



Michael Van der Sande

SKILLS

- Leadership
- Global automotive brand strategy for traditional and electric vehicle manufacturers
- Product strategy
- Sales, marketing and communications
- Low-volume product development, sourcing and manufacturing
- Revenue and profit optimisation
- Business turnaround
- Scaling a business

EDUCATION

London Business School

Senior Executive Programme

Nyenrode University

Master of Business Administration
Bachelor of Business Administration

CONTACT

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With recent experience in the EV industry, what do you think are the key challenges for electric vehicle adoption as we move towards the 2035 target in Europe?

Electrification of the automotive market is going to happen, and it's the right thing to do. EV technology is improving rapidly and battery costs are gradually coming down. I believe car manufacturers will be able to switch to electric propulsion relatively quickly, but charging infrastructure and grid capacity will become a major bottleneck if growth in electric vehicle parc starts to outstrip growth in charging infrastructure. The two need to stay in sync for the market to continue to grow smoothly.

It bothers me a bit that there is more and more polarisation in the public debate around electric vehicles. It's becoming almost a sort of 'religious warfare', whereby electric cars are either deemed the only justifiable short term solution or 'will never work'. Fact is, EVs are great and getting better all the time – but they are still expensive and not yet suited to all usage types. We will see at least 10-15 years of mixed sales of traditionally powered and electric cars, and longer than that in developing markets. Let's just accept that we will see a mixed condition for the coming years and we'll be amazed how much progress can be achieved - by both traditional manufacturers and new entrants.

Electrification is a huge technical, financial, distribution and customer change programme. Let's just get on with it!

Having worked on both sides of the distribution model, both dealer-based and direct, do you see advantages in either approach?

There are real advantages to the direct sales model, and in particular the closeness that a manufacturer can achieve with their customer (one CRM database!). End-to-end visibility is very valuable. However, there are two major challenges to implementing the direct model – firstly, direct distribution networks are very capital intensive, and secondly, the traditional dealer model is mature and very effective. Dealers can make commercial decisions in real time and tend to be better set up for activities where agility and local knowledge is key – trade-ins, used cars, local marketing etc.

There is a third option - the agency model that some manufacturers are now introducing sits between the direct and indirect models.

I think any of these three distribution models can work, depending on the scale and stage of development of the manufacturer. To me, it's more about achieving alignment and effectiveness than about which model is better.

What do you think has been the key to your success in business?

Clarity of purpose and leadership.

Clarity of purpose means a common, well-defined set of goals and priorities for the business that is understood and adopted throughout the company.

Leadership, to me, is about staff and stakeholders actually wanting to follow a leader's direction in the pursuit of the agreed

goals. Easier said than done - but once people buy into a strategy and trust their leaders, it becomes second nature for the business to move forward in the right direction. The results can be incredible.

And what has been your biggest challenge?

Internal alignment - especially in very large global companies. It's extremely challenging to be truly innovative and truly world-class in a huge corporate structure. Much of this is around when to separate activities and when to integrate. My general view would be to 'Separate to incubate, then integrate to scale' – but there's a fair amount of qualitative and creative 'magic dust' to be applied. Again, easier said than done!

Are there any lifetime ambitions you have not yet fulfilled?

I've been incredibly fortunate in my career, having had the opportunity to contribute to and lead some of the greatest brands in the automotive industry. But it's now time for me to help others succeed. If I can help companies and individuals grow their brands, build cool products and achieve lasting results, I'll be very happy. And I'd like to finally get to restoring my classic Alfa Romeo SZ.

