

DENKFA3RIK



NEW IDEAS FOR TOMORROW'S TRANSPORT

AT SECOND GLANCE

Identifying potential before it becomes obvious

+ HOW NICHES WIN

Small and medium-sized enterprises can really make their mark right now

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+ PREVENTING LOST CARGO

Here's how to protect yourself from phantom carriers

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+ AI IS A TOP PRIORITY

A visit to Europe's largest innovation centre

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(WHERE) WOULD YOU EMIGRATE ?

Bureaucracy and high taxes, the pursuit of a better quality of life, a warmer climate, or greater personal freedom – the reasons why people choose to leave Germany are diverse.

Almost one in two Germans can, in principle, imagine emigrating. And the figures speak for themselves as according to the Federal Statistical Office, almost 270,000 people emigrated in 2024, whereas in 2010 the figure was around 141,000. In a Statista survey, Spain tops

the list of preferred destinations: 11 per cent of respondents could envisage moving there. Austria and Switzerland follow, each with 9 per cent. Sweden and Canada are also mentioned relatively frequently. The USA, once the number one destination for emigration, now accounts for only around 4 per cent.

(Sources: Statista/Handelsblatt)



Dear readers,

In difficult times, we often focus on limitations rather than on what is possible. This may be because untapped potential lies dormant in many areas: in existing processes, within our own teams, and in technologies that are not yet being used to their full potential. Particularly when the operating environment shifts, it is not only crucial how we respond to change, but also whether we recognise the opportunities and strengths that already exist within our company.

In this issue of DENKFABRIK, we take a look at e-commerce and pharmaceutical logistics and show how medium-sized logistics service providers can capitalise on the dynamic developments in these sectors. Using the logistics provider Fiege as an example, we examine what a cultural shift within a company can achieve, and speak with experts about effective protection against cargo theft. Furthermore, Philipp Knobelspies, Director of AI at UnternehmerTUM, explains why SMEs are better positioned when it comes to AI than they often realise, and how they can make targeted use of this.

At Krone, our aim is not only to supply you with high-performance vehicles and solutions, but also to work with you to explore the opportunities that lie within your business. Get in touch with us – we are keen to discover what further potential can be unlocked.

I hope you find this an inspiring read!

Yours



Dr Nils Gimpel-Henning,
Chief Commercial
Officer Krone
Commercial Vehicle
Group

Nils Gimpel-Henning

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LEGAL NOTICE

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Blue Notes

News from the world of Krone



Krone integrates long-standing partner in Poland

Krone Trailer has merged with its long-standing Polish importer, **Pozkrone**. Following around 30 years of successful partnership, the company is now being fully integrated into the Krone Group. At the same time, Krone Fleet has been launched in Poland. Customers will benefit in future from a comprehensive range of services, from customised vehicle configuration and flexible rental models to spare parts and servicing. All jobs will be retained, and the existing team will be taken on in full. With this move, Krone is underlining its commitment to maintaining a presence in key markets with its own, efficient structures. ↩

Brighter, more robust, lower maintenance

Krone introduces a new **LED round light and LED light strips** for the cargo area. The round light combines tail, brake and indicator lights in a single light chamber, eliminating the need for additional elements. Optimised thermal management ensures rapid defrosting. The cargo area lighting provides an even light pattern over 12.5 metres, which significantly improves vision during loading processes – a single light strip delivers the output of two conventional work lights. Both systems are certified to protection class IP6K9K and are resistant to high-pressure cleaning. The light strips are fully integrated into the bodywork. ↩



EU relaxes CO₂ limits

The European Union is revising its CO₂ limit targets for heavy-duty vehicles, giving **manufacturers greater flexibility**. In future, companies will be able to purchase CO₂ credits if they remain below the fleet limits applicable to them between 2025 and 2029. Until now, it was only possible to accumulate such credits if emissions fell below an industry-wide reduction target. With this adjustment, the EU aims primarily to ease the burden on manufacturers of lorries weighing over 16 tonnes. At the same time, the regulation is intended to help avoid impending fines from 2030 onwards and to facilitate the transition to lower-emission powertrains. ↩

Greater stability – less wear and tear: the new Cool Liner

Krone has unveiled the latest generation of its Cool Liner refrigerated semi-trailer. The focus is on **design improvements** to the side walls, rear frame and floor, which are intended to enhance stability, insulation and durability. Reinforced door hinge brackets reduce peak loads in the rear area. New sealing concepts eliminate critical joints and help maintain the vehicle's value. The redesign has been validated through extensive testing at the Krone Test Centre in Lingen. [↪](#)



Electric lorries are gaining acceptance

A recent survey by the Öko-Institut shows a significant rise in support for battery-electric lorries within the logistics sector.

77 per cent of the companies surveyed expect electric lorries to either become the norm by 2030 (25 per cent) or to be used in at least part of their fleet (52 per cent). In 2021, only 5 per cent of companies expected battery-electric lorries to become the norm by 2030. At the same time, the importance of hydrogen-powered vehicles is declining. In the new survey, fewer than half expect hydrogen trucks to be standard or partially standard by 2030. According to the Öko-Institut, this figure was still around 80 per cent in 2021. The study also highlights information gaps: fewer than a third of companies were able to correctly understand the toll exemption for zero-emission lorries, 61 per cent have not yet compared the total costs over the service life of electric lorries with those of diesel vehicles, and around two-thirds of companies with their own depots do not know what their grid connection capacity is. [↪](#)

Truck driving licence set to become cheaper

In Germany, a truck driving licence remains significantly more expensive than in many other European countries. Companies in Germany pay around €8,000 for a Class CE licence. In Austria, the cost is just under €3,000, and in France it is around €6,000. Federal Transport Minister Patrick Schnieder (CDU) wants to make the training cheaper and has presented **key points for reforms**. The plan is to allow learners to acquire driving school knowledge independently, to scrap special driving sessions, to reduce the number of questions in theory lessons and to relax the requirements for training rooms. [↪](#)



OM X-Series scales up to over 10 megawatts

With the OM X-Series, ABB is launching a **modular megawatt charging platform** designed primarily for large-scale applications: logistics centres, bus and truck depots, and fast-charging hubs. According to ABB, the system can be scaled up from 800 kilowatts to over 10 megawatts and can supply more than 100 charging points. For energy distribution, ABB relies on centralised load management that dynamically controls power output. The platform is fully liquid-cooled, and the built-in silicon carbide power modules are said to achieve an efficiency of over 98 per cent. The CCS, NACS and MCS standards are supported. The most powerful "Ultra" charging unit delivers up to 1,500 amps – designed for heavy-duty electric lorries. In addition, ABB offers various dispenser and docking solutions for passenger cars, commercial vehicles and fleet applications. [↪](#)




Cover story

Seeing



what's
possible



Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are aware of their strengths, but do not make consistent use of them. Yet, particularly in the logistics sector, markets are constantly shifting so dramatically that numerous opportunities are emerging – as can be seen in e-commerce fulfilment and pharmaceutical and healthcare logistics. A way out of this **“opportunity blindness”**.

Unstable supply chains, rising costs, new technologies and regulations: SMEs are constantly faced with new challenges. They also know that upheavals hold potential – but knowing exactly where and how to tap into it often remains unclear. How this might look in practice can be observed in two market sectors: e-commerce and pharmaceutical and healthcare service logistics.

If the German e-commerce market were a freight train with ten carriages, Amazon and Chinese platforms such as Temu, AliExpress and Shein alone would have secured just under eight of them for their own use. The ninth is occupied by major players such as the Otto Group and Zalando, including About You. There isn't even a whole carriage left for everyone else.

Professor Christoph Tripp, who teaches distribution and retail logistics at the Georg Simon Ohm University of Applied Sciences in Nuremberg, has been observing the industry for years as a trend researcher and consultant. He says: “That is certainly a worrying picture, no question about it.” But do medium-sized logistics service providers have to give up? “Absolutely not.”

After all, the shift in the market also presents genuine opportunities: “The greatest growth potential for medium-sized logistics companies in e-commerce over the next three to five years lies in a combination of further specialisation, increasing the depth of customer-focused value creation, and a targeted geographical expansion of the business model.”

Growth arises wherever medium-sized companies play to their strengths: “They score points through clear USPs, service excellence, technical expertise, a close entrepreneurial relationship with customers, and the ability to offer flexible, scalable and, at the same time, high-quality solutions that go beyond industrial standardisation.” But they must →

ILLUSTRATION: ISTOCK/ROBINOLIMB

become more agile, specialised and technologically connected – and they must do so quickly.

Owned warehousing in Europe

Asian platforms are currently under considerable pressure to set up their own warehouses in Europe. Previously, the factory-to-consumer model had long been their hallmark: goods were shipped by air freight from Chinese factories to European end customers. This worked, thanks to generous duty-free allowances and customers' willingness to accept longer delivery times. Now, however, these companies are establishing their own fulfilment structures in Europe: local stock enables faster delivery times and better returns management. Service quality is improving, whilst prices remain low. This is fundamentally changing the rules of the game in the fulfilment market.

