

REPORT

Navigating the squeeze on the automotive frontline

Nordic Dealer Executive Outlook 2030

A report on how Nordic automotive retail executives expect electrification, changing customer behaviour, and shifting OEM relationships to reshape dealer economics by 2030.

Nordic dealers remain essential, but the economics that have supported them are being dismantled

The Nordic region is the most advanced testbed for electric automotive retail. Norway has already reached the post-transition stage, Denmark is close behind, Finland is accelerating, and Sweden remains the contested market. Across all four markets, the direction is clear: electrification is no longer a future scenario, but an operating condition.

This report draws on in-depth interviews with senior executives from leading dealer and importer groups in Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Finland.

The executives we spoke to leave little doubt that the dealer remains essential in that environment. Customers still need reassurance, test drives, technology explanation, and local support when something goes wrong, but the economics that made the traditional dealership work are being dismantled. Competition is high, new-vehicle margins are under pressure, residual-value risk matters more, and battery-electric vehicles (BEVs) reduce the conventional workshop income that historically helped cover fixed costs.

The result is a transformation challenge rather than a disappearing dealer model. Dealers must rebuild the model while continuing to run the core business exceptionally well, because site consistency, customer satisfaction, staff retention, stock discipline, pricing, and workshop throughput remain the foundation of the business and the precondition for transformation. OEMs still need viable local networks that can represent the brand and support customers, while shrinking those networks to fewer, stronger dealer groups operating fewer, more purposeful locations. The critical question is whether both sides can strengthen the core, simplify the network, and build the next model while they still have the capacity to invest.

Traditional dealer model		Emerging dealer model
Transaction led Value captured at the point of sale	>	Lifecycle-led Value earned across ownership, from financing to re-sale
Two pillars New-car margin and conventional service	>	Two pillars, expanded New aftermarket offerings cover EV-specific needs
Discovery-led footprint Dense showroom network built for discovery	>	Purpose-led footprint Fewer locations built for confirmation and service
Information gatekeeper Salesperson as gatekeeper and negotiator	>	Advisor and educator Salesperson as product expert and technology educator
Inherited loyalty Loyalty inherited with the vehicle brand	>	Earned loyalty Loyalty earned through service, responsiveness, and relevance
Reactive contact Customer contact reactive after delivery	>	Proactive engagement Data-enabled engagement between purchases
Top-down terms Terms, standards, and risk set by the OEM	>	Shared and local terms Economics, data, and risk shared and locally informed

Exhibit 1: The traditional and the emerging dealer model.

Executive summary

Five conclusions define the Nordic dealer outlook to 2030

1. The product shift to electrified and software-defined is resetting automotive retail

BEVs are the clear direction of travel, although the Nordic markets are at different stages: Norway has completed the transition, Denmark is close, Finland is accelerating, and Sweden is contested. The deeper shift is the product itself. BEVs change ownership economics, monthly-cost logic, residual-value exposure, and conventional service needs, while software adds new sales, service, and capability demands before it creates proven revenue.

2. The traditional dealer profit engine is being squeezed from both sides

New-vehicle margins are under pressure across all four markets. Tighter OEM terms, oversupply, price transparency, challenger competition, and the higher underlying price of BEVs all weaken the front end, while conventional aftersales declines as the electric share of the parc grows. Both pillars remain essential, and new profit pools can complement the core, but none has yet replaced traditional workshop income.

3. The customer shift to digital discovery increases the importance of purposeful physical interaction

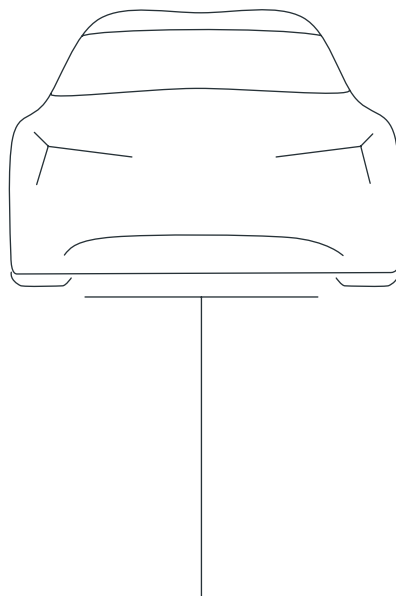
Customers increasingly discover, compare, and shortlist vehicles online, and the comparison is often framed around monthly cost rather than sticker price. But most still want reassurance, a test drive, technology explanation, and a local partner when something goes wrong. The dealer's role shifts from information gatekeeper to confidence centre, with a footprint built around digital discovery, physical confirmation, and ownership support.

4. Dealer–OEM relationships must become collaborative and locally informed

Executives describe pressure, risk, and investment demands flowing predominantly towards the dealer. Viable dealer economics, local decision authority, shared customer data, and stable operating models are prerequisites for a functioning network, and dealers' current negotiating leverage, while real, does not remove their dependence on strong brands and supply.

5. Transformation begins with stronger fundamentals, and is its own capability to build

Dealers must improve execution consistency and strengthen the existing core, build lifecycle management and data integration, and scale selected new capabilities to stay relevant – all at pace. However, transformation capacity is itself a capability to build. Many dealer organisations are too lean to manage this properly today, which makes the transformation muscle – the ability to run the current business while continuously developing the next one – one of the most important capabilities to build before the old economics erode further.



The dealer is not disappearing, but neither is its future guaranteed. Dealers and OEMs that redesign the model while they still have the capacity to invest can remain central to the customer. Those that wait for the old economics to return may find that the market has already moved on.

1. The product has changed: BEVs and software reset what dealers sell and support

The first shift is the product itself. BEVs change the economics of ownership, make residual value central to affordability, and reduce conventional service work. Software turns the vehicle into a more complex product to explain, update, and support. Together, these changes reshape both sides of dealer economics.

1.1 BEVs are here, but the Nordic markets are at different stages

The broad direction is similar across the Nordics, but the pace – and the pressure points along the way – differ materially by market. Norway is the post-transition benchmark, with passenger-car sales effectively fully electric. Denmark is the rapid-transition case, helped by a registration-tax system that makes combustion vehicles materially more expensive. Finland is accelerating, and is around the half-way mark. Sweden is the contested market: executives agree on the direction, but not on the pace or ceiling, especially while hybrids, cold-weather concerns, political ambiguity, and long-distance use cases remain relevant.

