

This year, we will press the accelerator pedal more

Interview with Răzvan Diaconescu, General Manager, IMPULS-Leasing Romania

The management of IMPULS - Leasing Romania believes that in 2024 the company had a normal evolution for its size, with an increase of about 10%. Its entire automotive portfolio is dependent on the profile market, for which specialists anticipate stagnation or even a reduction in 2025. IMPULS's response to such a trend is to accelerate automation, conclude new partnerships, focus on truck financing, approach car financing fields not taken into account so far. As a strategy, digitalization is a continuous and long-term process here. At the end of April this year, the implementation of the ILINCA chatbot was completed at IMPULS partners, a project that became functional in about 150 locations in the country. As an independent company, which does not have a bank behind it in Romania, IMPULS continues to focus on 100% direct sales. In recognition of its performance over the years, IMPULS Romania is appreciated at group level and recognized as the company with the best business results among its leasing entities in the region. A discussion about all these topics took place for the anniversary issue of FINLEASING with General Manager Răzvan Diaconescu.



For 2024, you anticipated a double-digit growth of the business by continuing to automate and digitize the financing processes. After a careful internal analysis, what were the final results of the company for last year compared to 2023?

Last year's results were as we had planned - an increase of about 10%. When you reach a fairly large business volume, it is more difficult to record a double-digit jump. It was, I would say, a normal evolution for a company of our size, with the mention that towards the end of the year, amid internal political tensions, we noticed a slowdown in car sales, and in the payments area a slight increase in provisions. Considering the background of the elections, potential clients were waiting for new investments. The trend has continued to some extent in the first months of 2025.

What should be emphasized regarding the prices of financed goods and to what extent did they influence the values of new leasing financings last year?

We have not observed an increase in the prices of financed assets, this trend being characteristic of the period 2022-2023 in particular and less so in 2024. Currently, we do not have this problem, prices are stabilized, there is even a slight downward trend due to the fact that at the beginning of 2025 there was a stagnation of car sales to the retail customer.

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With a monochromatic, 100% automotive portfolio, the IMPULS company is directly influenced by the evolution of the market to which it is closely linked through its financing. In terms of sales level, according to the APIA forecast, the local car market will register stagnation or even a slight decrease in 2025. How could you, as a business, mitigate such a trend?

Even under these conditions, we focus on the automotive market and do everything we can to finance better, by attracting new customers, including from the competition, to automate more, to

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open new partnerships and to capture other fields of automotive financing, such as, for example, the Chinese car segment, which we did not cover in our portfolio until recently. In the first months of 2025, amid all kinds of political and economic turbulence, we are in a slight decline compared to the same period last year (somewhere at - 5%). If the situation persists we will also look for other business opportunities in our field of activity. Then, we also focus on the truck market, which is doing well and on which we have relied and continue to rely. Given the international situation, nothing will be the same in business and we will have to be creative and find new solutions. As a business projection, the hard part will actually come next year.

A solid support in the company's activity has been represented over time by traditional partnerships but also by new collaborations in the field of car financing in financial leasing. How did the business relationship with the partners develop and what prospects do you think are in this regard in Romania following the reset of customs duties by the USA?

We have several solid partnerships on the passenger car side, as well as two such collaborations for trucks and semi-trailers, relationships that have been ongoing for several years and that generate consistent business volumes of millions of euros each year. For light vehicles, we already have a tradition in financing in financial leasing some brands of the Auto Italia group, as well as for the brands KIA, Isuzu, Suzuki, KGM (SsangYong). For Chinese cars, we have laid the foundations of partnerships with importers MG and Maxus, Farizon and, more recently, with Geely and LYNK&CO. In the first year of collaboration, we financed several hundred such hybrid and thermal cars imported from China. Regarding the European Union's surcharge on cars imported from this country, from what we have observed so far, the measure has not yet generated price-related effects on the Romanian market, meaning for deliveries of cars from stock. We are waiting to see what the European Commission will decide on this subject, given the customs duties imposed by the USA.

Regarding heavy vehicles, there is a long-standing collaboration in financing DAF trucks, and for semi-trailers, the partnership with KRONE. Such partnerships are different from those for cars, however, being personalized according to the needs of the client, which implies finding solutions to his specific requests.

Amidst international tensions, business in all fields will be affected. It is known that in Romania there are auto component factories - from the production of seats, wiring, upholstery or steering wheels to tires - which will probably suffer. On the other hand, business opportunities may also arise for Romania. Germany, our country's main trading partner, recently approved significant funds for its domestic defense infrastructure, which includes trucks, tires, etc., which could generate future orders, including for Romanian manufacturing companies specializing in automotive components.

At the end of 2024, over a quarter of the company's new business was financed through automated and digital processes, and about 70% of contracts were signed online, a result of the intensive digitalization process carried out by the company in recent years. What are the targets to be achieved in this area in 2025?

Digitalization is a continuous and long-term process for us. It is a matter of days until the implementation of the ILINCA Chatbot is completed at IMPULS partners, a very important step in the financing process at the company level. Our partners will thus have online information related to the client, the possibility of their qualification for financing, documents will circulate quickly and formalities that previously required several days will be completed quickly, and the contract will be signed in about ten minutes. The ILINCA project thus becomes functional in the approximately 150 locations of our partners, after a previous period of testing the system. From the experience gained with this project, I can say that the digitalization of financing is not a simple process and requires overcoming certain barriers, primarily at the client level but also at the car salesperson level. The financing automation process is brought to a certain point, after which the financing company's staff comes into play. A long period is needed to truly streamline the entire financing chain, but the earlier the financier starts such steps, the sooner it will be a few steps ahead of the competition. In our financing strategy, digitalization goes hand in hand with automation and robotization. And this is what the future will look like.

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Regarding electrified vehicles, how do you see the demand on the Romanian market, given that last year almost four times more such cars were registered in Romania than those with diesel engines?

We see quite a large growth on the hybrid car market. The same cannot be said about fully electric ones, for which we do not observe an increased demand; the Romanian customer in general is not prepared for these, still facing unknowns related to resale price, charging infrastructure, driving range, etc.

In the current difficult conditions facing the business environment, what strategy do you approach in 2025 as a manager with extensive experience in the field of leasing financing?

We will press the accelerator pedal more, I would say metaphorically. We try not to lose any client and if we notice a decrease in the car market, we will insist on the financing trucks. But this segment is also affected and to achieve the same business figures as before, I think it will take much more effort. We will look more closely at financing niches in financial leasing, such as photovoltaic panels or various equipment. I am betting on the fact that there is an appreciable number of healthy companies in Romania that will continue to need financing and we will come to their aid.

What do you think are the elements that differentiate a financial leasing company from the rest of the players in the field?

The most relevant tool in measuring the business performance of a leasing company is still the volume of items financed in a certain period, so new financing, followed by the one regarding the invested capital.

In the structure of the Austrian group of which the company is part, how do you position yourself compared to its other leasing entities existing in the region?

Furthermore, the Romanian subsidiary is appreciated as the company with the best business results in leasing within the group, but its financial situation for last year will only be published towards the end of 2025, within a bank yearbook in which the results related to leasing financing will also be presented.

Coralia Popescu