INDUSTRIAL SERVICE INFRASTRUCTURE

At 50, I Walked Away From Everything I'd Built. That Wasn't Courage. That Was Inevitability.

Why 25 years of building digital platforms made it impossible for me to do anything other than create a software category that didn't exist yet.

Gerd Bart · Founder & CEO, Transaction-Network · 10 min read

Some insights can't be learned from a book. They only emerge when you've been asking the same question long enough — across different industries, different clients, different kinds of pressure. It took me 25 years to fully understand one such insight. And once I did, it was clear I couldn't stay a consultant. I had to build.

The Thread I Almost Missed

Looking back, the thread was always the same. I just couldn't see it clearly until much later.

In 1998, I started my first company at 22. Not because I had a master plan, but because I saw that the internet could connect businesses with each other in ways that simply hadn't been possible before. I built websites, developed intranet systems, wrote early CMS solutions for mid-market companies — local banks, equipment manufacturers, dozens of small businesses suddenly trying to exist digitally. Always with the same question driving me: how do I connect businesses to each other through technology?

What followed were years in which that question kept sharpening. At living systems, I worked on dooyoo — one of Germany's early digital commerce networks, built before e-commerce even had a name. Then came years at dmc, one of the country's leading e-commerce agencies, where I ran platforms for Media Markt, Galeria Kaufhof, HSE24, and the largest mail-order retailers in Germany. I learned what it really means to build digital systems that don't just work internally, but enable real transactions between companies — in real time, at scale, under genuine operational pressure.

Then came the SAP world. At Sybit, I spent years working with manufacturing companies — on CRM systems, service processes, and the question of how a machine builder digitally reaches and collaborates with its customers. I know ERP systems, SAP implementations, and field service solutions not from textbooks, but from a hundred real projects where I saw exactly what they can do and exactly where they stop. And they always stop at the same place: at the company boundary.

SAP optimizes the company. MES optimizes production. Field service management optimizes the field team. Each of these systems is excellent at what it was built for. But none of them is built to operate where industrial service actually happens, between companies. In the gap between OEM and operator. Between service partner and parts

supplier. Between a machine alarm and the technician who needs to know about it before the line goes down.

> *“Not better than SAP. Not better than MES. Different. Because we operate where those systems stop.”*

The Moment That Changed Everything

The final piece came from a strategy engagement with Gerhard Schubert GmbH — a world-class manufacturer of packaging machines. I was brought in to develop the company's digital strategy, a task I'd done dozens of times before. But Schubert has one characteristic that seems unremarkable at first and turns out to be structurally critical: their machines always sit at the end of a production line. Always. Whether it's chocolate, cheese, pharmaceuticals, or cosmetics — packaging is the final step in the entire value chain.

Which means: whatever goes wrong upstream — a temperature variance, an inconsistency in the raw material, a synchronization issue between two machines from different manufacturers — the packaging machine absorbs it. It slows down. It stops. And with it, the entire line. Not because the Schubert machine failed. But because the problem lives between companies, and no system is equipped to intervene there.

The deeper I went into this, the clearer it became: you can't solve this with a better portal. Not with a new app. Not with another SAP integration. The solution sits structurally outside the reach of any single company — because it has to emerge between companies.

> *"The problem belongs to no one. It lives between companies — in a gap that only 25 years of platform work made fully visible to me."*

What This Looks Like in Practice

To understand why this matters so much, you have to look at what OEMs experience every single day. I'm not talking about edge cases. I'm talking about structural weaknesses that represent billions in lost margin potential and untapped service revenue.

PROBLEM 01

Installed Base With No Visibility

An OEM has sold 15,000 machines — and has no live view of which ones are still running, which customers have gone out of business, or who's overdue for an upgrade. Their most valuable asset is a blind spot.

PROBLEM 02

The Service Portal Only Solves One Side

An operator works with eight different OEMs. They don't open any single portal on a daily basis. The reach of even the best-built portal: effectively zero. The OEM invests. Nobody uses it.

PROBLEM 03

Parts Revenue Lost to Third Parties

Without a digital connection to the machine, operators buy spare parts from whoever is cheapest — including gray market suppliers. The OEM loses margin that structurally should be theirs.

PROBLEM 04

No Revenue Model for Digital Services

OEMs want to sell predictive maintenance, remote diagnostics, documentation subscriptions. But they have no infrastructure for entitlement, billing, and delivery at the machine level. The idea exists. The foundation doesn't.

