

Meeting customers' needs in a booming eMobility market

eMobility: Powering its way into the future

Twenty-five years ago, electric cars, and eMobility in general, seemed like futuristic pipe dreams. Not anymore. The days when countries could count their numbers of electric vehicles in their hundreds have given way to a booming mass market. Here, the statistics are as surprising as they are encouraging. The International Energy Agency's (IEA's) 2023 Global EV Outlook reports that, in just three years, from 2020 to 2022, worldwide sales of electric cars leaped from 5% of all cars sold to 14% – an impressive 180% increase in share.

Similarly, in Europe, it finds that electric car sales increased by 15% in 2022 alone, with one in every five cars sold electric. What's behind this breakneck growth in eMobility sales? The answer is a set of forces acting on the market that are driving fundamental and rapid change away from fossil fuels. The backdrop to all this is the climate crisis. Many countries' pledges to reach net zero by the middle of the century rely heavily on renewable power generation coupled with the electrification of a raft of sectors – from industry to transport.

At market level, the ambition is no less than to phase out sales of combustion-engined vehicles completely. Some countries aim to do this in the space of less than ten years. The rapid progress being made here is boosted by voluntary action from automotive players who are increasingly aware of both the climate imperative, and the opportunities offered by a booming market segment.

Such fundamental shifts are being matched by improvements in eMobility infrastructure. These are driven at governmental level by legislation, such as the EU's Alternative Fuel Infrastructure Regulation (AFIR) and the US Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). They've also been given a significant boost by the response to exploding demand. Analysis in ChargeUp Europe's 2023 State of the Industry report forecasts a staggering 960% increase in EU-country charging points by 2030 – which are set to reach 35 million, compared with 3.3 million in 2021. Not only do charging points power vehicles – saving, according to the IEA's report, the use of an estimated five million barrels of oil a day, worldwide, by 2030 – but they also have the potential, in combination with batteries, to help balance electricity networks that are increasingly powered by renewables.

Providing eMobility infrastructure: many challenges and many choices



On the frontline of this dash for infrastructure are Sonepar's eMobility customers. Many are installers – small, medium, and large – who work day-in, day-out to increase the stock of chargers across a broad range of settings. Others are facility managers, with responsibility for selecting, providing, and maintaining charging points at their premises. Property owners are also significant buyers of chargers as they work to ensure the facilities at their rental properties are attractive and keeping pace with the growing demand for eMobility.

While the charging needs of these three types of customers may be similar, the challenges they face are quite different. The world of installers has seen a supply chain marked by significant disruptions in recent years. Their challenge is to be able to source the chargers they need, along with all their associated accessories, easily; and to have them delivered quickly to the sites where they're working. For facility managers,

cost-to-value considerations are vital, as are support – pre, during, and after the purchase – as well as ease of maintenance. For property owners, the keys are finding a trusted adviser who can help them navigate an overwhelming array of options. They need to be able to install charging points that provide both a high-quality and smooth electricity purchasing experience for their tenants.

Sonepar: the trusted partner for charging infrastructure

To meet their challenges, these eMobility customers are increasingly looking to Sonepar for both its product range and logistics expertise. As a group built on supply chain know-how, and operating across 40 countries, Sonepar is well placed to help eMobility customers meet their challenges. The Group's core aim is to give customers what they want, where, and how they want it – easily. This is backed by a €2bn investment in ever-better supply chain logistics, with 200 warehouses and 28 new or improved Central Distribution Centers.

Globally, Sonepar's eMobility customers now make about 40% of their purchases online and they will increasingly be able to take advantage of the €1bn investment in Sonepar's online and customer-centric platform, to create and order the packages they need.

In an eMobility market that now accounts for €170m of revenue and sales of 140,000 EV chargers each year, Sonepar's goal is to be both the "go to" provider and the trusted partner of its customers. And it aims to be more than this. With eMobility customers across 20 developed countries, all with ambitious targets on climate change, Sonepar wants to play its part in a more sustainable future. As well as providing chargers for existing users, the Group aims to help increase the density of charging points that will accelerate the uptake of electric vehicles – after all, it's the charge point owners who provide this infrastructure and the drivers

who use it that are making the energy transition possible. It's an ambition well aligned with Sonepar's own pledges to invest 10% of the capital spent on supply chain improvements into sustainability solutions, and to reduce its own CO2 emissions and waste to help limit global warming to 1.5°C.

A tailored approach to best meet each customer's requirements

In some settings, Sonepar meets the residential charging needs of facility managers and property owners through its well-informed sales team.

In others it's done through a close relationship with high-quality partners. This includes innovative approaches, such as three-way, joint ventures that include Sonepar, installers, and electric-vehicle dealerships. Here, when dealerships make a sale, Sonepar works with the installer, leveraging its group-wide logistics ability to provide exactly the right components – on time. This means that the installation of a charging point for the customer can be arranged at exactly the time they need it.

Another high-growth area for the Group is helping meet the needs of commercial and municipal property owners. Here, Sonepar partners with large manufacturers, who sell charging units, to make its logistics network and expertise available for both large and small projects. This ensures that

manufacturers can get chargers to their customers efficiently and bundle them with high-quality accessories from Sonepar's comprehensive range of stock. The Group is increasingly adopting a similar approach in meeting the needs of motorists in settings like private car parks and carpools.



A broad range of high-quality products that serve the market's needs

A key strength for Sonepar is the depth and breadth of its stock. Depending on the country, the Group can offer customers up to 100,000 products. All these can be delivered rapidly from central warehouses and branches to any location its customers require.

This choice is mirrored in its eMobility offering, where it stocks AC chargers, with powers of up to 22 kW, to meet smaller and larger needs, as well as DC chargers in a range up to 150 kW.

Sonepar can also bundle all the associated components – like plugs, connectors, specially configured control panels, tools, and switchgear – together with the charger. This ensures an installer has all the equipment needed to put the charger in place – at exactly the right time. It's an important aspect for all Sonepar's customers, but is especially critical, for example, for facility managers. Here, the manager needs to be assured that everything required can be delivered to their site before the installer arrives, making the operation as smooth as possible and minimizing disruption to the facility.

To support all this, Sonepar aims both to continually improve the quality of its teams and to share expertise in the market. It sees these as a long-term investment in underpinning the Group's overall desire to be part of the eMobility journey. Sonepar's customer-facing team is now some 250 strong. This is complemented by 40 product managers, each with deep product expertise. They define assortments, provide pre-sales assistance, and offer technical support. What's more, product managers are closely focused on skills development. They undergo regular (often certified) training with manufacturers, bringing the new expertise in-house and then sharing it by, themselves, training Sonepar's own customers.



Bringing it all together



It's this combination of capability, ethics, and expertise that defines Sonepar's strength in the eMobility market. It brings a strong commitment to being an increasing part of the electric revolution, backed by solid corporate values on the need to address global warming rapidly and decisively. In practical terms, this means bringing its position as the distribution market leader to bear on chargers and their accessories – ensuring that installers, facility managers, and property owners get what they need, when they need it. The final outworking is a significant boost to overall charging infrastructure. This will help convince even more players, whether commercial premises, facility managers, or property owners, that installing charging points can add value to their property and create a better experience for drivers. In turn, this helps persuade the drivers that

electric vehicles are a viable option, as well as helping the market for electrified transport reach its critical mass and addressing the urgent need to reduce carbon emissions.



If you'd like to know more about our EV charging products or have an upcoming EV project, speak to one of our eMobility experts today:

sonepar.com/explore-sonepar

