Transparency

Dear Reader.

The German automobile industry is currently facing the loss of an established practice of cross-manufacturer networking, a practice that has led to much shared innovation while also eliciting the admiration and envy of manufacturers around the world. The blame for the loss can placed squarely on those responsible for emissions deception, as well as to some extent on those who have leveled partially justified, but often nebulous accusations that secrete agreements among German manufacturers have undermined free-market competition to the detriment of consumers.

The highly emotional and speculative public discourse on the issue has already exacted a significant toll. Manufacturers and engineers are rattled. Channels of communication have been closed. Important workgroups in the area of pre-competition research, a mainstay of automobile development, have been disbanded. Meetings at industry venues take place in an atmosphere of uncertainty only after the relevant compliance forms have been signed - an untenable situation given the record of engineers working together conscientiously with their cross-manufacturer on standards that redound to the benefit of consumers and help to lower purchase prices.

How should one respond to the overreaction? In his interview with ATZelektronik, Professor Stefan Bratzel, Director of the Center of Automotive Management (CAM) in Bergisch Gladbach, suggests that the uproar will need to play itself out: "The automobile industry is currently in crisis-response and remedy mode." Other market observers speak of a defensive posture. Bratzel points to the automobile industry's recent past as a phase of overconfidence, a culture that is now in need of a good shake-up and

that needs to be replaced by a culture of transparency that can restore credibility.

Can, for example, balanced congess moderation contribute to this new culture of transparency? And more debating enthusiasm during plenary sessions and not just during breaks? A bit, perhaps.

Standardization committees and key workgroups would have to do a better job promoting themselves, for instance, by broadcasting industry hurdles and touting their role in industry successes. Publication could take the form of objective, topic-based publications. In any case, that is what occurs to me spontaneously when I think about promoting transparency and what our editorial staff can contribute.

But what are your thoughts on this subject? We'd be delighted to hear from you!

Yours sincerely,

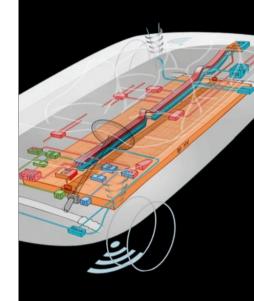
Markus Schöttle





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