

explore

Technology trends

We Love Tech

eos-solutions.com



The magazine for customers of the EOS Group

Real Estate
 Given a new lease on life

EOS Survey
 Bots are becoming more popular

More than climate protection
 Responsibility in debt collection



EOS at a glance

Main activities

- Purchasing unsecured and secured debt portfolios
- Real estate realization
- Fiduciary debt collection

Established in 1974 as the debt collection arm of the Otto Group in Germany, EOS is now a leading technology-driven financial investor with specialist expertise in the processing of outstanding receivables. EOS is a trusted partner to customers from a wide range of sectors in 26 countries.

For Europe's banks, we are one of the preferred purchasers of Non-Performing Loans (NPLs). We take over receivables management for companies, municipal authorities, and administrations, even across borders. Through our services, we ensure liquidity and investments and safeguard jobs. However, our most important investment is in our employees, who use cutting-edge technology to give their best, day after day. We introduce some of them to you in this magazine.



The companies of the **EOS Group** are located in

26
countries.

Through its **international network** of subsidiaries and partners, EOS offers services in more than

180
countries.

The

A

rating has affirmed the very good credit standing of EOS for nearly two decades.

More than

6,800

employees work for the EOS Group worldwide.



20,000

customers, including banks, insurance companies, utilities, mail order firms, telcos, mechanical engineering companies and publishers, are served by our more than **60 subsidiaries**.

editorial

Dear Readers,

"By 2005 or so, it will become clear that the Internet's impact on the economy will be no greater than the fax machine's." The fanciful speculation made in 1998 by Paul Krugman, winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics, has been proven wrong. The Internet has unleashed a technological revolution that touches nearly all aspects of the economy and of our everyday lives. The debt collection business too is being transformed, for instance, in matters of communication. With the help of artificial intelligence, we determine which approach will work best for each defaulting payer. In customer service, our chatbots are on hand to provide support. The changes don't end there. We are keeping an ear to the ground for tomorrow's trends. To find out what they might be, turn to our Technology Dossier starting on Page 10.

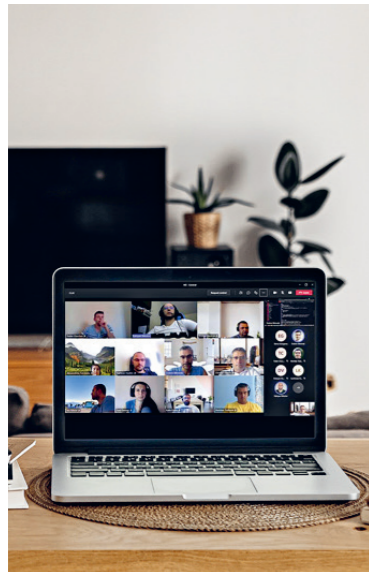
EOS is not content to tag along on the way to digital transformation. We want to shape and drive it, especially in our own sector. We would like to learn every day and improve ourselves through deeper understanding of data and human behavior and smart use of innovative technologies. One example is the bitcoin, which defaulting payers may be able to use soon to settle their debts. Given the rapidly increasing processing power of computers and the progress being made in machine learning, it is inevitable that operations of entire sectors will have to be rethought and redesigned.

In the midst of these upheavals, we have to remain aware of our overall responsibility. For me personally, corporate responsibility is very important. We ask as a company, how can we change things for the better? This question is at the core of our second dossier starting on Page 32. I believe that the attitudes toward corporate responsibility expressed by our talented young international employees in Outlook (pages 56–58) qualify them as ideal role models. Here's hoping you find some inspiration in this issue.

Best regards,

Klaus Engberding,
CEO of the EOS Group





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Everyone can help make the world a better place, including companies, says CEO Klaus Engberding.

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New NPL deals, IT manager of the year, membership of the UN Global Compact and the figures for fiscal 2020/21.

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Technological development never stops. To survive, companies always need to keep an eye on the latest trends. We've summarized four trends here.

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Traveling by plane, bus or train can be a nerve-wracking experience. These tools can help you get from A to B without stress.

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Find your nearest EOS branch.

Illustrated by Katrin Rodegast. The Berlin-based illustrator is especially well-known for her paper art and has won several design awards for her work.



Photos: studioline Photostudios GmbH, shutterstock, Christian Schmid, Andreas Wemheuer, Andreas B. Krueger, Mark Zlick. Illustration: Katrin Rodegast.

Legal notice

Publisher
EOS Holding GmbH
Steindamm 71, 20099 Hamburg

Tel.: +49 40 2850-1222
E-Mail: explore@eos-solutions.com
Web: eos-solutions.com

German Press Act: Lara Flemming
Editorial Board: Tabea Reich, Sabrina Ebeling
Publication frequency: twice yearly

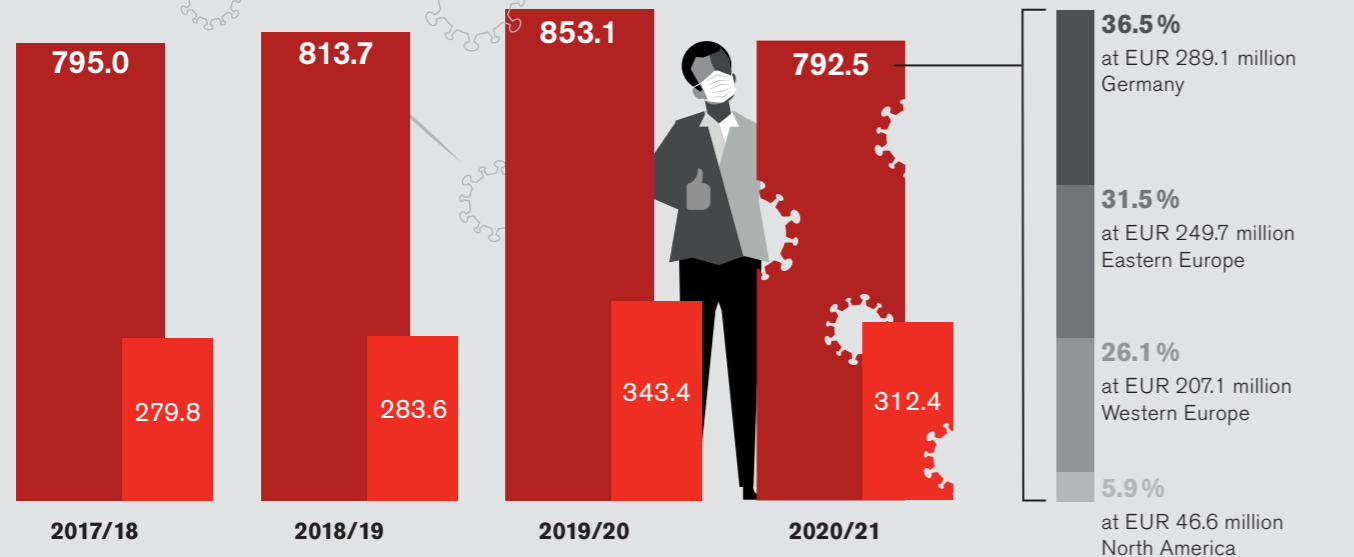
Editing & layout: C3 Creative Code and Content GmbH, Hamburg
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Project Management: Eileen Klussmann, Mareike Brenneisen, Rebecca Böger
Lithography: Giesick I Medien Produktion
Printing: optimal media GmbH, Hamburg

Good results in difficult times

The EOS financial year in figures



■ Revenue (in EUR million)
■ EBITDA (in EUR million)

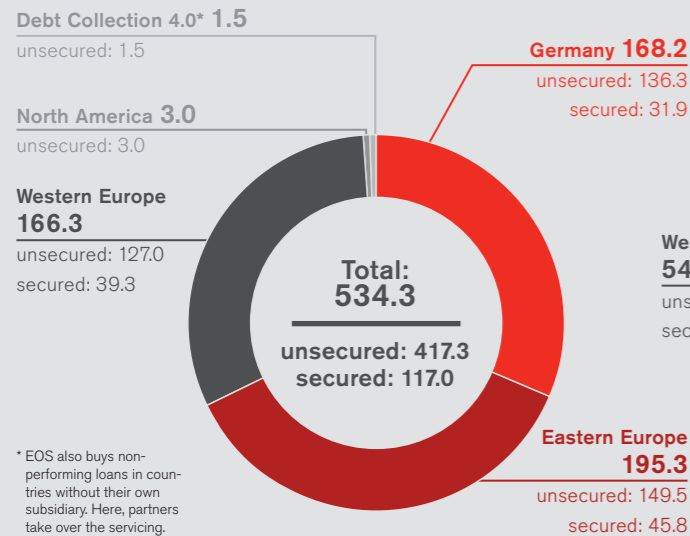
Due to the pandemic, EOS Consolidated experienced a slight decline in both revenue and in Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation and Amortization (EBITDA). In view of the difficult circumstances, fiscal 2020/21 was nevertheless profitable in terms of earnings with a substantial margin.

High level of investments despite crisis

Despite the limited number of NPLs on offer, EOS Consolidated once again passed the half billion euro mark in investment volume. In Eastern Europe, and in parts of Western Europe, investments in the unsecured segment were increased by as much as 21 and 28 percent, respectively.

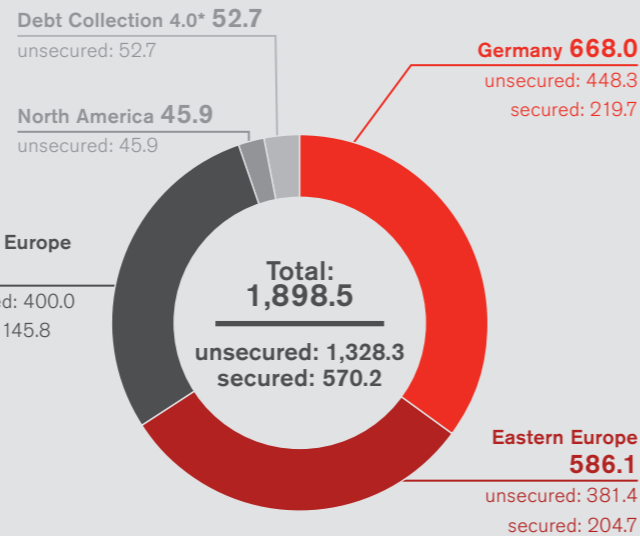
All data in EUR million

Investments in receivables purchases and real estate



* EOS also buys non-performing loans in countries without their own subsidiary. Here, partners take over the servicing.

Book value of the portfolios reported in the balance sheet at the end of the financial year



Selection of top investments

The core business and growth area of EOS is the purchase of non-performing loans and real estate in need of restructuring. In 2020/21, EOS confirmed again its commitment as a global investor.

All data in EUR million



EUR 810 million was the volume of receivables from three NPL portfolios that EOS in Spain purchased from Bankinter, CaixaBank, S.A. and Bankia, S.A. at the end of 2020. The debt portfolios contain a total of 232,000 receivables.



EUR 98.2 million is the nominal value of two debt packages with a total of 1,725 receivables that EOS in France purchased from CEPAC and Banque de Tahiti.



EUR 83.4 million is the nominal value of the two largest portfolios with a total of 17,000 receivables EOS in Croatia purchased from Croatian banks in the last fiscal year.

Consistently high

Technologies and IT processes continue paving the way to a cutting-edge debt collection system.



Total invested by EOS in the last fiscal year in upgrading its IT core systems.

Photo: Matthias Oertel
Illustration: GutenTag - Hamburg, EOS



For the complete Annual Report 2020/21 scan the QR code with your smartphone camera.



Credit rating 17 times A

EOS stands for "VERY GOOD CREDIT STANDING". This has been confirmed by Scope Hamburg, formerly "Euler Hermes Rating", which has awarded EOS an "A" rating for the 17th time in a row. The rating was based on the company's very high earnings level, stable cash flow, its long-standing experience in the evaluation, acquisition and recovery of non-performing receivables, its leading market position in Germany and strong position in Europe.

Prize for educational media

Two awards for finlit



The start-up team, (from left) Sebastian Richter, Jannik Steinhaus and Jana Titov, is delighted to receive the two awards for its educational initiative.

A DIVERSE JURY made up of scientists, educators and specialists gathered in Berlin on July 5, 2021, to honor the winners of the 26th round of the Comenius Award. This year, the panel looked at almost 200 digital educational media submissions from eight European countries and in the end chose the finlit foundation's ManoMoneta financial literacy initiative as one of the winners. Finlit, the first non-profit company of the EOS Group, is committed to providing the public with financial education. In addition to the Comenius "seal of approval" for teaching and media quality in the school education category, the founders of finlit received one of the EduMedia medals for outstanding educational products. "These two accolades are a huge honor for us, because the Comenius Award is a completely independent competition and provides confirmation that our concept is hitting the spot. Quite honestly, we had to pinch ourselves at first and are immensely proud!" says finlit foundation Managing Director Sebastian Richter.



IT Manager of the Year

Relocation to home office in three days

The pandemic has posed several challenges to the way we live and work. At the start of the crisis, IT experts found themselves on the front lines. It was up to them to make sure employees could work remotely from a home office and keep business processes up and running in companies and entire sectors.

At EOS in Bulgaria, the shift to remote working went very smoothly and quickly, in record-breaking time in fact. It was made possible by Dimitar Tsolov, IT Director of EOS Matrix in Bulgaria. For this achievement he was voted "IT Manager of the Year" by the CIO Club Bulgaria. His team co-workers had nominated him for the competition, which was being held for the 13th time. They wanted to acknowledge his professionalism and capabilities which have made EOS Matrix a technological leader within the sector.



At EOS in Bulgaria, **Dimitar Tsolov** has initiated a range of digitalization projects. Now the IT Director has received an award for his outstanding work.

"The very fast transition to remote operations provided important momentum for a range of other initiatives in digitalizing company processes," says Dimitar Tsolov. "Team leaders and managers began to optimize and rethink their work processes, which triggered a real development boom in robot-assisted process automations at the company." Amid the coronavirus crisis in 2020, no fewer than 17 of these robotic process automation (RPA) were developed and implemented at EOS in Bulgaria. "Other software products, chatbots and artificial intelligence systems are currently being developed and implemented, so that we will soon be able to personalize our contact with customers to an even greater extent."

