



Technology, Data and AI

The Food of the Future

4 Can you identify
unhealthy food quickly?

12 Fresh cucumbers should not go to waste:
How AI is Revolutionising Demand Forecasting
in the Food Industry



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The taste of new, relevant technology

Digitisation and new technologies pave the way for a future where food companies can optimise production, reduce waste, and still meet the growing consumer demand for responsibility.

At Columbus, we take pride in being part of this process, helping companies implement future IT solutions for the food industry that benefit both themselves and their consumers. With the latest AI and machine learning (ML) tools, food manufacturers can now predict demand with unprecedented accuracy. This not only provides economic benefits but also reduces resource waste, which is crucial at a time when sustainability is paramount. Technology also plays a central role in ensuring food safety and transparency. By digitising traceability systems, producers can quickly identify and recall potentially harmful products, saving time, minimising waste, and increasing consumer safety. Consumers are increasingly demanding quality and responsibility. Through data and digital solutions, food companies can track products from farm to table, building trust and transparency. It is an exciting and necessary development.

Happy reading,



Bo Krogh Knudsen,

Industry Practice Lead, Food,
Columbus

Can you identify unhealthy food quickly?

In the modern food industry, it is crucial to manage all traceability processes across the entire value chain. In reality, companies without sufficient control over testing, traceability, and other core processes make themselves unnecessarily vulnerable in a wide range of situations. The result is often increased waste and a waste of time and money.

By Bo Krogh Knudsen,
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Let's say a batch of goods turns out to contain metal residues from production. Here, it is important to be able to quickly withdraw the affected deliveries—but you also want to avoid recalling too much or too little.

The same applies if harmful concentrations of bacteria, like listeria, are found in a shipment of salmon. In salmon production, it only takes a very short time from when a batch is tested to it is on the move. The test result for the salmon therefore only comes after dispatch. If a batch tests positive for a harmful substance, it is crucial to be able to trace the exact batch and stop the shipment quickly.

However, stopping harmful foods from reaching consumers is easier said than done. Traceability is not standard in all business systems used in the food industry. Even in large companies, you sometimes see traceability managed with manual records in a customised Excel sheet or a binder on a shelf.



With the help of digital solutions and not least the right database, it is possible to recall the specific batch and ensure that only the contaminated foods are discarded.



It is crucial to get answers to many questions in a very short time.

Without support from the business system, recalls are a laborious, time-consuming, and manual-heavy process that often depends on just a few people who know the process and spreadsheets thoroughly. Therefore, valuable time can be lost when there is an unexpected need to clarify:

- Which exact batches should be recalled?
- Where were the defective or potentially defective products sent?
- Whether the involved products— or any potentially affected raw material— have been mixed with other products?

Often, time is short. That is why people often choose to cast a wide net and recall more products than actually necessary. This typically imposes a significant extra cost on the company, which can be avoided.



Tracking is often difficult – but it does not have to be

With the help of digital solutions and the right data foundation, it is possible to recall the specific batch and ensure that only the contaminated food is discarded. During the digitisation process, the following challenges should be addressed.

Data collection and structuring

How do we create the data foundation for effective traceability? And how do we prevent data collection from unnecessarily burdening our employees? The focus should be on minimising the need for manual entry and utilising the possibilities for data collection directly at the source, through integrations with laboratory/test systems, as well as MES and machine control. With low-code solutions such as Power Platform, you can connect directly to a wide variety of data sources, thereby minimising manual collection. Using batch numbers naturally means more data needs to be recorded each time an item is picked or moved, but modern ERP systems are equipped to print barcodes and use handheld scanners, so a lot of manual work is avoided, and the risk of incorrect entries is minimised.

User Experience

For the employee or customer doing the tracking, accessibility and simplicity are key: in a recall scenario, speed is often crucial, and the available information may be incomplete. Ideally, it is tracking by a batch number that is desired. But what if this cannot be found? Do we then need to be able to search by customer, supplier, item number, or perhaps shipping address? Think in scenarios when designing the user experience:

What are the most likely needs? And how do we meet them? With low-code platforms, user interfaces can be easily updated, and new apps/layouts can be tested.

