

AUTOMOTIVE

Mercedes looks to make consumer inquiries easier

November 9, 2017



Mercedes-Benz has previously partnered with Google Home

By BRIELLE JAEKEL

German automaker Mercedes-Benz is bringing artificial intelligence-powered chatbots to the automotive world to allow drivers to ask questions at any time.

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Daimler, Mercedes' parent company, is working on a new voice activated chatbot solution accessed through an application on mobile devices or in their cars. "Ask Mercedes" will interact with consumers to answer their queries and help build a series of customer support prototypes.

"This announcement makes Mercedes the first luxury automaker to integrate chatbot technology directly into their vehicles' computer/infotainment systems, (based on research we couldn't find any other evidence of a manufacturer doing this yet) which opens the doors to an influx of chatbot-enabled possibilities such as on-demand vehicle information, requests for specs, etc." said Doug Baldasare, CEO, ChargeItSpot.

"Perhaps most importantly, however, Ask Mercedes' could become a brand new revenue stream for the manufacturer by targeting both Mercedes vehicle owners and prospective customers around the globe, for everything from new vehicle models to OEM parts and other merchandise," he said. "By linking the Ask Mercedes' chatbot to Mercedes' online services and sales, the manufacturer can become a direct point-of-sale to vehicle owners from the comfort of their cars looking to buy new parts, but don't have the time or know-how to shop around, or get a routine tune-up. h

"Because of the sheer convenience an in-vehicle chatbot offers in this case, Mercedes can consolidate revenue from drivers that would otherwise hunt for deals by researching after-market part vendors or third party mechanics."

Mr. Baldasare is not affiliated with Daimler but agreed to comment as a third-party expert. Daimler was reached for comment.

Ask Mercedes

Announced by Daimler's chief operating officer, Sabine Scheunert, on Nov. 7 at the Web Summit in Lisbon, Portugal "Ask Mercedes" will be an app that both current and future customers will be able to interact with.

Users can use voice commands and text to ask the artificial intelligence-based communicative system questions through the built-in app within Mercedes vehicles. Customers can also download the app on their mobile devices or also on their Google Home.

The app and chat service will be available at all times. According to Reuters, Daimler has said that "Ask Mercedes" comes from previous pilots on Google and Facebook platforms.

Mercedes' app will launch in various markets, as well as different languages immediately but will expand worldwide in the future.

During the conference, Ms. Scheunert explained that the app is a cognitive assistant to help explore their Mercedes' vehicles.

Chatbot marketing

Artificial intelligence and chatbots are becoming more and more prevalent in retail and marketing.

For instance, mall owner and manager Simon is delivering personalized assistance to shoppers at its 208 North American locations at scale through a chatbot concierge.

Launched on Aug. 8, the mall chain's chatbot connects consumers with real-time information pertinent to their particular location through Facebook Messenger. Increasingly, malls are creating ways of bringing digital experiences to the bricks-and-mortar environment to ease consumers' searches ([see more](#)).

Swiss watchmaker Jaeger-LeCoultre also stepped away from typical luxury watch manufacturer strategy with an innovative experience that introduces a chatbot to Facebook followers as an out-of-store associate.

Interested customers on Facebook can now interact with Jaeger-LeCoultre to find the perfect watch for them. The chatbot recommends suitable watches based on users' responses to questions, a strategy that greatly differs from traditional watch brands that usually rely on their name to carry them ([see more](#)).

"Aside from the company's new chatbot becoming a viable new revenue stream for direct sales, versus after-market or third party vendors, and marking a potential foray for the manufacturer into the realm of automotive ecommerce, Mercedes will also have the benefit of data collection from drivers based on every interaction users have with its bot," ChargeItSpot's Mr. Baldasare said. "And because the bot will be proprietary, and some sort of terms of service agreement will likely need to be checked before use, Mercedes will likely have sole ownership of these analytics.

"Data like this can be used to better tailor the sale/suggestion of vehicle upgrades, parts and accessories, learn drivers' maintenance schedules, etc.," he said. "The more the chatbot learns about the driver, the more effective it'll become in navigating opportunities for upselling or cross-selling services with subtlety.

"After all, a commute is one of the best times to advertise, especially when the user can't actually avoid a sales pitch or advert without turning their vehicles off in the middle of traffic."