



Interview

OUR EDGE WILL COME FROM BEING THE MOST DIGITALIZED WHOLESALER IN ROMANIA

KARAN KHURANA, CEO, METRO ROMANIA

1. You have started one and a half years ago your mandate as CEO of METRO Romania. How do you view the role of the cash & carry business model today in Romania, how was the last year for the company and what plans do you have for the next years?

Romania continues to show strong appetite for wholesale, and cash & carry remains the backbone of reliable supply for HoReCa and resellers. At the same time, we are transforming METRO into a true multichannel wholesale partner, powered by digitalization and a stronger physical infrastructure.

In 2024–2025 we have been consolidating our logistics footprint to lift delivery reliability and speed for HoReCa and independent traders. We've committed investments of several hundred million lei to remodel and modernize the METRO store network, an ongoing transformation that strengthens our role as a trusted partner to more than 100,000 independent businesses. After completing upgrades in Constanța, Pitești and Craiova, the next stores on our list

are Iași and Suceava, which will operate in the new format starting next year.

A second strategic priority is the accelerated expansion of our LaDoiPași franchise, complimented by the LaDoiPași Extra format, in order to help independent retailers become more competitive locally with enhanced support in supply, merchandising and pricing strategy.

In parallel, we are speeding up the adoption of digital solutions wherever they bring a clear, measurable impact on our customers' profitability. Our annual investment budgets remain at double-digit millions of euros, directly funding the franchise expansion and our shift to a multichannel/multi-customer wholesale model that serves HoReCa & Traditional Trade seamlessly, whether in-store, or through digital ordering, via delivery.

2. METRO Romania has publicly stated its ambition to become “the most digitalized wholesaler in Romania”. How will this ambition be translated into specific value-propositions for your customers?

Our ambition is anchored in a substantial investment plan designed to consolidate our wholesale leadership and complete the shift to an integrated multichannel & multi customer model. Under our sCore strategy, we are building operational excellence with accelerated digitalization. The budget focuses on four strategic directions: growing the LaDoiPași network as a pillar of proximity commerce expanding delivery services, digitalizing core processes, modernizing stores, so that HoReCa operators and independent retailers experience tangible gains in predictability, efficiency, and flexibility.

Concretely, we have implemented advanced platforms such as Stock Location Management to find products in record time across the commercial areas of our stores and Predictive Replenishment to optimize inventory levels and reduce stock-outs. Digital Picking further streamlines daily operations, shortening lead times from order to handover. For all our customer types, our end-to-end Food Service Delivery ensures fast, precise deliveries with optimized routes and real-time task management. In parallel, our Mshop online platform gives customers transparent availability, pricing, and effortless reordering. This digital ecosystem is rounded out by the METRO App, which centralizes the digital card, invoice history, product availability, and online ordering; EPOS, an integrated management solution for LaDoiPași partners to strengthen margin control and pricing discipline; METRO Scan for swift in-store purchasing; and DISH, a dedicated platform for the specific needs of the HoReCa industry.

All of these investments and tools serve one purpose, to transform METRO into a truly multichannel - multicustomer wholesale partner, one that delivers reliable availability, accurate orders, and flexible ways to buy, so HoReCa decision makers and shop owners can focus on their guests, their shelves and their growth.

3. One of your references is the rapid expansion of METRO's "LaDoiPași" network and multi-format approach. How do you integrate these multi-format developments with your core cash & carry business for HoReCa?

LaDoiPași amplifies our wholesale mission. Traditional stores are under constant pressure from modern proximity and discount formats, yet in a country with a large rural population they still have a clear future. That is exactly why, back in 2012, METRO introduced a franchise model that preserves the owner's independence and adds our end-to-end expertise, from site selection and procurement to merchandising and the commercial offer. We run one wholesale backbone that feeds all channels, so the same professional assortment depth, freshness standards and price discipline benefit chefs and franchisees alike. In today's market, convenience is a baseline expectation. LaDoiPași has delivered remarkable performance year after year, including the milestone moment in 2024 when we opened 60 stores in a single day, the network surpassing 2700 locations.

4. The HoReCa sector is under pressure from increased taxation, rising operating costs (food, energy, labour) and changing consumer behavior. How is METRO Romania helping them to adapt and stay profitable in this challenging environment?

METRO Romania supports HoReCa and traditional trade to stay profitable by focusing on reliable supply, fair prices, and useful services. We expand the concept of our "Buy More, Pay Less" program to provide price stability, and we strengthen our Own Brand portfolio (METRO Chef, Fine Life, METRO Premium, METRO Professional, Aro, Rioba) to deliver tailored, efficiency-driven solutions with an excellent price-quality ratio, critical amid higher food costs and labor shortages. Our approach is built on continuously improving the offer and helping entrepreneurs navigate shifting consumer behavior.