Dimitar's colleague Dobrin Mirevski explains how RPA helps to digitalize processes on → [Pages 30 – 31](#)

Photos: shutterstock, EOS, Getty Images illustration: shutterstock

Serbia
1.7

billion EUR

was the volume of mostly unsecured NPLs that EOS in Serbia recently acquired as part of a secondary transaction. This makes the deal the biggest of its kind in the history of EOS in Eastern Europe. "This transaction has made us the local market leader in secured NPLs, way ahead of all other competitors," say the delighted Managing Directors Jelena Jovic Milentijevic and Jelena Jovic. "This is something that we fought hard for."

NPL deals

Investments in East and West

Despite the pandemic, the market for non-performing loans has not stood still. While our Spanish subsidiary is expanding its expertise in the credit card portfolio business, EOS in Serbia has secured a multi-billion deal.

Spain
40,000

accounts

valued at 200 million EUR were acquired by EOS in Spain from Madrid bank WiZink at the start of 2021. With this success, our Spanish national subsidiary has again demonstrated its expertise in credit card portfolios. "This portfolio is a perfect fit for the operational requirements and strategies that we have been working on in recent months. This new investment has allowed our business to continue to grow," says Managing Director Carlos Lorenzo.

UN Global Compact

EOS joins UN initiative

THE UN GLOBAL COMPACT has as many as 17,500 members; EOS joined their ranks in 2021. With its 10 principles, the United Nations program provides a framework for doing business sustainably and responsibly. By becoming a member, EOS commits to aligning its actions to the initiative's core principles in the future.

Read about what these principles are, and why it makes sense for companies to join, on → [Pages 38 – 41](#)



dossier NO 1

dossier 1_we love tech

Read here:

- Whether defaulting payers will soon be able to settle their debts using cryptocurrencies.
- How chatbots at EOS are helping out in customer service.
- Which tech trends companies should have on their radar in 2022.

We Love Tech

Thanks to artificial intelligence, cloud technology and chatbots, the debt collection business is a very high tech operation nowadays. As a technology leader in the sector, EOS cannot afford to relax, because the next major tech trends are already in the starting blocks.

Illustration_Katrin Rodegast



Getting ready in good time for virtual money

Paying in cryptocurrencies and other digital money could soon be an everyday occurrence. As a technology-driven service provider, EOS is therefore keeping an eye on developments in virtual money and if required, could offer it as an additional payment method on its Serviceportal.

Text_Florian Sievers

If you want to pay a bill in the Microsoft online store or streaming platform Twitch, you no longer have to use the euro or US dollar. Software users and gaming fans can use the cryptocurrency Bitcoin to make payments on those sites. Wikipedia and Greenpeace accept donations in the virtual currency, while some restaurants and pickup and delivery services take Bitcoin payments.

For most consumers, however, cryptocurrency is not a common method of payment. According to a survey by Statista in 2019, Turkey (22 percent) and Spain (10 percent) were the only countries in Europe with double-digit usage rates for cryptocurrency payments. By way of comparison, Germany and France stood at four percent. Nevertheless, there is increasing discussion about Bitcoin, Ethereum and Litecoin. As a technology-driven debt collection service provider, EOS is therefore keeping an eye on developments in virtual money.

When people start using virtual currencies to pay for goods and services regularly, they should also be able to settle their outstanding payment obligations with the same currency. "We always strive to meet defaulting payers in their comfort zone," says Elsa Quentin, who is responsible for the ongoing development of the digital Serviceportal of EOS in Germany. Already, defaulting payers can choose from among nine different payment methods on the portal to settle outstanding debts. "And at some point we could add Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies to Apple Pay, Google Pay and Paypal," says Elsa.

Tamper-proof

The CoinMarketCap platform currently lists more than 9,000 different cryptocurrencies, worth around 2 trillion EUR in total. With a market share of around 50 percent, Bitcoin is currently the biggest digital currency, with Ethereum a distant second. Many virtual currencies are cryptographically protected

(encrypted) on a blockchain, i.e., on a distributed ledger that records all transactions, which prevents tampering of currencies and transfers.

Another category of digital currency that customers and consumers will be able to use in the foreseeable future is Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDC), i.e., virtual currencies issued by government institutions. The Bahamas was the first country worldwide to introduce a CBDC, the Sand Dollar. The underlying technology is similar to that of cryptocurrencies.

"It is still entirely unclear which of the several thousand digital currencies will prevail," says Stefan Hölscher, who in his capacity as Lead Expert Payment, is responsible for all payment-related matters at EOS parent company Otto Group. In any event, the focus is on the customers who will decide which digital and cryptocurrencies they want to use to make payments. "We are assuming dynamic development and can imagine →

"In the future, digital currencies can be a valuable addition to the range of payment methods offered, if the underlying conditions are right."

Elsa Quentin,
Product Owner Portals at
EOS Technology Solutions



that these currencies will become more relevant in a few years' time," says Stefan.

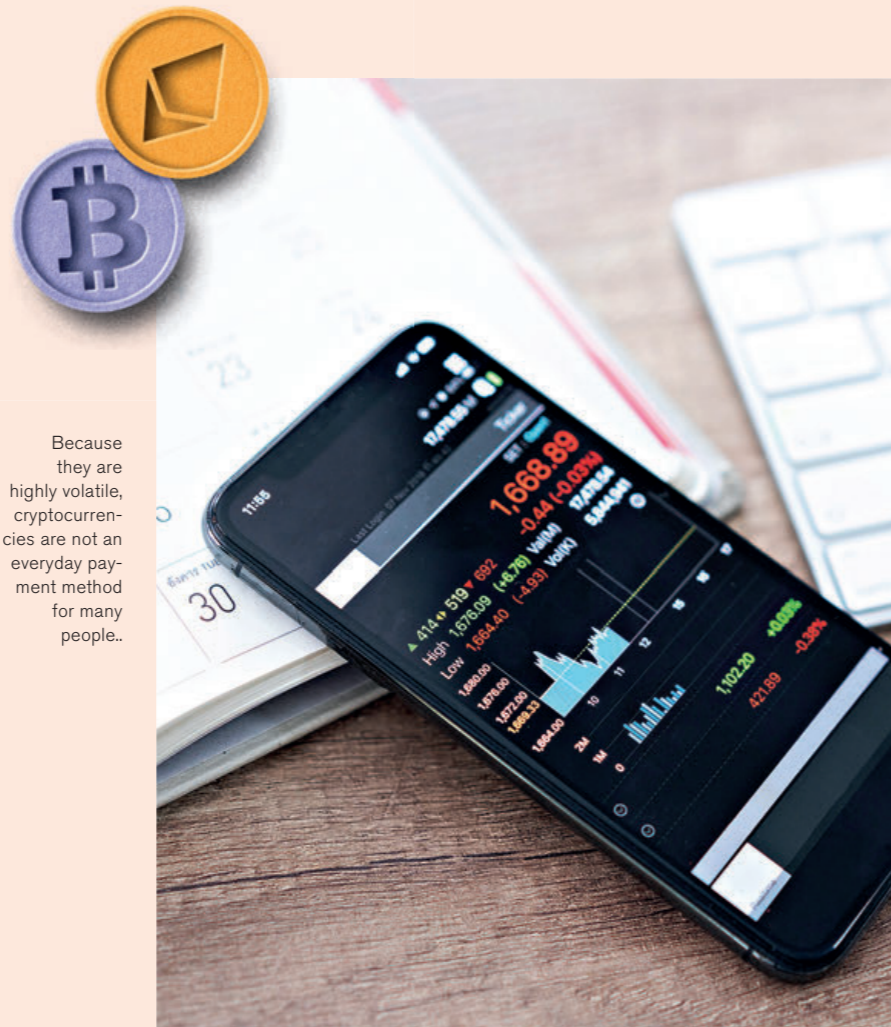
Several factors still holding things back

Legal uncertainty is one of the reasons why the use of virtual money in day-to-day business has been limited to date. It is still not clear how companies should account for cryptocurrencies in their balance sheets. Furthermore, fluctuating exchange rates make using virtual currencies difficult in the retail sector. Although the EU Commission intends to extend the automatic exchange of information to cover e-money as part of its action plan for fair and simple taxation, this is unlikely to be implemented before the start of 2023. Consequently, many companies are holding back. In addition, most consumers still regard cryptocurrencies mainly as investment or speculation tools, not as a means of payment.

However, as soon as digital money does become part of everyday life, EOS will respond by offering digital currencies as an additional payment option on its Serviceportal. "Users who have made their way to the Serviceportal are already demonstrating a willingness to settle their debts," says EOS expert Elsa Quentin. "We don't want to lose any of them because they don't find their preferred payment method there." This option could appeal to digital natives in particular.

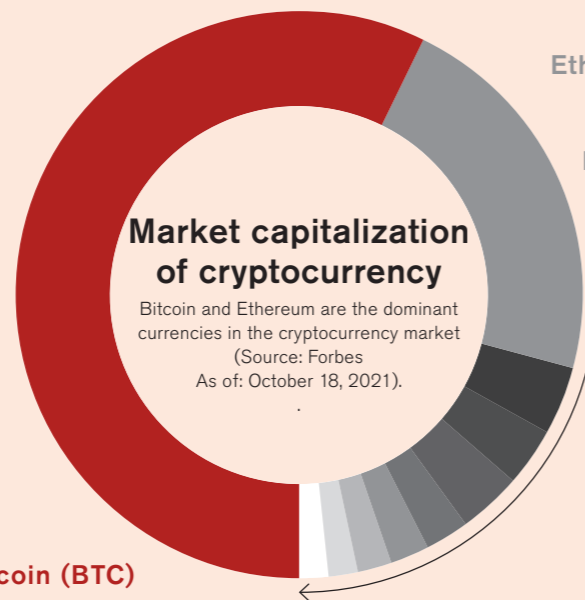
There are several benefits for defaulting payers if they also have the option of paying their outstanding debts with cryptocurrencies. For example, they could use money that is available to them only in digital form, when their other reserves may be depleted. In addition, Bitcoin and similar cryptocurrencies offer a payment option for people with no bank accounts or credit cards and thus ensures their participation in financial affairs. Depending on the currency, the blockchain technology guarantees transparent processing.

"In the future, digital currencies can be a valuable addition to the mix of payment methods offered if the underlying conditions are right," says Elsa. EOS is keeping its eye on the ball because we want to be prepared for any increase in demand.



Because they are highly volatile, cryptocurrencies are not an everyday payment method for many people..

Photo: Getty Images



Market capitalization of cryptocurrency

Bitcoin and Ethereum are the dominant currencies in the cryptocurrency market (Source: Forbes As of: October 18, 2021).

Ethereum (ETH)
385
EUR billion

Bitcoin (BTC)
998
EUR billion

- Binance Coin (BNB)**
- Cardano (ADA)**
- Tether (USDT)**
- XRP (XRP)**
- Solana (SOL)**
- Polkadot (DOT)**
- USD Coin (USDC)**
- Dogecoin (DOGE)**



Tom and Lea never sleep

Text: Philipp Stiens

Many companies are using chatbots to speed up processing of customer queries. At EOS too, chatbots support service personnel by providing information to defaulting payers.

They can provide advice with online shopping, search for a suitable flight connection or order your favorite pizza for delivery to your home. Whereas the 2010s were very much defined by the smartphone app, the current decade is the realm of digital bots and virtual assistants. For companies, they are a practical tool for automating processes and encouraging interaction with their customers.

EOS Contentia in Belgium is using a virtual assistant on its Website to provide defaulting payers with all the important information they need. The chatbot speaks three languages – French, English and Flemish – and goes by the name Tom, a reference to the Atomium, probably the best-known landmark in its native Belgium.

The idea for a chatbot came about during a detailed analysis of all issues that have

been raised in the past with the EOS Contentia service center. The survey showed that more than one in four inquiries involved a recurring matter that could be handled automatically without much input from customer service agents. "It was obvious that a chatbot in the service area could reduce our workload enormously," recalls Wesley Van de Walle, who is in charge of the project at EOS Contentia.

Before Tom could start helping his co-workers, he needed to go back to school, just like human customer service agents. "For each issue there are questions and keywords that the chatbot has to learn first of all," says Wesley. So that Tom knows what to say and when, Wesley and his team designed a tree diagram that mapped all relevant queries and possible follow-up questions. If a certain keyword occurs during a conversation with a defaulting customer, the chatbot automatically knows where to start. It then follows a kind of script prescribed by the tree diagram. To ensure that the bot achieves the right outcome quickly and reliably, possible answers are suggested to the users. What happens if Tom occasionally fails to get the right answers? "In that case we simply adapt the script by adding the relevant question and answer," says Wesley.



Wesley Van de Walle is a chatbot expert at EOS in Belgium and has been involved in the development of the chatbot Tom since the start of the project.

Humans and chatbots work hand in hand

Since the rollout of the chatbot in June 2020, the number of calls to the service center has declined noticeably. Tom conducts about 300 conversations with defaulting payers on average each month. One in five of the calls takes place outside of the center's normal business hours. That makes the chatbot a great help to the service team, but no more than that. At EOS Contentia, Tom will not be replacing any of its human colleagues, says Wesley: "Many of the tasks involved in the debt collection environment are too complex in any case. For example, a chatbot is not capable of putting together an individual payment plan."

Tom and its human colleagues have been working together even more closely since the last update, which connected the chatbot to EOS Contentia's debt collection software, so it can now process the personal data of defaulting payers. In this case, people are always informed that they are communicating with an AI tool. This offers users a whole range of additional options. For example, Tom can provide information on request about the amount of debt, the due date of the next payment, any costs incurred and a lot more. If a matter exceeds the bot's authority, the user is passed on to a human agent from the service team.

The challenge of two-factor authentication

Before a chatbot can start working with personal data it needs to comply with conditions imposed by the EU GDPR. "That was a lot of work," recalls Denis Jakob, Business Analyst at EOS in Croatia. Together with his project team he implemented the necessary steps to protect Lea, the Croatian counterpart to the EOS Contentia chatbot, from unauthorized access. "The data have to be protected when they are transferred by the chatbot to the system and back again. Chats have to be stored securely and deleted after payment has been made."

