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Q&A: Spotify, standards and in-vehicle infotainment



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Pascal de Mul, global head of hardware partnerships at Spotify, on standardization of in-vehicle infotainment platforms and bringing 20 million music tracks to the car in a safe and non-distracting way

A relative latecomer to in-vehicle infotainment, Spotify recently announced its first two automotive integrations, one with Ford, the other with Volvo. It is working on two more. Pascal de Mul spoke to TU's Jan Stojaspal about the need for common standards and the challenge of delivering 20 million music tracks in a safe and non-distracting way. Prior to joining Spotify, where his task is to make Spotify "blast from every speaker," Pascal de Mul worked for Philips,

Skype and Xerox Global Services in a variety of strategic business development functions.

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we see the car as an important space to innovate in, but it is also a very difficult one. You are driving around. You need your hands on the wheel and your eyes on the road. How do you make 20 million tracks available in a situation like that?

You have done it on a number of other platforms, including the home computer and the smartphone. How is the car different?

There is all manner of intricate functionality that is possible on the smartphone. You are able to create playlists, sort them, change them. You can search for new music and discover all kinds of things. But that's all possible because you are actually looking at the device continuously. In the car, you don't have time to scroll through lists.

Most of our users have smartphones, and if we don't do an automotive integration that is good enough, they will just pick up their smartphones and continue using Spotify through them. And that's a dangerous situation in the car.

So our goal was to create an integration that is better than anything we have done on the smartphone. We needed to figure out how we can offer Spotify functionality in a way that gives people the music they want but in a really elegant, safe-to-use way.

Have you succeeded?

We think we done it with Ford.

The entire solution is voice-activated. You can browse your music, you can start a playlist, just using voice commands. You can also link playlists to radio preset buttons in the dashboard. I have a couple of playlists that I subscribe to. I press button number one, and my "Summer Jams" playlist starts playing. I have a special road trip playlist, and that's available at the press of button number two.

We think that users will not need all the functionality that they use on their smartphones. If we focus on what they actually need and support those needs really well, we believe we can deliver a great experience that is simple at the same time.

How do you accomplish this?

In many ways, it's about how you enable access to the content in a

faces. This in-depth report will analyse the most successful models and value propositions in the industry and show you how to refine your marketing to increase the adoption of your product. With a combination of qualitative and quantitative data, this research report will provide unique analysis on how to build successful insurance products to increase adoption rates.

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To minimize distraction, we don't start from scratch, like, 'What should I listen to? I have 20 million tracks, and I need to start a search with an onscreen keyboard.' Instead, we make use of already existing context. You probably already have a couple of playlists that you listen to in the car, and we use those as a starting point.

To start a playlist, you name the playlist, and it will start. And while you are listening, you can, for instance, request an artist's discography and get access to all the albums that the artist has made. Or while you are listening to a track, you can say, 'Start an artist radio,' and it picks up the artist from the track that is currently playing and starts a radio station of similar artists around that.

You still get access to the full 20 million tracks but without having to go through online keyboards and those kinds of things.

(For more on in-car streaming audio, see [Telematics and the rise of in-car Internet radio, part I](#), [Telematics and the rise of in-car Internet radio, part II](#) and [Telematics, smartphones and the future of connected infotainment](#).)

One big issue for content providers is fragmentation of in-car platforms. How are you dealing with this?

All the content providers are struggling with this. It's not like Android, where you develop once and launch on multiple brands. You have to go one by one by one. It makes life more difficult. We would love to see common standards emerge. It would radically change the business case behind these integrations.

Right now, it's a tremendous resource issue. And that's not just to do the launch but also to do the maintenance and to make sure that the newest functionality is replicated in all the different car models. That's a big task for a company like Spotify.

How realistic is it for common standards to emerge?

I think they will. Without standards, there will be car companies that will be without certain key content. We are not able to support 30 different car models. There is a lot of innovation happening right now, and car manufacturers are choosing all kinds of roads to get connectivity into the car. There is also a lot of experimentation, and

Are there encouraging signs already?

Ford is sharing its AppLink smartphone interface. If other car manufacturers implement it, Spotify will play in their dashboards as well. We really applaud that. There is GENIVI. And there are some signs where partnerships are being forged between companies. Whenever a new partnership is forged, like the one between AT&T and GM, you see some standardization happening. The partners need to find a common language. And once you have a two-way partnership, it's only one step to add another party to that. And that can grow from three to four to ten very easily.

Jan Stojaspal is the editor of Telematics Update.

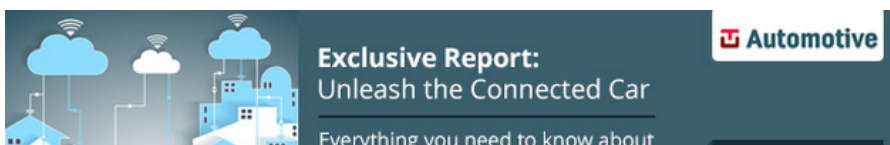
For all the latest telematics trends, check out [Data Business for Connected Vehicles Japan 2013](#) on May 15-16 in Tokyo, [Telematics Detroit 2013](#) on June 5-6, [Content & Apps for Automotive Europe 2013](#) on June 18-19 in Munich, [Insurance Telematics USA 2013](#) on September 4-5 in Chicago, [Telematics LATAM 2013](#) in September in Sao Paulo, Brazil, [Telematics Japan 2013](#) on October 8-10 in Tokyo and [Telematics Munich 2013](#) on November 11-12.


For exclusive telematics business analysis and insight, check out TU's reports: [Telematics Connectivity Strategies Report 2013](#), [The Automotive HMI Report 2013](#), [Insurance Telematics Report 2013](#) and [Fleet & Asset Management Report 2012](#).

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