From the Magazine: Will the Connected Car Leave the Smartphone in the Dust?

Ben Munson

Smartphones and cars concoct a toxic coupling in the collective conscious. In many regards with good reason—no one would argue in favor of texting while driving. But in a lot of ways, the car and the connected device form a symbiotic relationship. Without a connected device along for the ride, a car is about as “dumb” as can be.

Juniper Research puts nearly 100 million connected cars on the road by 2016. In the U.S. alone, ComScore estimates 141 million people own smartphones. So the chances for interaction between connected cars and smartphones is only going to increase.

“The phone is still a pretty important conduit in extending the reach of a connected vehicle to a cloud or to a network because in most cases people have smartphones with data plans that they just want to leverage in any type of device or environment that they’re in,” said Thilo Koslowski, lead automotive analyst at Gartner. “But at the end of the day, the vehicle is still a very unique environment.”

The connected car today leverages the connected phone because it provides the network, Koslowski said. But he foresees going forward that more and more cars will

come connected directly from the factory, and the link the phone provides to the outside world won't necessary.

There's a consumer need to minimize cost, especially those associated with separate data plans for phone and car, Koslowski added. But the carriers are getting more creative and embracing multiple platforms, not just the smartphone. It will become simpler and more attractive going forward to sign up for a dedicated data plan or to add the vehicle to an existing data plan without having to bring the smartphone.

"It's transitional and it's very important today. It might never completely go away," Koslowski said of the connected car's reliance on a connected device. "I foresee that the automotive industry will start embracing this unique space that people are in and to really turn the vehicle into the 'ultimate mobile device', where you'll have a much better experience in the car than you could ever have with a phone."

Koslowski admits we're not there yet and that the automotive industry is still trying to copy what works on a mobile phone and put that into a car. For example, he mentions touchscreens in a car are not the ideal interactive experience for a driver who has to maintain control of a speeding vehicle. Touchscreens are a necessity on a mobile phone because of the lack of real estate to play with, Koslowski adds, but in a car having physical buttons in many cases has more value than a touchscreen.

But once the connected car begins to realize its full potential, a reversal of the current standard will likely be in order. Koslowski doesn't think that will necessarily mean other connected devices will be left behind, but it could mean that the smartphone becomes peripheral to the connected car and the ecosystem it supports.

So it would still be a symbiotic relationship but the balance would shift more toward the vehicle.

"That's pretty significant because it will put the car companies back in the driver seat," Koslowski said. "It may make it more difficult for the consumer electronics companies to run their own show. They're trying to absorb the automobile at this point. I think there's an opportunity for the automotive industry to really recapture some of that."

Platform-Specific Automobiles

To a certain degree, Apple's often-frustrating voice command tool Siri being integrated into the Chevy Sonic is a sign of what Koslowski predicts. It's a hands-free experience that takes an idea from the smart device world and optimizes it for

the connected car experience. But it relies on an iPhone.

A better example of an automotive company innovating specifically for the connected car comes from Nissan, and its recent announcement of the Nismo watch. The Nismo is still in development but the company hopes the device will someday leverage a driver's biometrics to tailor the driving experience to the individual and make it safer. But again, a Bluetooth LE connection to a smartphone is required.

Koslowski sees Sprint Velocity as more of a step toward designing for the connected car experience and making the smartphone into an ancillary aspect of it.

"This is a technology offering that's been specifically designed for the automotive industry where car companies can take this solution set and create their own connected vehicle value propositions on top of it," Koslowski said.

Sprint's background in telematics touches on fleet management and other enterprise solutions, as well as after-market offerings for consumers looking to round up data from their cars and have it available in the cloud. But Velocity is Sprint's telematics platform designed specifically for automotive manufacturers.

"We would like to serve as what we call a 'mobile integrator,'" said Walter Fowler, communications manager at Sprint.

Fowler said Sprint takes the role of a traditional telematics provider like OnStar but instead of focusing just on a list of capabilities, Velocity works toward providing a complete user experience.

Fowler went so far as to say Sprint doesn't care if it's not providing the data connectivity—of course, it would prefer to be the network of choice. It's more about getting in and building the in-vehicle experience from the ground-up. That experience, Fowler said, is something that Sprint advocates to its partners as part embedded solutions, part brought-in phone.

Following the introduction of Velocity in late 2012, Sprint rolled out a service bus, expanding smartphone and cloud integration by leveraging IBM's Messagesight M2M appliance. It's resulted in speedier turnaround on functions like remote start, given less time to wake the central hub in the vehicle. It's also added better personalization that can be accessed in the cloud to tailor the car experience depending on the driver, and it's opened up more remote access to the information that sensors in the car provide.

It's seeing the value of the connected car and all the information that can come out

of it and, in turn, using the smartphone as a tool to push that information toward consumers.

Transforming Auto Data into Solutions

There’s a value proposition based on the data that can be collected from the connected car, Koslowski said.

“Today, cars are still dumb. The data that it generates can’t be collected, can’t be aggregated, can’t be leveraged,” Koslowski said. “Going forward, all cars will be connected and they will have smart mobility, where cars can actually help each other understand if there’s a safety hazard ahead.”

He added that the data will enable opportunities to optimize traffic and usage rates on public infrastructure roads. He cited usage-based car insurance and governments charging registration rates based on the amount of driving an individual vehicle does as current examples of that sort of analytics and data-driven solution.

But IBM, Sprint’s partner in Velocity, has experience guiding just that kind of thing. Kal Gyimesi, the Industrial Sector Offering Leader for IBM, talked about analytics and how the connected car information needs to be moved remotely and referenced an IBM project ongoing in the Netherlands in the city of Eindhoven.

The pilot program tapped 200 subjects who volunteered to connect their vehicles and let IBM gather the information for purposes of traffic optimization. Gyimesi said the program was very successful and showed just the first steps in what can be achieved with the data-driven network of connected vehicles.

“It’s the beginning parts of being able to manage traffic more intelligently and more creatively in a top metropolitan area,” Gyimesi said.

As the connected vehicle pushes the creation of a big interconnected ecosystem, Gyimesi sees the traditional industry borders becoming far more blurred.

Once enough vehicles are connected, we will have a smart network that will move things around in the best order, Koslowski said. “That’s a pretty big step. It’s a new era of smart mobility that will ultimately be realized through this connectivity.”

The data coming from the connected car is pushing forward advances in travel safety and traffic management. It’s becoming so important that Thilo believes at some point, motorists will have to be connected and collecting this data in order to gain access to public infrastructure and roadways.

But as this point, the programs leveraging connected car data are just pilots. The experience inside the connected car is still morphing to fit its unique confines. And for the most part, connected cars are still relying on connected devices to move and receive necessary data.

GSMA predicts more than 20 percent of global vehicle sales in 2015 will include embedded connectivity solutions and that more than 50 percent will feature both embedded and smartphone integration at that point. Not until 2025 does GSMA see every single vehicle being connected.

But when that day comes, and the connected car sheds its reliance on smartphones and becomes its own unique, beneficial connected device, it will be interesting to see where that leaves the smartphone. It will still likely have a big role, but the emerging connected car ecosystem will really change the scenery around it.

Source URL (retrieved on *12/10/2013 - 8:11am*):
http://www.wirelessweek.com/articles/2013/10/magazine-will-connected-car-leave-smartphone-dust