unites the future scenarios: The personal human-to-human exchange on site remains at the centre of trade fairs. The use of AI contributes on the one hand to the simplification and better comprehensibility of the customer journey. On the other hand, AI can contribute to generating impressive experiences and thus support networking, marketing and sales at trade fairs.

Finally, options for action in four fields of action are briefly presented. Here, too, the goal is to provide food for thought. A central success factor for the successful use of AI is the promotion of an innovation culture and change management. Effective change communication is central here, because the engagement of employees is decisive. Initial attempts, learning curves and costly lessons are part of the process. At the same time, feasibility is a suitable guiding principle that must be realistically assessed. Building AI competencies begins with theoretical knowledge, including information on relevant application fields. Learning environments are needed for testing in practice. Important here: A cross-functional approach in which, among others, Marketing, Sales and stand personnel test AI systems together in live operation.

The importance of data for AI applications is undisputed – however, a challenge in the trade fair context lies in shared usage. The development of digital infrastructure and collaborative data ecosystems is decisively influenced by the legal framework conditions. As a central platform for initiating business, high digital trustworthiness is not just a basic prerequisite.

In the age of AI, it will increasingly become an active quality promise for trade fairs – especially in international competition.

AUMA is the Association of the German Trade Fair Industry (Ausstellungs- und Messe-Ausschuss der Deutschen Wirtschaft e.V.), the umbrella organisation of the German trade fair industry. Both nationally and internationally, it represents the interests of all large and medium-sized trade fair companies in Germany, international organisers in Germany and the associations representing exhibitors, service companies, small trade fair organisers and visitors.

Trade fairs in Germany secure up to 230,000 jobs. Some 70 trade fair venues located between the North Sea and Lake Constance make the German exhibition scene unique the world over. Two thirds of all leading trade fairs in the global economy take place here. At peak times, international, national and regional trade fairs in Germany attract over 235,000 exhibiting companies and 16 million visitors. On average, 65 per cent of exhibitors and 35 per cent of trade visitors at all leading trade fairs come from abroad.

## Imprint

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