

AUTOMOTIVE

## Mercedes-Benz reflects on its heritage, harnesses technology to reach new drivers

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*Bettina Fetzer was named the global head of marketing at Mercedes-Benz in 2018. Image credit: Mercedes-Benz*

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By SARAH RAMIREZ

While luxury car brands work to reach women drivers and other consumer segments in more authentic ways, German automaker Mercedes-Benz is keeping pace with its legacy of female pioneers.

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After more than a decade with the marque, Bettina Fetzer became global head of marketing at Mercedes-Benz in 2018. Not even 40 years old, the German native feels prepared to preserve, and improve, the Mercedes-Benz brand identity as the luxury automotive industry continues to evolve.

"To be honest, I've been on the job for a few months and what I've been doing the last couple months is listen and learn," Ms. Fetzer said. "A few things I can already tell; I think we should definitely work on keeping up our brand image.

"We have a great brand image so far, it's very luxurious and comes from a natural heritage," she said. "But we're opening it up to new customers and new segments, and this is something we definitely need to focus on more."

In this Q&A, Ms. Fetzer discusses her career at **Mercedes** and the automaker's changing priorities. Here is the dialogue from a conversation at the New York International Auto Show:



*Mercedes-Benz has seen record-breaking sales. Image credit: Mercedes-Benz*

How did your earlier experiences at Mercedes-Benz prepare you for your new role?

The good thing is that I've been with Mercedes since 2003.

I'm a very spontaneous person and I like new challenges, to roll my sleeves up and dig into it. That's what prepared me best.

Sometimes when you're with a company like Mercedes for a long time and you tend to do one job only, you tend to settle. And I never settle. I was always open to new things and jump into new challenges.

What is your biggest challenge right now?

We have a couple. Fortunately we start from a good base. Mercedes-Benz is one of the top brands. It's a good base to start from.

Then again, luxury is changing. It's also different for each and every market.

At the headquarters we have to cater to a lot of needs. Is it customers in China, is it customers in the U.S., is it customers for the A-Class who are probably 20 years younger than those from anywhere else?

One thing that is helping us is data. So the better we know our customer, the better we can [reach] him or her.



*Mercedes brought its A-Class to Atlanta for the Super Bowl. Image credit: Mercedes-Benz*

What are your marketing priorities?

There's a few things to tackle.

We did a very different approach for the A-Class campaign. We do conventions all over the world, where we bring together thought leaders to discuss the future, because we do take responsibility as a company.

Then we have a couple of great initiatives like She's Mercedes, where we focus on female customers. We go very broad and are investing in golf, but also in sports.

Another focus area is data. To build an organization on data, it's more than just putting it on a piece of paper. It takes a lot of work to look at all the processes, to look at your people and their skills.

This is what we'll be focusing on for the next few months.

What makes She's Mercedes different from other automakers' initiatives to reach women?

First of all, it's inherited in our genes. Bertha Benz was the first person and she was a woman to take a car on a long-

distance journey and prove that she could actually do it and that mobility would change. She started a new era. For us as a brand, I would say it is very authentic to do something like that [with She's Mercedes].

[View this post on Instagram](#)

A post shared by She's Mercedes (@shesmercedes) on Apr 14, 2019 at 7:30am PDT

*The She's Mercedes Instagram page has more than 50,000 followers*

The other thing is it is not just the marketing initiative, where we bring women together to connect and see how they could join forces. It's also something that goes deep into the whole company.

So being a brand that's producing cars, obviously with it being male-dominated in the past, that means we also approach our customers often. I'm not saying everywhere, and I know the U.S. has a high amount of female customers.

We sometimes approach customers in a very general way.

When my car is due for service, when my husband gets a chance to take it in, it's the highlight of his week. He takes the whole day, he's super excited, he polishes it, he brings it there and then he has discussions with the engineer about what they're going to do. He's all excited.

If I do it, I'm like, "Can I just not be involved in anything? Can you just pick it up and bring it back to me and I'll write you a check?"

This is where and it's always a bit of stereotyping when you go into this discussion, but nevertheless we tick a little different. Therefore we do train our personnel, try to bring more females into the company at the headquarters and

also the service or in sales and just to cater to our needs and I say "our" as a female a little different.

I also think the role of women is changing a bit. I still have a lot of friends around me that have kids, and it's still more the responsibility of the woman.

I would say I'm living a very modern life and we share our responsibilities. So my husband takes care of our son just as much as I do, and his time alone is precious. He just likes to spend it on other topics than I do. I would rather go shopping, to be honest.

How do you market differently to women and families instead of focusing on men?

We focus on the customer. So when we have a family car like the GLS, it is often driven by women because yes, they fill the classical role of bringing their kids to their football games. Then again, if we have a GT or something that's mostly bought by men, we would address them in a different way.

I would not generally say that we're addressing more women, we're really looking at who is driving our cars and who is buying our cars. Then we approach the person as personal as possible.

Does the strategy change depending on the region?

A little, but not much. We are all marketing the same brands, so we should make sure that brand image we created is as consistent as possible.

There is of course a little difference, because people do look different on different continents. Especially in the Middle East, we use Middle Eastern women so the consumer thinks we're talking to her and not just some woman.

*Mercedes-Benz appealed to a new generation of Middle Eastern drivers with a female-centered film set in Dubai*

The topics are very similar. They all love luxury, they all love technology in their cars, because it makes their lives easier.

We are a company that wants to create trust with safe and responsible products, and of course we want to generate love at the end of the day. We hope to make the marketing most exciting and appealing to people all over the world.

The most natural communication in marketing that you can do with your customers and customers-to-be is to actually go in the field of their interest area. I think we need to see how we can connect different and very diverse touchpoints for those various generations.

The more natural we go into those areas, I think the better of a job we do.