Flexibility and Future-Proofing

Last but not least, it is important that the solutions are designed with future needs in mind: How can we quickly update the solution if the needs change over time due to new legislations, changes in product mix, market situations, or supplier composition? Here, too, it can be advantageous to base the solutions on a flexible and modern low-code platform, where updates can be implemented and deployed simply and quickly.

Traceability Across the Value Chain

Consider an example from a Norwegian salmon company, where a customer found listeria in a shipment of salmon. The Norwegian producer spent valuable time finding an employee who could check the production in an Excel sheet, only to discover that the issue had passed through quality control. It was later found that the contamination occurred in the customer's own logistics chain. However, the dairy's "investigation" still took 3-4 hours. With built-in and dedicated traceability, it would have taken just 30 seconds and could have been done while the customer was still on the line. It is a difference worth considering.

Technology can in many ways play a vital role in ensuring traceability in food production. By integrating digital solutions supported by the ERP system, such as low-code platforms, companies can get a detailed overview, effectively handle complex tracking requirements in their production flow, and react quickly if a recall is needed. The right technology enables precise tracking of contaminated batches, reduces unnecessary waste, and ensures that only necessary products are discarded. This benefits not only the company's finances but also creates a more efficient and responsive production line that can quickly adjust to changes or challenges.

Technology's flexibility and future-proofing also means that companies can adapt quickly to changes in legislation and market demands, which makes them better prepared for future challenges. Through automated data collection and user-

friendly solutions, employees can enter data directly from the production floor, which guarantees that the data is always up-to-date and can be tracked in real time. Every time a batch is moved or a product is processed, this action is recorded, allowing for a detailed history. This is essential for identifying problems such as quality defects or recall. It also enables the company to prepare for future need. Technology is thus not just a help but can be a necessity for efficient and safe food production.



Extensive food waste is a waste of resources

If we really want to do something about our massive food waste, it is relatively simple. The technology is already available. However, a significant challenge lies in educating food producers, retailers, and consumers to think more sustainably.





The technology to reduce food waste is available. It is largely about educating both food producers, retailers, and consumers to use it effectively.

– Bo Krogh Knudsen

Analyses from the Danish Environmental Protection Agency estimates that 1,214,000 tonnes of food waste are discarded each year. Of this food waste, 814,000 tonnes is edible, Danish households accounting for 235,000 tonnes despite 94% of Danes focusing on reducing their food waste. The largest amount of food waste, 579,000 tonnes, is generated by the food industry and its value chain. This corresponds to a loss in value of up to DKK 2 billion, which makes the final products more expensive and reduces the competitiveness of the producers. With the high inflation of recent years, consumers have become more price-conscious, making the price of food an even more significant competitive factor.

“There is, especially in the food industry, an enormous potential in reducing food waste for the benefit of the climate, but also for the benefit of the producers themselves. However, it is a complex challenge with many aspects, and the effort is largely about identifying challenges to adress.”

says Bo Krogh Knudsen, responsible for the food industry at Columbus.

This challenge can be addressed with specialised advice, so food producers do not have to spend their time keeping up with all the new technological possibilities.



A Question of Education

Nowadays, we have the technology to track our food across the entire value chain in the food industry. In reality, it is more about educating the food producers, the retail industry, and the consumers. That is what Bo Krogh Knudsen says.

They are very advanced in this area in Norway, and Columbus has multiple customers within food production and retail trade. Including in salmon production. With the help of AI, they have implemented facial recognition on the salmon farms, making it possible to identify and treat diseases and ensure minimal disease spread. It is also possible to track the fish from a specific breeding pool to see what they have been fed, when they were harvested, and how long they can be stored. This also makes it easier to predict the best ways to utilise fishing, as size and quality can be forecasted. All of this helps to reduce production waste. Facial recognition on salmon farms is just one example of the many new possibilities that AI offers.

Barcodes with Extra Functions

It is not possible to trace milk back to the individual cow yet, but it can easily be done at farm level. And the technology isn't really that complicated. We all know the traditional barcode with thick and thin lines. A step up from this is the 2D barcode, which can hold significantly more information and can already be handled by virtually any warehouse management system today.

"This makes it possible to track food items not just based on a product number, but also on batch number, which among other things can tell you where it comes from, along with information on the production date and shelf life. The interesting thing is that these 2D barcodes can be scanned by any modern smartphone, enabling stores to provide data directly to consumers. For example, information about discounts if the expiry date is approaching," explains Bo Krogh Knudsen.



