Michael Drolshagen aims to raise individual customer service to a higher level with digital technologies.

A PORSCHE MANAGER CLOSELY
FOLLOWS HIS CUSTOMERS.
AND SOMETIMES HE DRIVES OUT AHEAD.

CONNECTED TO CUSTOMERS

MAREN EITEL   CHRISTOPH BAUER

DIGITAL

CONNECTED

INDIVIDUAL

TRANSPARENT

Michael Drolshagen is a keen observer of Porsche customers. As the head of the aftersales department, he is very interested in what they experience after buying their cars. As an engineer, he sets superior standards. "Customer satisfaction is a matter of course," he says. As far as he is concerned, that should be obvious—and simply the starting point for higher aspirations. He considers each customer relationship to be its own work in progress. And seeks to invest in making each one as individualized as possible—especially in this age of digital transformation.

At Porsche, this begins long before customers start up their engines for the first time. Three months before they collect their car, they receive a user-friendly app tailored precisely to the vehicle. If they want, they can check out the car's functions beforehand. The personal consultation on the pick-up day is based on how they have used this digital version of their user's manual thus far. What do they already know? What is relevant for them? "The app lets us pinpoint the needs of each customer," explains Drolshagen. Developed by Porsche's customer relations department, the app is already being used on a trial basis in the USA and will soon be rolled out worldwide.

DIGITIZATION CHANGES EXPECTATIONS

The app is just one element in an aftersales system that covers all the points of contact with Porsche customers. Together with experts from Porsche Consulting, Drolshagen and his team are working on expanding this system still further. The objective is to guide aftersales services for Porsche customers into the digital age throughout the world. With a premium on offering each Porsche driver precisely the right service that he or she

desires. To do so, the company is drawing on the latest technical advances. "Digitization is everywhere," says Drolshagen. "It is changing expectations such that we now assume everything will be connected. Whatever we're talking about, we're always thinking about the digital possibilities as well." But anyone who assumes customer communications will soon take place solely on a virtual level would be mistaken

CUSTOMERS DETERMINE COMMUNICATIONS

Porsche lets its customers choose the means, frequency, and intensity of contact. Those interested will soon be able to watch every step of their car's maintenance procedures in real time on video. Others might prefer to leave their car at a drop-off point, such as an airport, and then pick it up freshly serviced on their return. Dialogue can take place by any means of communication and at the preferred level of intensity—anything from informational posts on the customer portal to personal visits to the customer's home.

Customers will also be able to communicate with their car themselves in the near future, thanks to automotive sensors and electronic data processing systems. An app will soon make this information available to drivers. It will give them a completely transparent picture of their automobile, such as the state of wear of individual components, and notify them when the next maintenance is due. Thanks to this data, customers will also have the chance to adapt their driving style. But that's not all. The app can also show them things like how to approach a curve in order to remain on the ideal line. This technology has already been successfully tested in a pilot project with Porsche Consulting and the MHP consultancy. The latest cars already have the requisite interfaces, and older vehicles can be retrofitted. →

As always, Porsche customers themselves decide what they are interested in and what data they would like to use.

24/7: CONNECTED TO PORSCHE AROUND THE CLOCK

For Drolshagen, the greatest benefit of this type of connectivity lies not only in providing customers with their data, but also in making the information available to Porsche. The company can then customize its service even more. As he explains, "The data lets us notify a driver when a part is about to wear out, for example. We can then offer a good alternative, such as a temporary replacement vehicle." Ideally, both drivers and cars should be connected to Porsche at all times. "We've entered a completely new age in terms of connectivity, especially with the new Panamera. We've set up a 24-hour concierge service for it in China and Japan," reports Drolshagen. Panamera drivers in these countries can use it for all their customer support needs. The Porsche Connect Support team can also provide services like making restaurant reservations.

