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NEWS RELEASE

Anticipating Trends Today for Products Tomorrow

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Understanding consumer trends is an often overlooked, yet very critical, consideration for automakers and suppliers during the product development stage. Awareness of trends is essential to delivering products that meet the unknown but anticipated demands of existing and future consumers.

To fully grasp what future consumers may want, an analysis of change processes and trends (inside and outside the auto industry) is required. To predict the shape of the world for years to come, researchers consider the view through the lens of social, technological, economic, environmental and political grounds ("STEEP"). This allows them to anticipate what consumers will want before those desires reveal themselves.

The purpose of advanced trend analysis is to take advantage of what's occurring in this fast-moving world and to capitalize on it — or at least avoid being caught unaware by it – thus adopting a mindset to better prepare for the future. Such analysis incorporates various tools that can interpret signals and visualize possible scenarios – always with the caveat that no tool can guarantee to predict the future accurately.

The automotive industry is transitioning into a new age of mobility. Previously, mobility mainly encompassed motorized individual transport, but today we can decide which means of mobility may be the better choice – mainly due to two developments:

> Digitalization – This has spawned the creation of traffic data universes to manage mobility. Systems assess participants, locations, speeds and mediums used. Localization, detection and real-time processing have transformed traffic into a spontaneous self-controlling system.

Technology – This has created an increased awareness about alternative transport options never available before. This includes varying drivetrains (e.g. electric or fuel-cell vehicles) as well as the wider use of a variety of mobility services (e.g. ride sharing and Uber) that are transport medium neutral without being fixed to specific modes of mobility. Before, during and after transit, users receive real-time recommendations how to most efficiently reach their destinations.

As a result, lifestyles become more sustainable – and we know from research that consumers do not want to be less mobile, but more intelligently mobile. In the near future transportation options will be more attractive, because of technology and the variety of mobility services it offers. Consequential outcomes are new business models such as the transformation of the auto industry from a vehicle manufacturer to a mobility services provider.

The car no longer is an isolated function as it serves several purposes. Vehicles will be permanently online – sending and receiving data. Connectivity allows the implementation of new features – such as display styles, interactions and user recognition (personalization) – so the ever-more important rich user experience becomes possible.

Upgradeability is another current industry challenge driven by customer expectations – which in turn is defined by the constant stream of upgrades typical of the digital ecosystem (smartphones, for instance). Architectures and platforms are required to perform these updates, upgrades and enhancements. This explains the changing landscape of the auto industry, with collaborations springing up that involve non-traditional suppliers from other industries.

Gaining an early awareness of trends, and applying that insight in the product development process is necessary to meet constantly changing market and consumer demands. This understanding of future consumer desires – and the dynamics of the automotive market– is a key driver to remaining competitive.

Stephan Preussler is responsible for advanced trends analysis at Visteon. He has held various positions in marketing, innovation and concept vehicle builds during his 15-year career in the automotive industry.