Implementing barcodes is often the easiest way to start getting a better overview of data in your food production. For instance, it is possible to identify affected batches of mayonnaise with mold, and trace it back to the production line or a specific ingredient. Then, producers can easily identify which products and batches contains the ingredient in their ERP system and quickly recall the exact quantities.

A major societal problem

The barcode can also automatically ensure discounts on food without the involvement of store employees via a loyalty app.

This could save man hours and help reduce food waste by increasing discounts as items get closer to their expiry dates. It sounds simple, and in reality it is, but the sad thing is that Bo Krogh Knudsen does not know of a single store or chain of stores that takes advantage of the opportunity.



"I believe the tipping point is the checkout systems. The key point here is to link the entire value chain together. For example, I can mention that more than 40 percent of the goods produced by one of the major bread producers in Denmark are never eaten. So overall, from a societal perspective, there is not only enormous food waste but also a tremendous waste of resources since packaging also has to be managed in the waste process," elaborates Bo Krogh Knudsen.

The potential for optimising processes is immense, and for many companies, it is a barrier to getting started. Where should one start? Fortunately, you do not have to figure it out by yourself. You can enter into a partnership to find the best solutions, without needing to have all the skills in-house.

Legislation might pave the way

Most recently, we have seen the new producer responsibility in the EU, which means that as a producer, you must account for different types of packaging consumption you are responsible for disposal.

For example, screw caps on bottles must now be attached to the bottle. All efforts are aimed at increasing the recyclability of packagings. Bo Krogh Knudsen is not dismissive of potential legal interventions either. However, he prefers to reward companies that think green and sustainably, so that we can combat overconsumption. In the long term, he even sees the possibility that we not only sort our waste, but also scan and register excess household food so that consumers can be rewarded for wasting less.

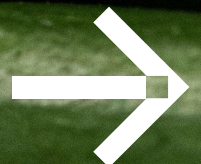
Do you want to know more?

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Fresh cucumbers should not go to waste: How AI is revolutionising demand forecasting in the food industry

When demand forecasting is based on AI and ML, the precision in the food industry's demand predictions takes a quantum leap. In this article, you can read about how Columbus has assisted a large supplier of fruit, vegetables, and flowers implement a cloud-based forecasting solution that not only improves accuracy but also saves the company millions of DKK.



One of the biggest challenges for the food industry is to balance the often highly perishable supplies precisely with demand, as cucumbers, bananas, and cut tulips do not last long in storage. The precision in demand forecasting for a company is therefore crucial. If the need is overestimated, companies end up with large amounts of waste, which can cost millions of DKK. If the need is underestimated, companies risk empty warehouse shelves and lost sales opportunities.

Inaccuracy disseminates

Traditionally, companies in the food industry have used manual methods and tools based on historical data and experience-based estimates. But these methods are often imprecise and resource-heavy, which can lead to significant financial losses. Bo Krogh Knudsen, F&B industry lead at Columbus, explains the challenges faced by the food industry as follows:

“In my experience, when demand is not predicted accurately enough, the inaccuracies disseminate through various parts of the business, whether it is production, sales, warehousing, or logistics. It all boils down to an inaccurate expectation of demand, which proves costly – both in terms of waste and expenses related to tools and labor.”

The solution: Forecasting with AI and ML

Demand forecasting involves analysing historical data, market trends, seasonal fluctuations, and even external factors like weather conditions. Previously, this process was manual, but with AI and ML, it can now be automated and made much more precise, Bo Krogh Knudsen explains:

“Demand forecasting with AI and ML allows you to analyse vast amounts of data and uncover patterns that would have taken a team of people weeks or months to identify. You can now automatically account for a wide range of factors – from

historical sales to external elements like economic trends, weather conditions, and consumer habits. For example, a machine learning model can predict how the demand for a specific type of vegetable will increase or decrease based on the weather in a particular region.”

It is about identifying errors, gaps, trends, and directions, that you would never be able to detect as effectively on your own.

“And the machine gets smarter the more data it receives, thereby becoming better and better at predicting demand.”



Fresh products benefit from precision

It is not uncommon for a company in the food industry to achieve 20–40 percent more accurate predictions by implementing AI and ML in its demand forecasting. This can lead to significant savings, as the company can reduce both waste and costs associated with inventory.