Anyone discussing growth potential in this sector soon ends up on the subject of automation. According to Tripp, it is now standard practice. Logistics service providers without effective IT systems won't even make it to the bidding stage. According to the expert, the real competitive advantage lies in data transparency. Customers want to know in real time which

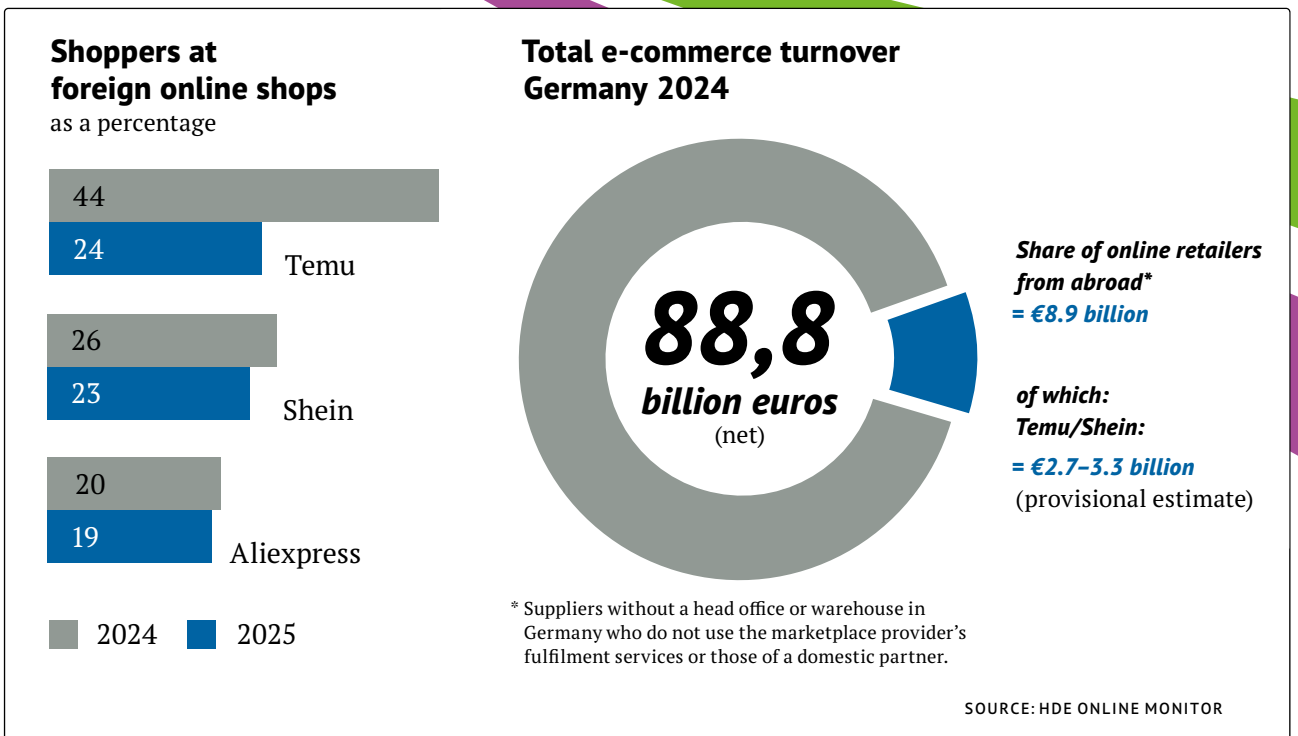
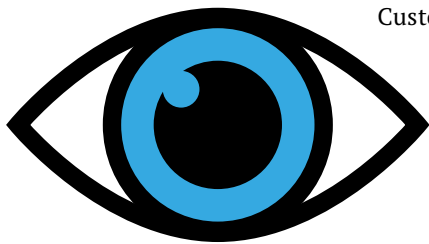
item is where and when – reliably and without having to ask. So, anyone who integrates inventory management, transport and customer systems in such a way that this picture is clear at all times is hard to replace. Those who fail to do so can only compete on price.

That is why investment in technology is needed: integrated platforms that combine data from inventory management, transport and customer systems create real added value for both contracting parties. Tripp advises planning with an open approach to technology and aligning investments strictly with process volumes and total cost of ownership criteria. And, above all, building a modular, integrable IT architecture.

Agility is no coincidence

Medium-sized logistics service providers have a structural advantage that larger players rarely manage to replicate: organisational agility. For these medium-sized firms, short decision-making processes and direct customer contact are the norm; they can implement bespoke solutions quickly. These qualities become a key differentiator in a market facing growing cost pressures, but only if you actively make use of them.

Tripp knows what matters strategically: "Successful market positioning is achieved above all through clear unique selling points: speed, high-quality service, process and data expertise, in-depth market knowledge and





CHRISTOPH TRIPP

Professor Christoph Tripp teaches distribution and retail logistics at the Georg Simon Ohm University of Applied Sciences in Nuremberg. He has many years of practical and consultancy experience in the retail and logistics sectors and works as a trend analyst, expert witness, presenter, keynote speaker, columnist, podcaster and author.



“The formation of a European fulfilment alliance comprising like-minded partners could be a promising approach to countering the concentration of power on the retail side.”

CHRISTOPH TRIPP

values put into practice, such as reliability and customer focus.”

At the same time, customers are no longer looking for individual service modules, but for packages. They prefer to have transport, warehousing, fulfilment, returns management and quality control all from a single source.

Those who cannot cover this deep level of service on their own should form partnerships with technology and recruitment providers. “The formation of a European fulfilment alliance comprising like-minded partners could be a promising approach to countering the concentration of power on the retail side,” says Tripp. Such collaborations are challenging, but they make it possible, for example, to share IT and procurement resources and achieve a pan-regional presence that would be difficult to achieve for individual SMEs.

Pharmaceutical and healthcare logistics: a market with high demand

Whilst e-commerce is dominated by the pressure from large platforms, the demand for specialised logistics solutions across all temperature ranges is, for example, growing in the pharmaceutical and healthcare sector.

The sector is also currently undergoing significant change. Until now, existing pharmaceutical wholesalers have relied on their own warehouse network, with more than 100 sites in Germany alone. Each of them maintains its own range of around 100,000 items to supply patients and if a shortage arises, each market participant can initially look after its own customers.

However, this does not guarantee that the goods always reach where they are needed, as the large number of market players means there is no transparency regarding stock availability. Andreas Thiede, CEO and founder of Vitaira Holding GmbH, wants to change this: “I want to make logistics in this sector efficient,

transparent and tailored to demand. The goods should reach patients as quickly as possible straight from production.”

Vitaira plans to establish a European temperature-controlled specialist logistics group for pharmaceutical and healthcare services. To this end, the company is acquiring specialist logistics and transport firms in the DACH region whilst preserving their independence, identity and culture. “In many cases, a financial investor buys companies and merges everything into one pot. But that triggers the classic restructuring issues: staff are cut and margins are continually squeezed,” says Thiede. “We don’t want that.”

A hub structure spanning the DACH region

Instead, Vitaira offers the acquired partner companies something that many of them could not achieve on their own: capital for investment, access to comprehensive quality management, combined sales strength and a growing platform structure across the entire DACH region, with links to a European network.

The target companies often find themselves in a similar situation. “They are hitting growth limits, a sort of glass ceiling. They can only develop to a limited extent because they are unable to expand geographically or financially, or simply because they have no solution for succession planning,” explains Thiede.

Vitaira is establishing a hub network across the DACH region, from which pharmacies, hospitals and wholesalers, amongst others, can be supplied within 12 to 24 hours. It is integrated into a logistics platform that incorporates transport solutions for all temperature ranges, from minus 80 degrees to the legally prescribed maximum temperature, and covers all modes of transport. As a first step, Vitaira acquired Hommel Pharma GmbH & Co. KG in Dülmen this spring. The provider of logistics and fulfilment →

+ ANDREAS THIEDE

Andreas Thiede, CEO of Vitaira, founded the company in early 2025. Prior to that, from 2024, he served as Managing Director at Fiege Logistik Stiftung & Co. KG, where he headed the healthcare division with a focus on hospital, pharmaceutical and medtech services. He also served as Chairman of the Management Board at Gehe Pharma Handel GmbH from 2020 to 2023.



solutions for the pharmaceutical and healthcare sectors handles key tasks along the value chain – from storage and order picking to the dispatch of medicines and medical devices from the Consumer Health range, including temperature-controlled processes.

Quality management as a lever

The key synergy in Thiede’s model does not lie in centralised accounting or joint human resources management, but in needs-based and optimised quality management. Until now, each company has developed its own processes to comply with the strict guidelines of pharmaceutical regulation. “In future, we’ll only have to do that once,” says Thiede. The quality processes

of the individual companies are integrated into Vitaira, further developed and made available to all partner companies. This saves resources, raises quality standards and makes the platform more attractive overall to manufacturers seeking an end-to-end, certified supply chain. From the customer’s perspective, this means that instead of five independent providers, there will in future be a single logistics partner taking responsibility.

Thiede also sees clinical trials and the supply of raw materials to pharmaceutical manufacturers as areas of growth. In some cases, minute quantities must be transported in accordance with the highest quality standards – for example, when an active ingredient needs to be shipped across continents at minus 80 degrees. This incurs costs running into tens of thousands of euros. “This is a highly specialised business that demands international expertise and the utmost reliability,” says Thiede. “Anyone involved in the development of a medicine is ideally placed to distribute it to patients in the future.”

A new approach to supply

For Thiede, it is not just about economic success, but also about security of supply: the majority of pharmaceutical production no longer takes place in Europe, which poses a greater risk given the changing global political landscape. Reduced stockpiling in significantly fewer warehouses and efficient distribution are intended to lower costs for the manufacturing industry and encourage policymakers to establish a legal framework for secure pharmaceutical production on the periphery of Europe.

Even the most challenging developments offer potential. It is important for entrepreneurs, despite all the demands of day-to-day business, to make the time to recognise these opportunities, assess them and see how they can be utilised. This can make the decisive difference in the race for future viability, resilience and success. ↩

The German pharmaceutical market

€ 67.8 billion

in turnover in 2025
= Europe’s largest pharmaceutical market

over 104,000
authorised medicinal products

approx. 22 %

of European pharmaceutical market turnover

around 20 %

of all medicines must be transported and stored at a constant temperature of 2–8 °C – and this figure is rising

SOURCE: PHARMADEUTSCHLAND.DE

“Anyone involved in the development of a medicine is ideally placed to distribute it to patients in the future.”

ANDREAS THIEDE

PHOTO: VITAIRA

What still moves us

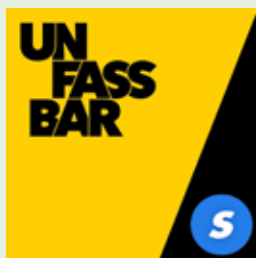
More inspiration, tips and thoughts



Nice and handy

One Sec is an anti-scrolling app: it discourages the reflexive habit of opening apps by displaying a deep blue bar before they launch, which initially covers the screen in a pulsating motion, effectively visualising a brief, deep breath. This turns mindless scrolling into a more conscious decision, and screen time often decreases as a result.

www.one-sec.app



Listen closely

'Unfassbar' is a podcast that explores business, science, culture and politics. Every week, the team of young journalists delves into a new, interesting story, told in an engaging and accessible way. Just like on their YouTube channel *Simplicissimus*, the topics are explored in depth and presented with great care, leaving you in awe time and time again.

Available on all major streaming services



Guesswork



This game takes you on a journey around the world! It's all about making guesses and exploring the globe. Which country has the largest population? Does Ghana have more forest cover than Austria? Players are asked to estimate facts and figures from all over the world, while getting as close as possible to the correct answer. This marks the start of an exciting journey around the globe, during which you'll get to know the world better and better.