Across markets, executives distinguish between incentives and penalties. Purchase incentives can accelerate demand, but they are often absorbed into pricing, discounts, or OEM economics. Penalties on combustion vehicles more directly change behaviour by shifting the relative monthly cost. The pressure points are the same across markets – affordability, residual values, charging confidence, product availability, and the timing of aftersales decline – but they arrive at different times.

At the same time, the BEV transition has lowered barriers to market entry and fuelled a rapid expansion in the number of brands competing for the same customers. Compared with combustion vehicles, EVs are mechanically less complex to develop and manufacture, while modern software capabilities can be built or sourced at comparatively low cost. This has enabled new entrants to shorten vehicle development cycles and bring credible products to market more quickly. The Nordics, and Norway in particular, have become an attractive proving ground, supported by long-standing government incentives and high consumer adoption. The resulting influx of vehicles from both challengers and established OEMs has intensified competition and helped trigger an increasingly aggressive price war.



1.2 BEVs change product economics and ownership risk

BEVs change the sale as customers increasingly buy on monthly cost rather than sticker price, which makes residual value a product-economic issue, not only a finance issue: the vehicle's future value determines today's affordability and decides who carries the risk. In leasing-heavy markets such as Sweden and Denmark, weak or volatile BEV residual values therefore affect both conversion and profitability.

The same product shift also changes what the dealer must support after delivery. BEVs need fewer fluids, fewer parts, fewer mechanical hours, and fewer conventional service events, but they create demand for tyres and wheels, SMART repair (small to medium area repair technology/techniques), diagnostics, battery, high-voltage, and advanced driver assistance systems (ADAS) capability. These activities matter, but they do not yet compensate at scale for the conventional work being displaced. The implication is structural: dealers will need to rebuild aftersales around new EV-related needs while managing greater residual-value risk and weaker conventional workshop income.

1.3 Software adds work, skills, and capacity before it adds revenue

Where battery-electric is one side of the product shift, software-defined is the other. Software-defined vehicles raise the bar for both sales and service. Salespeople need to become product experts and technology educators, because customers often arrive after extensive online research and may know the specification better than the salesperson. Handovers become longer educational sessions. In the workshop, technicians need software, diagnostics, high-voltage, and ADAS skills, and several executives expect fewer but more specialised technicians.

For now, software appears to create operational load before it creates reliable revenue. One group with a large electric parc reports that a BEV may enter the workshop several times a year for software-related issues. Visits that cannot be resolved through over-the-air updates consume workshop capacity and service bays, while OEM compensation often covers only a fraction of the cost. Software quality and remote-update capability may reduce this burden over time, but the interviews currently position software primarily as a capability, capacity, and compensation challenge rather than a proven revenue pool.



2. The two-sided squeeze – rebuilding dealer economics

The product shift creates a two-sided squeeze on dealer economics. Dealers are unlikely to replace the old model with one new profit pool. They need a disciplined portfolio: a viable core, complemented by EV- and lifecycle-related extensions and supported by scale advantages.

2.1 Sales and aftersales both remain essential, but neither can carry the model alone

New-vehicle sales still matter because they start the customer lifecycle and provide the base profit that funds transformation. Aftersales still matters because it carries fixed costs, creates loyalty, and keeps the customer relationship alive. But both sides are weaker than before: new-car margins are squeezed by monthly-cost competition, pricing pressure, and tighter OEM terms, while conventional workshop income declines as the electric share of the car parc grows. The answer is therefore to rebuild the economics as a portfolio rather than to bet on one replacement pool.

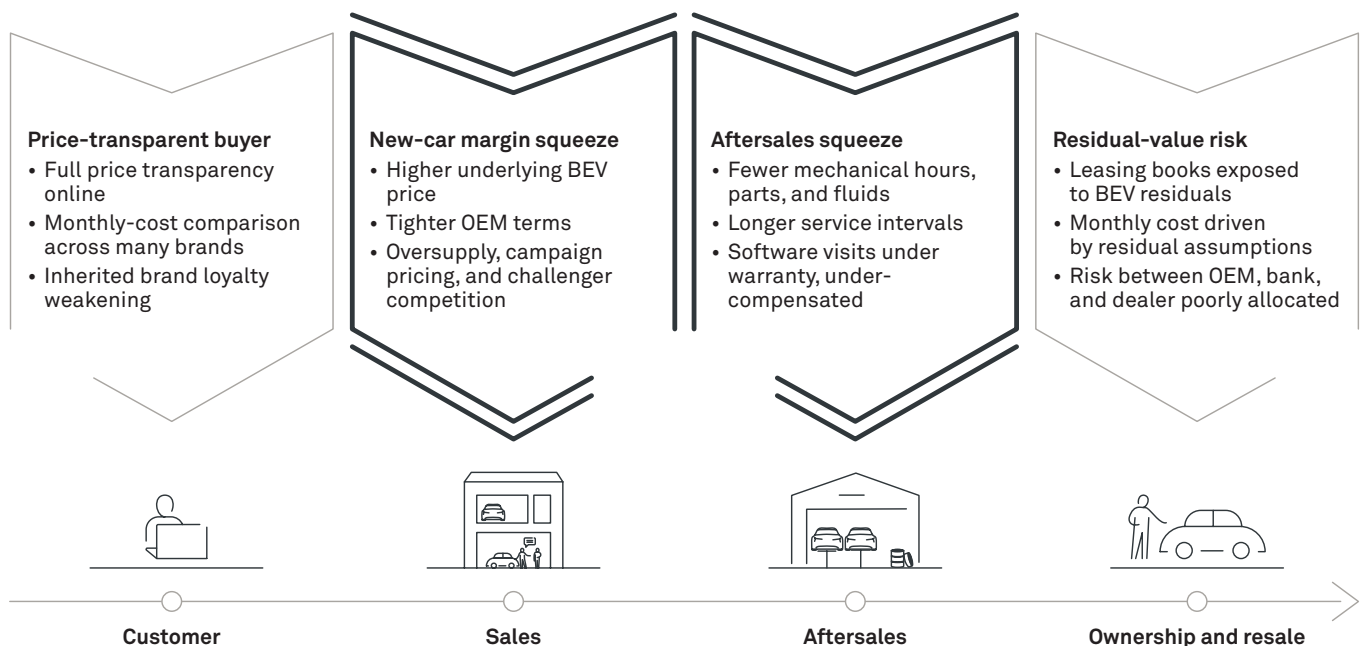


Exhibit 2: The two-sided squeeze on dealer economics. Summary of interview evidence; categorisation is Implement's.

