

Media Information

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“10 questions to...” Christopher Wehner, Managing Director, BMW Group Asia.

Singapore. After more than 18 years working in Munich for BMW AG, Mr. Christopher Wehner arrived in Singapore in August 2018 as the Managing Director of BMW Group Asia. Since then, he's surmounted many challenges, achieved significant successes, and has taken the BMW Group Asia region to new heights.

Christopher has spent a majority of his career in the automotive industry; however, nothing could have prepared him for what 2020 bestowed on us. Here, the 53 year old of Munich, Germany tells us his biggest lessons from the past year, and what we can expect in 2021 and beyond.

What was the biggest business challenge you faced in 2020?

The biggest challenge for me was running the BMW Group Asia business from home. First, the BMW Group Asia working culture is built on strong relationships. These hinge on working closely with colleagues within, and across, departments, and having in person engagements. When we were required to work from home, this culture was put to the test, but surprisingly it worked out much better than expected!

Managing my team was a big part of this and required a lot of trust, transparency, responsibility and appreciation, all core values of the BMW Group culture. It was our active demonstration of these values that also helped us in supporting our partners across 14 markets – from Southeast Asia to the Pan Pacific islands.

What was the biggest personal challenge you faced in 2020?

I have three amazing children, and my two oldest are currently in Germany. This is the longest I've gone without seeing them, and the whole family really misses being together. I hope things move in the right direction and I'll be able to see them as soon as possible this year.

What are your top 3 achievements in 2020?

Our greatest achievement in 2020 was having BMW recognised in Singapore as the second top-selling car brand, and the best-selling among premium brands. In addition to moving up three positions, from 5th to 2nd, our market share increased to 9.8%, the highest market share of any BMW NSC worldwide.

But that's not all. We maintained segment leadership in the Philippines for the second year in a row, and also secured premium segment leadership in Indonesia after 15 years (as of YTD November 2020).

Finally, sales in the region increased for both BMW and MINI brands across their model range. Our luxury models – 7 Series, 8 Series and X7 – increased by 15% and sales of BMW M and M Performance models increased by 14% in Singapore. Specifically in the Philippines and Vietnam, luxury model sales increased by 63% and 48% respectively compared to 2019. For MINI, we witnessed extremely strong growth compared to 2019 with our xEV models (+63%), Performance JCW models (+116%), and the new MINI Clubman (+74%).

None of this would have been possible without the relentless ongoing support of our strong partners in all markets.

What are your top 3 lessons learned from 2020?

From a business perspective, I learned it's critical to recognise change and act fast! Our success in the region last year was partly due to how quickly we were able to implement our digital offerings and address customer needs. In terms of my team, it was clearly evident that with proper support and leadership, they can succeed and overachieve expectations. Finally, 2020 confirmed that our customers are more willing to experience the brand through digital platforms and the future of our business will be built on providing a seamless connection between the physical and digital worlds!

What surprised you the most in 2020?

I was pleasantly surprised that the business didn't miss a beat during the height of the pandemic! Across all our markets, teams remained agile and quickly responded to ongoing restrictions on movement and engagement while keeping the health and safety of our staff and customers as a priority.

What are your top 3 expectations of the industry in 2021?

First, I expect all brands, regardless of what industry they are in, to raise the bar and explore new ways of engaging customers and growing their business through digital platforms. Second, I believe a hybrid of working from home and working from the office will be the norm moving forward, even post-pandemic. Finally, I foresee more of our customers will demonstrate their confidence and willingness to purchase luxury items online.

In your opinion, what is the most exciting product we can expect in this region in 2021?

This has to be the first-ever BMW iX. The BMW Vision iNEXT concept car has been around for a while, and in November last year, this vision became a reality with the BMW iX. This is the first in a generation of cars poised to redefine the driving experience, the feeling of space inside and the relationship between vehicles and those on board. The BMW iX harnesses the latest innovations in the fields of electrification, automated driving and connectivity to deliver a truly personalised mobility experience.

What are your top 3 markets for growth in the next 5 years?

The top markets for growth would definitely have to be Singapore and Vietnam. I also believe the Philippines and Indonesia have the potential for strong growth depending on how the situation progresses in regard to the pandemic in these markets.

Since joining in 2018, what has surprised you the most about this region?

Even with all the volatility and complexity in the region, these countries are strong-willed and face challenges head on. Their passion to innovate and succeed is extraordinary.

If you could tell your customers anything, what would it be?

From my time working in product development, I know how passionate BMW is about developing and producing the best cars that meet the needs of our customers. With the BMW X3, you already have the option to choose electric, Plug-in hybrid or a combustion engine. In the future, you'll have similar options across multiple models in our range depending on your preferences and lifestyle. Regardless of your engine choice, you can always expect the best-driving cars and sheer driving pleasure!

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The BMW Group

With its four brands BMW, MINI, Rolls-Royce and BMW Motorrad, the BMW Group is the world's leading premium manufacturer of automobiles and motorcycles and also provides premium financial and mobility services. The BMW Group production network comprises 31 production and assembly facilities in 15 countries; the company has a global sales network in more than 140 countries.

In 2020, the BMW Group sold over 2.3 million passenger vehicles and more than 169,000 motorcycles worldwide. The profit before tax in the financial year 2019 was € 7.118 billion on revenues amounting to € 104.210 billion. As of 31 December 2019, the BMW Group had a workforce of 126,016 employees.

The success of the BMW Group has always been based on long-term thinking and responsible action. The company has therefore established ecological and social sustainability throughout the value chain, comprehensive product responsibility and a clear commitment to conserving resources as an integral part of its strategy.

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