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## Face-to-face meetings in a changing world

The world around us is changing every day. What was unimaginable yesterday will be commonplace tomorrow. The rules of the game are changing and new behavior patterns are being created. Industry convergence, strong chains, more products, fewer market players, shorter product life cycles, and a focus on VIP customers are just a few examples.

Despite, or rather because of these changes, face-to-face meetings are of growing interest to more and more people. One key reason is that new technology has led to a number of changes that have completely altered the conditions in which marketing professionals operate.

### Example 1: Customer empowerment

Most markets today offer a surplus of products. New technology has also drastically reduced the cost of finding and accessing information. The customer has gained a better overview of the existing options. Sourcing an overseas supplier is not much harder than finding one at home. The result has been a power shift from the supplier to the customer.

Along with this increase in choice, the customer's demands have also increased. The supplier does not decide the rules of the game; the customer does. Products are no longer sold; they are bought. This is particularly true if you are selling to professional users in the business sector, but also if you are selling to private consumers. One of the supplier's greatest

challenges lies in understanding what influences customer decisions.

Discovering customers' attitudes, values, and needs necessitates an increasingly close personal relationship. This relationship must be such that customers dare to trust their supplier with information and rely on him to use that information in their best interest.

### Example 2: Information excess

It is becoming both harder and more expensive to arrange a face-to-face meeting. In contrast, mass communications are becoming easier and cheaper. Nowadays we are swamped with mass communication messages. Look at what happens when you open your e-mail inbox after a few days away. It is not only new technology that has opened the information floodgates: the flow is coming from every direction. The supplements of a Sunday newspaper probably contain more information than a person who lived in the 18<sup>th</sup> century would have been exposed to during his entire lifetime. In order to survive, most people surround themselves with an increasingly thick shield that shuts out information.

It is thus becoming harder to penetrate people's awareness. Shouting yourself hoarse in an advertising monologue to the entire market no longer seems to be a good idea. Instead, more and more suppliers are discussing how they

*New information technology has made the world shrink. Finding a supplier abroad is not much harder than finding one at home.*