



COMMERZBANK

Press release

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New SME study: despite multiple crises, sustainability remains highly important and there is still potential in digitalisation

- **40% of the companies surveyed already have a sustainability strategy, and 33% are planning one**
- **Digitalisation is confirmed as another major topic for the future – two thirds of those surveyed see increasing opportunities through data-based business models**
- **Data protection regulations are seen as a barrier to data use; however, most companies are restrictive when it comes to disclosing their own data**

Despite the ongoing economic and energy crisis, sustainability remains as important as ever for medium-sized companies in Germany. This is shown in the 21st Entrepreneur Perspectives study from Commerzbank entitled “Economy in transition: sustainable and digital”. The study was once again undertaken by market research company forsa on behalf of the Bank. 300 companies from the industrial, service and retail sectors with an annual turnover of €15 million or more were surveyed. The new results confirm the findings of the previous year’s study, which examined the importance of sustainability in medium-sized companies.

Companies are implementing further sustainability measures

The effects of the energy crisis are strengthening companies’ efforts to implement further sustainability measures. 91% of those surveyed foresee many opportunities, above all in using resources carefully. Sustainability is also perceived as an opportunity in terms of image cultivation (83%), strengthening social responsibility (81%) and enhancing employer attractiveness (73%). However, the proportion of companies that already have a sustainability strategy (40%) is not growing compared to the previous year’s study.

Opportunities through data-based business models

In addition to sustainable transformation, the survey also examines the second important topic of the future: digitalisation. Respondents were also asked about data use, data ethics and digital future technologies, i.e. essential aspects of digitalisation.

The results showed that two thirds of the companies surveyed see great opportunities in data-based business models. Better adaptation of services to customer needs (65%) and the development of digital platforms (60%) are particularly important. Respondents named data security and cybersecurity (81%) and the protection of personal data (77%) as the most important aspects of a data-based business model. Although data-based business models are rated positively, they are currently not relevant for most companies. 48% of those surveyed still use data primarily to optimise their internal processes.

Sceptical about disclosing own data

62% of companies anticipate changes due to increasing data usage, though assessments vary greatly depending on the sector. While almost half expect changes in the industry, the figure for the service sector is as high as 73%. A mixed picture emerges when it comes to attitudes towards data usage. On the one hand, data protection requirements for data use are seen as an obstacle. On the other, 56% of companies state that they do not want to disclose their own data. At the same time, however, a recognisable added value makes 34% willing to share their data.

Data ethics as part of the strategy

Clearly regulated, transparent and responsible handling of data is therefore not just a key to being able to obtain and use information. It is also anchored in strategic considerations. For 43% of all respondents, digital ethics is already part of their corporate strategy. In the case of companies with a specific sustainability strategy, the figure is as high as 58%.

Future technologies are used differently depending on the industry

Looking at the future of digital transformation in medium-sized companies across the board, one thing becomes clear: half of all companies see the Internet of things (IoT) as the dominant future trend. A more differentiated picture emerges for the various sectors. In industry, IoT is particularly relevant for 49% of companies, and for around 37% in additive manufacturing and autonomous systems. In addition to IoT, service providers are dominated by the concept of shareconomy, for example, the joint use of platforms (33%), and augmented/virtual reality (30%).

Advice from the bank wanted

Companies want support from their bank, above all in terms of advice on subsidies for sustainability measures and information on sustainability issues. "In the current energy crisis, many companies are able to keep a focus on the major transformation issues. They are pursuing a clear strategic course during implementation, with milestones and goals on the transformation path, as well as with the necessary resilience," says Michael Kotzbauer, Board Member for Corporate Clients. "It also helps to have sparring partners who they can interact with as equals. We accept that role," he adds.

The "Entrepreneur Perspectives" initiative and its studies

Since 2006, the "Entrepreneur Perspectives" initiative for medium-sized companies has provided a forum for public-facing entrepreneurial issues. Once a year, it surveys up to 2,000 business owners and top-level managers from companies of all sizes and sectors. The representative surveys are carried out by forsa. Representatives from business, associations, politics and science discuss the results on public panels.

www.unternehmerperspektiven.de

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About Commerzbank

Commerzbank is the leading bank for SMEs (the Mittelstand) and a strong partner to some 30,000 corporate client groups and around 11 million private and small-business customers in Germany. The Bank offers a comprehensive portfolio of financial services in two business segments – Private and Small-Business Customers and Corporate Clients. Commerzbank finances around 30% of Germany's foreign trade and it is represented in nearly 40 countries around the world in the corporate customer business. The Bank focuses on German SMEs, large companies and institutional customers. In its international business, Commerzbank supports customers with a business connection to Germany and companies from selected future industries. Following the integration of comdirect, private and small-business customers benefit from the services of one of Germany's most modern online banks combined with personal advisory services at a local level. The Polish subsidiary mBank S.A. is an innovative digital bank that serves around 5.7 million private and corporate customers, mainly in Poland but also in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. In 2020, Commerzbank generated gross revenues of around €8.2bn with just under 48,000 employees.