

TECHNOLOGY IN OUR LIVES

More Drivers Using Voice-Activated, Hands-Free Car Phones

(NAPSA)—Voice-activated, hands-free wireless phones are increasing in popularity. Perhaps nowhere is this technology more useful than in automobiles, where they can be a less distracting alternative to using a hand-held cell phone while driving.

Industry analysts project that more than 50 percent of vehicles sold worldwide will be equipped with in-vehicle communications—or telematics—systems and services by decade's end, with the number approaching 70 percent of new vehicles sales in North America.

Analysts also expect that the integration of voice-activated, hands-free cellular services will become increasingly important in telematics applications. There are 150 million wireless users in the U.S., and research shows that 50 to 80 percent of cellular phone use occurs in automobiles.

One example of this trend toward voice-activated, hands-free phone technology is the expansion of OnStar Personal Calling, whose usage tripled in 2002 over the previous year. Just two years after taking its hands-free embedded cellular personal calling service nationwide, OnStar has now sold more than 230 million wireless minutes.

A voice-activated, hands-free phone that is fully integrated into an automobile has the advantage of not being misplaced or forgotten, or having the battery wear down. It also gives motorists greater flexibility when traveling in areas where the use of hand-held phones is restricted while driving, such as the state of New York and a number of municipalities across the country.

Safety and convenience aren't

the only benefits of this technology. The others are the widespread coverage it offers and the simplicity of a three-button system.

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OnStar's 3-watt cellular system and external antenna is more powerful than the standard hand-held phone, providing better reception, signal hold and coverage throughout the U.S. It operates alongside the vehicle's electrical system and is powered by the vehicle's battery.

The benefits were clear as a bell for Bill Ender of Cypress, Calif., who found OnStar Personal Calling invaluable during a fishing trip with a group of friends in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Ender's group was in a remote area about 10,000 feet above sea level when they discovered their hand-held wireless phones were useless. With the nearest pay phone 55 miles away, Ender turned to the embedded phone in his 2003 Chevrolet Tahoe.

"Every time I used the OnStar phone service I was able to get right through to my family," said Ender. "My friends were really impressed, and all used the service to call their families."

OnStar Personal Calling is part of a new breed of "car phone" for today's drivers and passengers. With more than two million subscribers and its availability on more than 70 models from seven different automotive manufacturers, the OnStar type system may become the way of the future.