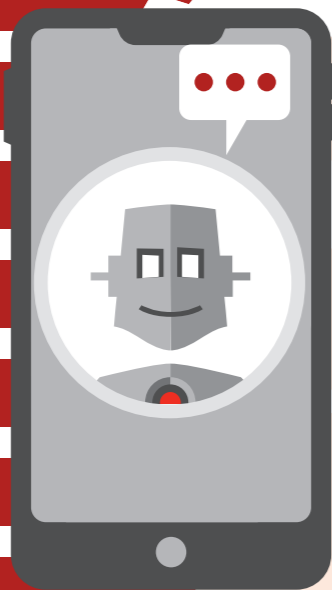
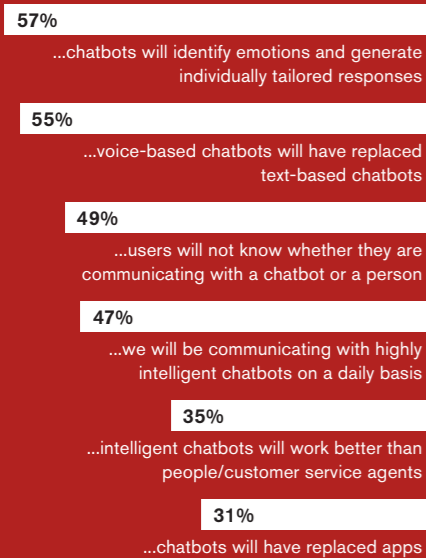
So that the chat partners can be identified, they have to undergo a two-factor authentication process. First of all, Lea asks for name, claim number and phone number. If the answers match the data in the system, the user is sent a four-digit code by email or SMS, which has to be entered into the live chat window. Only after these two hurdles have been overcome is Lea allowed to provide information about personal matters.



Chatbots are already reducing the workload of service center staff.

In 10 years...

In the EOS Chatbot Survey 2021, participants predicted where chatbot technology will be in 10 years. For more results go to → **Pages 28 – 29**



Percentage of answers 1 and 2 on a scale of 1 ("agree completely") to 5 ("don't agree at all")

Plans call for Lea to be integrated into common messaging services in the future. The Viber app, which is popular in Croatia, will set the ball rolling. Using a QR code in a letter, email or on the Website, defaulting payers will have access to their preferred communication channel and can interact with the chatbot in a familiar environment.



Denis Jakob, Business Analyst at EOS in Croatia

"Once people get used to this technology, defaulting payers will have fewer reservations about contacting debt collection services."

Chatbots increase capacity for self-determination

"Once people get used to this technology, defaulting payers will have fewer reservations about contacting debt collection services," says Denis. Nobody likes to be called unexpectedly and confronted with debts. Chatbots offer a user-friendly communication channel where defaulting payers can deal with their debt collection issues by themselves around the clock. This facility will be available initially in Croatia and Belgium and will soon be rolled out in other EOS countries. EOS in France has already integrated Tom into its communication, while Lea will soon be used in other countries, albeit under a different name. EOS in Croatia is working on a concept that will let other EOS national subsidiaries integrate the chatbot into their systems and adapt it to their own preferences. "We have the know-how and can simply pass it on," says Denis. When asked whether this means that the chatbot development is complete, he adds: "We are still working on a lot of other chatbot features. Making it available on commonly used voice assistants could be the next major step."

Photos: Getty Images, EOS Illustrations: GutenTag – Hamburg

Say hello to the future: The four top tech trends

Improved user-centricity, optimized AI applications, more advanced cloud systems and location-independent business processes are four of the technology trends that will support people and companies from 2022 and beyond.

Text_Denis Dilba

1

Connected in everyday life

The Internet of Behavior

ACCORDING TO EXPERTS, the 25 to 35 billion networked devices currently in the Internet of Things (IoT) continuously collect data whose analysis provides information about human behavior. This is the basis for the "Internet of Behavior" (IoB). Companies can leverage the IoB to gain insight into customer preferences and behaviors. Smart clothing, for example, can measure the heart rate, daily number of steps and calories burned by its wearers, while sensors in cars reveal braking and steering behaviors, reaction times, or periods of non-use. This kind of information helps companies to launch new user-driven products and services, produce targeted advertising and improve messaging strategies. According to Gartner's US analysts, who coined the term IoB, by the end of 2025, half of the world's population, i.e., around four billion people, will have been subject to an IoB program.



2

Back to local storage

Edge applications for Artificial Intelligence (AI)

UNTIL NOW, AI APPLICATIONS have had to be permanently connected to a cloud to satisfy their needs for processing power and storage space. Edge AI systems work without a cloud connection and shift the intelligence to the devices themselves or the sensors that collect the data. So operators of the sensors and devices retain ownership of the data, allowing personal information to be better protected than it is when outsourced to an external cloud. Companies do not have to share their own

sensor data with competitors during the machine learning process. In addition, data transport is substantially reduced, which lowers energy use, increases processing speed and makes the edge AI applications more robust, because they impose minimal requirements on the network connection. Even in 2020, edge AI technology was already "at the peak of inflated expectations", according to the Gartner hype cycle. It remains to be seen whether it will actually live up to these expectations.



3

Fast, local processing

The Distributed Cloud

THE DISTRIBUTED cloud aims primarily at improving processing times. The basic idea is to bring the cloud physically closer to its users. Whereas normal cloud systems store and process data at a central location in huge server farms, the distributed cloud relies on several smaller storage locations known as regional and edge clouds. The latter store data needed locally, including for edge AI systems, and therefore avoid a more complex download process from the central cloud.

This makes corresponding applications not just faster but more robust as well. This is important e.g., for video streaming and distributed smart city or smart factory applications. But above all, to ensure that autonomous cars can drive safely in the future. Another benefit is that it is easier for companies to meet data privacy regulations, thanks to cloud nodes located in their own countries. Gartner's IT analysts therefore assume that the next generation of cloud computing will have cloud sub-stations everywhere, similar to WLAN hotspots.



4

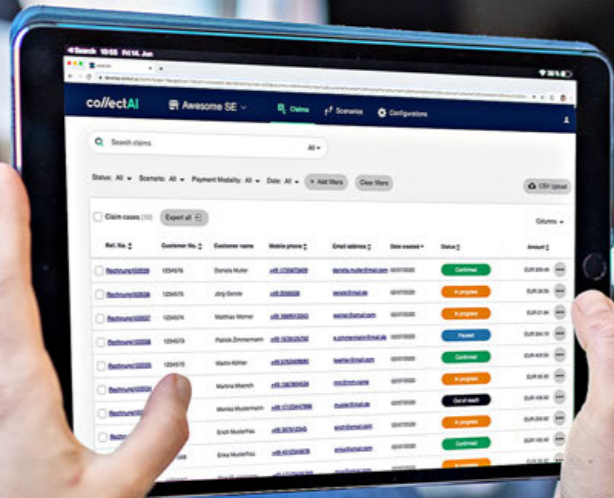
Work no matter where

Anywhere Operations

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC has shown just how vulnerable the concept of the permanent office is. In the next few years, working, doing business and offering services completely independent of location will therefore become the default for companies. This IT operating model, which Gartner has dubbed "Anywhere Operations", is about more than just working remotely from home or looking after customers virtually. Wherever feasible, the "digital first, remote first" rule should apply for all processes in a company. It would allow access to, transfer and sharing data and processes outside a company's own network, for example. As a result, contracts and other critical data could be made accessible to customers, employers and business partners regardless of location. Gartner's analysts predict that by the end of 2023, as many as 40 percent of companies will have switched to anywhere operations, to deliver optimized and blended virtual and physical experiences to customers and employees.



Digital dunning process from start to finish



When a company contacts its customers and reminds them of outstanding payments at a suitable time before the debt collection process begins, it increases customer loyalty. EOS in Germany has joined forces with Otto subsidiary collectAI to offer clients digital, AI-based receivables management across the entire value chain.

Text: Nicholas Brautlecht

man companies have at best digitalized parts of their dunning process, according to the EOS survey "European Payment Practices".

As far back as 2001, EOS customer PrintPlanet was doing pioneering work as one of the first interactive online printing firms in Germany. Some time ago, the company decided to give its dunning process the digital treatment as well. "We wanted to start talking to customers at an early stage about outstanding payments in a way that took into account their personal circumstances," says Thomas Demann, General Manager at PrintPlanet.

Turn dunning process into a good experience

As many EOS clients are in a similar situation and want to digitalize receivables management before it gets to the debt collection stage, EOS has forged an alliance within its

parent company Otto Group. In collectAI, the Group has in its ranks a young company that models this process to perfection. Established in Hamburg in 2016, collectAI digitalizes payment processes through a software platform with interactive invoices and a smart dunning process. "This means that clients receive a dunning process tailored to their customers, entirely in keeping with the principle of customer centricity," says Timo Seelmann, Key Account Manager at EOS in Germany.

As the company name suggests, artificial intelligence plays the leading role at collectAI, especially in machine or reinforcement learning. For instance, the software learns from past and current interactions between consumers and vendors what words to use to formulate reminders, e.g., whether it is more appropriate to address the customer by first name or title (Mr., Ms., etc.).

"Let's be honest: it's never a good feeling when you get payment reminder. You've forgotten to do something, and then you have to power up your computer, log in to online banking and type in a long IBAN," says Lars Nuschke, Head of Sales at collectAI. That's exactly where collectAI comes in, according to Nuschke. Instead of giving consumers a rap on the knuckles with one-size-fits-all reminders, collectAI aims to surprise them with a different approach. "Our business is to turn this disagreeable process into a positive experience." (See inset on the dunning recovery paradox.) That also convinced PrintPlanet to leverage this partnership as a customer.

If a bill for a printed coffee mug has not been paid, because the customer has forgotten to make the bank transfer, the AI system identifies the customer's "preferred channel", i.e., SMS, WhatsApp, email or traditional letter, that's best suited for a payment reminder. For example, the AI could send an automated SMS with a link to the payment page in the branding of PrintPlanet. A click on the payment link also verifies that the consumer has received the reminder. The AI also determines the frequency and timing of the approach. For instance, you are more likely to reach a student from Hamburg on a cell phone in the evening than a retiree in the countryside.

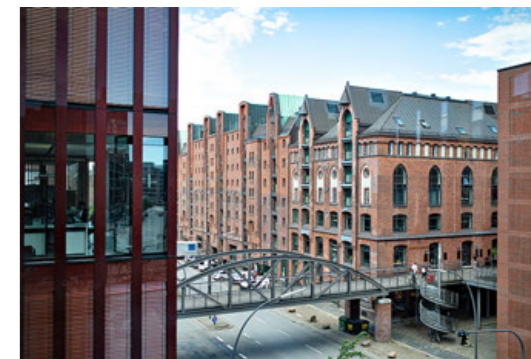
But of course, here too, any AI tool is only as good as the data on file. If a cell phone number is not available, the system can encourage consumers to simply provide it, to fur-

ther simplify the dialog. "Many consumers are then amazed by how it can all be handled with just a few clicks," says Nuschke. If the customer's history points towards an inability to pay, collectAI also offers the options of deferral or installments. "One of the goals of our customer-centric dunning process is to make sure that consumers come back for their next purchase," says Nuschke.

Fewer debt collection processes

However, if a debt collection process is unavoidable, the details of the receivable are passed on in encrypted form to EOS under the terms of the agreement. "Alternatively, the clients can of course pass on the data themselves," says Seelmann. Ultimately, this allows companies to realize an end-to-end digital receivables management process, from e-invoicing through commercial dunning process to fiduciary receivables processing or the sale of receivables.

The example of PrintPlanet shows the positive effects this can have on cash flow and customer retention. "We have seen the number of debt collection processes decline significantly since we've had collectAI on board," says Demann from PrintPlanet. "This shows us that approaching the defaulting payers at the right time is crucial, because we also want our customers to come back."



The alliance between collectAI and EOS makes a fully digital receivables management process possible (top). collectAI is located in Hamburg's warehouse district (bottom).

The dunning recovery paradox

Customers who receive a payment reminder are initially more dissatisfied than those who don't. However, if those customers who received a reminder are able to get rid of an outstanding debt quickly and easily, they have a much higher level of satisfaction.



People at EOS: Who are you?

Jobs and staff at EOS are highly diverse. Four of our colleagues tell us who they are, what they do and what drives them.



Ben Kleinebrecht

Has been working at EOS Deutscher Inkasso-Dienst in Germany since 2007 and heads the Debtor Centricity and Communication Team.

Has a particular passion for mini adventures in the great outdoors. For example, he likes hiking and enjoys geocaching and bird-watching.

"IN MY JOB I am always trying to reconcile the interests of clients, EOS and defaulting payers. Every single day it's a challenge for me to find practicable and sustainable solutions for all parties that can lead to freedom from debt, in keeping with our purpose 'For a debt-free world'.

As a qualified biologist, I like switching off from my job out in the natural environment. By simply taking a few minutes to really focus on the forest, sit with your back against a tree and enjoy the tranquility, the rustling of the leaves, the fresh air and the natural world, you can wind down and recharge your batteries. Just recently I bought a piece of woodland in North Frisia, where I come from. Since the property was ravaged by a hurricane, it's a poor excuse for a forest with very few trees. It has to be filled in with trees and allowed to grow into a proper climate-tolerant forest over time. I have already planted 750 saplings and am aiming for 1,000 in total. I sought advice from a forester when I was starting out, because the soil of this ancient dune is very sandy. I finally opted for two kinds of oaks and larches, beech and chestnut trees, all of which will thrive at this location."

Photos: Christian Schmid, Mark Zick



Marta Pereiro González

Has been working as People & Culture Director at EOS in Spain since 2020.

Has a particular passion for surfing and walks on the beach. On stormy days in particular the sight of the waves helps her to switch off and relax.

"THIS YEAR, we renamed the HR department at EOS in Spain 'People and Culture'. Because we have realized that people are the driving force and our objectives couldn't be achieved without them. The new mission of this area is to accompany them not only at a professional level but emotionally too. Each time we have the opportunity we ask people questions like: What do you need to be happy while doing your work?"

For example, we are currently endeavoring to raise awareness of health issues among the workforce with initiatives such as the World Day for Health and Safety at Work or the creation of a benefits catalogue with special rates on healthy activities like gym, spa or nutrition workshops. We will soon be offering seminars that show people how to deal with stress, for example when they change positions. Because if you are in a good place emotionally, you can achieve more, not just at work.

