



Interview

LEADING THROUGH CHANGE

KAI-UWE TRILLENBERG, CEO, MERCEDES-BENZ ROMANIA

1. You joined the Romanian organization at a time of accelerated change in the automotive industry. What stood out to you in your first weeks here, and which insights surprised you?

What stood out immediately was the strength and maturity of my team. I found a highly committed group of professionals who not only understand the pace of transformation in our industry but actively drive performance and innovation every day. Their readiness to embrace change gave me confidence that we have all the ingredients to lead the Romanian market into the next era of mobility.

I was also pleasantly surprised by the emotional connection Romanians have with our brand. Mercedes-Benz is not just a premium carmaker here — it is truly an aspirational brand. People place great trust in our heritage, design, engineering, and values. That emotional equity is a major advantage as the industry is going through one of its biggest transitions ever.

Finally, the pace at which customer expectations are evolving is notable. Romanian consumers are becoming increasingly curious about electric and connected vehicles. The appetite for innovation here is much stronger than many outside the country might assume. This is precisely where Mercedes-Benz shines, as we are uniquely positioned to not just respond to, but to inspire and elevate these expectations with our commitment to delivering the most desirable cars.

2. Your career spans several countries and business environments. Which professional experiences in the past years have influenced your strategic vision the most, and how do they translate into your leadership at Mercedes-Benz Romania?

My career journey across diverse markets has been instrumental in shaping my strategic vision. A pivotal experience was my time in China, where I was deeply involved in Product Management for Compact Cars and Network Development. This period taught me the immense importance of understanding local market nuances, adapting global strategies to specific customer needs, and fostering robust relationships with dealer partners. The sheer scale and speed of change in China, coupled with the rapid evolution of new retail formats, underscored the necessity of agility and continuous innovation in the customer journey.

More recently, my role as VP of Marketing & Sales in Thailand further refined this vision. Navigating a challenging market environment while successfully implementing the 'Retail of the Future' initiative was a profound learning experience. It solidified my belief in a data-driven approach, where every decision is informed by insights, and where we constantly incorporate new learnings. This experience also reinforced the power of a 'never give up' attitude — fostering a culture of experimentation and resilience to achieve ambitious goals, even when faced with obstacles.



Romanian consumers are increasingly curious about electric vehicles.



We are uniquely positioned to inspire and elevate expectations.

In my leadership at Mercedes-Benz Romania, these experiences translate directly into a clear focus on customer-centricity, digital transformation, and strong partnerships. We will leverage data to deeply understand the Romanian customer's evolving preferences, particularly around electrification and connectivity. We will accelerate the adoption of innovative retail and digital solutions, ensuring a seamless and premium experience. And crucially, we will work hand-in-hand with our dealer network, empowering them to be at the forefront of delivering the most desirable cars and services in a rapidly changing landscape. My strategic vision is to lead with adaptability, innovation, and an unwavering commitment to our customers and partners.

3. Mercedes-Benz is undergoing one of the most transformative periods in its history. How would you define the strategic priorities for the Romanian market within the brand's global direction toward electrification and digitalization?

After more than 20 years in Mercedes-Benz and in the automotive sector, I can say that while the scale of change is unprecedented, the mindset required to face it is not new to us. This company has always looked ahead, always pushed to outperform, and always invested heavily in innovation. That is why, even in this disruptive moment, we are not just adapting — we are leading.

The shift toward electrification is particularly intense, and competition is fiercer than ever. New players are entering the market with innovative approaches, which motivates us to step up our game and push the boundaries in every area — from engineering to customer experience. Yet among this fierce competition, we have a clear advantage: Mercedes-Benz is a love brand, built on 140 years of history. Combined with our substantial technological advancements — we are able to meet and exceed the increasingly demanding requirements of our customers. Challenges in the industry — from evolving competition to rapid technological change — push us to innovate faster, enhance sustainability, and



Customer expectations are evolving at a notable pace.

reinforce Mercedes-Benz as the benchmark for premium mobility.

For Romania, our strategic priority is to translate this global shift into tangible value for our customers. This means accelerating the adoption of electrified vehicles, delivering seamless digital experiences, and ensuring that our portfolio remains as strong, desirable, and diverse as ever. Looking into 2026, Romania will witness a firework of launches across all our segments, bringing electrified and intelligent vehicles to an even wider audience. Our mission is clear: to ensure that Romania experiences the very best of Mercedes-Benz — vehicles, technology, and services that are future-ready, luxurious, and unmistakably Mercedes.

4. Looking at your career evolution, which decisions or turning points were decisive in shaping your trajectory toward C-level leadership, and what advice would you offer to young professionals aspiring to similar roles?

At Rombat, Several turning points have been decisive. Firstly, the decision to move to China in 2014 was a significant leap. It was a completely new cultural and business environment, demanding a rapid expansion of my strategic thinking and adaptability. Taking on responsibility for product management and network development in such a dynamic market truly broadened my perspective on global business complexities and the power of localized strategies.

Secondly, embracing the challenge of leading Marketing & Sales in Thailand, particularly with the mandate to implement 'Retail of the Future' in a complex market, was another critical juncture. This role required not just strategic oversight but also hands-on leadership in driving significant organizational and operational change. It solidified my conviction that C-level leadership demands not only vision but also the resilience to execute, learn from setbacks, and continuously push boundaries. It taught me the importance of fostering a culture where data-driven decisions and a 'don't give up, keep trying new tactics' mindset are paramount.

For young professionals aspiring to similar roles, my advice would be:

- Embrace diverse experiences: Don't shy away from international assignments or roles that push you out of your comfort zone. Each new environment offers invaluable lessons.
- Be a lifelong learner and data-driven: The automotive industry is transforming at an unprecedented pace. Cultivate intellectual curiosity, constantly seek new knowledge, and learn to leverage data to inform your decisions.
- Build strong relationships: Success in leadership is rarely achieved alone. Invest in building trust and strong partnerships, both internally with your teams and externally with partners and customers.
- Cultivate resilience and a 'never give up' attitude: You will face challenges and setbacks. The ability to learn from them, adapt, and persist with a positive mindset is crucial for long-term success.
- Understand the customer deeply: Always keep the customer at the heart of every strategy and decision. Their evolving needs are the compass for our future.

