

MOBILE

Mercedes-Benz liberates the road to autonomy with connected car app

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Mercedes-Benz Marco Polo

By FORREST CARDAMENIS

German automaker Mercedes-Benz is putting itself on the frontline of technological innovation with its latest mobile application.

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Designed in collaboration with Pivotal, the Mercedes Me connected car app is being billed as the first-ever app of its kind and the first step in a new era of digital transformation for both the automaker and its industry. With consumers now wanting safety, environmental friendliness and a number of conveniences for their cars, the Mercedes Me app could position the brand as a leading developer of next-generation automobiles.

"It has been said that the next frontier is the automobile and it's hard to argue," said Jeff Hasen, founder of [Gotta Mobilize](#), Seattle. "Over time, connectivity will become as common place as air fresheners hanging from mirrors and Justin Bieber getting into a drag race."

Mr. Hasen is not affiliated with Mercedes-Benz, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

[Mercedes-Benz](#) did not respond before press deadline.

Locked out?

Users of the Mercedes Me app will no longer have to worry about getting into a freezing car on a winter morning or a hotbox on a summer afternoon, and accidentally locking themselves out of their cars will also be a thing of the past. The app, for iPhone and Apple Watch, will allow consumers to monitor a vehicle's vitals and temperature from afar, as well as to lock and unlock the door from even further away than a remote-operated key.

"When designed and developed right, connected apps can offer consumers the utility and convenience they desire," said Sep Seyed, CEO of [Plastic Mobile](#). "In turn, brands are not only supporting the post purchase journey but continuing to drive brand awareness and engagement. It's a win-win situation for both brands and consumers."

Moreover, linking useful software to luxury cars is one way in which brands can differentiate themselves from competition and target a particular market segment with needs and desires distinct from other automotive enthusiasts, who may look for speed, performance, or collectability in automobiles.

In a statement, Scott Yara, co-president of Pivotal, said "Daimler and Mercedes-Benz are pioneers and leaders of automotive engineering. Their commitment to learn Pivotal's modern agile software development methodology and

build the Mercedes Me connected car app on Pivotal's modern cloud native platform demonstrates they are now also a great software company."

Accordingly, Mercedes has made clear that the app is just the first step in a much more ambitious goal. The brand hopes to continue to make the most of innovative technology to offer emissions-free and autonomous vehicles as soon as 2020.

"Daimler is mobilizing people and cities, and our work with Pivotal on the Mercedes Me connected car app will ensure that people can get to their destinations in a convenient, economical and environmentally friendly manner," said Christoph Hartung, head of connected cars at Mercedes-Benz, in a statement. "With Pivotal we have minimized our innovation cycles and can now respond to changing market demands faster than ever before, both of which allowed us to develop a profound software culture in our transformational journey into a digital company.

"Our collaboration with Pivotal will define a new digital driving culture with state-of-the-art information technologies, online communication systems and automotive services," he said.

As effects of climate change become increasingly apparent, emissions-free vehicles will make Mercedes appealing to swaths of environmentally aware consumers. The safety and convenience of autonomous cars will also strike a chord with a large number of consumers who care less about style and speed.

"In this world where phones are doing so much, consumers expect the same from their cars," Mr. Seyedi said. "Speed and style will always remain imperative to consumers, but we are entering an age where convenience and digital innovation may begin to take precedence. We also don't see a reason why speed and style need to take a back seat to technological innovation, and believe that the two should be able to grow in tandem."

Further on up the road

Recent research indicates that Mercedes is currently in the lead in autonomous driving development, although a launch date of 2020 would be surprisingly early.

German automakers Mercedes-Benz, BMW and Audi are among the leaders in strategy and execution in autonomous cars, with Tesla and Jaguar a bit further behind, according to a new report by Navigant Research.

Although fully self-driving cars are still at least a decade away, pieces of the technology are already being implemented into vehicles today, meaning that the battle to be first is already waging. Because of the safety and ease of such a vehicle, the first brand to release an effective, fully autonomous car could capture a sizable segment of the market ([see story](#)).

Daimler, which owns Mercedes-Benz, was the highest scorer in both the "strategy" and "execution" categories that determined an OEM's placement. That Mercedes is innovating with technology in other ways likely indicates that they are staying ahead in the competition for autonomous cars, which the brand aims to have five years before Navigant expects.

The proximity between home and car is getting closer for other automakers as well, with brands opting for connected home rather than connected car software.

Specifically, U.S. electric automaker Tesla is going the extra mile in the name of convenience for its consumers.

Evolved Vehicle Environments Inc. (EVE) has used the latest technology to launch EVE Connect for Tesla, connecting the car with the home for the safety and convenience of the driver. The technology gives Tesla a unique advantage that will appeal to everyone from younger tech-savvy consumers to parents ([see story](#)).

"All of the new features have benefits to some, although none strike me as being differentiating," Mr. Hasen said. "Surely there will be people who want to get away from email and social networks while in the car. Opt-in or out will be key."

Final Take

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