

The world of tomorrow

20/05/2016 Innovation and Preliminary Development Management - it's an unusual department title in the world of Porsche. A look into the future of the Porsche brand.

The team led by Knuth Walczak packs trends, ideas, and challenges into valuable packages, to be opened later o. It's actually a matter of steering. That might come as a surprise given the fact that we're talking about trend research. The steering, however, consists of the timely, gentle counterpressure that keeps the thrill of intellectual drift on track. It's not an option for a brand like Porsche to be late in coming up with answers. Which is why, about a year ago, the company asked around twenty experts in managing innovation and preliminary development to take on the role of navigators. Farsighted individuals with specific ideas about what the future holds.

Knuth Walczak's team is used to working outside the public eye. Taking a sharp look at the future is not for everyone—but the editorial team succeeded in bringing together a few key experts and engineers for a talk. Oliver Klittich, director of Innovation and Preliminary Development Management, is the first to enter the Porsche Museum, where you can gaze into the future without losing sight of the past. The museum has closed for the day. The long escalators that carry its many international visitors from the foyer up to the top floor stand still. As still as the legendary Porsche models spanning eight decades.

History is holding its breath.

That is, with the exception of a few of the older 911s, which continue to revolve leisurely because their turntables operate around the clock. Klittich gazes at the turntables. He has worked at Porsche for fifteen years and, together with his team, ensures that the many ideas from innovation and research actually make it into future cars. For the most important ideas, everything from principles to budgets and schedules comes into play before they appear in the right vehicles some six to ten years later.

Walczak: “It’s a broad spectrum.”

Knuth Walczak, an automotive engineer, previously worked at the Volkswagen Group and came to Porsche four years ago. He joins the conversation. “Oliver Klittich’s area is a good example of what we do. We don’t look at the future from a purely theoretical standpoint. Instead, we’re absolutely product-oriented. Dr. Natascha Künstner examines the results of this research, in conjunction with a number of other things. We try to draw the right conclusions from a huge spread of information, ideas, and stimuli, and try to pursue these conclusions in a targeted way. This all has to culminate in Porsche’s future models.

We talk with our salespeople, derive ideas from a systematic study of future trends, examine what marketing institutes are doing, and work with colleagues from the product planning department to promptly define the demands on Porsche products that our technology experts can put into practice. It’s a broad spectrum. Our job is to identify potential innovations, raise their profile, and place them at the disposal of various groups in the development department,” explains Walczak.

A close eye on the trends

When it comes to the theory that paves the way for this work, Dr. Natascha Künstner plays a pivotal role. Künstner, who has been at the company for four years, studied psychology with a focus on the interaction between people and machines. This is how she describes her job: “We monitor our market environment and work together with sales experts to keep a close eye on the trends that affect our customers. We study the economic and cultural development of different markets and come up with recommendations for action. At the end, we consolidate this information and make forecasts that are based on hard data and facts from many different sources. This is no idle speculation.”

To the question of whether the Porsche brand faces a certain conflict between innovation and tradition, Walczak has a clear response: “We don’t define the Porsche brand of the future—instead, it’s the Porsche brand that defines our focus.” As Klittich adds, “Porsche has always commanded enormous potential. There’s nothing tedious about putting that into action. We have the fascinating job of continuing to build authentic sports cars.”

Technological development speeds up

A short while later the three navigators stroll through the gallery of the museum toward the exit. Walczak stops to look around. “I’m certain that the technologies of the future will not cool down the hot, fascinating core of the Porsche brand but instead will heat it up even more. As the pace of technological development speeds up, it's important to channel the right innovations promptly into the right Porsche products. To make sure this happens and to guide Porsche into the future, departments such as Innovation and Preliminary Development are essential.”

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