2.2 The future profit model combines a viable core with EV- and lifecycle-related extensions

We group the profit pools discussed by executives into two reinforcing layers with different roles and levels of maturity: a viable core and a set of EV- and lifecycle-related extensions. The core must continue to fund the business and the transition. The extensions must rebuild aftersales relevance, create additional value across ownership, and strengthen the customer relationship over time. They are not equally proven, but both are necessary to rebuild dealer economics.

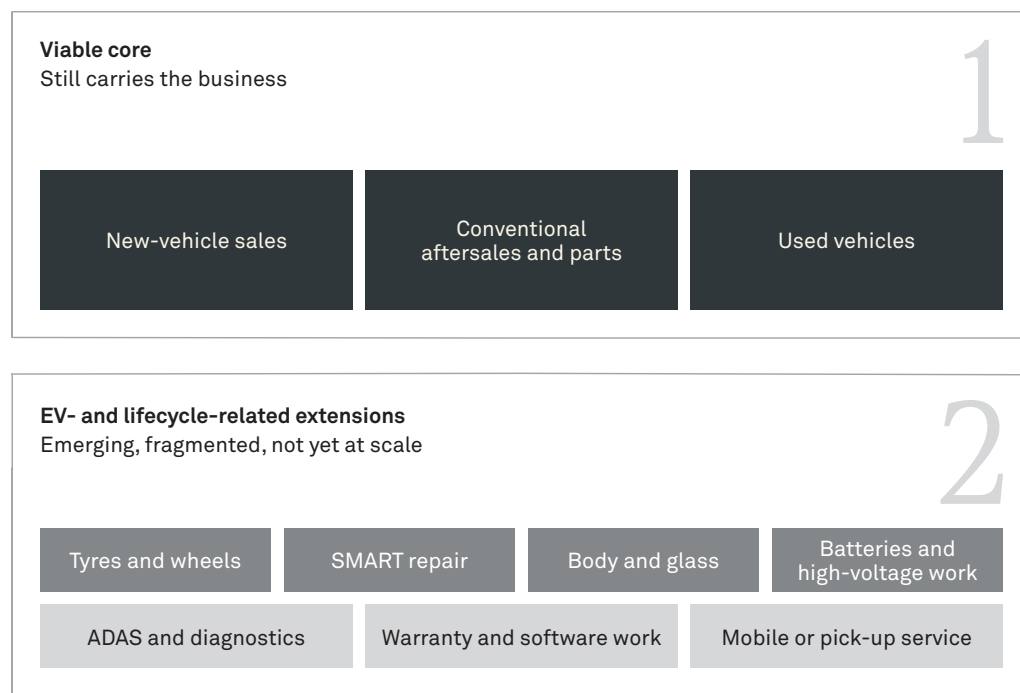


Exhibit 3: Two layers of the future profit model. Categorisation is Implement's interpretation. Inclusion does not imply a pool is proven at scale.

1. Protect the viability of the core

New vehicles, conventional aftersales, and used vehicles remain indispensable even as their relative economics change. The base profit on new cars funds the transition; the workshop, even shrinking, still carries most groups' fixed costs; and used vehicles are the pool executives most consistently expect to gain in importance. Protecting this core is less about defending old margins than about running it well: throughput, stock discipline, pricing, site consistency, and customer satisfaction. It also increasingly requires managing the customer across the ownership lifecycle rather than transaction by transaction. A closer, more continuous relationship can increase dealer loyalty, retention, and upselling possibilities, helping the dealer secure the next vehicle sale and keep service and repair work within the group, promoting the viability of the core.

2. Develop EV- and lifecycle-related service extensions

This is where the sober optimism sits. Executives in heavily electrified groups report that tyres and wheels have become a large business in just three years and that SMART repair should become a profit pool within a few years; one Swedish group offers cosmetic repair completed in about three hours without a replacement car. Battery, high-voltage, and ADAS work is needed whether or not it is lucrative, and software-related workshop volume must be managed deliberately with OEM compensation in mind. Alongside these EV-related services, dealers can develop lifecycle offerings across financing, maintenance, repair, replacement, and resale. These services create additional revenue pools while giving the dealer more reasons to remain relevant between vehicle purchases and build a closer, more continuous customer relationship. Each extension is real; none is yet at the scale of the income it must replace.

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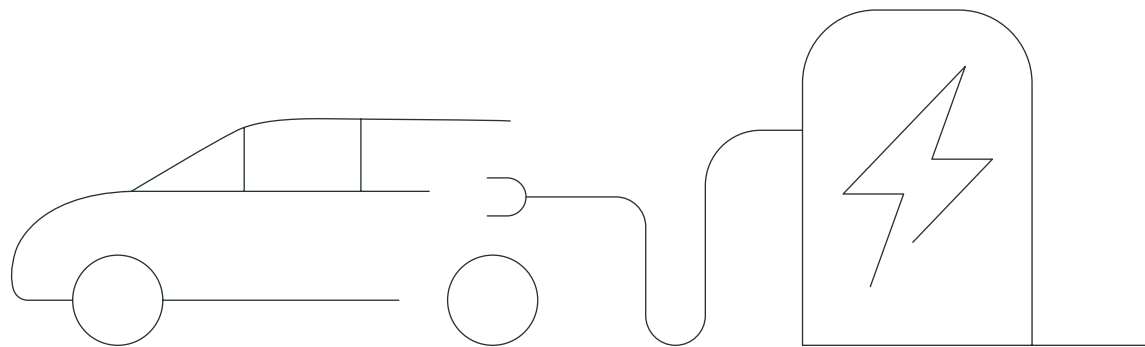


2.3 Used cars and residual values become a core commercial discipline

Used vehicles are becoming more important, but the real capability is not simply selling used cars. Europe increasingly operates as one interconnected market, with grey imports and re-exports moving vehicles, prices, and residual-value effects across national borders. This creates a new playing field in which dealers must manage sourcing, pricing, certification, cross-border flows, return risk, and remarketing as one commercial system. Used-BEV economics still differ materially by market: Swedish dealers carry residual-value risk on private leases and face oversupply of returned BEVs, while Denmark has recently seen used-BEV values recover as re-exports stopped and demand improved. Norway treats used cars as business as usual, and Finland's strong used-BEV values appear driven by fuel costs and household affordability pressure. The common theme is that used vehicles and residual values are no longer a separate back-office activity; they are central to the monthly-cost equation, portfolio risk, and the capabilities required to compete in an increasingly European market.