By Kosmos



Inspiring

Crises are ever-present. For the award-winning science journalist and 'hopeless optimist' Dirk Steffens, however, predicting the end of the world is simply not an option. He is convinced that humanity has more solutions than problems. In his inspiring exploration of what we believe, know and are capable of, he shows that, particularly in difficult times, optimism is the most sensible alternative. His conclusion is: better to throw flowers into the future than to bury one's head in the sand!

Published by Penguin



Phenomenal

The interactive Phaeno Science Centre in Wolfsburg opened in 2005. In the spectacular building designed by architect Zaha Hadid, visitors can experience science and technology in a fun and engaging way. Over 300 hands-on stations invite visitors to try out and understand phenomena for themselves. The focus is not simply on watching, but on making your own discoveries. In addition to the exciting permanent exhibitions, there are regularly changing special events, guided tours and hands-on workshops for young and old alike.

www.phaeno.de



Pioneers



Flexible and close to customers

Haaren Keimeier & Finke GmbH has carved out a strong niche for itself in the demanding B2C sector – thanks to a family-oriented ethos, robust technology and active involvement in logistics networks.

It is just before 7 pm when the phone rings: a vehicle on its way back to Spedition und Logistik Haaren Keimeier & Finke GmbH (SLH) has suffered major damage: a defective drive axle and two burst tyres. Franjo Finke, owner of the logistics provider, passes on the information immediately, and the team at the in-house workshop gets ready.

Just an hour later, the lorry is back on the road. “If there’s a problem, it gets sorted,” says Finke. That’s why every trailer in his fleet bears the slogan: “Can’t be done doesn’t exist.”

“That’s what we live by,” the entrepreneur affirms. “Being close to our customers is what matters most to us. Nobody here wears a jacket and tie. If necessary, we’ll just jump in the lorry and drive it ourselves.” The family has lived by this philosophy for decades.

The company is a modern logistics service provider based in Bad Wünnenberg, near Paderborn in North Rhine-Westphalia, with 180 employees. A large proportion of the workforce has been trained in-house: “Those who learn the ropes within the company from the



"In the B2C market, every major customer in Germany knows us."

Franjo Finke, owner of Spedition und Logistik Haaren Keimeier & Finke GmbH

The brothers Franjo (left) and Siggie (right) have been running the company since 1986; their sons, including Patrick (bottom centre) and Alex (right), are set to take over.



very start know our processes and customers best," says Siggie Finke, co-owner and brother of Franjo Finke.

The team runs its own workshop and has around 60 tractor units and roughly twice as many trailers in the fleet. Over the years, SLH has consistently focused on the B2C market: "We don't want to be dependent on a major client who drives down prices. We prefer to work for medium-sized businesses that value personalised service," says Franjo Finke. "And the B2C market is still growing."

At least 60 to 70 per cent of all shipments leaving the 80,000-square-metre company premises go directly to private customers. Awnings, solar panels, bathroom fittings, fridges, garden sheds: "We deliver almost everything that online retailers provide for living rooms and gardens," says Franjo Finke. "In the B2C market, every major customer in Germany knows us."

Specialist in B2C

This business is "demanding and difficult", the entrepreneur admits frankly. "Most haulage firms have no interest in it at all, and many aren't even capable of doing it." On their routes, for example, the vehicles often carry a portable forklift, frequently have to manoeuvre in narrow residential areas, while service expectations always remain high.

SLH rises to the challenges of the business. To support its reach, the company operates across four logistics networks with different specialisms: E.L.V.I.S. for part-loads, the CTL general cargo system, Online Systemlogistik (OSL) and GEL Express Logistik. This breadth also creates flexibility: "If a route becomes tight, there is always a second gateway in a different network as an alternative to ensure the consignment reaches its destination while maintaining a high standard," explains Siggie Finke. "We have established ourselves in all systems. Everyone knows us, and is aware that if there's a problem, all you need to do is give us a call and it's sorted." If, for example, a shipment needs to be rerouted at short notice or a partner needs additional capacity, there's no haggling, it just gets done.

Networks place specific demands on vehicles. For example, the bodies must be able to withstand the rigours of forklift handling. "The double-skinned sheet metal bodies on Krone's Dry Liners are the most robust and clearly the best suited to system transport. The front bulkheads and rear doors, in particular, are extremely sturdy," reports Siggie Finke. He and his team have significantly stepped up their collaboration with Krone in recent years. →



“The quality is simply spot on, as is the service. What’s more, we always have a personal point of contact, and any issues are resolved quickly and easily through the official channels.” The Krone team is extremely flexible and Krone delivers on its promises. This reliability is important to us.”

Flexibility thanks to an in-house workshop

The Krone online shop also stands out for its ease of use: enter the chassis number, tick the boxes, place your order – quick, easy and with short delivery times. Thanks to its in-house workshop, the company is highly flexible when it comes to repairs, servicing and maintenance. This saves costs, travel and time, and keeps the fleet on the move.

Regular servicing minimises the risk of breakdowns and downtime, and the team can respond immediately. This is all the more valuable when, particularly in times of a skills shortage, it is difficult to secure last-minute appointments at external garages. “While others are still waiting for a garage appointment, we’re already getting to work.”

The company’s history dates back to 1936, when the grandfather of Franjo and Siggie Finke co-founded Stümpel, a firm specialising in the transport of long timber. When Franjo and Siggie’s father passed away in 1986, the sons took over the business at the age of just 19 and 21. Soon there was a lorry in the yard. Initially they worked as subcontractors for others, then came their own customers. In 1992, freight forwarding specialist Norbert Keimeier joined as a partner, and since then the company has operated under its current name and continued to grow steadily.

A generational change is coming

The owners’ three sons have also been working in the business for several years. As a qualified freight forwarding agent, Siggie’s son Andreas is the only one of them to have chosen a direct route into the industry: after completing an apprenticeship at a small freight forwarding firm in Osnabrück, he joined the family business and now works there in fleet management. Franjo’s son Alex started out repairing bicycles

and mopeds. After training as a motor vehicle mechatronics technician specialising in commercial vehicle technology and a stint in the passenger car sector, he was drawn back to the family business, where he now manages the in-house workshop.

His brother Patrik is a qualified mechanical engineer. He is now in charge of digitalisation within the company and has, among other things, initiated the development of in-house software designed to make the haulage business paperless. The system covers the entire order process: dispatching, warehouse management and delivery tracking.

The next step is a planned controlling tool that analyses contribution margins and capacity utilisation at the touch of a button. In addition, the use of artificial intelligence is to be promoted, not to cut staff, but to free up capacity that can be channelled back into working with customers.

The three young men will take over the company in the near future, together with Siggie’s daughter Stephanie, who is expected to take charge of commercial management. Norbert Keimeier, long-standing managing director, co-partner and managing director at GEL Express, has already stepped down from his operational role at GEL and remains there in an advisory capacity.

And the timetable is set: the handover is to be completed within the next two to three years. “They won’t do everything the way we do, but that’s a good thing,” says Franjo Finke. One thing will certainly remain the same: “Nothing is impossible!”

The haulage firm delivers almost everything that is sold online, from awnings to fridges.



PHOTOS: MATTHIAS GROPPE

+ PROFILE

The freight forwarding and logistics company Haaren Keimeier & Finke GmbH (SLH) specialises in part-load and full-load transport services in Germany and Europe, with a clear focus on the B2C market, including specialised and heavy-haul transport.

“We have at least one case a week”

Alexander Gsell, a lawyer at **R+V subsidiary Kravag**, explains how claims involving phantom hauliers are covered by insurance.

Mr Gsell, as an insurer, how many cases of ‘ghost’ hauliers do you come across?

For about two years now, the number of cases has been increasing dramatically. We used to have one such case every two to three months; today it’s at least one a week. The losses quickly run into six figures, and it’s not uncommon for them to reach millions. But it’s not just about the money; there’s also the risk of massive reputational damage for the freight forwarder who has fallen victim to the criminals. Their client asks: “How could this have happened? Can I even continue to work with you?” To be honest, this issue really motivates me. I find it hard to accept that criminals are becoming increasingly active in this area and lining their pockets.

In your experience, how do criminals operate?

By far the most common scam – I’d say 90 to 95 per cent of cases – involves fake email addresses. Criminals pose as reputable, well-known haulage companies, have the lorry loaded and then disappear with the goods. There are also fake companies, which is why we advise against entrusting valuable or theft-prone cargo to contractors you are using for the first time. Another method is hacking: the perpetrators gain access to the freight forwarders’ IT systems. We strongly recommend keeping your IT systems up to date wherever possible, installing all updates and using anti-malware software.

How does Kravag investigate claims?

Firstly, we check whether our policyholder is legally liable. They are liable if – albeit unwittingly, though this is irrelevant from a legal perspective – they have commissioned criminals who have embezzled the goods. We then examine the obligations under the insurance contract: Was the subcontractor carefully selected? Did the dispatcher verify the email address? Were they trained? Does the manager regularly check whether the guidelines are being followed?

What happens if the audit reveals weaknesses?

If the dispatch manager has been trained, has followed the guidelines and still failed to notice the discrepancy, which is only human, the breach of duty was not then due to gross

negligence. But we have many cases where freight forwarders do not give it a second thought. There is a lack of training; they do not provide clear work instructions or carry out checks. All of this, however, is essential for freight forwarders.

There is concern within the industry that claims arising from phantom hauliers may eventually become uninsurable. Can you reassure us?

Yes, I can. There are currently no plans for this in the German market. We are represented within the German Insurance Association. The model terms and conditions are currently being updated there, partly in response to the increasing number of claims involving phantom hauliers, with the aim of ensuring that such claims remain insurable in the future.

Is artificial intelligence changing the threat landscape?

Absolutely. For example, it might be noticeable if a Czech or Lithuanian subcontractor suddenly starts writing in perfect German. You have to keep yourself constantly informed and proactively look out for new threats. Unfortunately, the criminals are usually one step ahead of us. ↩



+ ALEXANDER GSELL

Alexander Gsell is a lawyer at Kravag and works in the Transport Division. His responsibilities include dealing with **cases of fraud and major claims** in the transport and logistics sector.

The invisible haulier

Since mid-2024, cases of so-called **phantom hauliers** have been on the rise. A security specialist at a major German logistics company explains the tricks the perpetrators use, why the business is so lucrative, and how freight forwarders can protect themselves.