PROBLEM 05

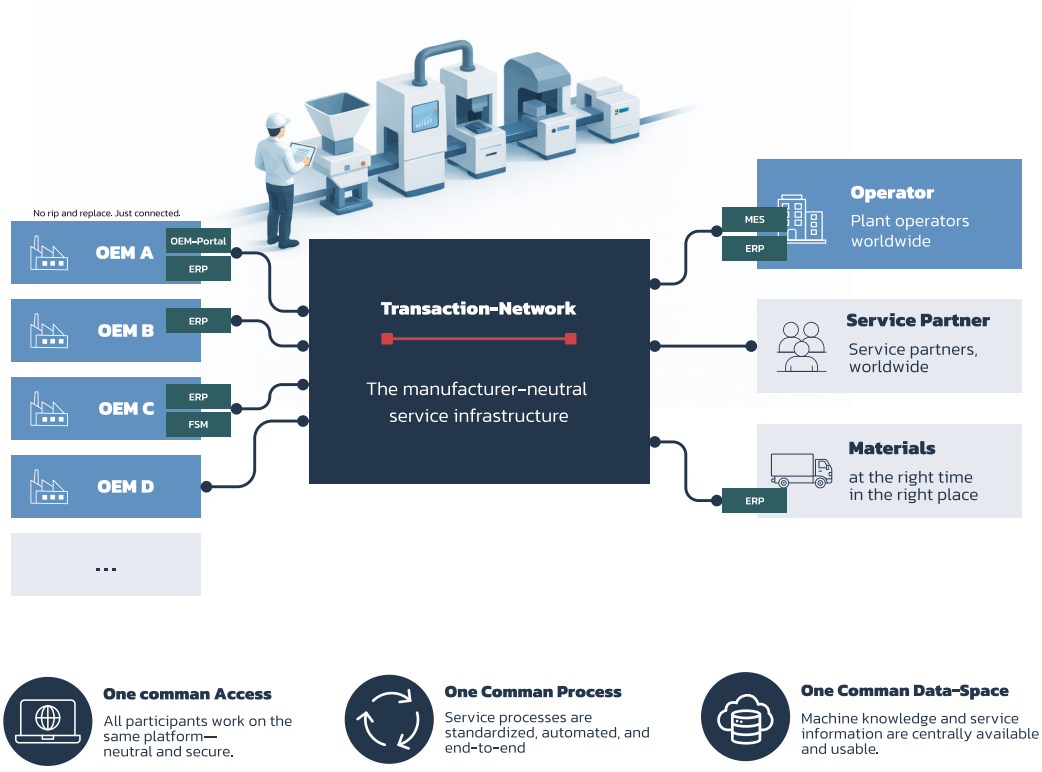
Multi-Brand Groups Can’t See Themselves

For groups running 9 brands: no unified view of service activity across all brands and markets. Every brand is an island. Cross-brand intelligence is structurally impossible — because the shared infrastructure doesn’t exist.

All of these problems share a single root cause: there is no neutral infrastructure on which OEMs, operators, and service partners can work together. Each party optimizes their own side. The gap in between stays open.

The Gap No Single System Can Close

This is the structural flaw I fully understood after 25 years. Industrial service is a multi-company problem — and it’s still being addressed with single-company tools. That contradiction is exactly where Transaction-Network came from.



Imagine you're an OEM. You have a service portal. You have an ERP. You might even have an IoT dashboard. Everything runs inside your company — clean, structured, digital.

Now you call your operator. They have their own system. Their own ERP. Their own ticket process. And their own version of organized chaos.

Between you: an email. A phone call. On a good day, a portal they open once a month.

That's not digitization. That's digitization up to the company boundary — and silence after that.

> *"Every machine alarm that doesn't automatically trigger a cross-company service order. Every spare part ordered by phone because there's no digital connection to the machine. Every service technician arriving on-site without knowing what the last three engineers already tried. All of it happens in that gap."*

This isn't an edge case. This is the normal state of operations in thousands of production facilities around the world. Every time a machine goes down and three parties start calling each other to figure out who's responsible — that's the gap. Every time a service technician stands in front of a machine his colleague already fixed three times, with no record of what was done — that's the gap. It's invisible because it lives between systems. But it costs the industry millions every single day.

The gap that belongs to no one. The gap that no single system was ever designed to close.

Until now.