In my free time I like to exercise or play sports, preferably spinning (indoor cycling), surfing and tennis, or I read a book. My favorite books are an ideal match for my job: Stephen R. Covey's 'The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People' and 'Emotional Intelligence' by Daniel Goleman."



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Benjamin Gerhard

Has been working as Senior UX & Visual Designer at EOS Technology Solutions in Germany since July 2018.

Has a particular passion for playing tennis. He is currently trying to teach his daughters the sport, with some success!

"I HAVE TO LOOK AT things from the perspective of the users; that's what makes my job so interesting. As a UX (user experience) designer, you have enormous influence on user behavior through concept development and the design of software user interfaces. In my case these are the user interfaces of the EOS Serviceportal and client portal EOS Space. For these platforms I am responsible for a positive user experience, so that ultimately EOS will benefit from it too. There's an interesting quotation by designer Frank Chimero that I often bear in mind, because it reminds me what my daily job is all about: 'People ignore design that ignores people'.

My part-time job allows me to follow my passion for design in the mornings and spend a lot of time with my children in the afternoons. I live with my family in Hoisdorf near Hamburg. It's where I have learned to redefine the term luxury: For me, luxury in this place is about nature, tranquility, country living, forests and lakes. All this plus the proximity to the sea and the short commute to Hamburg make it a remarkable experience. Unfortunately, it is still too rare nowadays for men to be given the opportunity to work part-time and be more involved in looking after their children, or to be considered capable of doing so. I am pleased that EOS gives me that opportunity, because it allows me to evolve not just professionally but in my personal life as well."



Shafagh Dastjani Farahani

Has been working as Data Scientist at EOS in Germany since 2020.

Has a particular passion for audiobooks. She especially likes listening to history podcast and novels, e.g., by Hermann Hesse.

"I AM ALWAYS HAPPY to learn something new, like the world of debt collection when I joined EOS. I actually have a PhD in physics. Today I evaluate data for the Center of Analytics as part of an international team of experts. I enjoy working with and understanding data and preparing it for the respective business case.

My roots are in Tehran, the capital of Iran. I came to Hamburg to study in 2003 and since then I have lived here in the North. Unfortunately, I have not been able to visit my homeland and my family for the last two years due to the pandemic. Since the indoor swimming pools opened up again, at least I can go back to doing my laps. I normally go swimming three times a week. Generally speaking, sport is my favorite hobby. Apart from swimming, I really love dancing, especially hip-hop and contemporary dance."

Photos: Benne Ochs, Michael Löwa

Moody's-type ratings for cybersecurity

Ongoing digitalization is accompanied by an increased risk of cyberattacks. Independent scrutiny of IT infrastructure and processes by an outside party is more important than ever. Security rating tools are now the most comprehensive solution.

Text_Nicholas Brautlecht



At the latest when hackers cripple another oil pipeline and drivers stand at empty gasoline pumps – a recent occurrence in the USA – managers will again ask themselves: Are we doing enough for our cybersecurity? Are our defense methods still state-of-the-art? Gunnar Voitack, who, as Chief Information Security Officer, has been responsible for IT security at the EOS Group since 2015, thinks he has found a robust response to this question at least for now. As hackers' tricks become more sophisticated, the defensive mechanisms used by companies have to evolve continuously too. For some time, the state-of-the-art method for checking a company's IT network for security loopholes was a penetration test in which experts simulated hacker attacks. EOS carried out such tests too. Gunnar says the 'pen tests' are no longer adequate, partly because the intervals between them are too long. "My front door might be regarded as secure today, but if the intruders develop an

effective lock pick tomorrow, I might not know that until a year later," says Gunnar. To allow continuous risk monitoring of the EOS digital footprint, the company decided in 2020 to expand its arsenal by adding IT security ratings.

The term 'rating' usually brings to mind agencies like Moody's and Fitch, but in this case it's not a company's creditworthiness but its cybersecurity that's being assessed. A credit rating is expressed in grades like 'AAA' or 'D', while security ratings are on a scale from 250 to 900, although a top rating of 900 is considered unachievable. Gunnar says that "There is no such thing as complete protection from hackers."

The sum of all data

How is such a rating produced? What's the story behind the figures? The simple answer is: an awful lot of data! After all, the rating providers don't carry out simulated attacks on the IT infrastructure, but evaluate the vulnerability of a network on the basis of data

from the global digital sphere. In the process, they look at data on automated malware (bots) and their ping-pong communications between the servers of hackers and infected computers. This allows the rating tools to find out precisely which of the company's devices are infected with malware and where security checks have failed. Although this data can be found on the public Internet, it can be filtered out only with the use of special applications. Moreover, the rating providers' algorithms analyze whether the work logins and employees phone numbers of can be found in the darknet. Information relevant for the rating includes how often, for how long, and how malicious the malware intrusion or data theft was.

The rating is the sum of many individual data analyses and a good starting point for Gunnar when he arrives at the office on Monday mornings. The rating gives him an overview without his first having to make phone calls to all colleagues in countries around the world. That's what he did in the old days.

The search for the security loophole

The platform, which Gunnar uses as an example to explain the methodology, displays the rating history of EOS over 12 months. The blue line in the graph moves with a narrow range. Compared with the ups and downs of share prices, there's not much movement there, but for Gunnar, that's a good sign. What's more interesting is the comparison with the company's main competitors, whose rating history also is displayed. "You can see who is taking cybersecurity seriously and who isn't going to so much trouble." In brief: EOS is up there among the frontrunners. After all, data are the basis for the company's business, so the responsibility is huge.

With the help of the rating tool, it is possible to better evaluate the cybersecurity of business partners. That's important because every company, whether a bank or automotive group, operates within an eco-system of sub-suppliers, auditors and software vendors etc., and thus in an environment full of risks. "We too were rated with regard to IT security even before EOS starting using the first rating tool itself," says Gunnar.

More work being done from home offices and blurring boundaries between personal and professional spheres do not make the work of Gunnar's team any easier. On the contrary, the risks in home-based networks are considerably greater. In addition, more business areas and processes are being shifted to the Web and data are being moved to the cloud. As a result, potential targets are getting bigger.

Gunnar and his co-workers are deployed in more than two dozen countries to close potential security loopholes in the IT network. They are assisted by the findings of the rating tool, which Gunnar enters and saves in an

test case

The differences between security rating and pen test

A **security rating** categorizes a company's cybersecurity on the basis of data. This is not done by attacking a network, but by analyzing a company's digital footprint.



In a **penetration test**, a real person tests an IT network for vulnerabilities. The tests are normally conducted once or twice a year.

Data-based approach

IT security rating tools analyze and assess whether data are accessible without the permission of the company being rated.

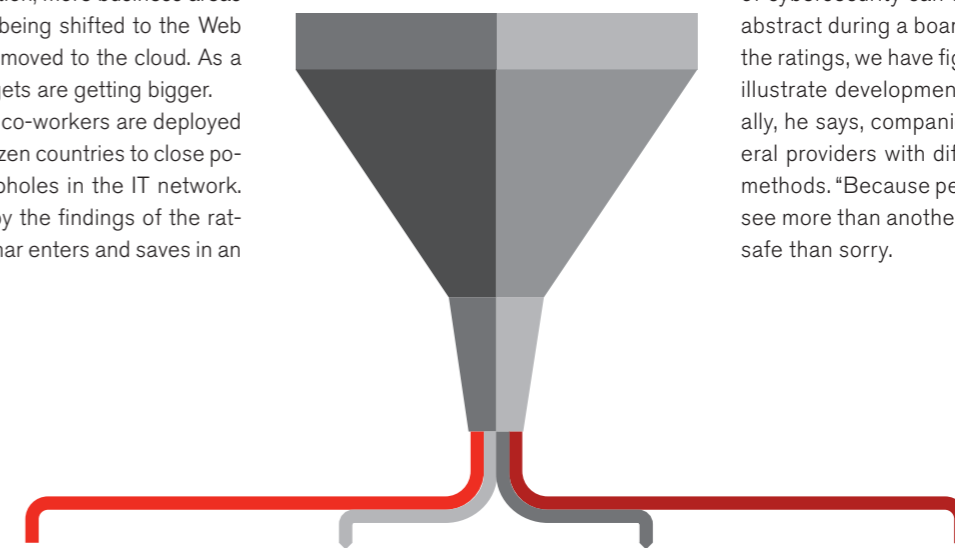
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Excel spreadsheet: The patchwork of green (as secure as possible) and a few red fields (check them out!) show Gunnar whether security certificates are up-to-date or if malware has infiltrated one device or another belonging to one of the more than 6,800 EOS employees. It also shows how well his team's 'pest management' is doing.

That the IT security rating providers were inspired by credit rating systems like Moody's simplifies communication within the company, Gunnar explains. If hackers are not currently knocking out an oil pipeline, the issue of cybersecurity can quickly become rather abstract during a board meeting. "Thanks to the ratings, we have figures on hand and can illustrate developments," says Gunnar. Ideally, he says, companies should rely on several providers with different data gathering methods. "Because perhaps one of them will see more than another," says Gunnar. Better safe than sorry.

Photo: Achim Mülthaupt Illustrations: EOS



Compromised systems

An important area that focuses on risks like spam, botnet infections, communication with malware servers.

Cybersecurity duty of care

Analysis of a company's defense mechanisms (open ports, TLS/SSL certificates, etc.).

User behaviors

Look at file sharing in corporate networks (files infected with malware? copyrights observed?).

Reported breaches

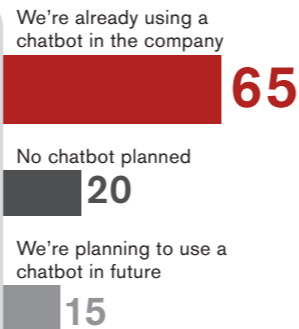
Scan the news for publicly reported breaches like data privacy infringements, data loss and data theft.

How can I help?

Two out of three companies are already using a chatbot in their communication with customers. The results of the EOS Chatbot Survey 2021 reveal what chatbots can do, how they are accepted by customers, and what companies can expect from these digital co-workers.

Widely used but ...

Two thirds of companies in the B2C segment are already using a chatbot in their communication with customers. Others plan to use a robot in the future. Data in percent.



49 percent

of the queries put to chatbots can be resolved by them independently.

30 percent

of digital communication is handled by chatbots.

71 percent

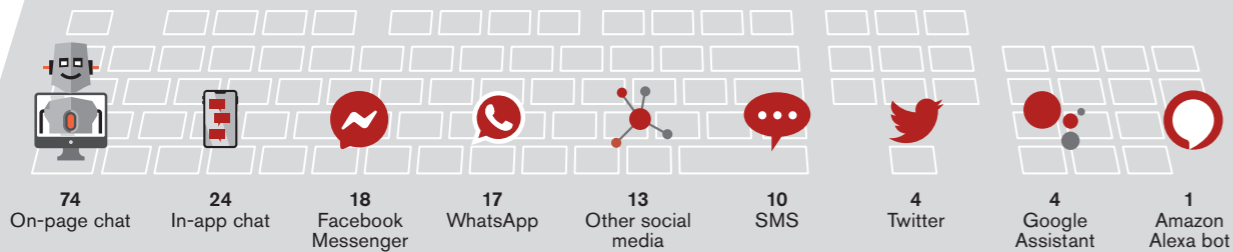
of respondents think that chatbots have become more important due to the Covid-19 crisis.

96 percent

of users have a very high level of acceptance of chatbots.

Majority of chatbots integrated into websites

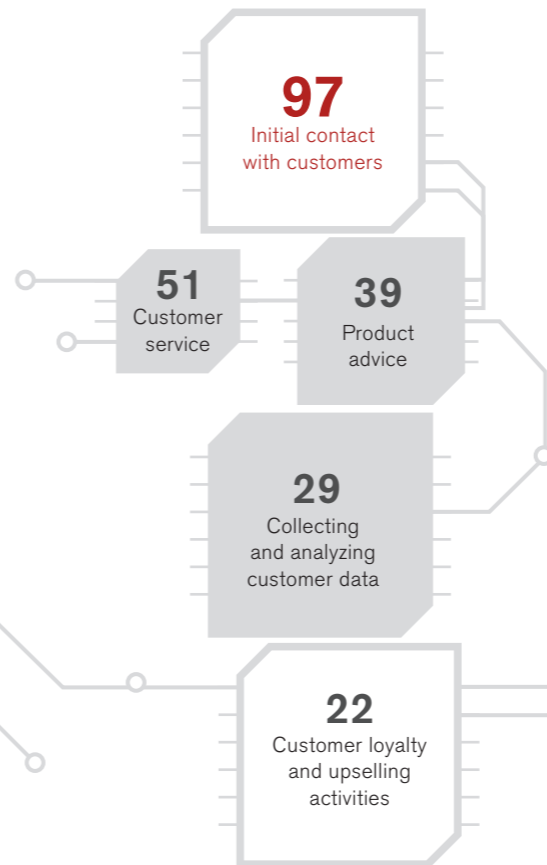
Many platforms can use chatbots. The most popular by far is the Website. Voice assistants are at the bottom of the rankings. Data in percent.



dataflow

Potential still untapped

Most chatbots are used for initial contact with customers. However, they are still not being used often enough for collecting data or for upselling purposes. Data in percent.



Focus on data and employees

Companies' expectations of chatbots vary. They want to use chatbots mainly to generate data and improve employee satisfaction. Customer satisfaction and cost savings also play a role.



Data privacy is the greatest challenge

To use chatbots you need to have internal expertise and revise your company's data structures. The biggest obstacle is data privacy. Data in percent.



Chatbots: a trending technology
You'll find more information about how companies use chatbots in our online magazine.



A win-win-win solution
Scan the QR code and read how companies, employees and customers benefit from chatbots.

* Source: EOS survey of 2,800 company representatives in 14 countries in Western and Eastern Europe; computer-assisted phone interviews conducted between April and June 2021.

“Our robot goes to work at 2 a.m.”

Robotic Process Automation (RPA) takes over routine tasks that otherwise would eat up our time. A team of specialists in Bulgaria has spearheaded EOS efforts to boost process quality and productivity through software robots. Their Chief Digital Officer Dobrin Mirevski explains how RPA is changing the face of the collection industry.



Dobrin Mirevski
Dobrin is Chief Digital Officer at EOS Matrix in Bulgaria and has been working in business development for the last 24 years including international assignments in Albania and Romania.

