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Bttry LO! Pls DNnt 4get 2 chg 2day! :-) TX

Robert Passikoff, May 27, 2011 07:46 AM

That's the message some Toyota owners will be getting.

From their cars!

[Toyota has teamed](#) with Salesforce.com and Microsoft to create a social network called "Toyota Friend," where Toyota's electric cars and plug-in hybrids can become "friends" with their owners.

By connecting the owners' smartphones via a dedicated app, the car will send a message to the vehicle's owner alerting him or her that the battery is low. Or that the car needs a tune-up. Or an inspection. Or that it's lonely. Okay -- not the last one, but the program is certainly more differentiating and engaging than a check-engine light, or a postcard from your dealer.

The new social network will be built into the dashboard of new models and will feature full Facebook and Twitter integration. There will even be a private Web site that Toyota customers can use to view news feeds about their cars. Or share stories about their cars. And if it turns out that your car is more technologically advanced than your mobile phone, messages will be sent via SMS.

Toyota -- which has been hit with recalls, shortages, more recalls, and factory shutdowns -- needs something to lift sales and repair its dented image. Toyota president Akio Toyoda, announcing the \$5 million venture, said: "Social networking services are transforming human interaction and modes of communication. The automobile must evolve in step with that transformation."

In a parallel lane, Ford had announced last year that it was adding a new feature to transform its in-car communication systems -- a "Do Not Disturb" button -- a proactive safety measure to block incoming calls and texts. Earlier this year, at the Geneva Motor Show, BMW introduced its "Connected Drive," a system that brings together more than 50 communication functions, including satellite navigation and self-drive technology.

Anything that can make drivers' lives safer and more comfortable is bound to offer new opportunities for brand differentiation and engagement.

And if they drive buying decisions, too, all we can say is XLNT!