2.4 Margin pressure leads to scale and consolidation

Margin pressure also changes the ownership logic of automotive retail. Smaller groups face the same capability demands as larger groups but with less overhead, less digital capacity, and less ability to absorb residual-value shocks. This pressure is already reflected in a growing number of smaller Nordic dealer bankruptcies in recent years. At the same time, OEMs are reducing network complexity and prefer fewer, stronger partners. This combination is accelerating dealer consolidation and has led to an increase in large international entrants from the wider European market and beyond. For many family-owned dealer groups, this raises a generational ownership question: whether to invest, partner, acquire, sell, or gradually exit. Consolidation is not only a question of ownership; it is an economic response to a model that increasingly rewards scale, shared services, professional management, and transformation capacity.



3. The customer journey is changing, and the footprint must follow

Digital channels increasingly shape discovery and comparison, while physical retail remains important for reassurance, experience, test drives, and problem-solving. The dealership must move from being an information centre to a confidence centre, supported by a more purposeful footprint.

3.1 The customer arrives further down the funnel

Executives in every market describe the same starting point. “People do 99% of the homework at home,” one executive said. “They just need to be confirmed in their own decision when they arrive at the dealer.” Others put the online research at eighteen hours or more and describe customers using AI to compare options and send quote requests across the country. Customers compare many more brands and frame decisions around monthly cost, technology, and features: “Now the customer has 20 choices. The power is on the customer’s side, not the dealer’s.” Younger buyers are described as being less attached to inherited brands and more attentive to software, features, and digital comparison, while older customers retain stronger brand loyalty.

3.2 The dealer moves from information gatekeeper to source of confidence

If discovery has moved online, the salesperson’s job shifts from holding information to helping the customer use it: the salesperson effectively becomes needs diagnostician, product expert, technology educator, adviser, and, above all, source of reassurance. That advice extends beyond the vehicle itself. Customers also need help navigating financing structures, insurance options, and the choice of bank or finance provider, where the dealer can simplify a complex decision and provide the guidance that is difficult to replicate online. The test drive is where leads convert, especially for unfamiliar brands, and the handover has become the moment the customer gets to know the car. Both become more important, not less. This is why the interviews do not support the disappearance of physical retail. Executives in all four markets expect most customers to want a visit before buying in 2030; very few rated a mostly online purchase as likely. Even one of those who did asks: “If we allow everything to happen on the internet, how do we meet our customers? How do we look them in the eyes and convince them?” Another frames the balance: “The digital side has been overestimated and the analogue side underestimated. The truth lies somewhere in between.”

3.3 The customer journey becomes digital, physical, and lifecycle-based

Digital discovery, physical confirmation, and digitally managed ownership are complementary stages rather than competing channels. Dealers are strongest in the second and weakest in the third: customer-360 capability is described as very low across groups, and customer-level profitability is very rarely measured. AI could strengthen lead management, personalisation, and proactive lifecycle engagement, but only where dealers first connect their fragmented customer data and systems.

The customer relationship is also becoming more shared between OEM and dealer. Digital and physical touchpoints between the parties across the lifecycle further signify the importance of coherent brand representation and lifecycle management of the customer.

How customer and usage insight is split between OEM and dealer

Usage data flows to the OEM, the customer relationship sits with the dealer, and little is shared between them.

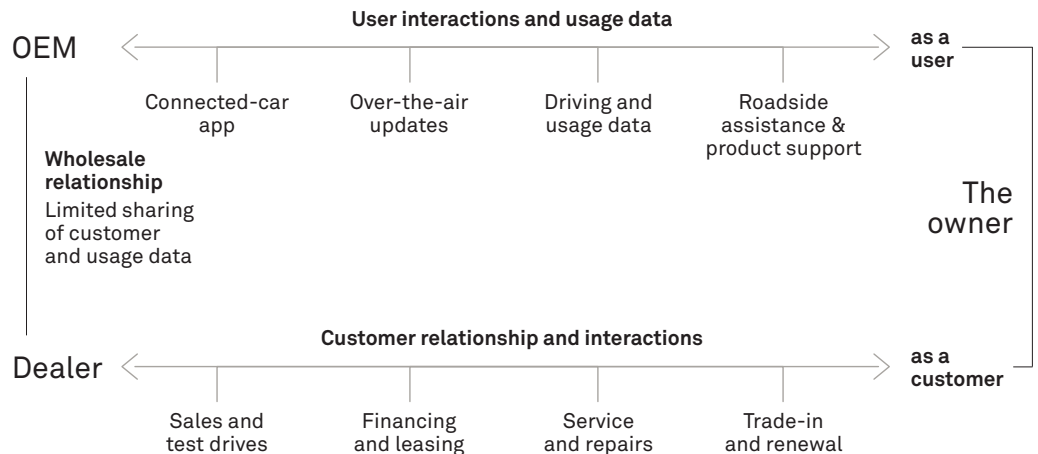


Exhibit 4: One owner, two separate relationships

3.4 Weaker brand loyalty creates an open contest for customer trust

Executives describe OEM brand loyalty as weakening, particularly among younger customers. As one executive put it, "It's now more a tech game than a brand game." The growing presence of challenger brands is accelerating this shift by broadening choice and weakening customers' inherited attachment to established marques. Yet, challengers have not necessarily built durable loyalty of their own. Rather than transferring allegiance from established brands to new ones, competition is opening a wider contest for customer trust. This trust does not automatically transfer to the dealer either. Executives want their groups to become trusted local partners but acknowledge that dealer loyalty must be earned through responsiveness, service availability, credible advice, and continued relevance after delivery. Workshop responsiveness is decisive, and the warning is sharp: "If we cannot take care of the customer's problems within a week or two, then we have a huge problem."

Continued relevance after delivery is the weak point. Executives describe a recurring loss of customer contact once the vehicle has been sold, despite broad agreement that the commercial relationship should continue throughout ownership. Fragmented systems compound the problem: each brand operates its own customer relationship management system (CRM), separate from the dealer management system (DMS) used to run the business, leaving dealers without a consistent view of the customer. "It's chaos." Managing the ownership lifecycle systematically therefore depends on integrated data and the right to use it.