Dobrin, according to one study, automation has revolutionized manufacturing processes and pushed up factory productivity 75 percent since 1980. On the contrary, office productivity is up only 3 percent in the same period as people continue to fill in forms, create spreadsheets, fetch and feed data from one system to another. Astonishing, don't you think?

DOBRIN MIREVSKI: Yes, while we can't digitalize things like putting food into our mouth, there's huge potential to digitalize repetitive office work. Top management must dedicate enough resources to digitalization and automation. It's not an 'only if we have time' issue.

The fastest growing segment of the enterprise software market is robotic process automation (RPA). At EOS in Bulgaria, you created a specialized team for the development of software robots.

RPA is a technology that software vendors often say: If you can start a computer, you can work with RPA. But that's not true. You need the relevant IT skills and training. Mathematical algorithms are only as good as the people who created them. We have a handful of dedicated RPA experts that have developed 20 robots by using a platform called UiPath with great results. Those 20 new 'colleagues' alone save us a total of up to 3,500 working hours a year. That's pretty exciting, given the fact that we didn't operate a single robot 2.5 years ago.

What kind of tasks do they carry out?

Essentially, they help us to get the robots out of humans. That includes labor-intensive back office jobs like dealing with long lists of print jobs. In that case our robot gets going at two in the morning and starts printing, classifying, sorting, so everything is waiting there when our colleagues enter the

office. The robot saves us the first two to three hours of the day, leaving more time to process the papers, do the brain work or anything that requires human interaction.

What does that mean for the customers?

It leads to considerably higher satisfaction rates among clients as you can be absolutely sure that accurate documents are sent at the agreed time, rather than hours or days later because somebody called in sick or is on vacation.

What other business areas can get a boost through RPA?

Another example is the legal area, despite many people assuming that the law is like German grammar with lots of exceptions. That might be true in parts but if you dig into that field from a business process perspective, you'll find enough patterns that allow for robotization. Let's say a certain case fulfilling a prerequisite reaches a stage, where the next action is 90 percent clear, while in the remaining 10 percent of cases that action doesn't do any harm. Our robots also monitor changes in legislation. They scroll through state gazettes and alert us that we should focus on paragraph 3 on page 5, for instance.

What about compliance?

Compliance is about very strict rules without much cognitive evaluation. With a properly designed robot, you avoid the risk of human failure for instance when checking if counterparts are on a public anti-money laundering list.

Once you have a solution you can probably scale it and use it in other countries, right?

That's an interesting point as our team has supported EOS units in countries like Spain and Croatia to kick off their RPA journeys. Since we're all part of the same group, you may think that all have the same needs. Surprisingly, we never ended up with the same proof of concept. While in one country crunching data on a daily basis without

thoughts

mistakes was the most urgent, it was the task of approaching a state institution and up- and downloading documents in another. That shows a robot is a platform that tackles a specific problem, but not a solution on its own.

How do you believe robots will change the collection industry as a whole?

Traditional call center-based agencies will become almost everything digital agencies. Collection strategies for certain portfolios, clients or types of debt will be completely replaced by customized strategies for each single obligation. AI-driven chatbots will allow the dialog between agencies and defaulting payers to be initiated even in out-of-office hours. Collection teams will focus even more innovation and brain work, while technologies will do the doing.

Will you be able to experience that in your career?

Definitely. Gordon Moore, the co-founder of Intel, in the 1960s predicted the number of transistors on a microchip to double every two years with the cost of computers halving. We can adapt Moore's Law to digitalization: Efficiency gains are exponential. Already we see that one robot we set up can immediately reduce the burden for employees of completing repetitive, dull data processing work by 50 to 60 percent and we expect that number to rise to 80 percent soon.

What other technologies do you expect to be around the corner?

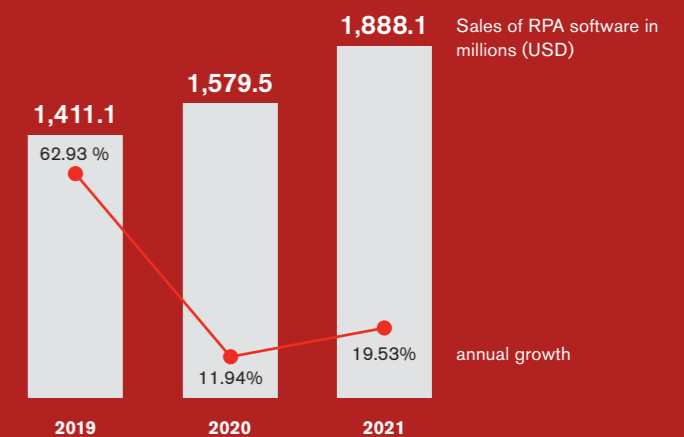
Frankly speaking, I have no idea. If I knew, I wouldn't be sitting here. But you don't have to be futurist to predict that we will see more exciting new technologies in the next 5 to 10 years, so it could well be that we will have to admit that our forecasts were very shortsighted. Let's stay curious!

Photo: EOS

The market is gathering momentum again

First, the COVID-19 pandemic stifled the rapid growth of the RPA market, but now it looks ready to give the market a real boost within the coming years, says the technology research and consulting company Gartner. It is estimated that some 90 percent of all major companies around the world will be using some type of RPA by 2022 in order to further reduce the number of routine, repetitive tasks being handled by employees.

Source: www.gartner.com



Read here:

- How sustainable criteria help the financial sector to go green.
- How responsible debt collection is causing change.
- Why corporate responsibility is a compliance issue.

Doing good

Companies have many ways to take on responsibility. For its part, EOS recently developed a strategy to change the financial sector for the better. But in the future, the financial market should compel companies to act more sustainably.

Illustrations_Katrin Rodegast



The financial sector goes green

Is sustainability a question of affordability? Not at all. In the future, you'll have to meet sustainable criteria to be able to afford things. These days investors are interested in a company's ESG factors, i.e., Environmental, Social and Governance.

Text_Philipp Stiens



The European Union (EU) wants to be carbon neutral by 2050 and its ambitious plan will have an impact on all sectors. In the future, a company looking for money on the capital market will have to prove it is pursuing a sustainability strategy in efforts to make a positive contribution to climate protection.

The approach, known as "sustainable finance" was presented by the EU Commission in April 2021. EU Financial Services Commissioner Mairead McGuinness plans to introduce "a fundamental shift in the financial sector". Basically, companies that set and achieve ambitious sustainability goals will enjoy preferen-

tial treatment on the capital market, either through favorably priced loans or greater demand for their shares. In the future, for example, financial service providers will have to incorporate sustainability criteria in their investment advice. Asset management and insurance companies will be subject to the same obligation.

SMEs will be affected

But when are a company's actions seen as sustainable? In the future, anyone looking for an answer to this question can consult the EU Taxonomy, a classification system for "the set of technical screening criteria to define which activities contribute substantially to two of the

environmental objectives: climate change adaptation and climate change mitigation". The criteria are based on scientific advice. Companies should make targeted investments in those activities. The regulation covers the sectors energy, forestry, manufacturing, transport and buildings, accounting for 40 percent of listed companies in Europe.

At present, a mere 11,000 companies in the EU are required to submit a sustainability report. However, the new regulation, the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), which is currently in the consultation stage, will extend the reporting obligation to all large and publicly listed companies, starting in 2024.

Does that mean that small companies are off the hook? No, says sustainable finance expert Lukas Simon. As suppliers or service providers to a large or publicly traded company, SMEs can also be held to account in the medium term. "The sustainability reports of major companies should ideally cover the entire supply chain. So what can happen is that a large company will approach its mid-sized supplier to ask about its CO₂ emissions from the last five years."

Having ambitious goals pays off

Sustainability criteria can be summarized in three ESG categories of environment, social

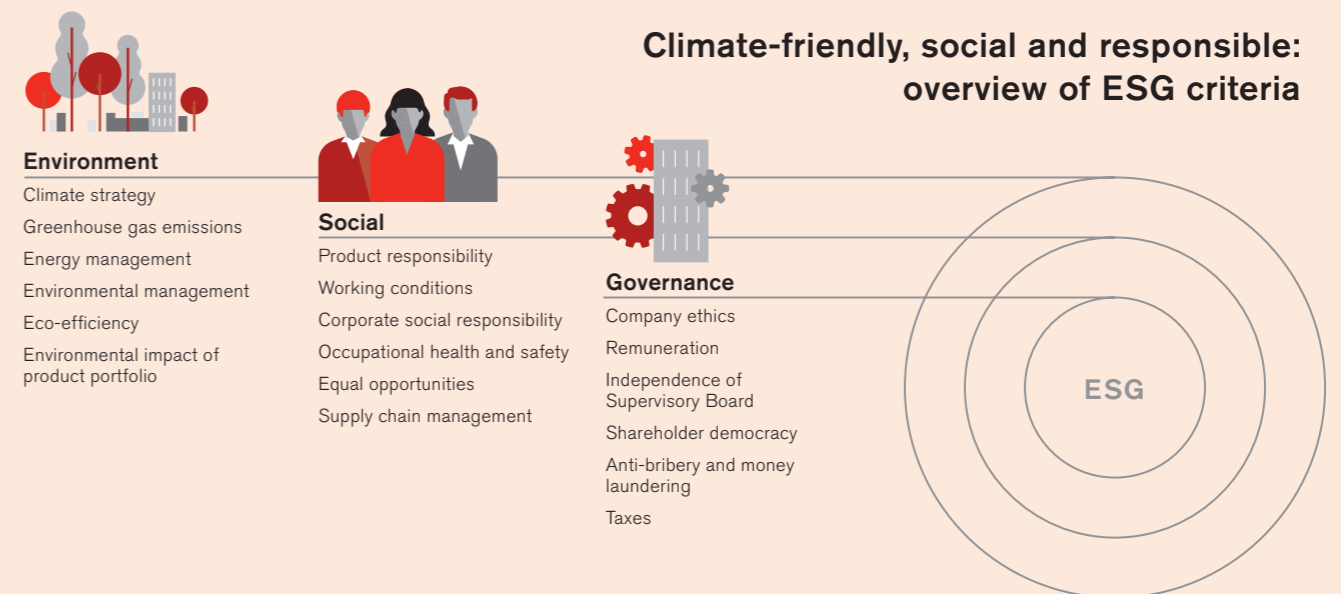
and governance. "Each of the three criteria harbors different, industry-specific risks. In the case of a car manufacturer, the CO₂ emissions of the car fleet have a greater impact on the future viability of the business model, whereas in the clothing industry, social criteria play a greater role," says Simon, who works in the field of sustainable finance at the Frankfurt School – UNEP Collaborating Centre, a think-and-do tank. Companies have to be familiar with industry-specific ESG drivers to be able to define a sustainable corporate strategy.

Banks already take account of and evaluate the sustainability commitment of companies in their approval process. The EU Taxonomy is designed to make this task easier for banks in future. "It provides the bank with reliable, scientifically grounded threshold values that they can integrate into their financing structures as KPIs." For borrowers this means companies that reach agreement with their bank on ambitious ESG targets should enjoy better contractual terms.

Publicly traded companies would do well in any case to integrate ESG into their corporate philosophy. Green investments are trending. According to the French financial services firm Natixis, 72 percent of institutional investors and 77 percent of fund selectors are pursuing sustainable investment strategies. ■



Lukas Simon worked for many years in the financial sector in the field of sustainable finance and ESG. Now, as a consultant for the Frankfurt School – UNEP Collaborating Centre for Climate & Sustainable Energy Finance, a strategic cooperation between the Frankfurt School and UN Environment Program, he advises companies and banks on the sustainable transformation of their business models.



Debt collection means taking responsibility

The EOS Group is resolutely pushing ahead with its corporate responsibility (CR) initiatives. It's not just about climate protection. The Group's CR strategy focuses above all on social and corporate engagement and setting an example for sustainable receivables management.

Text_Philipp Stiens

When companies assume responsibility for a sustainable future, the first thing that comes to mind for many people is the lowering of CO₂ emissions and other measures to protect the climate. Major car makers like Audi and BMW recently announced that in the future they would be stocking their fleets increasingly, or even completely, with electric vehicles. Moreover, companies are setting ambitious targets for achieving carbon neutral production by a certain date. But what possibilities are open to companies whose business does not involve the manufacturing or

sale of emission-intensive products? How can financial services providers like EOS, for example, do their part?

What many people forget is that sustainability doesn't stop at climate protection; each industry has its own sustainability criteria to be met. Whereas for the above-mentioned car manufacturers, environmental factors are the focus, financial services providers like EOS, are concerned with sustainable corporate governance and social responsibility which are key to the debt collection business. With its aim "Changing for the better", EOS has defined its ideals for a sustainable future. "Personally, I would want to work only at a reputable company," says Klaus Engberding, CEO of the EOS Group.

A climate-friendly office environment is just one of the measures that EOS is implementing as part of its CR strategy.



EOS has four key action areas in corporate responsibility



Responsible Collection: How can responsibility and debt be reconciled?

As a debt collection service provider, EOS has to perform a difficult balancing act in the interaction of debts and finances. "On the one hand you have the interests of the clients, and on the other those of the defaulting payers who wish to be treated fairly and respectfully," says Ben Kleinebrecht, Head of Debtor Centricity and Communication at EOS. "Only if we accommodate everyone can we offer a practicable and sustainable solution that can lead to complete elimination of debt." EOS manages to accommodate competing needs through equitable communication, personalized handling of receivables cases, and use of artificial intelligence. AI helps the collec-

tion agents at EOS to make the best possible judgments about when a particular collection step makes the most sense for the defaulting payer involved.

Reasons for not being able to settle a debt in the long term might be due to serious illness or incapacity to work. EOS in Germany established the "hardship case community" to ensure that such cases are handled in the best possible manner in the interests of the defaulting payers, who are always to be treated with respect and decency.