WHAT COUNTS IS PERSONAL CONTACT

The 815 Porsche Centers around the world will remain the foundation of this aftersales system. "Dealers are the ones who have constant, direct contact with our customers," says Drolshagen. In his view, digital technologies should be used primarily to strengthen these points of contact in the most beneficial ways. They should support individual on-site service options. "The cars are becoming ever more complex," he notes. "That makes it harder for any given individual to have the answers to every possible question, including how each detail of the car functions, every maintenance and repair procedure, and all the many ways the car and related services can be personalized. Our aim is to enable dealers to remain the expert contacts for our customers in the future."

A classic example of routine workshop questions has to do with repairs to the car body. The special blend of aluminum, steel, and carbon used in many Porsches can only be treated correctly by specialists. There are stringent safety requirements for both drivers and technicians, which means that not every garage has the facilities to handle each and every car. "We're working with Porsche Consulting on enabling all Porsche Centers worldwide to access a network of certified body shops—with the help of a digital app, of course," says Drolshagen. "This will give all customers the service they need for their individual car, still coordinated by their own personal dealer."

INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAMS REACH THE FINISH LINE FASTER

In order to incorporate all of the new options as promptly as possible into programs and processes, Drolshagen has restructured a number of things in his department. His main priority is the following: "IT has to be centrally organized but decentrally developed." Members of different departments and IT special-

Michael Drolshagen (born in 1971) is familiar with many different aspects of Porsche—from working for a supplier to joining the sports car maker itself in 2000. Since then, he has held positions in development and production, and most recently set up the workshop for the 918 Spyder limited-edition super sports car. He has headed the aftersales department since 2015.

ists therefore work closely together on solutions within each project framework. Someone from the service team, for example, might describe an app needed for his specific work while an IT expert sits right there and writes the code. The teams try out their initial test versions, known as mock-ups, at an early stage. "One major advantage of this method is that we're much faster than before. It also prevents misunderstandings and really gives us what we want. Moreover, we can involve external partners and are not caught up in our own structures. The view from outside is quite valuable," observes Drolshagen.

This new approach also means that employees have to step completely out of their everyday routines while their apps are being developed. Drolshagen is a strong advocate of this. "These topics are so complex and innovative that it's absolutely essential for people to concentrate on them one hundred percent. You can accomplish more in one or two weeks this way than by having everyone work on it on the side." Speed is admittedly not everything—but when it comes to digitization, it can certainly help. ←

A SPACE FOR THINKING

An open coffee bar occupies a prominent place at the Porsche Digital Lab in Berlin. It facilitates the rise of new ideas. Here, with a view of the River Spree, software specialists and engineers from the sports car company work together with colleagues from MHP, an IT consultancy. They also collaborate with start-ups, tech companies, and scientists from around the world. Their mission is to turn major concepts like big data, machine learning, microservices, and cloud technologies into practical applications for Porsche.

Boris Behringer (born in 1974; photo below) founded a number of start-ups after earning a degree in economics. In 2001 he joined Porsche AG, where he has worked in IT, sales, development, and production. He now heads the Digital Lab.

Why does an engineering-based company like Porsche need a Digital Lab?

Boris Behringer: We are acquiring technologies that make our products and company rise above the competition. Digitization means we have to look well beyond our usual horizons. And we have to be quick about it. A lab that works largely independently of company headquarters is very well suited for this purpose. Its team enjoys greater latitude. In return, each member bears responsibility for the results we achieve.

Why Berlin?

Berlin is a unique place in Europe—cosmopolitan, affordable for start-ups, and home to an expanding tech community. We're part of the network and are forging contacts with future partners, also in an international context.

Does an open working space remove mental barriers too?

Creativity doesn't appear on demand. Architecture and interior design can support it, but the space alone won't change anything. What's key is how you work together. No rigid hierarchies—instead, close links to start-ups, research institutes, and technology partners, plus the chance to engage in uncomplicated ways with experts from all parts of the company.

Does openness now trump confidentiality?

We have to be very receptive to ideas from outside. And we seek to be an attractive partner for innovators. Confidentiality is crucial in many areas, but not in the early stages of our IT development process. Here, we need to take an open and interconnected approach.

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