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3.5 “We need to be more like IKEA” – the future footprint has fewer locations with clearer purposes

A network built for customer discovery is too dense and too showroom-heavy for a journey in which customers arrive largely informed, and executives expect it to shrink materially. Danish executives make the case most forcefully. One calls the Danish model structurally broken, with too many dealerships that are too small, and argues that a customer who has decided online will happily drive an hour to see the exact car they are looking for: “We need to be more like IKEA.” Another noted that satisfaction and profitability both rose when scaling down locations: “IKEA can have people drive 80–100 kilometres to buy a small shelf, and we should be within 30 kilometres. It makes no sense at all.” However, while dealers broadly agree that consolidation is needed, there is a stand-off over who moves first: cutting a network overnight hands share to competitors still present on every corner. As sites consolidate, future sites should have explicit purposes:

Brand-building locations

Flagships and pop-ups in city centres and malls suit brands that are still building awareness but sell almost nothing: “You don’t sell any cars from a mall showroom. Not at all.” Their cost and funding logic must be explicit, and one Swedish executive expects shopping-centre showroom concepts to almost entirely disappear.

Sales and test-drive locations

Fewer, larger, and better-stocked sites, with sales and test drive kept together, can serve customers who will travel if the exact car is there. Showrooms themselves are shrinking: one executive describes buildings designed to requirements from 20 or 30 years ago: “If you have 2,000 square metres and 15 cars to show, you don’t need that.” On corporate identity (CI), the OEM’s standards for signage, fittings, and facility design, most dealers argue that requirements are too extensive, change too frequently, and often focus on small details with limited customer value. One executive argues that “Human capital matters more than what kind of sofa you have,” while another believes the physical experience must keep developing, with OEM co-funding.

Delivery and handover

Longer, educational handovers require time, capability, and a deliberate location model. Pre-delivery inspection can be centralised: one group is doing so to cut vehicle dwell time at dealerships from roughly three weeks to three days, and handover need not happen where the car was sold.

Service and repair

Service may require greater density than sales, but electrification, longer intervals, remote updates, and mobile formats will gradually change that requirement. The open issues are software-visit volume, technician skills, and retention.

The purpose-led footprint is not a dealer-only design choice. OEM decisions on customer data, standards, products, pricing, compensation, and distribution determine whether dealers can make the new customer journey and location model economically workable, which makes the dealer–OEM relationship the next part of the model to reset.

4. Resetting the dealer–OEM relationship

Dealers and OEMs remain mutually dependent, but the current relationship often transfers pressure and risk down the system. A viable future model requires transparent economics, local authority, shared customer access, proportionate investment, and stable distribution arrangements.

4.1 Shared dependence, unequal pressure

Dealers and OEMs are mutually dependent: OEMs need a viable local network to represent the brand and support customers, while dealers depend on competitive products, strong brands, and reliable supply. Yet the relationship is not experienced as balanced. Executives describe margin pressure, investment requirements, and operating-model changes flowing predominantly towards the dealer. “If I’m in a crisis, I would do the opposite of what they’re doing,” one executive said. “Why would you not team up to get stronger, instead of pushing pressure down the system?” The commercial consequence is direct: a dealer whose economics are continually weakened cannot invest adequately in staffing, service, or customer experience. As one executive who also sits in the importer chair put it, “I would secure the dealer economy. We are simply still squeezing the dealers too much.” The core message is therefore not that dealers should be protected from pressure, but that viable dealer economics are a prerequisite for OEM success, customer experience, and network resilience.

4.2 A workable partnership has seven requirements

Across countries and across importer and retail roles, the requirements executives describe for a workable partnership are strikingly consistent.

1. Secure viable dealer economics

Executives argue that the OEM offer should be simple and attractive enough for the dealer to be profitable from day one – ideally from the first car, not after several years of investment and ramp-up. A network unprofitable from the first car cannot staff, serve, or retain customers, and every vacated site is an entry point for a competitor.

2. Create transparency in both directions

Executives ask for openness on margins, targets, campaigns, inventory, residual-value exposure, and required investments. OEM information is described as being washed to fit internal agendas so that decision-makers never see the real picture, while dealer executives claim they try to be fully transparent towards OEMs.

3. Move decisions closer to the market

“They are in their offices somewhere, some not even in our market, and they think they know better how the market works,” one executive said. Others describe OEM decisions moving to headquarters, and instead ask for the frontline to decide within an agreed framework.

4. Treat the customer and data as shared assets

“Instead of negotiating about volumes, dealers should start negotiating about the right to contact the customer and the data.” Under agency and direct-sales models, the customer record is the asset most at risk, and without it, the customer lifecycle management is impossible.

5. Make standards proportionate and co-funded

“You can’t imagine how many tiles I have changed in showrooms around [my market].” Executives ask that CI money go into service, product availability, and trained people, and that requirements designed for dense central European networks be sized to Nordic volumes and distances.

6. Stabilise the operating model

Executives describe OEMs oscillating on various types of agency and wholesale models. Each switch costs the retail tier an investment and confuses customers; predictability in pricing and campaigns is worth more than any single tactical move.

7. Share inventory, pricing, and residual-value risk

Stock should be specified with local knowledge rather than from afar, pricing needs to be set right from the start in agency models where the dealer has no lever, and residual-value exposure needs to be allocated explicitly. Alongside risk, the operational basics must work: software quality, warranty processes, and parts logistics, since disappointed owners tell the ten people closest to them not to buy.



4.3 Challenger and established OEMs each offer only part of the answer

Most groups interviewed represent both established and challenger brands, so executives judge each by where it is the stronger partner. Challengers bring speed, frequent model launches, software capability, hunger, and, in some cases, simpler contracts with clear margins: “They simply come with a car, clean margins, we know what we’re earning.” Established OEMs bring established brands, mature parts and training systems, long-term market knowledge, and experience of dealer economics. Neither group has the complete answer. Challengers are often weaker in aftersales, parts, warranty, and logistics – “Spare parts? Stone Age.” – as well as local-market understanding and business-model stability. Established OEMs are often slower, more bureaucratic, and centralised, with outdated systems and heavy corporate-identity requirements. Individual OEMs differ, and the better partner depends on the time horizon: one executive sees established brands as the main source of profit for some time, while another expects selected challengers to offer the better five-year opportunity.