It often starts with an email or a message via a freight exchange: a transport operator offers their services, has spare capacity, and can run at short notice. Everything looks normal, the documents check out, communication is professional, and the price is attractive. But once the lorry leaves the loading site, the goods are gone. The carrier doesn't exist, the address was forged, and the vehicle is never seen again. Like a phantom, hence the term "phantom haulier". "Since mid-2024 the figures have risen sharply. Virtually every major freight forwarder has already been affected," says the security specialist, who has worked for more than ten years in loss-prevention at a large German logistics service provider and wishes to remain anonymous.

Lower-value goods are also being targeted

The criminals are no longer only after high-value loads. "In the past I used to say: from a

goods value of €100,000 you need to be careful," the expert says. "Today that's completely irrelevant because anything gets stolen." Chocolate, cheese, trainers, football shirts, coffee – there's a market for many products.

During peak periods such as Easter and Christmas, cases of phantom hauliers increase particularly strongly. Goods have to go out, and checks sometimes fall victim to time pressure. The scams are now so sophisticated that even experienced dispatchers fall for them.

"In the end, you can never rule out that even people who work in logistics companies are involved." On freight exchanges such as Timocom, perpetrators can see which companies are offering freight and, in some cases, download documents. "That way I already have the letterhead and licences of transport companies that actually exist," the expert explains. Add to that, forged email addresses: for example, a 'w' is made to look like a double 'v'. Or an official company domain is turned into a slightly modified variant. The perpetrators →

use the forged addresses to latch on to existing business relationships or to initiate new ones. Networks such as LinkedIn are also used systematically.

Consistent checks make it harder for offenders

A particularly insidious aspect is that drivers and transport operators sometimes don't know they're working for criminals. They are used by the perpetrators to carry out the transport and, for instance, receive a call after loading to say the trip has been rescheduled at short notice. The driver follows the instruction and the goods disappear, for example across the border.

There are also transport companies that switch sides. "They have a customer number, they've been everywhere," the expert says. "And at some point, they'll run off with ten lorries. You can check as much as you like." There is no one-hundred-percent security. But anyone who checks consistently makes it significantly harder for offenders.

The protective measures can be divided into two areas: selecting the carrier at the desk and checking at the loading site. Email addresses should not only be read but also cross-checked in the freight exchange. Licences and VAT identification numbers must be verified. And: "If you're commissioning a new operator, call them, and do it via the number on the official website, not via a mobile number," the expert recommends. He has seen a fraud uncovered only because a dispatcher called the genuine operator, who said: "I'm not driving anything for you today!"

Checks at the loading site

The loading site is the last opportunity to prevent a fraud. There should be a clear inspection protocol here, and not just checking reference numbers as used to be common practice. In addition, the driver's name, the operator's name and the number plate must be checked as a matter of course. The key is to question any discrepancies and, if necessary, even compare the vehicle documents and the vehicle identification number.

To comply with data protection requirements, QR-code-based systems are used in which drivers enter their name, ID card number and date of birth. The data is deleted after a short time. Large shippers are already automating the entire access process by using digital registration, automated ID checks and vehicle checks at the gate.

The perpetrators are organised. They write to for example, 20 freight forwarders

and see who bites. If one scam is uncovered, they switch to the next company. That's why information exchange within the sector is crucial: "Operators should talk to each other! If nothing has happened to you yet, you might be the next victim."

At the DSLV (German Freight Forwarding and Logistics Association) there is a logistics security working group in which the major freight forwarders meet. "Current perpetrator methods are discussed here and concepts to prevent theft are developed." Cooperation with police and the judiciary is more difficult. "Jurisdictional boundaries between federal states, lack of specialist knowledge about logistics processes and overburdened public prosecutors slow down criminal prosecution."

Loss amounts are rising – and the insurance sector is reacting. The expert expects that insurers will, by 2027 at the latest, no longer cover phantom consignments to the same extent as before. He anticipates high deductibles or blanket exclusions. "As long as the perpetrators can still get hold of enough goods, they're not under pressure to do things differently," he is convinced.

Conversely, this means that every additional check, every verified email address, every checked ID makes it more complicated for the perpetrators, and makes the phantom-haulier business model a little less attractive. [↩](#)

Information

The LKA Cottbus deals extensively with the phantom issue and is responsible for the Brandenburg region. A functional mailbox has been set up there (phantom.lka@polizei.brandenburg.de) and cases are also forwarded to other state criminal investigation departments if the incident falls outside the area of responsibility.

The German Insurance Association (GDV) has published an information sheet on phantom hauliers:



Reality check

In Germany, entire lorry loads are regularly stolen by criminals who gain access to freight platforms using false identities. What is often underestimated has long been a serious, structural problem for supply chains across Europe. Despite a sharp rise in losses, concern within the industry is waning in some quarters. Many companies rely more on insurance than on preventive measures.

Cargo at risk

Ghost hauliers – cases and claims on the rise

The claims data reported by transport insurers for the period from January to July 2025 and the annual estimates from the German Insurance Association (GDV) point to an alarming trend.

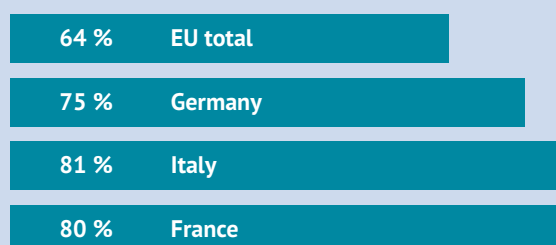


Regardless of this, several trade associations – including the GDV – estimate that **nearly 26,000 lorry loads** are stolen in Germany every year, which works out at roughly one incident **every 20 minutes**.

Direct damage to goods is estimated at around **1.3 billion euros** per year. Added to this are consequential costs of around **900 million euros**, for example due to contractual penalties, loss of revenue and production downtime. *Source: GDV*

Cargo theft – A wide gap between perception and reality

According to a survey conducted in April 2026 among more than 3,500 fleet managers from seven European countries, concerns about cargo theft have fallen compared with a year earlier – **despite a 438 per cent rise in losses since 2022**.



Cameras are the most common preventive measure in the EU, **at 27 per cent**. There is low uptake of other tools such as
→ real-time trailer tracking,
→ sensor-based alerts or
→ verified driver identification.

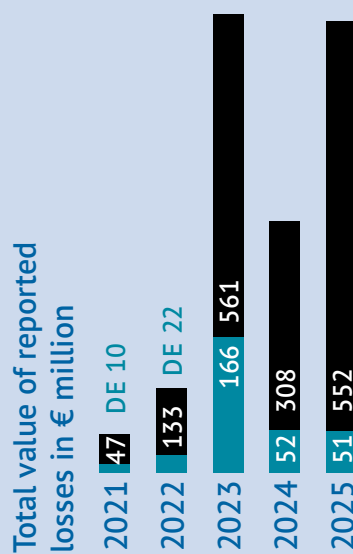
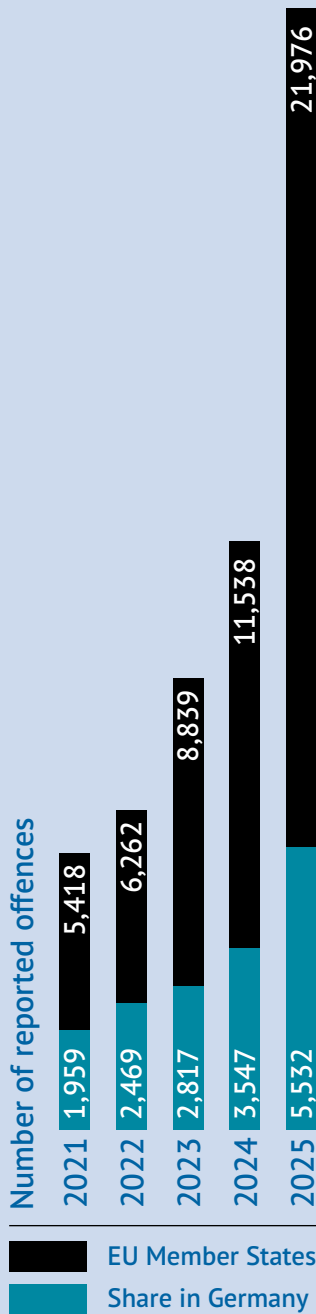
22 per cent of respondents (in Germany and the EU) rely exclusively on insurance cover. As a result, drivers, customers and supply chains are less protected overall. The resulting additional costs are passed on to customers through higher premiums and rising prices, amongst other things.

Source: Geotab

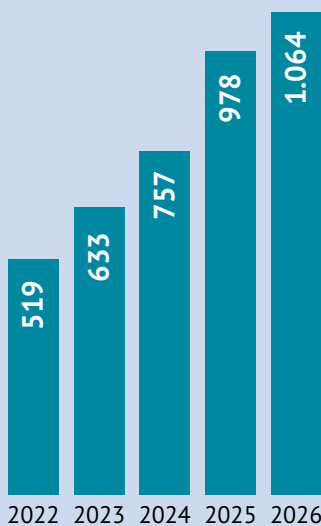
Freight crime – trends, losses and methods

The Transported Asset Protection Association (TAPA) is an international network of manufacturers, logistics service providers, freight forwarders and security managers whose aim is to reduce theft and other security incidents in supply chains. A key tool is the TAPA Intelligence System (TIS) database, where members can report and analyse security-related incidents involving transport and storage. The figures presented are based on these TIS reports and reflect the respective reporting volumes of the participating companies.

