

Ford adding tweets to its Sync in-car technology

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Ford President and CEO Alan Mulally gives the keynote address at the International Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas on Thursday, Jan. 7, 2010. (AP Photo/Laura Rauch)

(AP) -- Ford Motor Co. is adding Twitter messages and Internet radio to its in-car entertainment and communication service, known as Sync, and suggests that the voice-activated system is safer for drivers than trying to manipulate applications on their cell phones.

Ford CEO Alan Mulally told an audience at the International [Consumer Electronics Show](#) on Thursday that Sync is designed as a way for drivers to do things like chat with their kids and make dinner reservations, "all while keeping their eyes on the road and their hands on the wheel."

Ford is one of many companies at CES that are showing off information and entertainment technologies for car drivers and passengers. Such

products have been available for several years, but their proliferation is leading to increased fears about whether drivers can stay focused on the road while listening to tweets and requesting stock quotes.

Paul Green, a professor at the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute who studies the effects of distractions for motorists, said automakers are making a "reasonable effort" to minimize the problem. It's unclear how successful they are, though, because vehicles are becoming more and more complicated, adding to a driver's workload.

Green said that since Sync uses voice-activated commands, it should make it easier for drivers to keep their attention on the road.

"They're providing more things for drivers to do, but they're providing them in an easy way," he said. "One hopes it's a net gain."

Ford's Sync service, which was developed by [Microsoft](#) Corp. and rolled out in 2007, already lets drivers do such things as make phone calls and use GPS technology to get turn-by-turn directions and traffic information.

Now, Ford executives said Thursday, Sync will begin working with two Internet radio services, Pandora and Stitcher. It also will connect to OpenBeak, which can read your or your friends' Twitter posts out loud. Users will need to have the Sync versions of these applications on a phone with a Bluetooth wireless link.

Later this year, Ford plans to allow more software developers to modify their applications to work with Sync, too.

In an interview, Pandora founder Tim Westergren said the car is the "holy grail" of radio, and having his music application available through

Sync shows how important Internet radio has become. Internet radio services offer a much wider variety of music than commercial services, generally without ads.

"This is a tipping point, I think," he said.

Ford executives said that the company is talking with Google Inc. about bringing its services to cars as well, and that it plans to add Wi-Fi to some cars that have Sync.

Ford also said it will roll out a new LCD dashboard for cars later this year. Called MyFord Touch, it would work with Sync and let users do things such as personalize a car's audio and temperature settings. The company plans to have MyFord Touch on 80 percent of its vehicles in the next five years.

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