These benefits are shown in the case of a large food company, whom Columbus recently helped implement a cloud-based ML solution to replace the previous manual demand forecasting.

The company is a major supplier of fruits, vegetables, and flowers to supermarkets and operates a complex supply chain. The company must forecast supermarket demand in advance to ensure the right amount of stock is available.

Small mistakes have major consequences

“In the past, the company spent large sums on a team and a tool that cost millions in salaries and licenses, but often delivered inaccurate predictions, resulting in overproduction and waste. A good example from this case is that if you miscalculate by just 1 percent of what you sell in a month, you end up with a lot of raw materials that have to be thrown away. And in an industry with fresh products, this can quickly become very expensive,” Bo Krogh Knudsen points out.



By implementing a cloud-based ML solution, the customer has achieved much more accurate demand forecasts. This not only significantly reduced their waste but also led to savings of several million DKK per year.

“With our help, the customer improved their forecast accuracy by up to 30 percent for each product, allowing a total potential savings of DKK 4.5 million.”

The automated system has also cut down the time spent on producing forecasts, freeing up resources for other important areas.

“The development of AI-based demand forecasting is still in its early stages, but the benefits that can be reaped are already significant. There are many companies that have not yet taken this step, but those that do now will have a clear competitive advantage in the future,” Bo Krogh Knudsen says.



For example, a machine learning model can predict how demand for a certain type of vegetable will increase or decrease depending on the weather in a specific region.

– Bo Krogh Knudsen

Immense potential

The potential of demand forecasting with the help of AI and ML is massive, not only in the food industry but also in many other sectors. Retail, manufacturing, and healthcare are just a few examples of industries that can benefit from more accurate forecasting.

“The development of AI-based demand forecasting is still in its early stages, but the benefits that can be reaped are already significant. There are many companies that have not yet taken this step, but those that do now will have a clear competitive advantage in the future,” Bo Krogh Knudsen says.

At Columbus, we look forward to helping more companies make the leap into future demand forecasting. Whether your company is already using cloud-based solutions or is facing data management challenges, we can tailor a solution to meet your needs.

Do you want to know more?

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Columbus restores Danish Agro's retail operations with the rollout of Dynamics 365 in record time

Few years ago, Danish Agro began consolidating and aligning its internal businesses with a unified ERP and CRM solution. According to Chief Information Officer, Bo Rønn, Danish Agro chose to use Microsoft Dynamics 365 early in the process due to the system's ability to integrate various divisions and unique business areas.





Danish Agro conducted a proof of concept and defined 10 business-critical processes. The project to implement Dynamics 365 then began in the Agribusiness and Service divisions.

The original plan was to implement the system gradually, focusing on quality rather than speed. However, this changed when a major ransomware attack shut down a large part of the cooperative's IT system.

The attack petrified the POS and CRM systems, forcing employees to manually perform these functions, even though the manufacturing facilities stayed operational. While the company tried to reboot its 450 servers and 3,000 IT users' systems, they also had to ensure adequate security to block potential intruders.

Overcoming Challenges: Project Quick Retail

Almost immediately after ransomware attacked Danish Agro's IT infrastructure, the Columbus team and Danish Agro's project team collaborated to develop a rapid implementation plan.

The plan identified the key components required to restart the servers while ensuring security. The project was named "Quick Retail."



Trying to restore the old systems would have been very time consuming, if not impossible.

– Bo Rønn,
Chief Information Officer,
Danish Agro





Columbus initiated the recovery process with Danish Agro Shoppen, which is their Danish retail chain comprising 21 physical stores and an online shop. These stores struggled to maintain operations using manual methods due to the outdated retail system.

Bo Rønn, Chief Information Officer, explains: “Trying to restore or make the old systems work again would have been timeconsuming, if not impossible. “Since we were already planning to switch to the Dynamics 365 retail project, a quick installation was done to get the systems up and running.

The first step for ensuring the quick installation was that Columbus and Danish Agro agreed to compress the original sixmonth implementation

plan to just four weeks. This was followed by discussions on what ought to be done to achieve this goal, which elements should be included in the solution, and how the process could be accelerated. In stark contrast to the original implementation conditions, the new situation required swift action. This meant that the entire solution did not need to be perfect from the start.

