

How Your Church Resembles New-Car Technology

Billions of dollars are spent annually on vehicle technology that drivers never use.

J.D. Power and Associates released [a report](#) last week about technology use in cars, explaining that today's luxury cars are packed to overflowing with every connected gadget automakers can dream up.

Yet car owners aren't using much of the new technology, for several reasons: They don't know how to use it. It doesn't enhance the driving experience. And they already have other devices that accomplish the same tasks.

So what determines whether the technology gets used?

Consumers use the technology if it's connected to the main function of the car. Lane warnings, blind spot detection, back-up cameras, navigation systems, active cruise control - car owners like those things. If it makes driving cars easier and safer, then consumers use it.

But technology that doesn't directly impact the driving experience is going largely unused. Built-in apps? Nope. Apple and Android connectivity? Nope. In-vehicle concierge services? Mobile routers? Nope and nope.

Eugene Peterson once asked, "How do I maintain a sense of pastoral vocation in the middle of a community of people who are hiring me to do religious jobs?"

For car manufacturers, the question might be, "How do we focus on the service we're really trying to deliver - a safe and pleasant driving experience - over all the other stuff people say we ought to be doing, but that they really don't need?"

For churches, that question might look like, "How do we maintain a clear sense of purpose in the middle of an extraordinary push to gain the attention of an increasingly distracted and disengaged culture?"

For individuals, the question might be translated, "How does what I'm adding to my life add to or distract from my core purpose?"

As we ask those questions, Christians and churches can learn something from the J.D. Power report.

People like cars that get them where they want to go safely, reliably and comfortably.

If technology can make a car safer, more reliable or more comfortable, people love it. But if new technology isn't directly applied to the core purpose of the car, most people can take it or leave it.

Along the same lines, people come to church out of an ingrained desire to be more holy, healthy and whole.

If we can find new ways to help communicate truths, build communities and create experiences that move people toward holier, healthier and more complete lives, then we should aggressively update how we do things.

But if the new "stuff" - ideas, initiatives, technology - isn't directly applied to the core purposes of our church, people will find it more of an unnecessary distraction than a tool for kingdom advancement.

That doesn't mean we should reflexively resist all things new. Cruise control, airbags, anti-lock brakes, power windows and car audio systems were once new technology in cars, and they are widely valued today.

It does mean, though, that we should evaluate all change through appropriate filters - namely the core-purpose filter.

Drivers don't adopt new car technology if they don't know how to use it, if it doesn't enhance the driving experience, and if they already have something else to fulfill the same function.

Maybe churches should use similar questions for new programs and initiatives:

1. Do our people understand how the new stuff works? Has it been clearly explained?
2. Does the new stuff enhance the "church experience"? Does it directly improve the core things we're trying to do?
3. Are we trying to fulfill a function at church that is better fulfilled somewhere

else?

As churches race to keep up with the times, we shouldn't be in such a hurry that we don't remember to maintain consistent alignment with our core purposes.

And what's true for cars and churches might also be true for individuals. So we should be asking ourselves several questions.

What have I added to my life that might be detracting from my core purpose? We all have something - a habit, an attitude, a relationship, an unhealed wound.

Cars are meant to get people from place to place safely, reliably and comfortably. What am I meant for?

Are the "new" things in my life making me more or less holy, healthy and whole? Are the new things helping me move toward justice, mercy and humility (see Micah 6:8) in partnership with God?

How are they helping exemplify my love of God and love of neighbor (Matthew 22:36-40)? How are the new things helping me become more like Christ?

New, different and upgraded isn't necessarily bad for cars, churches or people. New can be - and often is - a great improvement.

But all that we do and all that we add to our lives should pass through those "core purpose" questions.

Adding new things to cars that detract from their core purpose can be a multi-billion dollar distraction. That's no small thing. Imagine the cost when we're talking about people.

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