Joint Progress: Why children should develop financial literacy

Sebastian Richter, the Managing Director of the finlit foundation, a non-profit company of

the EOS Group committed to increasing financial literacy in society, knows only too well how important it is to understand personal finances. "Our ideal of a debt-free world obliges us to act, but it cannot be achieved through our business operations alone," he says. "We need to take a proactive approach to excessive debt, through corporate social responsibility in the field of financial education." The goal of finlit is to remove the stigma from issues of money and debt and give people basic financial knowledge for their everyday lives, so that they do not end up with excessive debt in the first place. "Financial education needs to start in elementary school," says Sebastian. That's why he and his co-workers launched ManoMoneta, a

multi-media educational program for German schools in September last year. Within the company too, EOS demonstrates social engagement with its own employees. We make better use of individual strengths, capabilities and personality traits, and give employees greater visibility. Employees are encouraged to share responsibility for this goal. The workforce has developed in-house initiatives by like Queer@EOS and W:isible and thus set the stage for diversity and equal opportunities.

Financial Sustainability: How values drive the debt collection sector

In the EOS business environment, it is important to do more than formulate standards for fair collection and responsible action. "Standards have to be transparent, tangible and realistic," says Klaus Engberding. To that end, EOS campaigns for binding standards for ethical and professional conduct in the industry and participates in international and national debt collection associations like the Federation of European National Collection Associations (FENCA) or German Association of Debt Collection Companies (BDIU). EOS also is a member of the UN's Global Compact, the world's largest initiative for responsible corporate governance. The EOS Code of Conduct provides its employees with principles and rules for navigating their own daily activities.



"Standards for fair debt collection have to be transparent, tangible and realistic."

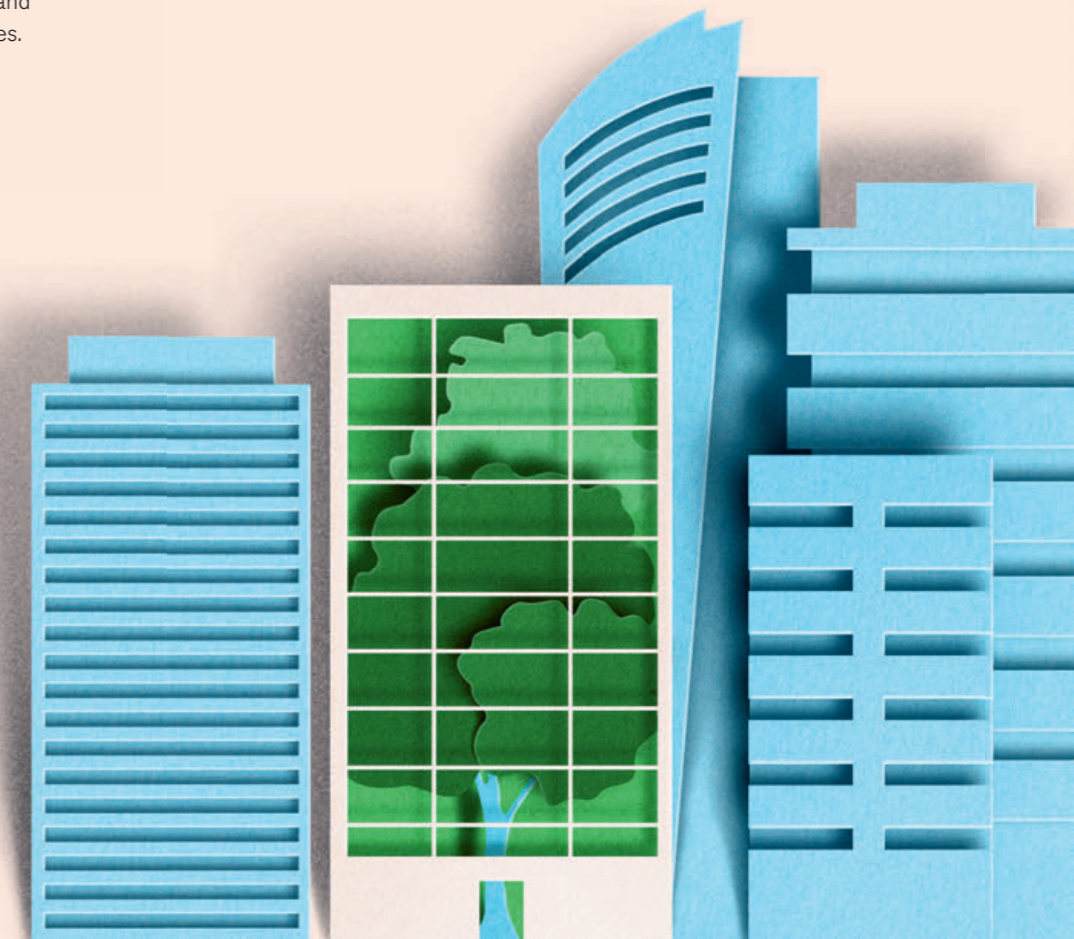
Klaus Engberding,
CEO of the EOS Group

Environmental Protection: How can companies do their part to protect our climate?

EOS is working with its parent company Otto Group to be carbon neutral by 2030. Since 2006, reducing CO₂ has been one of the corporate goals pursued by the Otto Group with its Group-wide guidelines for doing business sustainably. EOS has defined its own focused and readily implementable measures: Switching to 'green' electricity for greater energy efficiency, reducing office space for optimum use of resources, adding electric cars to the company fleet, and relying on digital communication channels to improve the carbon footprint. These measures for climate and environmental protection are an integral part of the company's CR strategy. "When they leave the paper, so to speak, and become part of the DNA, not just of the organization but of every individual within it, then responsible debt collection will become a reality," says Klaus. That's how debt collection can help make the world a somewhat more responsible place. ■



Scan and discover
 You'll find more information on the EOS CR strategy in our online magazine.



“Doing nothing is not an option”

Management boards all over the world are paying attention to corporate responsibility issues. Sibylle Weingart, Head of Corporate Compliance at EOS, also has to deal more often with matters relating to sustainability.

Text_Philipp Stiens

Sibylle Weingart has been in charge of corporate compliance at the EOS Group since 2016. The Swiss native works with her team to ensure that the company and its employees operate within a legally and ethically sound framework at all times.

Photo: EOS

Sibylle, what specific compliance and sustainability issues land on your desk?

SIBYLLE WEINGART: Mostly issues of data privacy, anti-corruption, fraud, anti-trust legislation, and information security. But there are also more and more requirements relating to corporate responsibility. Nowadays, that issue affects all stakeholders, including the company's employees themselves. I also deal with a lot of social issues.

How does EOS handle these topics?

We have a Group-wide Code of Conduct as a framework for our own actions. It helps our employees navigate their day-to-day business. It has always covered important aspects like the observance of human rights, and as a quasi living document, it is adapted continuously to the changes in our corporate culture and communities. Other impetus comes from outside, e.g., from our parent company Otto Group, which has made a clear commitment to sustainability and requires us to pursue it.

For example, via the new Code of Ethics or the Group-wide 2030 climate goals...

Exactly. At EOS we are working on the question of how we can incorporate all these aspects into our own CR strategy and ideally, combine them effectively with one another: To which objectives of the strategy can EOS contribute, and how, and what other goals could we add? Within the Otto Group, the focus is naturally on e-commerce. At EOS we are more concerned with issues like financial sustainability or the fair treatment of defaulting payers. However, it is not just about the defaulting payers, but about respectful interaction with all stakeholders. This also includes, for example, all employees, customers and other business partners of our company.

What do EOS clients think about CR?

It varies. Corporate responsibility has definitely become more relevant. EOS clients and potential co-investors increasingly approach us with very specific questions. We then need to explain clearly the measures we are taking in this area. There has definitely been an increase in the number of such queries. Clients are asking very specific questions, for example, about our adherence to anti money laundering guidelines or membership in sustainability initiatives like the UN Global Compact.

EOS recently joined that alliance. What effect does our membership have on corporate compliance?

At EOS we have been thinking of joining the UN Global Compact for quite some time. This is why early on, we had already taken account of a large number of the initiative's principles in our Code of Conduct. It is a good basis, but of course it is not enough. There are 17 'sustainable development goals' associated with the 10 principles of →



UN Global Compact

The 10 principles of good governance

The UN GLOBAL COMPACT is a United Nations program to promote responsible and sustainable business operations. Over the years it has evolved into an internationally recognized framework. To date, more than 17,500 companies and organizations from over 170 countries have joined the program. The focus of the initiative is on 10 principles that members should adhere to. Businesses should ...

- 1 support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights
- 2 make sure they are not complicit in human rights abuses
- 3 uphold the freedom of association
- 4 support the elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labor
- 5 support the effective abolition of child labor
- 6 support the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation
- 7 support a precautionary approach to environmental challenges
- 8 undertake initiatives to promote greater environmental responsibility
- 9 encourage the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies
- 10 work against corruption in all its forms, including extortion and bribery

the UN Global Compact. Every member seeks out the goals that it can best serve, and then reports its progress.

To which goals does EOS contribute?

A wide range. Often they are projects that existed at EOS before it joined the UN Global Compact and were already contributing to one of the objectives. One issue that is very topical at EOS is equality of opportunity. Recently various networks have been established that are designed to encourage the diversity and equality of all EOS employees. In addition, we are engaged in longstanding association work that has an impact beyond our company. Since joining the Global Compact, our CO₂ footprint has become more of a priority. Some would perhaps say that as a financial services provider, EOS does not have any significant opportunities to reduce CO₂. But for me, doing nothing is simply not an option, and lots of smaller measures can have a positive effect.



Code of Conduct

The cornerstone of corporate culture

FOR EOS ITSELF, the Code of Conduct (CoC) is the foundation and framework for the everyday actions of its workforce. For all external stakeholder groups it is a reliable reference point they can draw on in their interactions with EOS. What precautions has the company taken against money laundering and corruption or in relation to compliance and good corporate governance? What is it doing about ecological sustainability and data privacy? The CoC and associated implementation guidelines provide authoritative answers about these and many other aspects.



Scan the QR code to go the Code of Conduct and read about how EOS works.

Sustainability strategy

Climate neutral by 2030 – the goals of the Otto Group

EOS parent company Otto Group has a history of pursuing ambitious climate protection goals. As part of its corporate responsibility strategy, the company reduced the emission of harmful gases by more than half between 2006 and 2020. This is a success story that encourages to achieve even more.

- 1 Carbon neutral by 2030
- 2 CO₂ offset through climate protection projects
- 3 Fewer business trips by plane
- 4 Digitalization driven by green energy
- 5 Reduce CO₂ emissions in the everyday office routine
- 6 Greater e-mobility to improve eco-friendliness
- 7 Less air freight – more ship and rail transports

EOS Board of Diversity & Inclusion

Improving the diversity of employee profiles



Nowadays, diversity in the workforce and corporate culture is considered an important success factor for a company. To improve this aspect in the EOS Group as well, we have set up a Board of Diversity & Inclusion that meets monthly. "The aim of the board is to give diversity a strategic direction for the future," says Magdolna Solti, Senior HR Manager at EOS in Hungary and member of the Diversity & Inclusion Board. Along with 12 other members, consisting of HR and business managers, the EOS Board of Directors and representatives of the various diversity networks at EOS, she will coordinate and support all of the Group's endeavors in this area. The focus is on initiatives established by employees, like the LGBTQ network Queer@EOS, the women's network W:isible and the international network Around the Globe. "We are delighted that our staff members are pursuing this issue so pro-actively and would like to support this positive development," says Andreas Kropp, EOS Group Director and Member of the Diversity Board. Thus far, some initial panel discussions and a diversity awareness workshop have been conducted and a mentoring program has been launched. Other measures are in the preparation stage.

Legislation round-up

Which legislative procedures are currently of interest to the business community? What changes have been made to legal frameworks? An overview of relevant judgments, laws and directives from the last six months.



EU Action Plan

EU Commission strengthens European NPL market

DURING THE 2008 GLOBAL FINANCIAL CRISIS, banks worldwide were exposed to an unmanageable volume of Non-Performing Loans (NPLs). To prevent another build-up of NPLs, the European Commission has published an action plan devised to counter the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the heart of the strategy is further development of the secondary market for NPLs. Other goals include reforming corporate insolvencies and debt recovery and supporting the establishment and cooperation of national asset management companies. At present, the EU action plan is in the process of being finalized with the EU Council. If adopted, EU Member States will have two years to implement the reforms.

NOTE: To find out how the action plan will affect the business of banks and credit servicers, read our interviews with experts on Pages 46 and 47.

For more information go to: bit.ly/nplaction



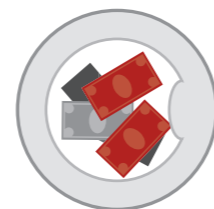
Legal Tech Act

Contingency fees extended to lawyers

LEGAL TECH COMPANIES DEFEND THE RIGHTS of air travelers, challenge penalty notices for traffic infringements or support companies with inexpensive legal advice. They long ago became established and profitable companies in the legal services arena, including the debt collection segment. In October 2021 the German Federal Parliament adopted legislation designed to ensure a level playing field for legal tech providers and lawyers. The official title of the legislation is "Act to Promote Consumer-Oriented Offers in the Legal Services Market", but it is better known as the "Legal Tech Act".

It is intended to allow lawyers to charge a contingency fee, particularly in cases where they are permitted to offer debt collection services. In this context, the underlying regulatory framework for legal tech companies has been tightened up and the requirements for registration increased.

For more information go to: bit.ly/legaltechlaw (German only)



Financial Crime

EU steps up the fight against money laundering and terrorism financing

WITH NEW LAWS, the European Commission is strengthening the fight against money laundering and terrorism financing. The Commission's action plan proposes setting up an EU-level supervisor. The objective is to make it easier to detect suspicious transactions and activities and close loopholes used by criminals to launder the proceeds of crime or to fund terrorist activities via the financial system. The single EU rulebook calls for connecting existing national registers of bank accounts. Access to these registers for financial intelligence units (FIUs) and law enforcement authorities is also to be improved in order to speed up their investigations.

The changes should allow complete tracing of crypto-asset transfers so that authorities can prevent and detect the transfers' potential use in money laundering or terrorism financing.

For more information go to: bit.ly/molatr



Retail payment services

Council supports instant payments and EU-wide payment solutions

CONSUMERS IN THE EU should find it easier to pay in shops in the future. Retail payments, particularly e-commerce transactions, are to be made widely available, convenient and secure. With this strategy the Council supports the following objectives: to ensure a competitive and innovative retail payments market in the EU, promote the uptake of instant payments, and develop EU-wide payment solutions to reduce the EU's dependency on the major global players in this area.

