

## Airbiquity exec: Car connectivity to see 2014 boost



New technologies are likely to give a strong boost to car connectivity in the next two years, a senior industry executive predicts.

Leo McCloskey, who heads sales and marketing for Airbiquity, cited in particular the major improvements in voice-recognition software, which will benefit in-car systems. And he said closer cooperation between the various industries involved in car connectivity will be another key factor underpinning his high expectations.

Airbiquity, a US-based provider of connected vehicle services, is working toward an adaptive and flexible car-to-car communication and car-to-infrastructure environment by 2014.

"Our policy engine will allow automakers to choreograph a unique environment of information and services that are right for the driver and the automaker," McCloskey said in a recent telephone interview with automotiveIT.

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Airbiquity's growth plans are in line with industry forecasts of sharp increases in the number of telematics-equipped cars on the road in coming years.

This month, analysts at ABI Research predicted that connected car system shipments are set to grow to 39.5 million in 2016 from 8.22 million this year. SBD, another market research firm, in February issued a prediction that, by 2025, every car will be connected.

Airbiquity wants to bring services into the vehicle taking into account four factors: The driver and his preferences; a car's IT capabilities; the location of the vehicle and the rules and regulations that are in force in a particular location; and whether a car is parked or driving.

### Helping the driver

The company's approach is relatively simple. "We're not trying to fix anything," McCloskey said. "But as the world becomes more personalized, we need to provide an infrastructure that helps the driver."

Airbiquity is one of the biggest players in connected vehicle services. Its Cloud-based global platform delivers services to more than 16 million vehicles, which conduct hundreds of thousands of transactions each day across its infrastructure. It is a key supplier to General Motors' OnStar and Ford's Sync connectivity systems and provides the connection platform for the Nissan Leaf electric vehicle.

The privately held firm, which is owned by several venture capital and investment groups, doesn't provide sales and earnings data. But McCloskey said Airbiquity's business has been growing by 70-100 pc a year.

Part of that growth comes from consumer demand for more services in the car. But it also reflects a desire by automakers to get more data on customer behavior - which they can get once a car is connected. "We want to enable automakers to build better relationships with connected customers and build better brands," McCloskey said.

In the process, drivers will provide more information to car companies than ever before. This has raised privacy concerns and McCloskey agrees that the industry can provide more transparency on how data is collected and shared. But he also notes that less privacy is the price to pay for better service. "If you want full-time connectivity, the only way is to let systems know where you are."

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The Airbiquity executives sees two major developments in connecting cars. The first is "the start of a scalable information and communication technology environment." For this to be realized, he said, even closer cooperation between the auto industry, service providers and computer companies will be required.

The other major change McCloskey expects in coming years is the increased use of voice-recognition software. Citing Apple's new Siri software, McCloskey said voice recognition is about to make a major leap in the car.

Resource-intensive applications no longer require more processing power in the car because connected smartphones take over the work. Said McCloskey: "You don't have to build that horsepower in the vehicle anymore because the consumer brings it in as an off-board resource connected to the car."

-By Arjen Bongard

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