

Growth in information and communication technologies has led to information overload and driver distraction. Carmakers are under pressure to provide the latest infotainment, but they also have to keep the process of human interaction with the car simple enough to discourage driver distraction. Which of these conflicting goals is winning?



Research by NHTSA has shown that 17%, an estimated 899,000, of all police-reported crashes in 2010 in the US involved some type of driver distraction. Of those, distraction by a device or control integral to the vehicle was reported in 26,000 cases. Based on these results, NHTSA has formulated voluntary guidelines for vehicle configuration to discourage driver distraction, which will be rolled out in three phases based on device origin and interaction type. NHTSA plans to take account of feedback from motorists and hold public hearings before finalising the first phase of recommendations.

Smartphones are one of the major sources of driver distraction, the US National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) said in December 2011 as it proposed a nationwide ban on the use of personal electronics devices while driving. It said the risk of crashing is four times higher when using a phone while driving a car.

However, Frost & Sullivan analyst Krishna Jayaraman believes a Federal regulation banning the use of hands-free systems including wireless headsets could cause conflicts with automakers offering phone integration in their vehicles. Voice control is being increasingly looked at as a possible means of reducing the distraction created by vehicle infotainment systems, but the state of the art is still quite early in terms of the migration from command-based to natural speech systems.