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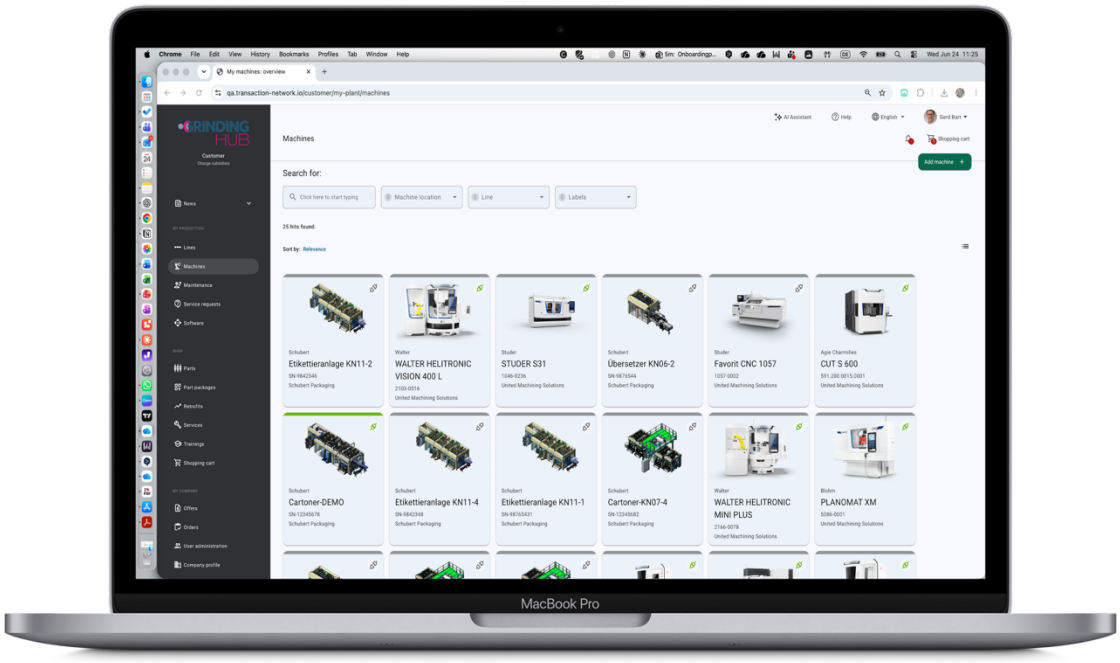

Figure 1: A centralized overview of your entire fleet of machines, regardless of the manufacturer

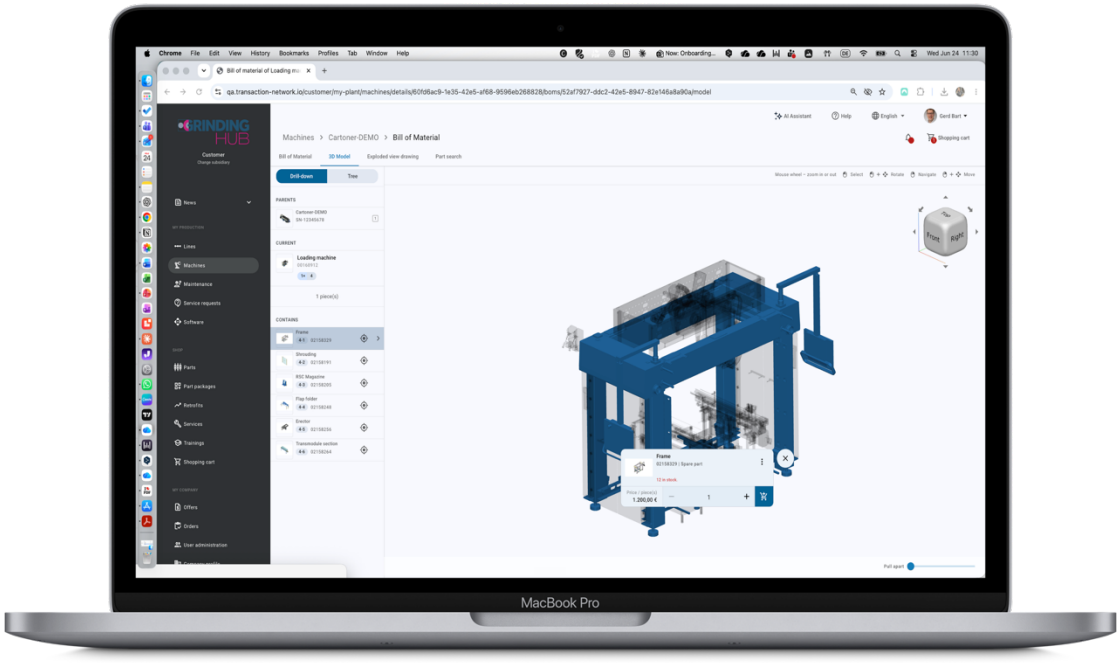

Figure 2: Part Identification—Fast, Easy, Using AI, and Directly in the Bill of Materials

