

The right tone

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13/11/2015 Between tradition and innovation, perfection and passion – as Member of the Executive Board for Sales and Marketing, Detlev von Platen sets the right tone for Porsche.

Detlev von Platen is a cosmopolitan. In the truest sense of the word: he has German parents, yet was born in France. He grew up in Orléans, studied at the universities in Tours and Poitiers – and has retained his mischievous smile and slight accent from his youth right up to the present day. He has worked in France, Germany and the USA. “In Atlanta, I was probably the only person with a German name who spoke English with a French accent,” von Platen recalls. “And in Zuffenhausen – I’m trying my very best – a little Swabian comes into the mix.” For Porsche, therefore, he is the ideal appointment as Member of the Executive Board for Sales and Marketing: as a mediator between the cultures, as a liaison between the company, the general public and customers, as an international communicator.

Paris, Munich, Atlanta

More than 30 years ago – when he chugged up to the university in Tours in his two-cylinder 2CV – it seems almost as if Detlev von Platen already had one major passionate goal: Porsche. On graduating at the age of 24, his first post took him to BMW, as Marketing Manager in France for the motorcycle division. He later held various management positions in the Marketing Department of the BMW parent company in Munich. Then in 1997 came a decisive step: the move to Porsche. Here von Platen took on the management of the Porsche brand in France; he founded Porsche France and from 1999 was in charge of the company as President and CEO. And with success as well: when he took up the post, the French Porsche sales organisation were selling some 400 cars a year; at the end of his time in Paris, ten years later, the figure was almost 2,900 – an increase of more than 700 per cent. In the USA, he repeated this success once again, as President and CEO of Porsche Cars North America (PCNA) in Atlanta from 2008: at the beginning Porsche was selling 26,000 units per year in the USA. In 2014, the figure had almost doubled to 47,000.

One of his most impressive achievements west of the Atlantic is probably the opening of "One Porsche Drive" in May 2015. The new US headquarters in the immediate vicinity of Atlanta International Airport – with 100 million dollars the largest foreign investment by Porsche to date – takes customer retention to a new level: a site with an area of some 10.2 hectares provides an opportunity not only to view and admire the Porsche sports cars but also to experience them with literally all the senses. Detlev von Platen has therefore not only made "One Porsche Drive" the new address of the PCNA headquarters in Atlanta but also a showcase example of how to convey brand values masterfully and how to interconnect modern communication channels with traditional customer retention approaches as part of a hands-on experience. With all this wealth of ideas and thirst for action – what actually motivates von Platen, what is his recipe for success?

Courage, conviction, passion

"I have always had the great fortune to work for companies and products in which I can really believe," explains von Platen. "Every morning when I take my car, a 911 Turbo, I have this feeling. Everyday magic, as it were. This time spent driving to the office, listening to the sound, pressing my foot very gently onto the accelerator – is fantastic." The fact that he allows this enthusiasm, this conviction to flow directly into his work and then implements it in ideas and campaigns is no doubt the source of his success.

Private passion and professional ambition, dedication and assertiveness go hand in hand for Detlev von Platen at Porsche. His messages are well received because they come from a deep convictions; his professional career is shaped by an entrepreneurial approach. And presumably also because he still manages to find some time for his private life: von Platen is married and has four children. Running, hiking and diving keep him fit; as a sport pilot, he takes time out for himself above the clouds.

In Zuffenhausen, von Platen aims to provide new stimuli in sales and marketing – and at the same time continue many of the established strategic elements of his predecessor Bernhard Maier. "Bernhard Maier consistently professionalised the entire sales organisation and pursued a path of international growth for the company," explains Dr Wolfgang Porsche, Chairman of the Supervisory Board of Porsche AG. "Brand value was increased significantly under his management; Porsche achieves top marks in customer satisfaction. Detlev von Platen has a tremendous amount of experience, which should enable him to follow on seamlessly from the successes of his predecessor." Von Platen also aims to continue developing the dealer network: Porsche will keep expanding the sales network steadily until 2018. In China, for example, the second most important sales market for Porsche after North America, the plans are to expand the dealer network to 93 Porsche Centres by the end of 2015. In Shanghai, the next Porsche Experience Centre is scheduled to open in summer 2016.

Challenges as an opportunity

"We are indeed in a very strong position," says von Platen. "Yet we are also facing major challenges and cannot afford to rest on our laurels." In these endeavours, the Member of the Executive Board for Sales and Marketing is – as it were – operating on the front line. The world is changing rapidly: customer wishes, customer behaviour, the economy, legislation, technologies, digital revolutions. "The current record values for delivery figures show us that we are ideally equipped for the future with our innovative products, our highly motivated employees and a strong sales organisation around the world. Nevertheless, we are pursuing our targets prudently and with the required respect for change. "If we tackle this properly, with dedication and team spirit, and if we are also prepared to integrate the innovative spirit firmly into our work culture in the future, then I do not see the challenge as a danger but rather as a great opportunity for Porsche." This is what he will aim for, Detlev von Platen promises – with all his heart and soul.

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