Established OEMs		Challenger OEMs	
Strengths	Weaknesses	Strengths	Weaknesses
• Brands that still evoke attachment • Mature parts, training, and process systems • Long-term market knowledge • Stronger aftersales infrastructure • Experience with dealer economics	• Bureaucracy and slow decisions • Outdated systems • Heavy CI and investment demands • Centralisation • Repeated organisational and model changes • Higher franchise and CI costs	• Speed and model cadence • Software orientation • Hunger and curiosity • Simpler systems and contracts • Entrepreneurial flexibility	• Weaker aftersales maturity • Parts and warranty challenges • Inconsistent logistics • Limited local-market understanding • Unstable business models
Neither group consistently combines both sets of strengths			

Exhibit 5: Challenger OEMs and established OEMs as partners, as described by executives. Generalisations drawn from the interviews; executives stress that individual OEMs in both groups differ.

4.4 Distribution models succeed when their economics are coherent

In the franchise or wholesale model, the dealer buys the car, sets the price, carries stock and residual risk, and owns the customer. A private importer adds a national tier between OEM and dealers; a national sales company (NSC) is that tier owned by the OEM. Under genuine agency, the OEM sets the price, owns the stock and the customer, and pays the dealer a commission. Non-genuine agency keeps fixed prices and OEM stock risk but leaves the dealer with more of the customer relationship and more commercial freedom.

The interviews judge these models by their operational consequences. One executive describes agency as removing control over pricing, local campaigns, and inventory, and some of the entrepreneurial charm of retailing, in return for predictable margins and lower capital binding. Some executives running a challenger brand under non-genuine agency find, to their surprise, that it works: with pricing removed, the salesperson’s job becomes explaining the product, which allows them to recruit differently skilled, lower-paid staff from other industries like consumer electronics. “One is the negotiator and the other one is the product expert.” Genuine agency is another matter: the OEM must price correctly from day one, because the dealer can do nothing if it does not, and stock specified from afar misses the local market. The most damaging feature of all is the switching itself.

On the distribution tier, views differ by market: Danish executives favour private importers because a small market with complex taxation requires local understanding; Swedish executives expect most established brands to retain NSCs; and one Norwegian executive points to examples of NSCs withdrawing from Norway. These perspectives indicate that market size and complexity influence the viable distribution tier, but the evidence does not support a universal answer. All these models can work under the right conditions. Problems arise when pricing, stock risk, customer ownership, accountability, and local authority are separated incoherently or changed repeatedly.

	Model	Price and campaigns	Stock and residual risk	Customer and data	Dealer role and capital
Outsourced to partners 	Private importer External importer runs full market operations	Importer sets national frame; dealers set transaction price	Importer and dealer	Importer and dealer; limited OEM access	Local expertise; entrepreneurial; extra tier adds cost to serve
	Franchise dealer with OEM sales company (NSC) OEM runs the national tier; independent dealers retail	NSC sets national frame; dealer sets transaction price	Mainly dealer, with some OEM share	Dealer, with growing OEM access	Entrepreneurial; high capital and risk; less local autonomy
	Non-genuine agency OEM fixes price; dealer keeps more commercial freedom	OEM fixes price; dealer can use margin to incentivise	Mainly OEM, with some dealer share	Dealer and OEM	Product-expert sales staff; more levers than genuine agency
	Genuine agency Dealer acts as the OEM's agent	OEM	OEM	OEM	Commission-based; low capital; no pricing lever
	Direct-to-consumer (D2C) OEM sells and serves the customer directly	OEM	OEM	OEM	No dealer role
Insourced by OEM					

Exhibit 6: Distribution models through their operational implications. Simplified; arrangements vary by brand and contract. Implement's synthesis of interview descriptions.

4.5 Dealer leverage is real, but uneven

Capable dealer groups have more choice than for many years as OEMs compete for strong networks. "If you come with ridiculous demands today, dealers will laugh at you and say go fish," one executive said. "It's the dealer's market now." Several executives expect margins to be pushed back up within five or six years out of necessity. However, leverage varies by country, brand, and dealer group, and it does not remove dealers' dependence on competitive products and supply: established brands remain where most profit sits, and losing a large partner would likely result in a two-to-three-year dip. Leverage is an opportunity to negotiate a better bargain, not a substitute for choosing partners well. The transformation agenda must therefore address both sides of the system: what dealers can control themselves, and what must be redesigned jointly with OEMs and importers.

A self-reinforcing loop in established vehicle retail

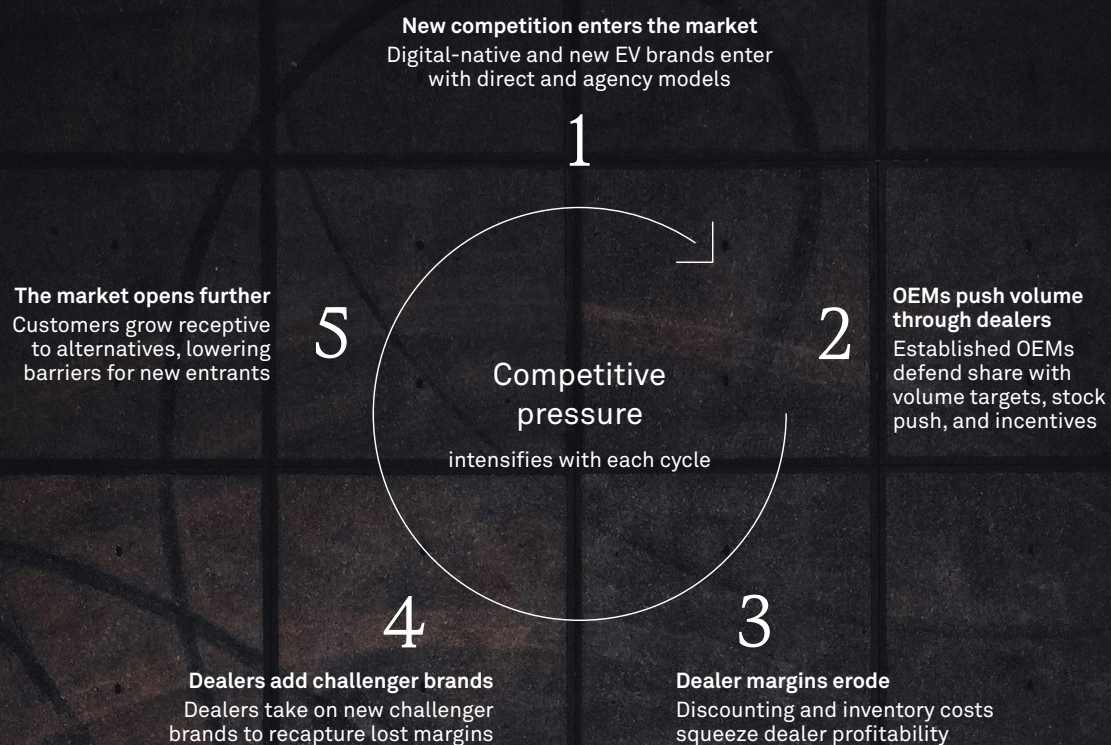


Exhibit 7: How the OEM–dealer model fuels its own competition



5. Turning the outlook into a transformation agenda

Nordic dealers remain essential, but preserving the current model is not an option. The groups best placed to adapt will use the core business to fund the next one and build transformation capacity before the old economics erode too far.