Source: TAPA EMEA



Membership figures TAPA (as of April 2026)

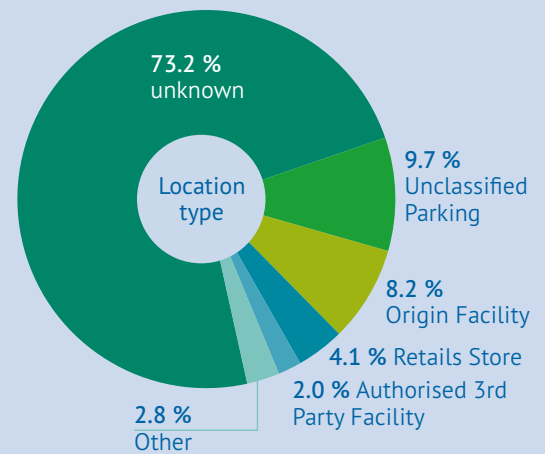
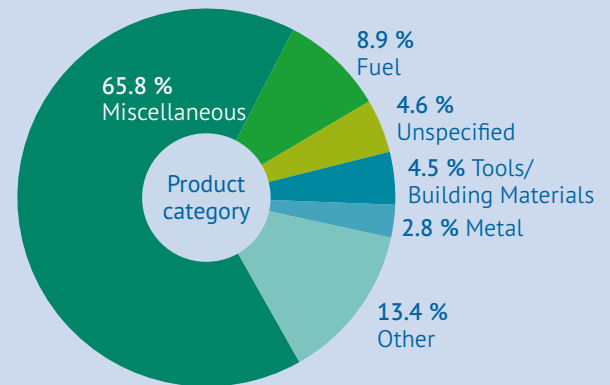
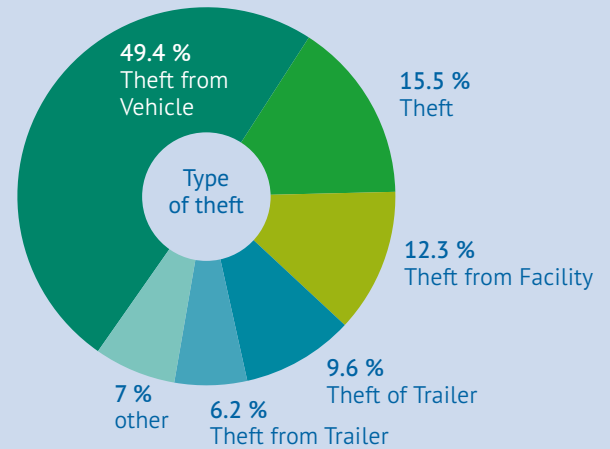


Rising membership figures at TAPA EMEA suggest that supply chain security is becoming increasingly important for businesses due to rising levels of theft, fraud and tampering. At the same time, there is growing pressure from customers, insurers and auditors to provide verifiable evidence of security measures. Many companies are therefore seeking common standards to reduce risks and make processes more comparable.

In 2024, almost three times as many security training courses were completed at TAPA as in 2022.

Source: TAPA EMEA

Reported incidents in Germany in 2025



Truck parking spaces

According to a study by the European Secure Parking Organisation (Esporg), there is a shortfall of around 390,000 lorry parking spaces on motorways across the EU. The study suggests

that by 2040, this shortfall will rise to around 483,000 spaces for heavy goods vehicles. In 2019, the organisation had identified a shortfall of 100,000 spaces.



VOGEL
SPEDITIONSGMBH



"Our industry only works when many different functions mesh together seamlessly."

Achim Obkircher, Managing director of Zugvogel Spedition GmbH

Structured growth

Over the past ten years, **Matthias Fischer** and **Achim Obkircher** have expanded **Zugvogel** from a three-man operation into an internationally active logistics company with three sites.

Stans in Tyrol is a municipality with just under 2,000 inhabitants, where Zugvogel has relocated its headquarters at the start of the year. The decision to choose this location builds on the company's previous development and underlines the ongoing expansion of its structures.

In just eleven years, Zugvogel Spedition

GmbH has grown from a start-up with three employees into an established logistics company with over 120 staff and three sites in Austria and Germany.

The team started out with a clear focus on north-south transport routes in Europe. "From the very beginning, our aim was to grow in a structured and sustainable way," says Fischer.

“We have developed the company step by step, consistently prioritising quality and reliability.” Today, Zugvogel handles Europe-wide transport; in 2023, global air and sea freight, project logistics and warehousing solutions were added.

Achim Obkircher, also a managing director, adds: “Above all, our customers value our transparency and our ability to develop bespoke solutions. We work in a structured and efficient manner, with a clear focus on reliable processes, which is crucial in our industry.” Especially in times of economic uncertainty, this is a key advantage: manufacturing companies need logistics partners who think proactively and offer solutions, rather than simply providing cargo space.

Everyone pulling in the same direction

“Connecting Visions” is Zugvogel’s motto and encapsulates its commitment to reliably coordinating complex logistics processes. “Our industry only works when many different functions mesh together seamlessly,” says Obkircher. “Actively managing this interplay, both internally and externally, is a central part of our work.”

For the company, long-term success is based on clear structures, reliable cooperation and mutual trust. “We work with our customers as partners and on an equal footing,” says Obkircher. “It is crucial that everyone involved plays their part and works together towards a solution.” This understanding shapes day-to-day collaboration within the company.

Sporting spirit and team culture

At the same time, this approach is also reflected in how we treat our staff. Zugvogel is firmly committed to in-house training and long-term staff development. The aim is to build stable structures and develop skills within the company in a sustainable way. “We have no trouble finding staff, and we never have,” says Matthias Fischer. “This is mainly because we offer prospects and create an environment in which people can develop both professionally and personally.” Instead of short-term incentives, the focus is on clear development opportunities and taking on responsibility.

Staff turnover in the company is very low, says Fischer. A large proportion of the workforce has been part of the team for many years. Quite a few are also close friends outside work and meet up for sport after work, for example. “We have several former competitive athletes from various disciplines in the team. I myself was active in luge and bobsleigh and took part in World Cups,”

reports Obkircher. “Sport shapes qualities such as resilience, motivation and goal-orientation – qualities that are also crucial in logistics.”

Quality, price and flexibility

For a long time, Zugvogel operated without its own fleet, relying exclusively on partners. The decision to build up its own fleet was a deliberate one, based on clear strategic considerations. The company initially started with 22 of its own trailers in order to analyse processes and requirements in detail. At the end of 2025, the decision was made to invest in further expansion.

The partnership with Krone was chosen with full conviction. “I visited the factory and took a look at the production facilities. It made a very professional impression,” reports Fischer. “Quality is extremely important to us, and here the combination of quality, price and flexibility was just right.” Obkircher adds: “From the order through to configuration and collaboration, everything was professional, with quick communication and a strong customer focus. Our fleet manager, who has been in the business for decades, preferred Krone for its quality: a sturdy trailer that is easy to handle.” →

Matthias Fischer and Achim Obkircher (from the left) are working together to further develop the company on an ongoing basis.



+ PROFILE

Founded in 2015, **Zugvogel Spedition GmbH** specialises in European road transport, air and sea freight, and international project logistics, with a particular focus on the renewable energy sector. The company operates **three sites in Germany and Austria**, employs around 120 staff and has a fleet of 120 modern trailers.

Zugvogel has chosen not to rely exclusively on standard semi-trailers. “Our approach from the outset was to deliberately move away from traditional solutions,” explains Fischer. “Instead of standard tautliners, we specifically rely on flexible equipment variants such as megatrailers, extendable curtainsiders or coil carriers. These have proven their worth in operational use.” Customer demand has also increased significantly once again following the expansion of the company’s own fleet.

From rockets to solar panels

In addition to standard freight, Zugvogel also handles specialised transport projects: one example is the transport of a rocket for the aerospace company Rocket Factory Augsburg to the Shetland Islands – a complex logistics operation requiring precise planning and execution

It was specifically for such projects that the subsidiary Zugvogel Renewable Logistics GmbH, based in Bremen, was founded in 2023. The company specialises in project logistics with a focus on renewable energy projects. “The idea came about through two brilliant colleagues who bring operational experience in international project transport and specific expertise in managing energy projects,” reports Fischer.

Matthias Fischer (right) commissioned an agency to come up with the company name “Zugvogel”: it symbolises a sense of belonging, a shared direction and clear guidance.



The entrepreneurs want to support their customers in the long term – even if their needs change.

The team at the Bremen site manages complex transport operations from production in Asia to construction sites in Europe. For Obkircher, the focus is clear: “Energy independence is a key issue, particularly in Europe. Through our logistics services, we are contributing to the implementation of such projects.” The Bremen site is a key component of Zugvogel’s international strategy and helps to further develop the company’s global logistics solutions.

Where is Zugvogel heading?

Where does the haulage company’s unusual name come from? “It was important to us to find a name that would stand out and not sound like a traditional haulage firm,” recalls Fischer. Working with a marketing agency, the name “Zugvogel” was eventually chosen.

The name sums up the company’s focus. “The company started with north-south transport routes – Scandinavia, Italy, Germany. And the migratory bird has many characteristics that we embody within the company,” says Obkircher: “A sense of togetherness, a shared direction and a clear focus.”

The next steps are therefore clearly defined: Zugvogel aims to become a global full-service provider. Alongside its established land transport operations, the company is specifically expanding its sea and air freight services as well as complex logistics solutions. “Our goal every day is to keep developing,” says Obkircher. “Our aim is to support our customers in the long term, even as their requirements change or they expand internationally.”

For Fischer, this has always been the vision: “We wanted to create a stable environment for employees, take on responsibility as an employer and, at the same time, build a high-performing company.” Together, they have made this vision take flight. [↪](#)

PHOTOS: MARIA KIRCHNER

Sharing a leadership role

Job tandems can help attract and retain qualified managers. The concept offers **many benefits** for both parties, whilst also presenting them with challenges.



Part-time leadership? Job tandems make it possible: two people share a single role and can take on responsibility without having to work full-time. Together, they take on the leadership role, make decisions jointly, stand in for one another and present a united front as a team. In light of the skills shortage, this model is gaining in importance.

Keeping everyone in the loop

For example, the logistics company Fiege has appointed a duo to the role of “Head of Project Management” in its “Digital” business unit: Swantje Hepke and Carina Haverstreng. They became aware of this model through the company’s own “FIEGE Equality Power” programme.

Among other things, the initiative aims to consistently support women in their career development. For Hepke, it is clear why this is necessary: particularly after parental leave, many women “often hit a glass ceiling”, she says. Hepke and Haverstreng organise their week so that one of them is always available – both for their team and for their line managers.

Structured handover sessions and brief written summaries ensure they are always on the same page. Their shared goal: “The duo should shine.”

Companies also benefit from this model: decisions are no longer made by just one person, but from two perspectives, drawing on different backgrounds of experience and networks. This makes leadership more stable – and often wiser. Furthermore, one person is always available if the other is absent due to illness, holiday or unforeseen circumstances. This ensures greater continuity. Especially at a time when skilled workers are in short supply, the job tandem is a way of retaining qualified staff who are unable to work full-time, or can no longer do so.

The relationship has to work

However, a partnership doesn’t just run itself. It thrives on trust, open communication and the right combination of personalities: not every pairing works, because people with fundamentally different working styles or priorities will quickly reach their limits when working in tandem. Hepke and Haverstreng admit that they first had to work out what information each of them needed from the other. “Of course, in a model like this, you have to find your feet first,” says Haverstreng.

