



"The Chinese market is growing in importance dramatically"



Before taking on his current job, Wilko Stark was head of strategy at Mercedes-Benz Cars, where he focused on preparing the German premium car brand for a future characterized by connectivity, autonomous driving, electrification and the sharing of vehicles. Today, Stark is in charge of purchasing and supplier quality at Mercedes. In a brief interview, he talks about making the brand's global supplier network fit for the new-mobility future. By Ralf Bretting.

Late last year, Daimler, Mercedes' parent company, signed delivery contracts for some 20 billion euros of battery cells. Are you sure Daimler will need that many batteries? Absolutely, we will electrify the complete Mercedes-Benz Cars portfolio by 2020. That means we will



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be able to offer our customers various electric alternatives in every segment, ranging from the smart small car to our big SUVs. We're planning more than 130 electrified model variants, from 48-volt systems to plug-in hybrids to battery-electric vehicles. We're investing massively in electric mobility and purchasing is playing a big role in the implementation of our CASE (connected, autonomous, shared, electric) strategy. We are expanding our international supplier network, are clearly focused on innovative technologies and are making our supply chain planning more reliable by introducing more flexibility.

Your department deals with around 2,000 direct suppliers worldwide. Asia, and China in particular, will become more important because of the addition of battery cell companies. Which consequences will that have?

At Mercedes-Benz, we basically have the goal to increase our degree of localization wherever we produce. Having your suppliers close to your production location is important if you want to build and use parts in sync with production. But you're right: The Chinese market is dramatically growing in importance. China is very advanced when it comes to electric mobility and digital services. That is why we are closely following which new technologies from China are promising and which suppliers can deliver them with the quality that Mercedes-Benz requires. Next to the cost considerations, we also want to participate in the technology development taking place in China.

Aren't you worried that the value you are adding yourself to Mercedes-Benz cars will decline in relative terms as you start building more electric cars?

We are very consistent in pushing the electric future of our company and we are pressing operating several levers such as, for example, the big move to start buying battery cells. But that in itself is not enough. Strict cost management is important for the overall success of our vehicle projects, without making any concessions on the quality or sustainability front.