

MOBILE

Automakers show dedication to tech-minded consumers with smartwatch compatibility

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Bentley Bentayga TSR Apple Watch app

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Britain's Bentley Motors is the latest automaker to enable Apple Watch connectivity, but how important are smartwatches to the industry?

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Bentley's new mobile application, entitled Bentayga TSR, synchronizes with the vehicle's Touch Screen Remote to allow Bentayga passengers to control or monitor vehicular functions. However, the new technology has still not proliferated, raising questions about what it means to be an early adapter when benefits are minimal.

"Apple Watches are still popular amongst millennials; I actually own one, too," said **Lauren Fix**, automotive expert, Lancaster, NY. "The ability to lock, unlock, locate and start your car from your watch is totally awesome.

"Hyundai and others have even brought this technology to reasonably priced cars," she said. "This is a very smart and hi-tech intelligent offering."

Smart and savvy

With the Bentayga TSR, passengers can control climate, the seats' massage functions and monitor vehicle information from their wrist. While it demonstrates the connectivity and functions of the vehicle, it also forces consumers to ask whether adjusting the temperature from their smartwatch would be easier than doing it from the vehicle itself.



Apple Watch

Other automakers have also created Apple Watch apps. BMW was an early entrant, allowing owners to adjust the temperature as they approach the vehicle and check the charge on the electric BMW I model.

More recently, newer Jaguar models are also compatible with the Apple Watch, allowing users to lock and unlock the vehicle from afar ([see story](#)). The function is useful in the event that a friend or family member needs to get into the car but is not in possession of the key, or if an outdoor activity such as swimming is planned and leaving the key in the car is more convenient.

However, even if these benefits may scan as minimal to the average consumer, smartwatch compatibility is less about selling more cars because of the benefits than in sending a message to the most tech-minded consumers. Being an early adopter and offering any benefits tells smartwatch wearers that the automaker is designing with them in mind.

If smartwatches become more prominent, automakers will be able to tout their credibility as tech-harbingers. Rather than scrambling to catch up to the trend, they will already boast apps and compatibility with vehicles.



Mercedes Apple Watch

"I believe the integration of smart devices including the Apple Watch is great way to integrate with tech-minded people who never leave the devices behind," Ms. Fix said. "It definitely adds to the experience.

"The market for this type of integration will grow quickly," she said. "Just as with Bluetooth, wireless technology is the wave of the future and merging the two will be part of the buying decision."

Stay connected

Within the past year, automakers have continued to appeal to the wearables market.

Wearable devices seem particularly well-suited for driving conditions, but last year drivers largely saw no point, according to a recent report by Strategy Analytics.

Wearables have been heralded as a breakthrough technology, but marketers still struggle to prove their

indispensability to consumers who regard many of the promised benefits as superfluous. To get past initial adoption humps, wearables have to put forth a value proposition that goes beyond satisfying invented problems ([see story](#)).

Other sectors have also gotten involved in the wearables market.

French leather goods house Hermès joined in the fervor during Apple's Cupertino, CA, press conference Sept. 9, 2015.

Technology junkies had been eagerly awaiting the press conference to learn about Apple's new gadgets such as the next generation of iPhones among a host of other announcements such as an Apple Pencil stylus, a partnership with Adobe and a pregnancy monitoring app. By being part of Apple's brand announcements, Hermès has better situated its brand and products within the greater technology conversation ([see story](#)).

Since then, other fashion brands, including Michael Kors, have also invested in their own smartwatches ([see story](#)). Within the automotive market especially, though, the interest in smartwatches aligns with the general convergence of the sector with technology, equally visible in the race for autonomous and connected vehicles.

"It has been said that the next battleground in tech is the car," said Jeff Hasen, founder of [Gotta Mobilize](#), Seattle. "For connectivity, information and entertainment, automakers are evolving to meet rising consumer expectations.

"Eventually, we likely will have significant mass adoption of smartwatches that will play a part in this always-on experience that includes the car," he said. "But that surely will take time given the early stage that we are in with smartwatches.

"Prices would need to come down and use cases need to go up. But in the luxury category, given disposable income and a history of early adoption, we will see an earlier 'drive' to this connected place."

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