

As car buyers demand more content inside their vehicles, it falls to interior designers to make interaction with the technologies safe and satisfying. Several statistics confirm the importance of designing systems that allow drivers to safely use navigation, outbound texting and soon, social media.

Federal research shows 16% of all fatal crashes in 2008 involved distracted driving and 28%, or 1.6 million, of all car collisions per year occur while drivers are using a device. Furthermore, a crash becomes four times more likely when a driver is using a cell phone, and multiplies by 20 times when the driver is text-messaging.



Many drivers are convinced some risks are less serious than others.

“People call it multitasking; it's actually task-switching”, says Visteon's strategic marketing manager Michael Tschirhart. “People aren't doing two tasks at once, they are doing one task, switching to another and back...and performance on both tasks goes down. People are overconfident”.

However, patching up existing systems ultimately will not work. Designers must provide a bulletproof interface from the outset. “Design things to enhance the perceptual ability of the driver.” Tschirhart says.

To that end, Nokia have partnered with Valmet Automotive and Fiat to deploy a connectivity system called “Terminal Mode.” As the name suggests, Terminal Mode marries hand-held devices such as smartphones with existing vehicle components through Bluetooth and USB connections. Nokia deployed an advanced version of the system on a Valmet concept car at the 2010 Geneva auto show, as well as simpler variant on a Fiat 500 at the same event. The system presents mobile device applications on existing display screens and allows them to be controlled by the vehicle's human machine interface.