

COMPANY

BMW

INDUSTRY

Automotive

TESTING TYPES

Functional

Usability

APP TYPES

Websites

Mobile Apps

Connected Cars

CHALLENGES

Access to older, unmodified vehicles

Complexities of integrating with third-party mobile apps that were not designed for in-car usage

RESULTS

Avoided costs associated with maintaining large test vehicle fleet

Confirmed capabilities on cars not originally designed for detailed in-car app framework

Actionable usability feedback improved how customers interface with third-party apps

Gained coverage beyond typical customer use cases

CASE STUDY



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USTOMER

Automakers have long pushed engine capabilities and performance as the prime reason for purchase, but it is the in-car technological extras and mobile apps that are increasingly important, especially for those companies that see cars as objects of desire. Simply turning the key and hitting the road is no longer enough, driving needs to mimic the lifestyle of the person behind the wheel.

Over the last decade or so, the increase in mobile tech has been responsible for numerous app-related innovations within a wide range of vehicles. It would be fair to assume that the majority of drivers also own a mobile device and there has been a demonstrated rise in the number of new cars that now include popular apps as standard.

As one of the foremost examples of a car manufacturer associated with an aspirational product, BMW is widely acknowledged as being a leader. For nearly 100 years, the German firm has been responsible for developing not only iconic vehicles, but also perfecting features that take the drive to the next level.

CHALLENGES

Christian Schmid is a Senior Advanced Technology Engineer with BMW and is responsible for testing multiple-platform apps within a lab-based environment at the automaker's research facility in Mountain View, California. Over the last five years, Schmid has been part of the team developing 'BMW apps,' a platform-agnostic system that provides the framework for in-car mobile applications such as Pandora, Yelp, Facebook, Wikipedia and, most recently, Spotify.

Most leading manufacturers are already in a race to bring the hottest apps into the dashboard, meaning that a company like BMW needs to make the most of its resources. While the company operates a dedicated R&D department in Silicon Valley, there are test locations all over the world that create partnerships with local app developers - all of which are orchestrated by Schmid from his California base as part of the bigger BMW picture.

“When we approach a partner... let’s say Pandora, we work with them closely and identify what features are in their app” Schmid says. “For example, which features would we like to show in the vehicle. It’s usually a subset of features because we don’t want to put any distraction on the driver. We only want to really offer the most important features of an app.”

What sets the BMW-related apps apart is the fact that the app architecture runs in the UI layer of the car, with the coding team creating the interface between operating systems as opposed to the app developer.

BMW engineers define how the app should act in the car, and then integrate that into the UI. The team then provides a template to the partner company who hook that up to their product and import that information directly into the app. Then whenever a device with that app is connected to either a BMW or a Mini, the app will show up in the dashboard.

Most of the vehicles that carry this system are sold across the world, and there was a BMW requirement to test apps on vehicles that may not have been originally developed with that level of in-car app framework. This becomes even more important when the company has a reputation for quality.

SOLUTION

A demonstrated need to test apps in real world conditions with real BMW and Mini drivers was extremely logical, even more so considering the generic challenges faced by all global companies. According to Schmid, time differences and language barriers are one thing, but Applause was able to provide not only testing services but also something extra.

“We were only able to maintain test reqs mainly,” he notes. “Our development process within

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Christian Schmid



BMW is set up to always test the latest and greatest technologies in the vehicle and not hold onto older platforms. That's been a big benefit of working with Applause is that we don't have to hold on to all of the existing vehicle platforms. "

There was also the small matter of having enough vehicles available to test. Research labs are not known for having enough space to keep or maintain a full compliment of older cars on standby, a factor that Schmid admits was another key reason for bringing a managed tested service onboard.

"By using Applause, we were able to get access to existing customers of our vehicles," he said. "We know they have real production vehicles that aren't modified. Those are really reference. That's really reference hardware and software that we can test against."

At the same time, Schmid had access to a community of in-the-wild testers that -- on occasion -- went above and beyond in terms of feedback, with one individual taking an app designed for racing enthusiasts to a local track and testing it in actual race conditions.

"It was very interesting to get the findings and even get a video of how he used the app on the track," Schmid says. "That is of course something we could do at BMW too. We do it at BMW, but it's harder to orchestrate a test session on the racetrack."

RESULTS

BMW has always prided itself on being an ultimate driving experience, and for millions of people this has certainly been the case. However, as mobile tech integrates more seamlessly into every aspect of life including driving, it is apps that will make the difference. And effective testing is what moves that into a higher gear.

"You always see it from the same perspective," notes Schmid. "Having someone to look at these apps who has never used them before, that was really something new. We learned a lot about usability, how the testers from Applause are approaching these apps and are using these apps versus our internal testers. It was very interesting to see what feedback we got as Applause testers represented a customer."

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**ABOUT APPLAUSE**

Applause empowers companies of all sizes to deliver great digital experiences (DX) - across web, mobile and IoT as well as brick-and-mortar - spanning every customer touchpoint.

Applause delivers unmatched in-the-wild testing, user feedback and research solutions by utilizing its DX platform to manage communities around the world. This provides brands with the real-world insights they need to achieve omni-channel success across demographics, locations, devices and operating systems that match their user base.

Thousands of companies - including Google, FOX, Best Buy, BMW, PayPal and Runkeeper - rely on Applause to ensure great digital experiences for their customers. Learn more at www.applause.com.