

Uwe-Karsten Städter: from Volkswagen apprentice to Member of the Executive Board

30/07/2021 As he marks his final working day, Uwe-Karsten Städter – Member of the Executive Board responsible for Procurement at Porsche – looks back at a diverse career.

Uwe-Karsten Städter was born in Wolfsburg in 1956, completed an apprenticeship at Volkswagen and climbed up the career ladder rung by rung. "I hadn't planned it that way," he says in an interview with Braunschweiger Zeitung. The 64-year-old, who retires this August, looks back at almost half a century in the automotive industry, describes the current issues in procurement and reveals what he loves about his home city.

Mr Städter, you set foot in the door at Volkswagen for the first time at the age of 16. This year you will be 65 and will leave the Group after almost 50 years. What has kept you at Volkswagen for so long?

Uwe-Karsten Städter: The exciting tasks I was responsible for, the positive development of the

Volkswagen brand and the Group as a whole. And also the great people I worked with. This inspired me time and again. Volkswagen is so varied and successful at the same time. I owe a lot to the company. It shaped me, challenged me and entrusted me with various management positions.

Do you think a career like yours – from apprentice at Volkswagen to Member of the Executive Board at Porsche – would still be possible today?

Städter: I would not rule it out. But luck plays a big part. You have to be able to work in a team, be passionate, tackle challenges. The framework conditions today have, of course, changed. In any case, I never planned my career, even if no one believes me (laughs).

You have worked in purchasing for your entire professional life. How has this area changed in recent decades?

Städter: The dimensions of procurement have changed. The multi-brand strategy has played a major role in this. The Group has grown strongly since the 1970s. This has also had an effect on procurement. The purchasing volume is much higher, and many more people work in this area today. Digitalisation has provided another boost. I can still remember my early days at Volkswagen: we had metal desks and two employees shared a telephone with a dial. Work processes have evolved up to the present day and I have really enjoyed being a part of that.

How does the lack of semi-conductors affect Porsche?

Städter: We have got through this quite well. We have optimised and managed the production of our vehicles in such a way that this has only had a minor impact on our production so far. We coordinate things within the Group, but it is still a difficult situation.

And what other effects has the coronavirus pandemic had at Porsche so far?

Städter: The pandemic has hit everyone. We especially felt it during a six-week production shutdown last year. We nevertheless maintained supplies thanks to a combination of coordination and organisation. Intensive communication with our suppliers was crucial: we were in constant contact and were aware of all of our partners' situations at all times. I asked my team to call our suppliers every day and find out how they were doing. And, of course, the Group helped: we closely coordinated coronavirus protection measures in particular. We also shared Group standards with suppliers.

How many suppliers have you lost due to the coronavirus pandemic?

Städter: Not a single one.

And how do you assess the situation of suppliers with regard to electric mobility and the phasing out of the combustion engine?

Städter: We are witnessing a transformation on a scale that we have not seen before. This is particularly demanding for suppliers and service providers. They are facing great challenges. Not only in terms of the product portfolio, but also in terms of financial resources. Around 25 per cent of our traditional suppliers have already started changing to electric mobility.

How important is it for German car manufacturers to become more independent from Asian suppliers when it comes to electric mobility?

Städter: The transformation will dramatically change supply chains. Globalisation is irreversible. In procurement, we will increasingly act as managers who create value. Combustion engine technology has formed an established element at suppliers for decades. The new structures are very different: new components, special raw materials and new technology. This means that we need to build up expertise much earlier, for example in terms of raw materials. The focus is on sustainability, starting with the procurement of cobalt and lithium for battery cell production. That's why we already make sure we have competent partners within the supply chain. In general, it can be said that decisions are currently being taken as to who will work with whom and how in the future. This is a huge task. Everyone, including manufacturers, must rethink their approach within the value chain.

What do you think? How much of a risk is there that when redefining the supply chains, for example, sub-sub-suppliers will be involved with employees working in poor conditions? Such as in cobalt mining, for example.

Städter:I would not call this a risk, but an opportunity. Thanks to artificial intelligence, we are now able to identify when something is not working properly at a supplier. We monitor over 4,000 suppliers around the world with an early warning system. That's the start. We therefore know when we need to proactively intervene. We focus on sustainability as part of a targeted process and also help suppliers to improve structures and processes. Ultimately, it is about people and fair working conditions. We are committed to this.

Is that enough? You can sign a lot of agreements and have early warning systems in place, but it's just a start, as you said ...

Städter: We also visit suppliers on site and look around. And not only when there are signs that a manufacturer is having issues. We ourselves visit the mines or let suppliers show us how they tan the leather.

What kind of car do you drive?

Städter:I always drive a car made by the brand I am working for: a Volkswagen at Volkswagen, a Seat at Seat and now the Taycan, our first all-electric sports car, at Porsche. By the way, all of Porsche's executive board members drive electric vehicles. We need to experience the vehicles on the road to share our customers' experiences.

And what do you prefer to drive? An electric or combustion-engined vehicle?

Städter: Both! The driving experience offered by electric mobility is simply fantastic. The tremendous acceleration, the silent coasting, the powerful driving performance. This is a completely new and modern way of mobility.

You would say that, wouldn't you?!

Städter: But I am being serious! I am also passionate about our emotive combustion engines. For instance a Porsche 911 GT3 RS. One thing does not rule out the other, even though I grew up with combustion engines. But taking the opportunity to help shape the all-electric future is very important – and it's a lot of fun!

Personal information

- Uwe-Karsten Städter, 64, was born in Wolfsburg in 1956.
- In 1974, he started training as an industrial clerk at Volkswagen and subsequently trained as an industrial business administrator.
- Städter worked in several positions within the Volkswagen Group: from 1999 to 2002 he was Head of Chemicals Procurement at Seat, and in 2007 he became Head of Electrical Systems Group Procurement.
- Since 2011, Städter has been on the Executive Board of Volkswagen's subsidiary, Porsche – he is also responsible for procurement at the sports car manufacturer.

Info

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