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Usability and Driver Distraction

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It's hard enough to try and create enjoyable user experiences through intuitive human machine interfaces. But when you factor in life threatening situations, you better make sure the usability is not just good, but really good. Such is the case with navigation systems. What was once a luxury has become a standard. Whether is be factory installed systems, portables, or even using the cell phone - going to MapQuest and printing out directions has become archaic - a thing of the past.

Users of all ages using systems of all sizes. The problem is not so much who uses the product or the product size (although these are factors as well), it is the interaction with these products while driving. Here then lies the problem - reducing or minimizing the driver distraction. Usability becomes a very important factor here. Some companies lock out the entire system while the vehicle is in motion. Great for minimizing the distraction but frustrating for the user experience. What if they have a passenger or if they were in the middle of entering an address and the light turns green? There has been so much complaint of the lockouts that those clever enough have figured out ways to bypass it, effectively voiding their warranty and accepting full liability. Some systems only allow you to access certain features or set a speed limit before locking you out. Others provide an annoying warning message each time you want to access the menu, claiming no liability if something terrible were to happen to you and/or your vehicle. And then there are those that do nothing and let the User use the system as they please. Either the usability and design of their systems are top notch or they simply like playing with the house's money (read: lawsuit).

The Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) has proposed a recommended practice, known as the 15-second rule. The rule states that if a given route guidance destination entry function can be completed in 15 seconds or less by a sample of drivers without concurrent driving, then that function may be accessible while the vehicle is in motion. The point I am trying to make is this - no matter what the system does or does not do, the usability and design is of utmost importance. Could someone have improved the design of the navigation system that locks you completely out so Users would be able to to accomplish their task faster and easier? Could users use voice commands instead of interacting with the touch screen

while the vehicle is moving?

Navigation systems are here to stay and the ones with the best user interaction while minimizing the driver distraction will not only be the ones that people like best but could possible save the company a lot of future legal fees.

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