The Council highlights the challenges to be taken into account when further developing and regulating the market, such as financial inclusion, security and consumer protection, data protection, and the prevention of money laundering. The Council gives the EU Commission a political mandate to push forward related initiatives and present legislative proposals where appropriate.

For more information go to: bit.ly/retailpaym



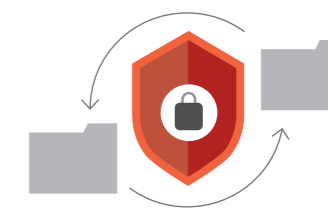
Hague Judgments Convention

Foreign judgments to be recognized more easily

RECOGNITION and enforcement of foreign judgments in civil and commercial matters are to be made easier across Europe. The European Commission has accepted a proposal for the EU to sign the Hague Judgments Convention. It simplifies trade and investments by improving legal certainty and reducing costs involved in international trade and the settlement of international disputes. Previously, it could be cumbersome for private individuals and companies to assert their rights in a country outside the EU.

Joining the Hague Judgments Convention would not only save time and money, but considerably reduce the average duration of the processes involved.

For more information go to: bit.ly/intenf



Data Transfers

EU strengthens international data protection

THE TRANSFER OF DATA is becoming more important in an increasingly digitalized world. The EU is now set to further improve the protection of transferred data. The European Commission has adopted standard contractual clauses that can be used for pan-European and international data transfers. The contractual provisions also meet the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

The new clauses offer companies a useful tool to ensure that they are complying with the data protection regulations in their activities within the EU and for international data transfers. They also serve to protect citizens' data. The stricter clauses will give companies more security and legal certainty for data transfers.

For more information go to: bit.ly/datatransf

Action plan for bad loans

With an action plan to reduce Non-Performing Loans (NPLs), the European Union wants to prevent an impending financial crisis. High time, say banking experts, but not at any price, debt buyers argue.

Outsider viewpoint

“The issue is so complex that many banks don’t have the know-how.”



Christoph Roessle is Partner at Ernst & Young and supports banks in Europe with restructuring. In his former position at a bank, he was responsible for the sale of NPLs.

Why is a high NPL rate so damaging for the banks?
CHRISTOPH ROESSELE: A high NPL rate can quickly trigger a vicious circle at banks. The NPLs force the banks to build up reserves, which puts a strain on their equity and makes refinancing more difficult. When a bank has trouble refinancing, its profitability and ultimately its competitiveness are jeopardized. Then the bank’s tolerance for risk generally increases and its NPL rate inevitably rises. To put it in a nutshell, a high NPL rate is toxic for banks.

Private individuals and the economy have both been hit hard financially by the COVID-19 pandemic. Is there any evidence of that in the banks’ balance sheets?
To date, surprisingly few effects have shown up. That’s attributed greatly to the COVID relief funds that governments have been pumping onto the market during the past two years. In Germany alone the funds amounted to one trillion euro. Such enormous sums naturally had an effect on the volume of NPLs. But we mustn’t forget that every receivable and every assistance loan represents additional credit volume and must be paid back at some point. When that time comes, you’ll see the first major litmus test.

To prevent credit problems, the EU is currently working on an action plan to help banks reduce their NPL inventory. What is your opinion?
In my conversations with customers I have noticed increased interest in selling NPLs since the beginning of the crisis. The issue has become so complex that many banks don’t have the know-how, especially when it comes to selling entire NPL portfolios. That’s completely understandable. After all, this is not part of a bank’s day-to-day core business. That’s why I see the need for a mechanism that says to banks: “If you want to sell your NPLs, then you have to take the following steps.” So I think the EU action plan is a good way to put this issue in the spotlight. However, it is not yet clear whether it can deliver the help that is needed.

What does EOS think about the current status of the EU action plan to reduce NPLs?
FREDA STOCKFLETH: First of all, we are pleased that the topic has become a priority again, thanks to the publication of the action plan in December 2020. We welcome harmonized requirements for NPL investors and their service providers as well as high standards in consumer protection. At the same time, however, consideration should be given to the impact on the operations of credit servicers in practice. Through investments in NPLs, companies like EOS make a substantial contribution to stabilizing the European economic system, and this aspect was clearly highlighted by the action plan. To be able to offer these solutions, the business has to be worthwhile for the purchaser of the loans.

To what extent is the EU action plan likely to affect the business of credit servicers like EOS?
In June the European institutions agreed on a directive specifically aimed at credit servicers and purchasers. It is intended to harmonize the authorization procedure for credit servicers in future, for example. I think this is a good thing. But there are also some aspects of this directive that in my view interfere very strongly with established business processes.

What are they?
For example, the directive opens up the possibility of generally prohibiting credit servicers from accepting monies from defaulting payers. Not only is this contrary to the usual practice in Europe, it would also mean that the credit purchasers themselves would have to accept and manage the payments. This would be a strong intervention and would make a lot of things more difficult in practice.

In your opinion, will the EU action plan change the NPL market in the long term?
That remains to be seen. From the current perspective, it is in any case sending out a message to all players on the NPL market. The message is that you need to do something before Europe finds itself in a second financial crisis again.

Insider viewpoint

“The business has to be worthwhile for the purchaser of the loans.”



Freda Stockfleth is Senior Vice President Corporate Legal and Public Affairs at EOS. She works with her team to support the acquisition of international NPL portfolios.



All about NPLs in our online magazine
For more about the EU action plan and general information about NPLs, please visit our online magazine:
eos-solutions.com/magazine

stopover

Out and about in Paris

Paris is a dazzling metropolis where it is easy to give in to its charms. Here are some tips to make your next business trip to France's capital more than a professional success story.

01 Galeries Lafayette

The Parisian department store is a byword for luxury and glamor. And even if shopping's not your thing, you can still admire the store's impressive Art Nouveau architecture. Incidentally, goods have been traded on this site since the early 19th century.



02 Hubsy Cafe & Coworking

Although the three Hubsy coworking spaces are not very elaborate, they offer a central location, a cozy working atmosphere and an uncomplicated hourly billing system. A special touch is the excellent coffee, which is provided free to users along with other drinks and snacks. (Open Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., €5 per hour/€24 per day; hubsy.fr)



First impressions

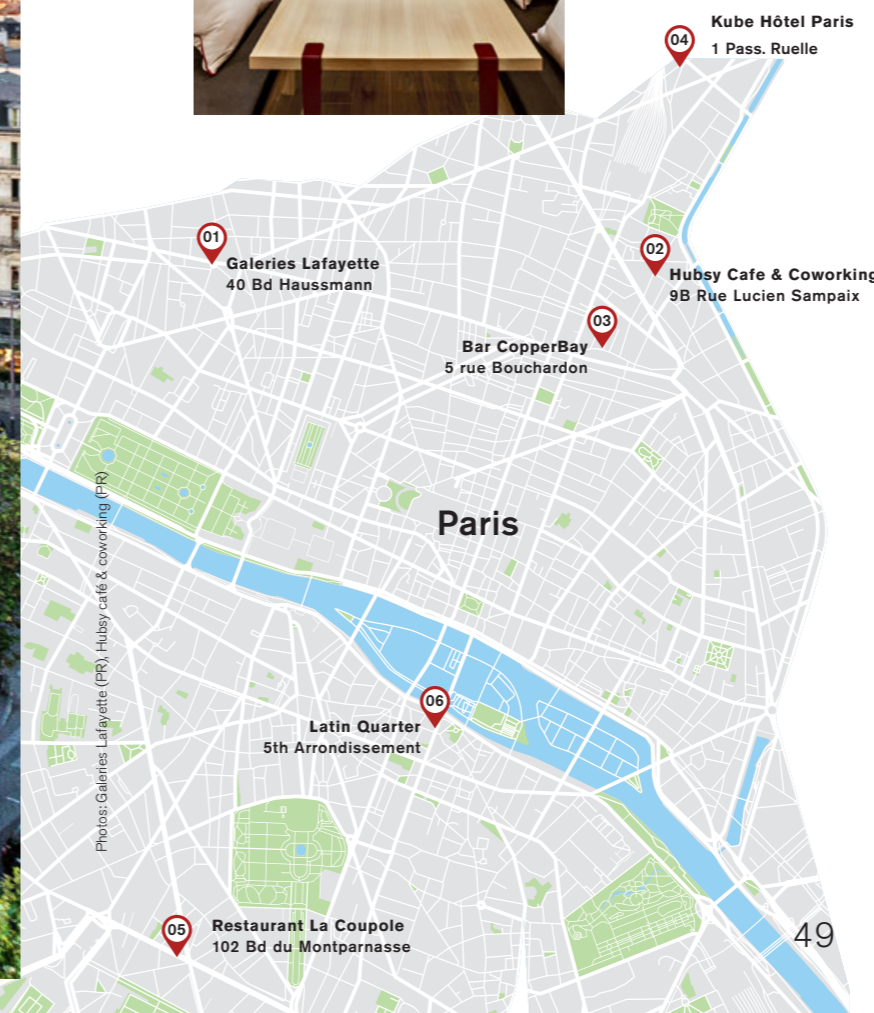
If you have some time on your hands after your arrival and would like to get an initial feel for the city over a coffee or cold drink, head for the roof terrace of the quintessential Parisian department store **Galeries Lafayette on Boulevard Haussmann**. Unlike the Eiffel Tower, the city's No. 1 tourist attraction, entry is free and there are no queues. At the top you'll find a cafe from where you can enjoy a panoramic view over the rooftops of the city center, including such iconic sights as the **Eiffel Tower** and the **Opéra Garnier**.

If time permits, it's worth going down a few floors to take a look at the department store. Even if you're not a big shopping fan, the oldest department store in France is definitely worth a visit.

Switch off and relax

If you don't have any important meetings at midday and you'd like to stretch your legs a bit, we recommend an excursion to the famous Montmartre artists' quarter. In days gone by, even great artists such as Renoir, Van Gogh or Picasso were fascinated by its unique charm. Today, Montmartre is like a village in the middle of a major city. During a **two-hour guided tour** through the quarter's narrow alleyways, you'll discover hidden vineyards, colorful artists' markets and the world-famous cabaret venue Moulin Rouge. Also included in the tour is a visit to the Sacré-Cœur Basilica, located on the highest hill in Paris. From here too, there are breathtaking views over the city. (Tickets: €20; Tuesday–Sunday, 2 p.m.; turbopass.com)

Those who'd like to take things a little easier but still not miss anything can simply board one of the sightseeing boats on the Seine and explore the city from the water. The tours leave every hour from the foot of the Eiffel Tower and take you past other Paris landmarks like the Louvre or Notre-Dame. For an extra charge you can also book lunch or dinner on board. (Tickets: €15; open daily 12 a.m.–10 p.m.; www.seine-river-cruises.com) →



EQS explore 02-2021 eqs-solutions.com

Dining out

In the mood for coffee and French pastry? Then it's well worth a detour to the elegant Parisian district of Saint-Germain des Prés, where the Café de Flore has been operating since the end of the 19th century. In its heyday it was frequented by the big names in the French literary scene. A word of warning: The prices here are a little bit higher than in other coffeehouses, but the unique charm of the place is well worth the little extra you pay. (Open daily 7:30 a.m. – 1:30 a.m.; a coffee costs around €4; cafedeflore.fr)

Just a short stroll away in the Montparnasse neighborhood, you'll find La Coupole, an iconic Art Deco brasserie that serves specialties from all regions of the country. The restaurant is known beyond the city boundaries for its seafood dishes. The unique atmosphere of La Coupole also makes it ideal for a business lunch or dinner. However, you should book a table in advance, which you can do easily via the restaurant's Website. (Open daily, 8 a.m. to midnight, average cost per dish: €20–40; lacoupole-paris.com)

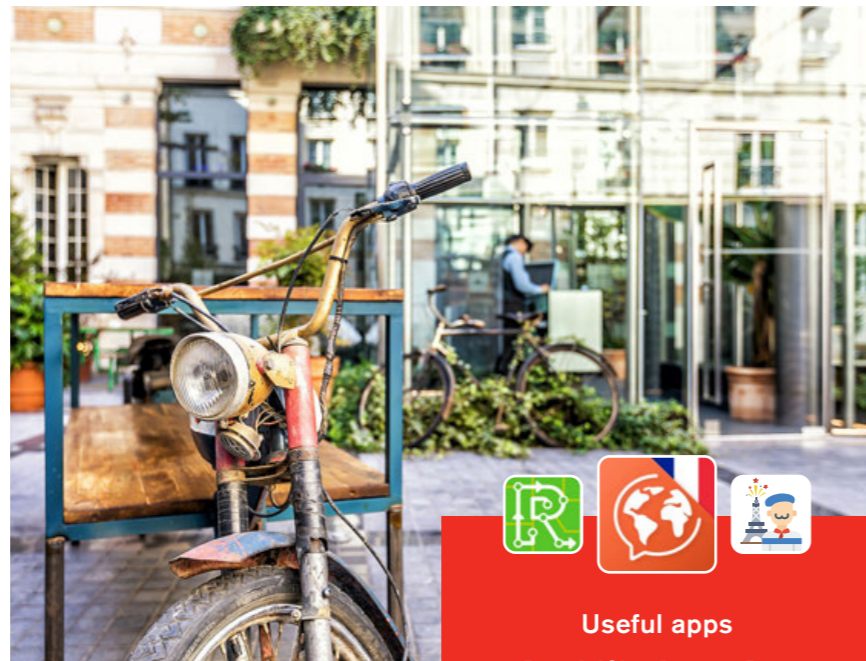
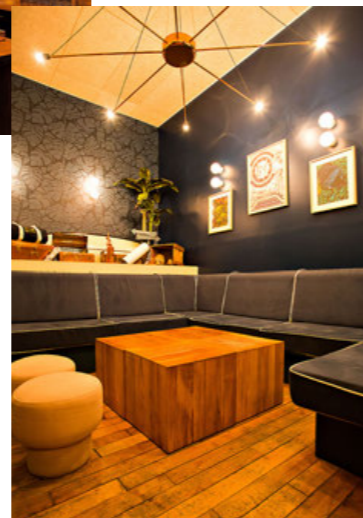
Accommodation

The Kube Paris Hotel is located just a few minutes' walk from the Gare du Nord and gets its name from the striking glass cube in the foyer. In its stylishly decorated suites, business travelers will find much-needed relaxation during a demanding business trip. The hotel offers an inviting terrace, a gym, its own restaurant, and two bars, one of which is the only ice bar in Paris. WLAN is available in the entire hotel. Event and meeting spaces can be booked on request. (Single rooms from around €130, kubehotel-paris.com)



03 Bar CopperBay

The Bar CopperBay is not far from the Strasbourg-Saint-Denis metro station. With its cozy maritime vibe, it's the perfect place to wind down with a cocktail at the end of the day. But there's also plenty on offer for those who are not fans of cocktails, or patrons who just want a little snack. (5 Rue Bouchardon; copperbay.fr)



04 Kube Hôtel Paris

The hotel is in the La Chapelle district. In addition to rooms and suites, it houses a bar constructed from several tons of ice. The temperature there is reportedly minus 20°C. So you'll need to wrap up well, or borrow one of the down jackets available at the entrance. (1 Passage Ruelle; kubehotel-paris.com)



Useful apps

Runnin'City: Discover Paris by running or walking – with audio navigation and interesting facts about your surroundings.