The industry has a capability mismatch at the centre of the transformation. OEMs often have the resources, but too often sit too far from the market – centralised, slow, and filtered through internal processes. Dealer groups have the market proximity, customer relationships, and operational reality, but many are too lean to build the capabilities now required. In simple terms: OEMs can be too far away, while dealers can be too thin. Transformation cannot be pushed down from headquarters or improvised locally site by site. It has to be built jointly, with clearer economics, shared data, local authority, and real transformation capacity on both sides.

5.1 Running the core exceptionally well is the precondition for transformation

The first priority is to run the core business exceptionally well rather than to chase every new profit pool. Site consistency, customer satisfaction, staff retention, stock discipline, pricing, margin control, and workshop throughput are not ‘basics’ in a boring sense; they are the cash engine and management discipline that make transformation possible.

This was one of the clearest messages in the interviews. Dealer groups cannot transform from a weak core. A group with inconsistent sites, poor customer follow-up, low staff retention, or weak stock discipline will not have the margin, confidence, or management bandwidth to build new capabilities. “You have to do the basics better than anyone else – and right now we are quite far from that,” one executive said.

The implication is practical: the core business should be managed as the foundation for transformation, not as yesterday’s business. Strong sales execution, professional used-car operations, disciplined aftersales, reliable handovers, and responsive service remain the base on which the next model is built.

5.2 Build the next profit model around lifecycle, data, and risk

The next dealer model depends on managing the customer and vehicle across the lifecycle: sale, financing, service, repair, replacement, and resale.

This requires three capabilities that many groups do not yet have at sufficient maturity. First, customer lifecycle management: staying relevant after delivery, connecting sales and service, measuring customer value over time, and using service moments to secure the next sale. Second, data and systems integration: reducing fragmentation between brands, CRM, DMS, finance, workshop, and lead-management systems enough to create a real view of the customer. Third, risk and portfolio management: understanding residual-value exposure, used-BEV pricing, lease returns, stock quality, and remarketing as one commercial system. AI can turn integrated customer data into more timely sales, service, and retention actions, but without connected systems and usable data, it remains an ambition rather than an operational capability.

Aftersales remains central, but it has to be developed rather than defended. Tyres, wheels, SMART repair, body and glass, battery, high-voltage, ADAS, and diagnostics all matter. But the larger point is commercial: aftersales leaders need a growth reflex, not only an efficiency reflex. As one executive put it, if a salesperson is losing orders, the answer is to find more customers – the same mindset has to enter aftermarket.

5.3 Make transformation a joint dealer–OEM agenda

Dealer groups cannot solve this alone. OEMs and importers control many of the conditions that determine whether the dealer model works: product availability, pricing logic, customers and data, inventory, residual-value exposure, warranty compensation, software quality, parts logistics, CI requirements, and distribution models.

For OEMs, the question is not whether they still need dealers. They do. The question is which networks they want to make viable. A smaller network is not automatically a stronger one. Fewer locations and fewer dealer groups only work if the remaining partners can represent the brand, support customers, and earn enough to invest.

Priority	Dealer groups must...	OEMs must...	Why it matters
1. Fix the core	Lift site consistency, staff retention, stock discipline, pricing, workshop throughput, and customer satisfaction	Secure viable dealer economics and stop destabilising the core through repeated tactical changes	A professional core funds the transformation
2. Connect the lifecycle	Manage the customer across sale, finance, service, repair, replacement, and resale	Share customer data, contact rights, and lifecycle-relevant information	Transactions must become managed relationships
3. Rebuild aftersales	Develop EV-related aftersales (tyres, SMART repair, HV, ADAS, software) with commercial ownership	Improve software quality, parts logistics, warranty processes, and compensation for software-related work	Aftersales remains essential, but the old model will not return
4. Manage risk and used vehicles	Manage residual-value risk and build used-BEV sourcing, pricing, and remarketing capabilities	Share stock, pricing, and residual-value risk more transparently	Monthly-cost economics make risk management central
5. Redesign footprint and scale	Make every location purposeful; consolidate where it strengthens the model; build scale where needed	Define viable networks as fewer, stronger partners – not simply fewer points on a map	The future footprint must support both brand and customer
6. Build transformation muscle	Develop project capability, data capability, and leadership capacity to run today's business while building the next	Make transformation a joint programme with local authority, shared KPIs, and stable distribution models	Transformation is not a one-off project

Exhibit 8: Transformation priorities. Implement's recommended priority agenda; based on interview evidence and our interpretation of what it implies.

5.4 Choose a path before the market chooses it for you

The most dangerous position is to understand the transition but postpone the decision. Dealer groups need to decide whether they will build the required capabilities themselves, partner to access them, acquire scale, or prepare for consolidation. For many family-owned groups, this is also a generational ownership question: invest, partner, acquire, sell, or gradually exit.

OEMs need to make the same kind of choice. They cannot ask for fewer, stronger, more capable partners while continuing to push risk, cost, and complexity into a network that is too thin to transform. If the network is strategically important, it must be made economically viable.

The window is open because the core business still funds the transition in most markets. It will not stay open indefinitely. One executive described the industry as a marathon without a finish line. That is right – but the first decision is whether to start running now, or wait until the old economics no longer pay for the journey.