If the handover doesn’t work well, the team usually pays the price: through duplication of work or the impression that there are two managers who aren’t pulling in the same direction. The model also entails a certain amount of extra work for the company – for instance, in terms of coordination or when the tandem needs time to work together.

Anyone wishing to introduce it should allow sufficient time from the outset. However, experience at Fiege shows that job tandems can be much more than just a compromise for a better work-life balance. They tap into skills that would otherwise have remained untapped and ultimately offer many benefits for everyone involved. ↩

“Many underestimate the fact that German SMEs often have better data than many a tech conglomerate.”

Philipp Knobelspies,
Director of AI UnternehmerTUM



“AI is not an IT project, it’s a leadership challenge”

As Director of AI, **Philipp Knobelspies** is responsible for artificial intelligence at UnternehmerTUM, Europe’s largest innovation centre. A conversation about SMEs catching up, the power of the ecosystem, and why speed alone is not enough.

UnternehmerTUM is Europe’s largest centre for innovation and start-ups. Every year, it supports over 1,100 start-up teams and more than 17,000 participants in educational programmes. Mr Knobelspies, what role do you play in this?

I am responsible for AI for businesses. My job is to understand what is technically possible today, to anticipate what is coming and to translate both into the world of SMEs. SMEs have formed the backbone of the German economy

for decades and are currently learning how to deal with AI across the board. We provide guidance and support – for example, through our AI SME programme and various exchange formats in which business leaders can discuss matters on an equal footing. After all, AI is still new to all of us. We are driven by the idea of AI as a kind of sport that we will all be practising in the future. Those who don’t get involved will no longer be competitive. There are two levels within a company. The foundation is laid by

‘mass participation’ – AI in customer service, sales and standard processes, where efficiency is boosted. Building on this is ‘elite sport’, with AI integrated into the products themselves. This is where entirely new value is created and it is precisely here that it will be decided who will still be the market leader in ten years’ time.

What makes Munich such an attractive location for start-ups?

It brings together strong industrial companies, cutting-edge research, a deep talent pool and capital. What’s more, the city, the state, universities and the business community are all pulling in the same direction. To be innovative, you need an ecosystem. To this end, institutions such as UnternehmerTUM actively bring the key players together in one place: founders, researchers, established companies and capital. There is no other place in Europe that offers this level of concentration and continuity.

We are here at Munich Urban Colab, one of UnternehmerTUM’s main sites. What does this place offer?

Spanning 11,000 square metres, a unique space has been created where everyone who makes innovation possible comes together. Alongside start-ups, established companies, investors, the academic community and the city administration, it also brings together local residents. It is not just a place for young entrepreneurs; family businesses and industry also find a home here. At the same time, it is a meeting place, open to everyone. Here, you’ll find everything you need to develop and implement ideas: events, a high-tech prototyping workshop, co-working spaces and, through the UnternehmerTUM network, access to capital. It also takes you out of the daily grind of business and encourages you to start thinking differently. But it’s important to note: if you want to be part of it, you have to see yourself as part of the ecosystem and work together with others. It’s not a traditional co-working space where everyone sits separately working on different topics.

How does the high-tech prototyping workshop work?

It’s a makerspace: if you want to bring an idea to life, this is the place to come. You have access to the textile workshop, the woodworking workshop with CNC milling machines, a whole range of 3D printers and laser cutters, as well as an electronics lab. For companies, this is an opportunity to step outside their own structures. Engineers in particular can discover different approaches here. Our teams provide support; they’re all clever tinkerers, some of whom come from the TUM environment

“AI projects almost never fail because of the models, but because of culture and organisation.”

PHILIPP KNOBELSPIES

themselves. And private individuals can also come and bring their ideas to life. We always want to fulfil this social mission of getting as many people on board as possible. That way, individuals and companies can build things together in the makerspace.

You often talk about the ecosystem. How does that work in practice?

Let’s say I want to set up a start-up in the charging infrastructure sector. To do that, I need energy companies, perhaps car manufacturers too, and definitely the local authority, which sets the regulatory framework. Everyone needs to be in one place, where start-ups and talent come together – and that’s here. Because as a single start-up, you can’t influence the charging infrastructure sector. You need the whole ecosystem. The idea behind UnternehmerTUM is to bring our three target groups – start-ups, corporate partners and talent – together in one place so that they can work on innovation together. Always with the aim of keeping Germany and Europe competitive and driving forward so-called deep-tech topics. We offer courses to the talent, in which we train them to become the next generation of founders. There are programmes such as ‘Manage & More’ for high-potential individuals, with accompanying mentoring over a six-month period. I, for example, am also a →

11,000 square metres dedicated to innovation: at Munich Urban Colab, start-ups, industry, research and the wider community work together under one roof.





“What advice would you give to a family-run business that is open to innovation but comes from a traditional industrial sector?”

1) Treat AI as a management priority, not an IT project. If senior management delegates the matter, it will fail.

2) Start with the basics, then move on to the advanced: begin by identifying internal use cases, for example in sales, customer service or documentation. This builds expertise, trust and delivers quick wins.

3) Transform with your existing team: Train 10 or 15

of your best people to become AI champions – people who know your industry, your customers and your machinery. This combination of domain knowledge and AI expertise is far more valuable than external specialists without industry DNA.

4) Make use of the data you already have. German SMEs have been maintaining ERP systems, machine, service and customer data for decades. That is worth its weight in gold. You don't

have to start from scratch, but can tap into what you already have.

5) Don't view this as competition with the German engineering firm next door, but as a question of location. We have industrial strength in Europe, but we will lose it if we do not build it up together. The competition is not SME X versus Y. The competition is Europe versus the US and China. Exchange ideas and cooperate with start-ups!

mentor for TUM students. We try to empower them to build the truly relevant start-ups of tomorrow, something we've already managed very successfully on a few occasions.

What are you currently working on, and what issues are you focusing on in your work?

On the corporate side, the main question is how we can bring the benefits of AI, which have long been proven in tech companies, to the wider SME sector. This is no longer a technical issue, but a human and transformational one. The models and tools are there. Even more important are people who understand AI and their industry, clear processes, courage on the part of

Innovation needs an ecosystem: bringing together start-ups, research, capital and established companies in one place – that is the idea behind UnternehmerTUM.

management, and a willingness to bring about real change internally. AI isn't just a new technology, but unfortunately it is often treated as such. It represents a fundamental change in the way we all work. In our Venture Labs – programmes in which we systematically build up research-based start-ups from TUM – we primarily support two areas on the start-up side. On the one hand, Industrial AI – AI for production, maintenance and quality, and on the other, Physical AI – AI for robotics. The TUM Venture Labs are extremely exciting. Founders from research groups come together there, and we try to develop them into start-up professionals. We have carried out a great deal of basic research, but it is usually the Americans who have commercialised it. This is precisely where Venture Labs come in. In my view, this is where the greatest potential lies for the German economy. We have a wealth of industrial assets, a strong mechanical engineering sector and considerable expertise in hardware. Whilst generative AI, as we know it today, stems largely from the American software world, the next wave – AI that merges with machines and the physical world –

“No one should feel ashamed if they feel they're lagging behind; we all do.”

PHILIPP KNOBELSPIES





+ ABOUT

UnternehmerTUM is a leading start-up centre and affiliated institute of the Technical University of Munich (TUM). It operates two main sites: the Entrepreneurship Centre in Garching and the Munich Urban Colab. The Munich Urban Colab is a joint project between UnternehmerTUM and the City of Munich – an innovation hub for smart city solutions offering co-working, prototyping and events.

is a much better fit for our strengths. And ultimately, we are transforming ourselves as well. We are preparing for how innovation will work in the near future, namely increasingly through agent-based processes, i.e. AI systems that take on tasks independently. Start-ups used to take much longer to become economically successful. Today, teams of fewer than five people can achieve the same pace as teams of 20 or 30 used to. That pace has changed incredibly. And as Europe's largest innovation hub, we are naturally expected to maintain a corresponding pace.

What does innovation mean to you?

If you come from the start-up world, the saying goes: "Ideas don't matter, execution counts." And I think our SMEs are realising this too. There is enormous potential and a wealth of ideas there, but in the end, it always comes down to implementation. The more complicated a project is and the more parties I need to involve, the more difficult it becomes. Our aim is therefore to create a space where implementation succeeds. We train not only the founders but also the SMEs to produce much faster, release prototypes early on and discuss them with customers. Agility is the basis for this, but you can be agile slowly or agile quickly. The success of start-ups lies in speed. That said, a distinction must be made, because in cutting-edge research, such as quantum cryptography and fusion reactors, speed takes on a whole new dimension; there, it takes years for something to work. With start-ups, it's simply the fastest that wins.

How exactly do you bring companies together?

We're talking about co-innovation or co-creation projects. In each case, we bring together several companies working on a specific topic, be it the circular economy or AI, within a kind of programme. What strikes me time and again is the power that is unleashed when people tackle things together within an ecosystem. The basic concept is to shape innovation together. It's not a case of a single company coming here and us advising them; instead, we tackle the whole thing together, always with →





From prototype to product: in Urban Colab's high-tech workshop, ideas take shape – for businesses and individuals alike.

the aim of strengthening Europe's resilience. These are not the times for SME A to be fighting against SME B.

How keen are established companies to work with you?

There is a great deal of interest, but from our point of view, there can never be enough. Our mission at UnternehmerTUM is to contribute to the economic and technological sovereignty of Germany and Europe through tech start-ups, key technologies and a strong SME sector. This mission can only succeed if established companies are on board. They are the first customers for start-ups, pilot partners, and often investors too – and the ones to whom the AI wave must reach on a broad scale. We are currently seeing a qualitative improvement in the level of interest. Two or three years ago, many companies came

+ PHILIPP KNOBELSPIES

Philipp Knobelspies is **Director of AI at UnternehmerTUM in Munich**. As a serial entrepreneur with experience in exiting companies, he has developed AI strategies within organisations, from conception through to operational implementation. He studied computer science and holds an MBA in Business Creation from TUM, specialising in tech venture building and e-commerce.



to us asking: "We need to do something with AI – what do you suggest?" Today, they come with specific pain points, such as a bottleneck in production, a question about service quality, or a competitor that is gaining ground. This makes collaboration significantly more productive.

In your view, where do German SMEs currently stand when it comes to artificial intelligence?