Columbus made this balance between speed and functionality possible for Danish Agro by optimally utilising Dynamics 365 to unify the cooperative’s systems and processes and streamline operations, which provided Danish Agro:

- An overall view of operations
- Help in transforming retail practices, leading to better business decisions
- New practices through wider offerings like Microsoft Power Platform, Azure, and Microsoft 365

Columbus strengthened the user-friendliness of Dynamics 365 Finance and Operations and its remote capabilities, facilitated by Microsoft Teams, to ensure that Danish Agro’s systems were operational across all locations.

The implementation and setup required education of 22 super users and approximately 80 employees in the involved complexities—a task that the Columbus team successfully managed by collaborating effectively with Danish Agro’s other technology partners.

“Since the attack happened without any warning, a recovery process had to start immediately. The Columbus team quickly developed an implementation plan for Dynamics 365, combining speed and functionality to install, set up, and educate our staff in collaboration with our other technology partners,” says Rønn as he describes, what it was like to experience the ransomware attack and Danish Agro’s experience with Columbus resolving the issue for the Agro company.



What does Columbus help Danish Agro achieve?

Columbus ensured an accelerated migration of Danish Agro to the Dynamics 365 solution by swiftly restoring all ERP functions. In fact, the solution was rolled out in just four weeks to 21 of Danish Agro's physical stores and their website. The cooperative not only resumed operations but also improved their online presence with a more customer and user-friendly platform. Expressing Danish Agro's view on the collaboration with Columbus and their competences, Rønn says;



Working with the Columbus team has been extremely rewarding. Their expertise, professionalism, and ability to deliver even in critical situations—like the one Danish Agro experienced during the ransomware attack—have been exceptional.



Danish Agro is now planning, in collaboration with Columbus, a rapid rollout of Dynamics 365 to other areas of the company.

Do you want to know more?

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We must reach the cloud before harvest! Smaken av Grimstad completes cloud migration in just 8 weeks

If we do not meet the deadline before the harvest, we will have to postpone the ERP project. That was the message Columbus received in a meeting with Smaken av Grimstad. After just eight weeks, the entire ERP cloud migration was completed on time and within budget.





When the board decided to move the ERP solution to the cloud, there were only two months left until the harvest in July.

“Cucumber production starts on July 25th and marks the beginning of the harvest season. We had to be ready for production; otherwise, we would have to postpone the entire ERP project,” Jan Rommetveit, CEO and co-owner of Smaken av Grimstad, says.

Columbus and Smaken av Grimstad have had a strong customer relationship for over 10 years. “Speed is one of Smaken av Grimstad’s core values, and we truly experienced that.” We have never before delivered an ERP cloud migration in just eight weeks, Per Christian Øen, Customer manager at Columbus, says.

Sustainable from farm to table

The story of Smaken av Grimstad began in 1917, founded by local farmers and businessmen with the aim of producing “canned fruit and vegetables.” In 2012, Grimstad Konserver AS changed its name to Smaken av Grimstad AS. In 2022, the company had a turnover of NOK 115 million, 36 employees, and produced for large households, industry, and the grocery market.



Columbus knows us well and has done an excellent preliminary job. The collaboration worked perfectly.

– Jan Rommetveit



“We have been sustainable long before the concept was introduced in 1987 by the Brundtland Commission,” Rommetveit says. “Throughout history, we have collaborated with local breeders in the Grimstad area.”

When the raw materials are harvested, they are transported a few kilometers by tractor before being delivered to the factory.

Ready for change

“We have investment and implementation plans, and the old ERP system has been on our ‘to-do’ list for a long time,” Rachel Mentzoni, CFO at Smaken av Grimstad, admits.

The last upgrade of the ERP system was in 2018, and it is used across the entire company, from purchasing raw materials and production planning to sales, invoicing, and as an accounting system. Several factors indicated that it was time for a change, and that Smaken av Grimstad had maxed out the ERP system’s capacity. They therefore chose Infor CloudSuite’s industrial solution for the food industry.

“The bank informed us that the remittance files needed to be changed to a new format by April 1, 2024, and new VAT reporting requirements increased our manual workload,” Mentzoni explains. “We also faced challenges tracking input factors – from farm to table, which is critical for our administration as a responsible food producer. The outdated ERP solution was holding us back. We could not wait any longer.”

