



From Immigrant Child to Innovation Whisperer

Dr. Serhan Ili ■ Founder & CEO of ILI.DIGITAL AG

Serhan Ili was born in 1978 in Karlsruhe. His entrepreneurial spirit emerged early — even as a primary school student, he rented out a self-welded bicycle in the schoolyard for a fee. After an internship at Porsche, a PhD from KIT, and international experience, his path into industry seemed set — but the financial crisis following the Lehman collapse led to a hiring freeze. One hundred applications went unanswered. It was only through a series of assessment centers that his greatest strength became clear: entrepreneurial thinking.

In 2010, he made the decision to become an entrepreneur. For a €500 fee, he developed a brand positioning for an auto parts business — a project he landed through what he calls a “pity recommendation.” Soon after came a second assignment in the medical technology sector: €2,000 for three months of work.

In 2011, Serhan Ili founded Ili Consulting in Karlsruhe. With no employees but a clear focus on sales and vision, he rented an office — still under construction at the time. In 2012, he moved in; in 2013, he made his first hires. The breakthrough came with a project for Bombardier: How can an inductive charging battery from rail technology be adapted for the automotive industry? The result of the project was later implemented in the Porsche Boxster.

From projects like these, Ili developed his consulting approach: “How can our clients generate revenue with their existing assets in three to five years?” Initially focused on “Open Innovation,” based on his doctoral thesis, the consultancy increasingly shifted toward digital transformation.

In 2018, he made a radical break: Ili parted ways with his existing team. “We had strong individuals, but we weren’t a team.” Since then, he has surrounded himself with people “who are 100% aligned with our DNA. I look for people who say ‘yes, and’ — not ‘yes, but.’”

This fresh start led to the development of ILI Digital into a technology-driven partner with strong execution capabilities. One example: for BASF’s Animal Nutrition division, ILI Digital developed an app and e-commerce platform that provided shrimp farmers with free access to expert knowledge — in return, BASF received valuable data to inform sales planning.

Today, ILI Digital is among the leading mid-sized innovation consultancies in Germany. The focus: digital transformation, AI strategies, and change management — with entrepreneurship as a mindset and execution as the core strength.



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