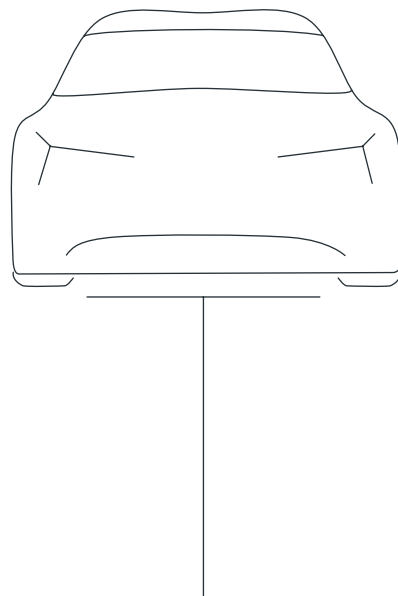
Closing perspective

The dealer remains essential, but time is the critical variable

The choices facing Nordic automotive retail are usually framed as binaries: physical or digital, established or challenger, franchise or agency. The interviews suggest these are the wrong questions. The real challenge is to combine complementary strengths and to transform at the pace required in each market.

Norway shows what a more advanced stage of the transition looks like, and demonstrates that a dealer business can survive it, in a rebuilt form. Denmark shows how quickly the economics can turn once electrification passes the tipping point. Sweden and Finland retain more time to invest before the traditional workshop weakens further, and the opportunity for those groups, and for the OEMs that depend on them, is to build the lifecycle, data, aftersales, and risk capabilities now, while the traditional workshop still helps to pay for them.

The dealer remains essential. The current economics cannot be defended indefinitely, and neither dealers nor OEMs can rebuild them alone. Done together, the transition is an opportunity to build a model that is more customer-centric, more productive, and more sustainable than the one it replaces. Delayed, it becomes a slow loss of relevance and viability. One executive put the choice in five words: “Without change, we don’t survive.”

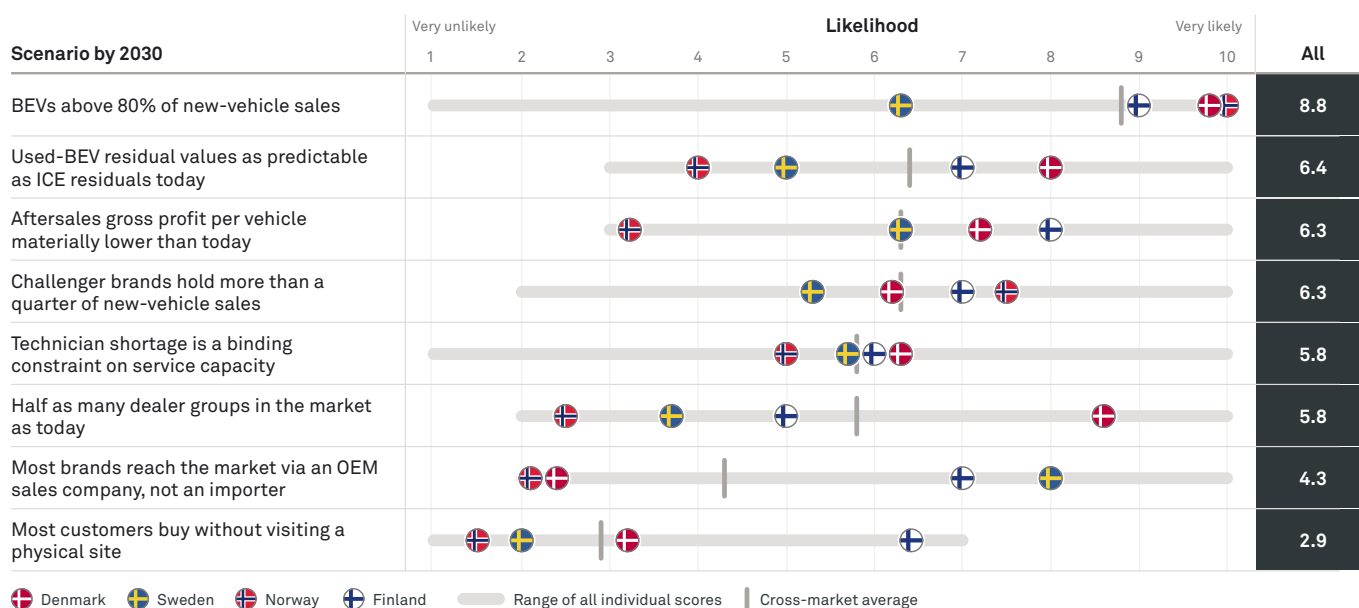


The dealer is not disappearing, but neither is its future guaranteed. Dealers and OEMs that redesign the model while they still have the capacity to invest can remain central to the customer. Those that wait for the old economics to return may find that the market has already moved on.

Appendix

Consolidated executive view on the future

How likely executives consider eight market scenarios by 2030 (1–10 scale). Flags mark the average score per market; the bar spans the lowest to highest individual score.



Note: Directional executive sentiment, not a statistically representative survey. Scenarios ordered by overall mean.

Exhibit 9: A set of core beliefs on the future of an industry in transition

About the research

Executive interviews across four Nordic markets

This report draws on in-depth interviews conducted by Implement Consulting Group in 2026 with senior executives from leading importer and dealer groups in Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Finland. A structured guide covered profit pools, customer behaviour, market dynamics, OEM relationships, operating models, and capabilities, followed by a short set of directional questions scoring profit pools and the likelihood of selected developments to 2030.

How to interpret the findings

The interviews provide directional executive perspectives rather than statistically representative findings. Respondents include senior executives from importer and dealer groups, with several combining importer and retail roles. Rating scores indicate direction of sentiment rather than statistical averages, and the report's conclusions draw on executives' explanations. Quotations are anonymised. Unless supported by another source, figures about individual markets are presented as executive views. The analysis and conclusions are Implement's interpretation of the evidence.

About Implement Consulting Group

Implement Consulting Group

Implement Consulting Group is a Nordic-founded management consultancy with more than 2,000 people across Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Switzerland, Germany, and the United States. We were founded in 1996 on a simple idea: what matters is not only having the right answer, but whether anything actually happens afterwards. We help organisations solve complex strategic and operational challenges and turn decisions into lasting change. Our work combines deep subject matter expertise and hands-on implementation, guided by our purpose: to leave every organisation we touch more fit for humans and fit for the future.

Implement's automotive team

Implement's automotive team works across the full value chain of suppliers, OEMs, importers, dealers, and aftermarket businesses. We support clients on corporate and go-to-market strategy, distribution-model design, launch readiness, retail and aftersales transformation, and M&A support. The Nordic Dealer Executive Outlook is part of our continuing research into how automotive retail is changing. We publish it to inform the debate across the industry and help its participants build commercially viable models for the future.

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