

## Move over, phones. Cars are becoming the new mobile target for marketers.

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**Step by step, your car is turning into a behaviorally profiled marketing destination.**

You're already accustomed to the fact that your smartphone and tablet are mobile targets for marketers.

But the pieces are now moving into place to transform your other mobile device into a full marketing target: your car.

The car-as-target effort is moving forward on many fronts, reflecting the fact that sending advertising to your vehicle is, as engineers like to say, "a non-trivial task."

Let's start on the outside, with **digital** billboards.

In Montreal, Dannon Yogurt is [running a campaign](#) that displays a different visual ad for up to four traffic speeds. When the traffic speed is very slow, for instance, the ad shows a napping driver and the message: "There's no fast way home," along with the image of DanActive drinkable yogurt.

In the UK, London-based media owner Ocean has [launched](#) a new campaign that captures the license plate of the lead car stopped at a red light opposite several digital billboards. The license plate is immediately matched on a public database to the exact car make and model, so that a car-specific message can be shown on the billboard opposite:

"Hello, you in the silver hatchback," it reads, followed by other car-specific messaging.

Outside of Tokyo, [digital storage provider Cloudian has teamed up with ad agency Dentsu](#) to train an artificial intelligence-powered system how to recognize several hundred kinds of car makes, models and years as they whiz by on the highway.

When that project is fully rolled out, a digital billboard might show an ad for an eco-friendly product if several hybrid cars approach at the same time, or there might be an ad for a

refreshing drink, targeted at a long-distance truck in one lane. Car-specific digital billboards, of course, could be replicated on any electronic signage, such as messaging at gas pumps.

## A moving billboard

Another company, LA-based [StickerRide](#), marries the billboard to your car (See photo at top of this page).

Participants download a mobile app, and then schedule a visit to a StickerRide facility, where their car is covered with large 3M stickers for, say, an ad campaign from Marvel or Gillette.

For participating motorists, **CEO Christian Lundgren** told me, “you are no different than a taxi top.” The participant receives points for driving around and showing off the moving billboard, earning more money for spending time in specified local areas.

Now let's move inside the car. **Kevin Foreman**, GM of geoanalytics at traffic analysis/connected car firm [Inrix](#), told me about “the three Bs” for inside-car messaging.

First, there's “brought-in,” meaning your smartphone.

It's common to see location- or search-based targeting on your phone, of course. If a passenger searches for “oil change” while they're on the highway, ads for nearby oil changes emerge. Similarly, ads on mapping apps or Foursquare point out the nearest places to eat. Although mobile is old hat, it's still part of the messaging we receive in cars.

But a variety of companies are adding new meaning to “brought-in” messaging. Berkeley, California-based [Iota Labs](#), for instance, is now raising money on Kickstarter and is in beta testing for small, inexpensive personal Bluetooth beacon “dots” that users can place around the locations in their lives to provide a reference point for their apps.

A dot placed on a car dashboard, for instance, could result in a compatible app sending your phone a personalized message to pick up milk every Thursday evening as soon as you get into your car. The dot specifically pinpoints your location for a task you've previously set up — and it could include an ad for the nearest store with milk.

The second of Foreman's B's — “beamed-in” or real-time content — includes traffic info or targeted satellite radio, both of which can include commercial messages. Sometimes these are factory-installed in cars, or they can be picked up by your phone.

Since phones are commonly linked to car dashboards and sound systems through Apple's [CarPlay](#) and other means, you can receive voice directions from your mapping app over your sound system. Marketers can and sometimes do attach targeted ads to those audio streams, so they are heard along with the content.

Billboards, phones, phones + cars: These are the low-hanging fruit for marketers. The real challenge — and the potential mother lode — is the car itself.