First of all, we must recognise just how rapidly AI is changing. The pace of change is unprecedented. Even I have to reassess daily which models and tools remain relevant. Start-ups face the same challenge. No one should feel ashamed if they feel they're lagging behind; we all do. However, SMEs are catching up. Over the last

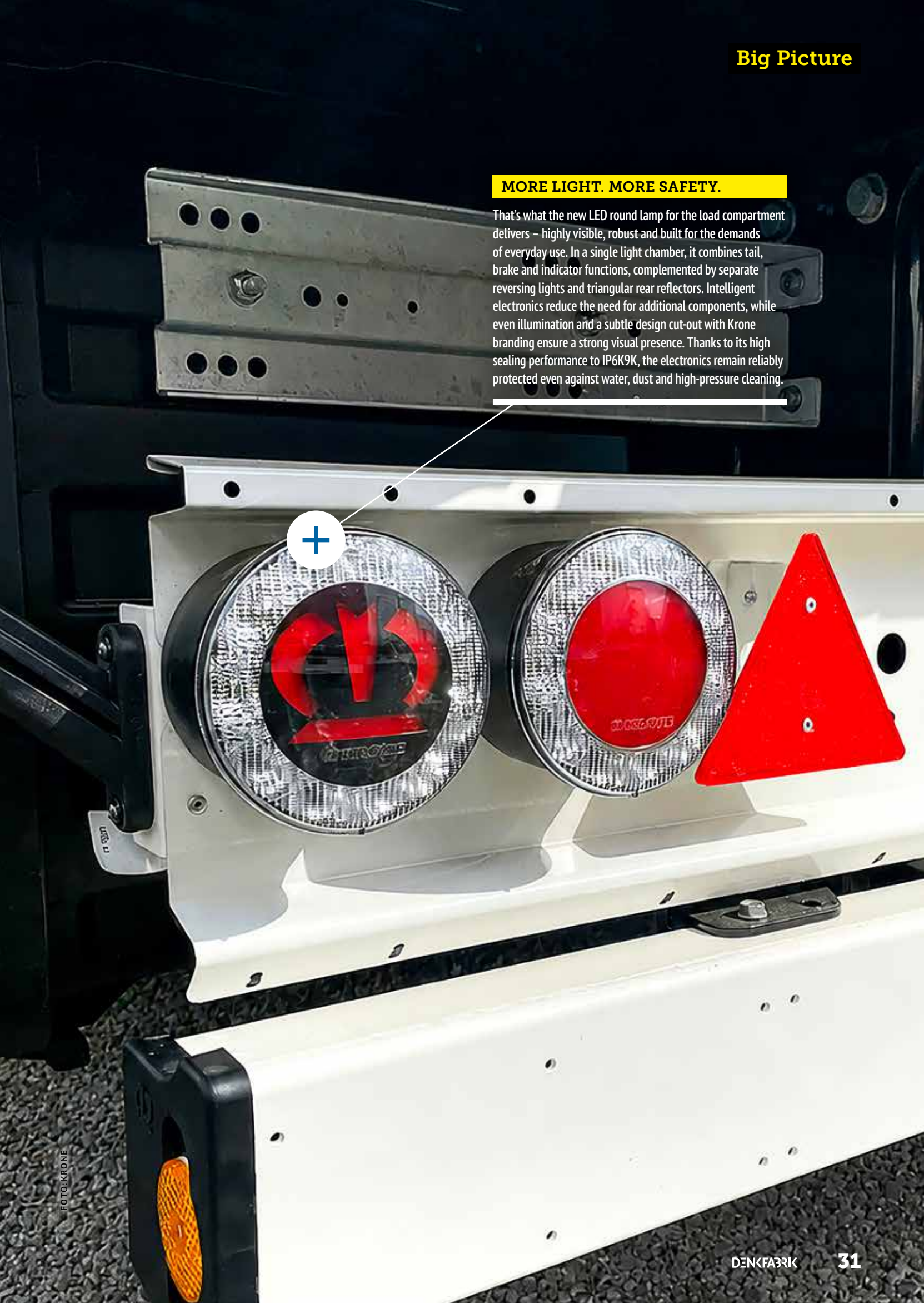


two years, priorities and maturity levels have changed noticeably. AI offers enormous opportunities, but also harbours risks – and the greatest risk is not engaging with it sufficiently. Anyone who waits until the market has settled down will find that this doesn't happen. Incidentally, many underestimate the fact that German SMEs often have better data than many a tech conglomerate. ERP systems maintained over decades, clearly documented processes, deep domain knowledge – worth their weight in gold. This potential is still far too rarely exploited. And when it comes to AI, we in Germany and Europe are already facing a challenge because we are not really making use of the current wave of generative AI. We have missed out on things. We are up against US companies that invest as much in data centres alone as all our DAX-listed companies put together. But Europe's great added value lies in the manufacturing industry. There are still huge opportunities in machine learning and industrial AI. We need to work together on this. When things go wrong, it's usually not down to the technology. At their core, AI projects almost never fail because of the models, but because of culture and organisation. AI isn't just new software that you roll out, it fundamentally changes the way we work. And so, it shouldn't be treated as an IT project, but as a leadership challenge. [↪](#)

PHOTOS: LUKAS BARTH

MORE LIGHT. MORE SAFETY.

That's what the new LED round lamp for the load compartment delivers – highly visible, robust and built for the demands of everyday use. In a single light chamber, it combines tail, brake and indicator functions, complemented by separate reversing lights and triangular rear reflectors. Intelligent electronics reduce the need for additional components, while even illumination and a subtle design cut-out with Krone branding ensure a strong visual presence. Thanks to its high sealing performance to IP6K9K, the electronics remain reliably protected even against water, dust and high-pressure cleaning.





"We focused straight away on international transport."

Mateusz Wdowiński, son of founder Marek Wdowiński (front right)

Solutions, not Excuses

The Polish family-run business **Walmart** started out in 1997 with a single tarpaulin-covered lorry; today it operates 35 tractor units and 40 semi-trailers. It has relied on Krone for over two decades.

Between minus 25 and plus 25 degrees determines whether active ingredients retain their integrity, whether cold chains are documented in an audit-proof manner and whether a customer places another order.

Anyone wishing to reliably maintain this temperature range on Europe's roads needs good equipment, a well-coordinated team,

specialist knowledge and precision. You also need processes that work even at three o'clock in the morning.

This is exactly what Walmart, a family-run business from Przasnysz in Poland, has been delivering for almost three decades. Temperature-controlled transport is at the heart of Walmart's operations. Using refrigerated double-deck semi-trailers, the company safely

transports food and chemical products across two loading levels while maintaining strict temperature control throughout the journey.

A tarpaulin-covered lorry with a gross vehicle weight of 6,000 kilograms – that was what brothers Marek and Sławomir Wdowiński launched their haulage company with in Przasnysz, Poland, in 1997. And they set their sights high right from the start: “We focused straight away on international transport,” says Mateusz Wdowiński, Marek’s son. In 2002, the team bought their first Scania tractor unit and their first Krone semi-trailer. “That marked the start of our dynamic growth.” Today, the company is being shaped by the second generation, as Sławomir’s sons Adam and Paweł have joined Mateusz in the business.

Full-load transport services throughout Europe

Walmar is now a modern transport company with 35 tractor units and 40 semi-trailers, including curtain-sided and refrigerated vehicles with FRC and ATP certification. All vehicles comply with the Euro 6 emissions standard. The range of services includes full load transport throughout Europe: standard transport as well as refrigerated transport, ADR transport and express deliveries. “If necessary, we can organise a lorry on the very same day,” explains Mateusz. “In some cases, we swap trailers between vehicles to ensure that the freight continues its journey.”

Walmar’s main routes run to Germany, Switzerland, France and the Benelux countries

– supplemented by transport services to Spain, Greece and the UK. Germany is the most important market: its strong industrial base offers a wealth of transport opportunities, and its geographical proximity to Poland allows drivers to return home regularly. Switzerland was added to the portfolio rather by chance: “One of our customers was having difficulty finding a haulier for this route,” explains Mateusz. “We carried out one transport, then another, and over time it became a regular route.” Today, Switzerland is one of Walmar’s most important, but also most demanding markets, particularly when it comes to transporting high-value goods such as electronics.

Reliability and punctuality

The company’s clients include logistics firms, manufacturers and retailers, many of whom operate in the cosmetics and electronics sectors. These are sectors where reliability and punctuality are not optional, but essential. Walmar guarantees companies complete control over the transport process. All vehicles are GPS-monitored, and the location of the freight is tracked in real time.

To maintain the fleet, Walmar operates its own workshop. This ensures minimal downtime, and if a vehicle requires attention, the team can respond quickly. What sets this family-run business apart from larger competitors? “We don’t work strictly according to set procedures,” says Mateusz. “When a problem arises, we focus on finding a solution rather than explaining why something isn’t possible.” →

From -25 to +25 degrees: With Krone refrigerated trailers, Walmar reliably maintains the temperature on Europe’s roads.



+ PROFILE

The Polish haulage company **Walmar**, founded in 1997, offers full truckload (FTL), refrigerated, dangerous goods (ADR) and express transport, as well as pallet exchange – primarily in Germany, Switzerland, France, the Benelux countries, Spain, Greece and the UK.

Latest generation: The Walmar team picked up the new Cool Liner directly from the Krone plant in Lübtheen.

The short decision-making processes of a family business are a key advantage here: “We’re available round the clock, and there’s always someone on hand who can respond immediately.” Service quality is a must for Walmar. “We believe that customers these days would rather pay more for a well-organised transport service than opt for something cheaper that lacks reliability,” Mateusz is convinced. This approach also extends to sustainability. The fleet is regularly renewed, drivers receive training in fuel-efficient driving, and routes are planned efficiently to avoid unnecessary mileage.

Long-standing partnership with Krone

Technology also plays an important role. In addition to GPS monitoring, Walmar is increasingly relying on modern tools and automation. “We see artificial intelligence playing an increasingly important role in transport planning and data analysis,” says Mateusz. This shows that the company is not just thinking about the here and now.

Krone has been working closely with Walmar as a long-standing partner for more than two decades, ensuring that the vehicles remain a constant feature of the fleet. “We have tested other brands, but Krone best meets our requirements,” says Mateusz. “The trailers are robust, well-built and reliable in daily use.”

The Walmar team recently collected a new Cool Liner from the Krone factory in Lübtheen – a vehicle from the latest generation. It builds on tried-and-tested technology: the



Modern fleet: 35 tractor-trailers and 40 Krone semi-trailers form the backbone of Walmar.

side walls and roof continue to be made of large-format foam-filled panels, whose homogeneous structure guarantees a stable K-value over many years and thus reliable temperature control. Where the body previously reached its limits during intensive loading and unloading, Krone has integrated a newly designed inner layer at the transition from wall to roof and floor, making it significantly more durable.

