

The connected car: driving us to the future

 By [Michael Frans](#)

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One of the next great frontiers of consumer technology will be the humble automobile. No longer just a piece of physical engineering, the car of the future will soon connect us to the digital world in ways that stretch the imagination and excite our ambitions. And that future is not very far away.



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For consumers, connected cars promise to make our lives simpler, more convenient, and safer - augmenting our digital lifestyles in a variety of ways. For vehicle manufacturers, dealers, and workshops, connected cars will open up new opportunities for enhanced "after-market" customer engagement. It will enable more proactive maintenance and support, real-time diagnostics, and ultimately, a number of new revenue streams. For society at large, connected cars will play an essential role in realising the vision of 'smart cities' - as they transmit information that informs the design of road networks, facilitates traffic management, and improves the lives of citizens in a host of ways.

So, just what does the term 'connected car' mean? **Broadly speaking, there are six areas that we can consider:**

- **Entertainment:** Connected services can host libraries of audio and video media content, or stream podcasts and internet radio. Safety considerations being high on the agenda, video content is more applicable to panel displays to passengers in the back seats.

- **Geo-location services:** Information about points-of-interest in the local area - such as restaurants, hotels and parking bays will bring greater levels of convenience to drivers and unlock opportunities for enhanced loyalty and satisfaction for various companies.
- **Customer safety:** Real-time, on-board diagnostics tools can communicate directly with manufacturers, dealers, and emergency services. So, if a car is in an accident, it can send an alert directly to paramedics. Faults with the electronics or the mechanics can be automatically reported to the right service providers. Or, if the car exceeds a speed limit, for example, the driver can be alerted.
- **Track and trace for fleets:** fleet managers have used connectivity for a while now, to manage the routes travelled by cargo vehicles, for instance. With the connected car, more detailed information can be captured and used to optimise activities like route planning and vehicle maintenance.
- **APIs that enable a third-party ecosystem:** everyone, from tyre fitment centres, to coffee shops, to electric car charging stations will benefit from the real-time flow of information - creating opportunities for more tailored and useful marketing.
- **Data integrity and security management:** Technology and automotive companies will need to ensure that the transmission of all this data happens securely and does not expose the driver to new risks.

Platforms wars

For all this to happen, a new form of platforms wars may soon emerge, with many software companies forging consortiums and pinning their hopes on developing the 'connected car platform' that will become ubiquitous. Last year, we saw two leading technology companies announce solutions leveraging voice commands as well as steering wheel buttons with uptake from a number of car manufacturers. Other technology companies and vehicle manufacturers are taking different directions. However, ignoring this fragmented ecosystem for now, the exciting promise of the connected car is tantalising close for consumers.

Driving into the future

Connected cars will effortlessly integrate into the fabric of our lives - helping us book parking bays at the Gautrain station as we are approaching, presenting coupons for the coffee shop on the way to work, sending alerts to colleagues or family when the traffic means we will arrive late, and serving up our favourite music based on the playlist on our smartphone. From there, connected cars will pave the way for increased levels of driving automation and robotics. From predictive driving systems that warn us of dangerous intersections or impending snarl-ups on the freeway, to semi-autonomous systems that take over driving responsibilities in certain situations, to a state of full automation.

In the future, we could well be sending our cars to collect the dry cleaning, pick up some lunch, or even to get the kids from school. While this may still be some way off, very few would argue that driving is a mundane chore that simply has to be done. Over the coming years, we'll hand over increasing driving responsibilities to the magic ones and zeros of the digital age, freeing us up to spend more time doing what really matters to us.

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