That foundation is being built, and that brings us to the third B for car services — “built-in.” It's reasonable to expect that car-based internet connections will eventually become ubiquitous. Connected cars — of which [Tesla](#)'s are perhaps the most advanced — already relay operational data about your car to the carmaker, so that the light on your dashboard about a low tire might first go through the car maker's communications center. This data feed, for instance, makes [OnStar](#) possible.

**Scott Frank**, VP of **Marketing** for connected car service provider [Airbiquity](#), pointed out to me that many modern cars have a GPS that is anonymously tracked by the carmaker. The opt-in, he noted, is buried in the Terms and Conditions.

Although the tracking is anonymous, Frank acknowledged that the carmaker has the VIN number for the car and could identify the owner. Once the owner is identified, the person and vehicle could conceivably be matched with all the other behavioral data in your profile — what websites you frequent, what magazines you subscribe to and so on.

Frank noted that at the moment, neither the carmaker nor the connected car service providers, which handle this data management for the carmakers, provide this info to marketers.

## “Another layer of mobile”

But it's only a matter of time.

Just as your web surfing behavioral profile tracks your site visits, downloads and purchases, so your car-based behavioral profile could track where your car travels and stops, with matches to your credit card purchases for gas stations and roadside restaurants, and additional layers about your web surfing or app downloads.

Users will need to give permission, Frank said, although it's unclear if that is just for identified cars and not for anonymous behavioral tracking. And hopefully, the opt-in will be more obvious than the fine print in a Terms and Conditions document.

Ocean's **Marketing Director, Richard Melton**, told me he could envision car-based behavioral profiles based on license plates, which are tied to VIN numbers. “It's just another layer of mobile,” he said.

“It's inevitable,” Frank said, because it will allow marketers to deliver highly contextual offers

right into the car's dashboard.

And that's where it gets tricky, of course, since this isn't a screen on a desk or a phone in someone's hand as they sit in a restaurant. It's a display in the front of a sizable chunk of metal hurtling down a road, carrying very vulnerable human freight.

Once targeted marketing moves into the dashboard, [Amplero](#) **CEO Oilly Downs** and Chief Product Officer Matt Fleckenstein told me, it becomes orders of magnitude more complex than current marketing systems.

Amplero uses machine learning to optimize online personalization, and Downs was previously chief scientist at traffic analytics/connected car firm Inrix.

Marketing to the car, they pointed out, has a large number of contextual factors. Not only weather and all the retailers you're whizzing by, but also traffic conditions, your speed, whether you're driving alone, if your passenger has already received an ad about a nearby restaurant, and possibly more, like whether you're applying the brakes. Unlike other mobile marketing, safety and compliance issues are paramount.

## **Not just a new kind of screen**

"It's not just posting to a new kind of screen," Downs pointed out. "We all believe this is the way things are going, but [current models of targeting] don't take into account the customers in the car or the safety issues."

It's not an impossible task, he added, but it's "a constrained environment."

In addition to the many contextual factors, display is a key issue. Ads sent to targetable, in-car sound systems can allow a driver to keep her eyes on the road, although there still is the issue of whether highly targeted information becomes a distraction.

An out-of-nowhere voice ad for an oil change because your car has silently signaled it is running low, for instance, could cause you to focus on that instead of the truck up ahead.

As for in-car visual displays for marketing, there may be only two solutions. One is a heads-up display, adapted from commercial aircraft where the pilot can look ahead and see all kinds of information in one field of vision.

<https://youtu.be/pKL4PJICS40>

That could solve the problem that humans only have one pair of eyes. It doesn't necessarily solve the problem that humans have only one brain, and the limits of in-vision information overload for an ordinary driver have not yet been established.

But the real solution, the one that will get marketers out of safety concerns altogether, is the [self-driving car](#).

If and when such cars happen — and all the auto makers and several tech giants like Google are betting heavily on them — the humans inside the car are no longer responsible for keeping other cars at a safe distance.

As far as marketers are concerned, at that point, the car becomes a living room. A fast-moving one, of course, but marketers are accustomed to targeting living rooms.

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