Reinforced rear section and new cross-member design

The rear section has also been reinforced with more robust hinge blocks and new sealing elements. These are particularly well-suited to withstanding the manoeuvring of forklift trucks. The result is a sandwich construction that can withstand even more weight.

Before the new model was allowed on the road, it had to prove itself over many months at Krone’s own test centre in Lingen. Mateusz Wdowiński is convinced: “The vehicle is very well built and designed for practical use. The insulation quality is excellent, and the specifications are always to the highest standard.”

Vehicles such as the new Cool Liner are in line with the course Walmar has set for itself. The company does not seek to grow at any cost, but rather to grow sustainably.

The family-run business has set clear goals for the future: expanding its fleet, strengthening customer relationships and maintaining the highest service standards. No more, no less. Because Walmar only promises what it can deliver – and delivers on those promises. [↪](#)



The trailer as a data supplier

As part of the **CargoTrailSense_AI** research project, Dortmund University of Applied Sciences and Arts has turned semi-trailers into veritable mobile measurement laboratories and is investigating, in particular, the distribution of loads.

If cargo is distributed incorrectly in the trailer and axles are overloaded, both vehicles and roads suffer. The CargoTrailSense_AI research project analyses how load distribution and axle loads can be detected and optimised directly on the trailer whilst the vehicle is in motion.

Mobile measurement through sensor fusion

CargoTrailSense_AI, funded by the Federal Ministry of Transport under the mFUND programme, combines data from multiple sensors. These include tyre pressure and temperature, air-suspension pressure and suspension movement, as well as GPS and acceleration data, to create a precise picture of the vehicle's condition.

In collaboration with industry partners such as Krone and the project partners Log4-Consult GmbH, Impaqed Products, Stadthafen Lünen, OKIT GmbH, ContiTech Luftfedersysteme GmbH, F&T LaSiSe gGmbH and BPW Bergische Achsen KG, the technology has been tested in real-world conditions on various trailer models.

The system is highly accurate: following a one-off calibration for the respective trailer, it records the load distribution so precisely that deviations from the scales are less than 1 per cent. For haulage companies, this means less waiting time at stationary checkpoints, continuous load monitoring and timely warnings of overloading.

The research clearly shows that anyone who believes they are already making optimal use of their load space is often mistaken. "In the case of a haulage contractor transporting steel, we found that they could have loaded two to three more coils per journey," reports Marius Jones, a research assistant in the Department of Mechanical Engineering at the university. The research team also sees potential for predictive maintenance: changes in sensor data can provide early warning of tyre wear, brake problems or bearing damage, before breakdowns occur.

Detecting potholes, protecting bridges

The sensor technology also monitors road conditions as a secondary function. Conventional

weighing systems provide static weight data. However, the extent to which roads actually wear depends on the dynamic axle loads whilst driving. This is precisely where CargoTrailSense_AI kicks in. The official assessment by the authorities is carried out via 'Condition Monitoring and Assessment' (ZEB): specially equipped measurement vehicles detect cracks, ruts and unevenness on the road surface with high precision.

Professor Yves Rosefort, project manager of CargoTrailSense_AI, explains: "Our system will never measure as accurately as a ZEB vehicle, but it can detect damage to the asphalt at an earlier stage. If this isn't repaired in time, it will end up costing even more."

The path to market readiness lies in cost efficiency: "Sensors and microcontrollers are getting cheaper every year," says Rosefort. The research team also suggests offering freight forwarders toll discounts as an incentive if they make road condition data available to the general public. The grand vision: the lorry evolves from a simple delivery vehicle into a data provider, thereby enabling new business models for the entire industry.

The next steps are the scientific publication and the industrialisation of the system. By the end of 2026, a spin-off from the university is set to be established to bring the technology to the roads. ↩



Dr Yves Rosefort,
Professor of
Mechanical
Engineering at
Dortmund University
of Applied Sciences



Marius Jones,
research assistant
in the Department
of Mechanical
Engineering at
Dortmund University
of Applied Sciences





The connector

Katharina Kreutzer founded Muvn, a platform that matches unused road freight capacity with transport demand to fill a gap.

There are 60 million registered vehicles in Germany, and in most of them one thing is along for the ride above all: a lot of empty space. Katharina Kreutzer wants to change that. To do so, the founder and CEO of mobility start-up Muvn, together with her two co-founders Massimo Sabatino and Emre Aydin, has built a platform that connects private individuals and logistics providers with spare capacity and people who want to transport something that won't fit in a parcel, is particularly sensitive, or is urgent. The idea: if someone is already driving from Hamburg to Munich, then perhaps they can also take a washing machine, a bicycle, or Grandma's antique wardrobe along the way. The app has been on the market for a year; it has been downloaded around 88,000 times so far and has 15,000 active users per month.

Ride-sharing for goods

Katharina Kreutzer previously worked in procurement at the Edeka Group and there became deeply involved in logistics processes. "I thought a lot in terms of capacity and efficiency," she says. When she then wanted to move house, she became aware of a problem: "I contacted 20 logistics providers, but got hardly any replies. The prices were unclear." She got the idea of asking friends whether they could simply take something along for her on their journeys. "Most of the time the answer was: I'd be very happy to – I'm driving there anyway." So the core business idea was born.

What Muvn transports is, for logistics providers, "the weeds of logistics": items for which traditional freight forwarders are not an option. For example, a small-ads purchase that won't fit in a parcel, or a television without its original packaging. "No one wants to deal with your washing machine or your sofa," she says. "But at the same time there is capacity sitting unused

on the roads and we bring it together with the people who need exactly that." Senders could save around 80% of the usual costs, while private drivers can earn a little extra on the side.

From private boot space to a professional platform

Muvn started with private cars. Soon, logistics companies and haulage firms also got in touch, wanting to offer their spare capacity via the platform. In February 2026, Muvn Pro was launched and within a very short time almost 170 logistics companies registered. Weekly growth most recently stood at around 55 percent.

"The demand is there," says Kreutzer, "on both sides." The algorithm behind the platform learns from every transport. The more data, the more precise the matching between supply and demand. In future, logistics companies will be able to connect their fleets directly via an API interface – fully or partially automated, depending on their level of digital maturity.

There are also solutions for companies that still work with Excel lists. Internally, Muvn follows an AI-first approach: many processes are already automated. "As a young company we have the advantage that we don't have to break up old ways of working, but can start straight away with new ones."

Entrepreneurship from an early age

Kreutzer comes from an entrepreneurial family. Her parents and grandparents run businesses in catering, hospitality, and the meat trade. "I grew up asking guests after school how their last evening was and whether they had a good time," she recalls. "Interacting with customers, gathering feedback, and staying close to the product – for me, that's still second nature today."

She uses the app herself, offers journeys, and transports items. She also regularly calls →



Muvn lets you arrange rides for items and connects senders with people who have room in their cars.

+ KATHARINA KREUTZER

Katharina Kreutzer is co-founder and CEO of the mobility start-up Muvn in Hamburg. She comes from a Bavarian entrepreneurial family, completed vocational training as a retail sales assistant, and studied business and retail management. Previously she worked as a buyer and founded the start-up Boomerang for reusable packaging.

customers personally to ask how they experienced a shipment. “We’re living in a time when hardly anyone wants to talk on the phone anymore,” says Kreutzer. “But customers are often pleased, enjoy sharing their experiences, and we learn something from every conversation.” From her family story she has also taken away one insight: “If you don’t eat the dishes in your own restaurant, you can’t know what they taste like.” She therefore wants to align the product consistently with customers’ needs, gathering feedback so her team can offer exactly the features and services users want.

The average age of the Muvn team is just under 30. Katharina Kreutzer is 27 years old and was already included, at 23, in Forbes’ “30 Under 30” list. After all, Muvn is not her first company: previously she founded Boomerang, a start-up that develops sustainable reusable packaging for e-commerce and logistics. The packs and boxes made from recycled

polypropylene can be reused up to 50 times. Customers pay a deposit and send the empty packaging back free of charge, folded down to A4 size. In 2023, the company was honored with the “German Packaging Award,” followed by winning the “States’ Start-up Contest” in 2024.

Muvn, too, has already received several awards, including the “CNS Transport Award”, and is among the 25 Mobility Trailblazers. “That this recognition comes from the mobility and logistics sectors makes me particularly proud,” says Kreutzer. “Originally, I was worried that we might not be properly noticed in either field because we sit right between them. But we keep being told that it’s precisely this combination that’s needed.”

A transport network for all of Europe

The entrepreneur is now part of the jury for innovation funding at federal level and, together with the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs, has analysed how the Muvn model could work in other European countries. The vision is ambitious: Muvn is to become the digital transport network for all of Europe. “We’re not solving a German problem,” says Kreutzer. “Across Europe, everyone suffers from unused road capacity.” Demand is further driven by the re-commerce boom. While traditional e-commerce is weakening, trade in second-hand goods is growing and with it the need for flexible, affordable transport for items that don’t fit into a standard parcel.

“We want to create a network that makes transport accessible, affordable and more sustainable for everyone,” says Kreutzer. What drives her? “Actually solving a problem. Seeing every day that it works. That’s hugely motivating.”

PHOTOS: MUVN



A column by Bernard Krone

What's already available



Potential does not mean a lack of something, but rather an indication that more is possible than we are currently utilising. Yet we often focus first on what is missing: resources, time, skilled staff, planning certainty. Especially in times of uncertainty, our perspective can quickly narrow. However, progress and innovation rarely arise from perfect conditions, but from what is already there.

In companies, this often reveals itself in processes that “have always been done this way” and are rarely questioned. Employees have skills that remain largely untapped in everyday work, while technologies are often only partially used. The biggest opportunities therefore frequently lie not outside the business, but within it – hidden in plain sight.

Thus, the first step is not a major strategic shift, but rather a change of perspective. Those

who begin to look more closely discover new potential in existing processes, in teams or in previously untapped data. Rather than constantly creating something new, it is more a matter of better understanding what already exists and developing it in a targeted manner.

“Those who begin to look more closely discover new potential in existing processes.”

Potential does not unfold by itself. It requires attention, openness and at times, the courage to approach things differently. It is not an abstract idea, but a concrete invitation to turn possibilities into reality. [↪](#)