We also back HoReCa with an ecosystem of initiatives & communication programs, such as the Entrepreneur's Dream platform and the HoReCa Manifesto, the newly launched Smart Chef Program, our continuous involvement in really shaping what HoReCa stands for, showcase our customers' stories, share practical guidance, and boost their visibility.



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5. How do you see the role of local sourcing, and what advantages does it bring to your customers?

Local sourcing is central to how we serve more than 100,000 Romanian entrepreneurs in HoReCa and traditional trade. We build the assortment around real customer needs, keep Romanian products constantly visible, especially in fresh, seasonal categories, and increasingly produce Own Brand items locally. We work with domestic suppliers who meet professional quality and volume standards and prioritize long-term partnerships, offering predictability, shared standards, and growth together.

Beyond purchasing, we provide clear frameworks that give producers tools, stability, shelf visibility, logistics support, and advisory. For customers, this means fresher, more reliable supply, stronger price stability and price-quality, menu and shelf differentiation, and tighter, more responsive chains that keep operations efficient while supporting local jobs.

At the country level, HoReCa still depends heavily on imported staples that could be made in Romania. We advocate for a coherent plan of investment incentives, product standardization, and short supply chains to accelerate local production and strengthen the economy.

6. Which product categories do you believe will see the fastest growth or the biggest change in Romania (e.g., premium items, private label, ready meals, plant-based foods)? How is METRO responding to these trends?

We expect the fastest growth in private label and convenience (ready-to-cook/ready-to-serve) within HoReCa and convenience. METRO is leaning into this with our Own Brands — METRO Chef, Fine Life, METRO Premium, METRO Professional, ARO, Rioba — built to lower total costs while giving us direct control over quality and traceability. Our promise is consistent quality every purchase, secure supply, and healthy customer margins, which is why Own Brand share is rising across essential categories. For HoReCa specifically, our portfolio spans from foundational ingredients to premium cuts and rare fish, plus a growing convenience

range tailored to fast, reliable kitchen operations.

7. Sustainability and ESG are becoming more important also in HoReCa (food waste, energy efficiency, packaging). What role does METRO Romania play in supporting these businesses to become more sustainable?

METRO Romania's role is to help HoReCa operators cut waste, comply with new circular-economy rules, and run more efficiently. We work with food-bank partners and run sustainability initiatives to reduce food waste at store level and in the wider community, aligning with METRO's group target to cut emissions and waste across the value chain. We also equip restaurants with practical, business-friendly tools, such as the DISH digital platform for online menus, orders and reservations, to improve demand planning and operations, which helps limit overproduction and waste. On packaging and recycling, we provide guidance on Romania's Deposit-Return System (SGR) and sector-specific obligations for HoReCa, helping businesses recover value from packaging flows and meet EU circular-economy expectations.

8. The cash & carry model is often seen as self-service for business clients. How do you enhance the "experience" of the purchaser in-store and online to add value beyond price?

For professional buyers in HoReCa and independent trade, "experience" means speed, availability, and operational efficiency. They arrive with a list and expect to get in, stock up, and get back to their business fast. In-store, we design for volume: pallet-friendly receiving through to shelf, dedicated loading zones, and racks configured for both case/pallet and unit picking.

For HoReCa, rapid replenishment in bulk with full traceability and freshness is a clear differentiator. Our "smart palletization" cuts handling time significantly in fast-turn categories like beverages and frozen, while our systems manage full pallets and large-format demand for HoReCa and LaDoiPași so supply stays predictable and quick year-round.

Online, we mirror that same logic with

bulk-oriented assortments, clear availability, and streamlined ordering to minimize steps from cart to collection or delivery. The result: a time-saving, reliable buying journey that adds value well beyond price.

9. Finally, looking ahead to the next 3–5 years, what innovations or strategic priorities will define METRO Romania's competitive advantage in serving professional clients in an increasingly digital and demanding marketplace?

Looking 3–5 years ahead, our edge will come from being the most digitalized wholesaler in Romania, scaling a true multi customer/multi channel model (store, delivery, and digital) and developing

solutions built for professional customers. Concretely, we're investing in smarter supply chains to guarantee availability and speed, while sharpening price models and assortment through data.

We'll keep expanding Own Brands to deliver consistent quality, traceability and better margins for HoReCa and traders, and we'll keep growing LaDoiPași as the country's largest and leading proximity network to serve independent retail. All of this is anchored in METRO's sCore strategy: focus on HoReCa and traders, link wholesale stores with delivery and digital, and raise the share of core professional customers, so we compete on reliability, efficiency and insight, not just price.