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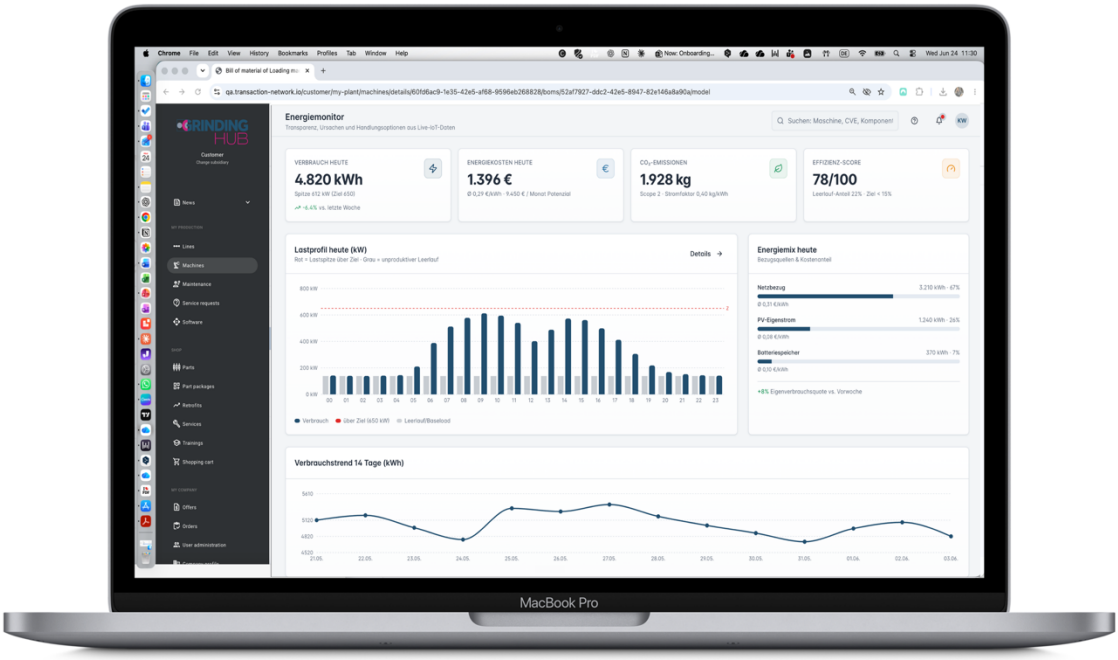

Figure 3: Energy Monitor. Your energy consumption at a glance. The potential for savings. This is made possible by our IoT connection to machines via our own integration platform.

Why I Founded This — and Why at 50

Once the full scale of that gap was clear to me, one thing was immediately obvious: you can't fix this by improving an existing system or adding a new feature. The gap isn't technical. It's structural. And it forms precisely where every existing system stops thinking — at the company boundary.

I didn't found Transaction-Network because I wanted to walk away from a comfortable career. I founded it because, after 25 years, I could finally answer the question I'd first asked myself in 1998 — just at a different level of scale. Back then: how do I connect a company digitally with its customers? Today: how do I build the infrastructure on which industrial service between companies actually works?

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At 50, I had something I wouldn't have had at 30: enough experience to understand the problem in its full depth. Enough of a network to find the right partners. And enough perspective to stop waiting for the next wave of hype and start building something that actually holds.

> *"We didn't improve the space. We occupied it for the first time."*

Transaction-Network is today the first infrastructure on which OEMs, operators, and service partners work together — not side by side, but with each other. Machine signals become service orders. Processes run structured and automated across company boundaries. Spare parts are ordered tied to the machine. Digital services are sold and billed directly at the point of service need.

This isn't another tool in a long line of tools. This is the Industrial Service Network. And we're the only ones building it.

Why I'm Writing This

I'm not writing this newsletter to sell Transaction-Network. I'm writing it because I know there are decision-makers out there — at OEMs, at operators, at investment firms — who feel exactly what I felt in that strategy engagement. Who know that the tools they're working with today were built for a world that no longer exists. Who sense that the next competitive advantage won't come from the next feature release, but from the question of who controls the infrastructure on which industrial service runs in the future.

I'm convinced: the companies that understand this now will be standing on a very different side of the line in ten years than those who are still waiting. And the

infrastructure that makes that possible is being built right now — not in a corporate innovation lab, but here, in the real market, with real OEMs and real operators — from the factory floors of Europe to the show floor at IMTS Chicago. Today, over 80,000 machines are already running on the Industrial Service Network. The CECIMO Innovation Award 2025 was a signal — but the real proof comes from the shop floor, every day.

If you see it the same way: I'd welcome the conversation.

Gerd Bart

Founder & CEO · Transaction-Network

Category Creator · Industrial Service Infrastructure

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About

Gerd Bart. Founder and CEO of Transaction-Network (transaction-network.com). I'm building the infrastructure on which industrial service between companies actually works — the Industrial Service Network.

25 years of platforms, networks, and digital processes across industrial markets. First in e-commerce. Then in the SAP world. Today as a category creator in industrial service.