Move to the cloud in just eight weeks

Getting production up and running was the most critical factor. The cucumbers are ripe and ready for harvest around mid-July. A few days later, they start to rot. Therefore, the factory must be staffed and the systems ready to receive the raw materials when they are harvested. To ensure the company’s liquidity, the order and invoicing system had to be operational.

“Moving the ERP system is like performing complicated heart surgery, but with skilled people, we were not worried,” Rommetveit says. “Columbus knows us well and has done an excellent preliminary job. The collaboration worked perfectly.”

To be continued →



Despite thorough preparation, a critical element that had to be handled appeared in the project. Otherwise, the cloud migration would have been delayed.

“It was about the warehouse’s ability to scan pallets when delivering the goods and receive electronic information about goods deliveries to customers. If this was not in order, our customers would have had to do it manually – something our large food wholesale customers, Norgesgruppen, Rema, and Coop, would not accept,” Rommetveit says.

The harvest of cucumbers starts on July 25th, which also marks the start of the production season at Smaken av Grimstad. With such a tight schedule comes increased risk, and Columbus highlights two critical factors that contributed to the project being completed on time and on budget.

“One is the team effort behind the cloud migration or the ‘we effort,’” Vidar Furuborg, Project manager at Columbus, says. “It was not ‘us and them’, but ‘we’ all the way. Many people were involved in the project, but the combination of precise resource allocation, data migration with robust assurance of quality and timeliness, the right expertise, and professional project management, along with an agile project approach and close team communication, led to a successful conclusion.”

“The second factor was, that early on we decided to do a 1:1 move, meaning we would move the current solution ‘directly’ to the cloud.” This was the best approach and the most suitable for Smaken av Grimstad; we based the cloud migration on proven project methodologies for Infor’s solutions. When we switch to the cloud, Smaken av Grimstad knows what to expect, and once we are operational, we can focus on developing new functionalities,” Furuborg explains.

The solution’s farm-to-table perspective, Infor Cloudsuite Food & Beverage, powered by Amazon Web Services (AWS) in the cloud, is highly

competitive with its low operating costs. Infor continuously updates the solution with industry-specific content to meet the needs of food and beverage manufacturers worldwide.

“Infor’s multi-tenant cloud solution offers value that appeals to customers. They get a solution with built-in functionality, security, compatibility, and stability. This is also the reason why they are becoming more popular in the ERP market worldwide,” Per Christian Øen, Customer manager at Columbus, says.

“The solution addresses our long-standing farm-to-table perspective by giving us insight into the entire supply chain. It is also crucial that we have access to functionalities that are relevant today. We know the solution is continuously updated





with industry-specific functionality. This gives us security for, ensuring we have a future-proof platform that will always be relevant to our business. Additionally, this has cost us no more than a used tractor, demonstrating that modern ERP platforms are now accessible to small and medium-sized businesses like ours,” Rommetveit concludes.

Governance in a new context

The new ERP solution is continuously updated with new functionalities. This means that Smaken av Grimstad practically gains new opportunities to perform actions differently across the entire organisation, or internally within procurement, production, storage, and financial functions.

“To keep the momentum, we have to be ‘on’ all the time,” Rommetveit says. There is always an opportunity to improve business processes, but it must be handled differently than before. It is about governance in a new context. I completely agree with what Rommetveit mentioned. It is a topic that many become aware of when they are in the cloud, namely the development of a governance model that anchors, communicates, and implements new functions in the ERP system as with their business development, Øen says.

This also affects our role, where we often contribute ongoing with advice on which functions need to be activated, while using our implementation method to ensure that we involve and engage the entire organisation.

Do you want to know more?

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Columbus: A trusted partner for digital transformation in the food industry

Columbus is your partner for digital transformation in the food industry. With our deep industry knowledge and specialised IT solutions, we help you navigate a constantly changing industry.

We understand the challenges you face – from rising commodity prices and changing consumer demands to new regulations and competition. Through automation of manual processes, optimisation of supply chains, and centralisation of your data, we ensure that your company is prepared for the future. Let us help you realise your full potential and create lasting growth through digital transformation.

Find out more: www.columbusglobal.com