Learn French. Speak French: Maybe you don't speak French, but you'd like to learn? This app will help you excel in everyday situations.

Parissi: Interested in concerts, exhibitions or sports events? With Parissi you'll always know what's happening in the city.

Photos: Bar CopperBay (FR), Kube Hotel (FR), La Coupole (FR), Andreas B. Krueger, shutterstock

stopover



My Paris

Chiara Pulici, Cross-border Manager at EOS in France, moved to Paris only recently, but has already discovered a lot of interesting places. On her days off, the Italian national likes to wander around and starts her day with a coffee in the Café de Flore. She particularly likes the café's beautiful art deco room. The story goes that in his time the French writer Jean-Paul Sartre was a regular patron who spent a lot of time in the café without ordering very much.

After a little refreshment, the next stop is the Latin Quarter. The traditional student district is on the Left Bank. With its many little alleyways, it's a great place for a long, leisurely stroll with no particular plan in mind.

05 Restaurant La Coupole

For brunch, lunch or dinner, La Coupole is a top-class destination for all kinds of French delicacies. Besides an exquisitely decorated interior, the restaurant offers an inviting outdoor dining area where you can eat and drink late into the night.



06 Latin Quarter

Strictly speaking, the Latin quarter is not a proper district as such but an area located mainly on the slopes of the Montagne Sainte-Geneviève hill, where the activities of the University of Paris and a range of other educational establishments are concentrated. The area is popular with tourists and well-known for its restaurants, bars and cafes.

Given a new lease on life

In many cities around the world, buildings are standing empty and falling into disrepair. EOS is making sure that these properties can be put to use again.

Text_Isabelle Buckow

It had started off well. The facade was up, cables, water pipes and tiles were laid, windows, doors, kitchens and bathrooms installed and the walls plastered. At the time, the owner named the construction project "Tychis", the Greek word for "luck". Costing EUR 6 million and measuring 3,073 square meters, it would offer 2,000 m² of office space at the front with 1,073 m² of apartments behind. It was supposed to be a flagship project for the neighborhood. But it wasn't to be.

The owner got into financial difficulties after several years. Apartments and offices were abandoned and the building fell into disrepair. With its broken window panes, rubbish strewn on the paths and graffiti on the walls, it was the perfect backdrop for a horror movie in the middle of a solid middle-class residential area south of Athens, just a few kilometers from the old international airport. Not what you'd describe as "luck", but an eyesore.

"The building was in a wretched state," says Karel Smerak, Director of Capital Markets & Transactions at EOS. "But we wanted to give it a second chance." The property had been left in limbo for 12 years until EOS came onto the scene. "We wanted to find a solution to allow the property to be used again," says Karel.

Given a new lease on life

Karel coordinates the international real estate business at EOS. After positive experiences in Germany, the business model was also expanded to Southern and Eastern Europe. He

argues that investing in real estate was a logical step for EOS. "As an experienced debt collection service provider, EOS has always invested in non-performing loans," says Karel. "This is our core business." So it made sense to expand the business model and take on real estate and building projects whose owners were close to insolvency or where construction had come to a halt.

With the help of EOS, the properties can be given a new lease on life and put to use. EOS buys the debt from the bank, steps in as the new creditor or owner, and tries to de-leverage of the debt on the property. At the same time, EOS finds ways of completing the property or making it usable again. "Often, the situation has been put on ice at the bank for years," says Karel. As a new investor, EOS has the advantage of being able to negotiate with the defaulting payers or administrators using an approach that is more solution-driven and effective. "We have the capacities, the experience and the know-how," says Karel. "We can look at things in a constructive way, determine what the technical, legal and financial problems are and try to resolve them." It can be a complicated process, but it's worth it.

Using what's already there

With support from EOS, abandoned warehouses and residential buildings are being completed at last. Hotels and shopping centers are finally opening or being re-opened. Ageing buildings are being refurbished and apartments are being offered to private buyers at reasonable prices. "We are bringing properties that have run into trouble back into the economic cycle," says Karel, "even if they are already in horrific condition." Like the building south of Athens.

After 12 years in limbo, that building is getting a fresh new look. EOS purchased the building and its debts from the bank in July this year. Progress has been made since then. "First of all the building was thoroughly cleaned, the rubbish was taken away and the graffiti removed," says Yannis Delikanakis, the co-founder of SouthRock, a joint venture company of EOS. At the same time, the site was made safe and secure. The next step was to refurbish it.

But what was to be done with the building? As there was considerable demand for new apartments in the area, EOS approached

property developers. "At the moment we are discussing two options," says Yannis: "We will either enter into a partnership and refurbish the building together, or we will sell it directly to the developer." In either case, the building will be completed so that after 12 years it can be used again. It creates sustainable added value, and not just for the neighborhood.

"It is a kind of building recycling," says Karel. "Because we are not building from scratch, but using the existing structural fabric and creating a new building from it, one that is energy-efficient and a good match for its surroundings." Benefits are all around: for the environment, through reduced use of materials and energy consumption; for the bank that gets rid of its debt; for the people who can buy the apartments and live in them; and for the cityscape that is enhanced and upgraded.

"Many cities have some properties that have been left to rot for years," says Karel. Athens is not an isolated case. However, the 'house of horrors' is the best example of why it is worthwhile bringing unused buildings back to life. "It was the biggest eyesore in the area," says Yannis, the EOS partner in Greece. "We now hope it will become the pride of the neighborhood." ■

Derelict buildings like these can be found in many European countries. Completing them provides urgently needed living space and beautifies the urban landscape.

Photo: Steedsy

Apps and gadgets to take away the stress of travel

Now that business travel is possible again, demand is increasing for flights and rail journeys. Between hotels, visits to customers and conferences, life can quickly become stressful. On business trips, gadgets and apps can help you to keep track of everything while you recharge your batteries for the next meeting.



Triplt

The complete picture Useful travel apps

Is my flight on time? Who did I book my rental car with again? And from what time can I check into my hotel? For many people, business trips mean rifling through your inbox for booking confirmations. If you simply send them to Triplt, you have everything together in one place and an overview of your entire trip in one app. Triplt Pro offers additional features such as real time alerts, information about waiting times and assistance with finding a better seat.

Triplt: free | Triplt Pro: USD 49/year; available on Google Play and App Store



PackPoint

People who stand helplessly in front of their suitcase before every business trip can save themselves a lot of time and stress with PackPoint. The app needs information about the destination and length of the trip, the reason (business or pleasure) and any planned activities. Taking into account the weather forecast for the destination, the app generates a packing list to which personal items can be added. Your suitcase will practically pack itself in the future. The premium version of the app can even be combined with Triplt, so the packing list is created as the trip is booked.

PackPoint: free | PackPoint Premium: approx. €3.50; available on Google Play and App Store



WiFi Finder

Through mobile data use, we are connected to the Internet virtually everywhere today. But when we travel abroad on a business trip, the costs can quickly add up. So where is the nearest WiFi hotspot? The WiFi Finder app will tell you. The users themselves add hotspots to the database that already contains hundreds of thousands of public networks worldwide. But that's not all – it even knows their upload and download speeds.

WiFi Finder: free | available on Google Play and App Store

Top 3

Business trip travel companion



Digital notebooks

Notebooks are the perfect travel companion for capturing and writing down your thoughts on the go – if only they weren't so terribly analog! That's what the creators of **Rocketbook** (from €18/getrocketbook.com) thought when they brought the traditional notebook into the digital age. You still put pen to paper, but the notes are sent to the cloud so you can call them up later, or are sent directly with your next email. The notebooks are available in different sizes and versions.

If that's still too analog for your taste, **reMarkable**, the "paper tablet" may be a better option (from €399/remarkable.com). This device digitizes handwritten notes, and allows you to read and comment on text documents.

tools



Noise-canceling headphones

Anyone who has ever tried out Bluetooth headphones with active noise canceling will probably never willingly choose to board a train or plane without them again. They filter out ambient sounds like engine rumbling or noise electronically, which soothes the nerves even on short trips. The best protection is afforded by over-ear headphones like the **Sony WH-1000XM3** (about €200); if you prefer a lighter version, go for an in-ear model like the **Bose QuietControl 30** (about €250) or the fully wireless **B&O Beoplay E8** (about €250). An extra benefit is that headsets that support Google Assistant can be used for simultaneous interpretation.

3

Coffee presses to go

Are you someone who just won't compromise when it comes to coffee? Of course, instant coffee or hotel coffee machines are not an option for the connoisseur. **Nanopresso** (from €63/wacaco.com), a portable espresso machine, comes to the rescue. Measuring less than 16 cm, it fits into any piece of luggage. It works without electricity and, with a maximum pressure of 18 bar, creates a wonderful crema. So rather than hunting down a good espresso, you need only to look for the closest source of boiling water.



For everyone who prefers "normal" coffee, there's **AeroPress Go** (from €29/coffeecircle.com). The travel-style coffee press brews coffee in just one minute. If there is no hot water on hand, a cold brew coffee can be made in no time.

Why taking responsibility matters for companies

Candidates are becoming more selective on the job hunt. How important is Corporate Social Responsibility (CR) for them? What can we do to make office life greener? Our young talents have the answers.

Photos_zlick

“Millennials have a new approach to work.”

We're looking beyond salaries and fixed positions. We're looking for values, creativity, flexibility and diversity. Although society as a whole has a responsibility to contribute to sustainable development, companies have an important role to play too. Their initiatives can change the habits of customers and employees, helping to improve people's lives through the products and services they offer. The continuous search for higher energy efficiency, more responsible water management, reducing plastic packaging and shifting to local food products can help to cut our carbon footprint.”

Alejandro García (29),
SME's & Big Tickets Legal Agent,
EOS Spain

“Taking part in the World Cleanup Day, waste sorting and recycling

are just a few of the measures that we've introduced at EOS in Paris. As a member of the Corporate Social Responsibility team, I want to emphasize that besides our green initiatives we care deeply about social welfare. We've collected Christmas boxes for the most disadvantaged of our society and care packages for students in need. So, we can really be proud to work in a sustainable workplace at EOS. Our company really cares for the well-being of its employees. That's underscored by the fact that we had flexible hours and home office before the pandemic started and still have that flexibility today.”

Zehra Topal (25),
HR Assistant,
EOS France



“Sustainability is a key factor for me when choosing an employer.”

It is one way a company can demonstrate that it cares for the environment and especially for the people who are part of it. We at EOS in Spain have carried out different CSR measures, such as donating money to social institutions and collecting toys for children in need for Christmas. We are collaborating with food banks and are carrying out computer equipment auctions among employees. To attract new talents, companies have to work by and for the people and not simply follow an economic objective. Efforts to create a sustainable workplace are of equal importance as a fair salary and professional development. It is the combination of these factors that make a professional position attractive and fulfilling.”

Jennifer Becerra (29),
People & Culture Technician,
EOS Spain

“Our society is becoming more and more inclusive

and that's positive as we should all have the same rights. Companies mustn't discriminate in any way when it comes to the mix of its labor force. That's essential if we want the foundations of equal opportunities to be consolidated further. In terms of sustainability, I've never been one to squander resources and I expect any organization to do the same. I wouldn't want to be part of a company whose philosophy is not aligned with these values.”

Sergio Pena (28),
Big Data & BI Consultant,
EOS Spain



outlook

“We must continue to come up with new ideas

and work-life balance are important gestures, but can only be the start. Having an environmental impact and increasing social commitment is a matter that concerns and affects us all directly. For companies in particular, sustainability should be a fundamental pillar. Reducing the environmental footprint can contribute to their future viability. It is also a differentiating feature for companies when compared to the competition.”

**María Ordóñez (29),
Procedural Lawyer,
EOS Spain**

“Our generation wants to feel good at work.

After all, we spend half of our lives there and firms take heed of that. I once did an internship at a company that had a beehive on its roof and offered e-bikes and cardiac coherence sessions to its employees that help you concentrate. As a member of the quality compliance department at EOS France, I am well aware that EOS is committed to respecting regulations and caring for the well-being of its employees and the environment. Many certifications such as Ecovadis and Qualicert are proof of that.”

**Lisa Barru (25),
Data Protection Officer (GDPR),
EOS France**

“To cut carbon emissions, companies should limit business trips,

boost the use of video conferencing tools and increase efforts to go paperless in the office. At EOS in France, we’ve managed to cut down on plastic, increase recycling and have switched to ordering fruit and vegetable baskets from local farms instead of relying on products from overseas. Generally, I believe that companies should stop pushing people to be more productive and never treat them as a number, but as human beings and team members. Generally, I believe that when people are treated as team members, they are more productive.”

**Hanane Cabecas (36),
Debt Collection Department,
EOS France**

“Companies must transform themselves to remain attractive

for candidates in the recruiting process. They simply have no choice. While Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a concept was introduced back in the 1950s, its importance has increased to an unprecedented scale in recent years. Environmental and social issues have become the main prism through which companies, public policies, etc., are evaluated. The challenge for companies is to find the right balance between ideological intentions and economic reality. We ourselves, on the other hand, must remain vigilant that we always identify the real intentions behind CSR initiatives and that we are not caught up by people and companies that are just following a fashion trend.”

**Maxime Maingreud (26),
Portfolio Valuation Department,
EOS France**

EOS worldwide – we’re happy to help.

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