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# Free The Vehicle

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By Alan Dvoskin

## Entry 1 - INTRODUCTION

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As transportation experts test new technologies meant to lead us to a truly “autonomous vehicle”, and as reports by vehicle manufacturers, government agencies, and hi-tech companies tease us with previews of this ultimate destination, the cries come loudly from the back seat: “Are we there yet?”

The best answer is a familiar one, “Close your eyes for a few minutes, when you wake up, we’ll be there.”

Let's take this journey together, gaze through the windshield at the road ahead, and explore the ways that evolved transportation will navigate to all corners of our lives.

I call this blog "Free The Vehicle", because I interpret the coming changes as a new path for machinery which transports both us and our stuff. The vehicle will escape the grip of human hands, human feet, and human minds. These constraints have previously limited the abilities of terribly sophisticated machines. The transportation machine can do so much more if we let it. So, let it. Free The Vehicle!

When the engine on my beat up, rusted, 1967 Mustang gave out shortly after graduating college, I purchased my first new vehicle, a Nissan Sentra. I didn't want much, just a vehicle that I could rely on to get me to work and back, and take an occasional road trip. I did not think much about fancy features, however, this vehicle had a feature known as Cruise Control. When I took a trip with two of my friends from Atlanta to New York, I could rest my leg during the monotonous stretches of highway by setting the cruise control to my desired speed and pulling my foot away from the accelerator. Wow! Pretty high-

tech! In the back of my mind I'm thinking, "I wish this machine would control the steering wheel as well, then I'd be set."

That was my first experience with the removal of the human from the driving process. It was a perfect illustration that humans are not made to drive long distances encumbered by repetitive scenery and distractive passengers. Watching the white lines fly by at a rhythmic pace is like watching paint dry; it is, in fact, "watching dry paint". Humans are not the best tool for this.

Compare it to adding up a long column of numbers. Humans are certainly capable of doing it, however, using a spreadsheet on your computer to do it, assures you of the quality of the job and leaves you with time to do more important things.

Evolved transportation is now introducing itself to many aspects of our lives. I intend to follow that journey, and talk about all the ways it will impact us. How our kids get to school, how pizza is delivered to our home, how we arrive at work meetings, all of these things will be affected.

The subject of autonomous vehicles excites me, because it will eventually shine its light in so many places. And affect so many people in a positive way. I love talking about it. It moves me!

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### Entry 2 - WHAT WILL POWER THE TRANSITION TO AUTONOMOUS TRANSPORTATION?

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Many people have touted the obstacles to autonomous transportation, the bumps in the road that will slow down or even stop its implementation. After all, just because the technology exists, it does not mean its application will be accepted or become successful.

I have listened to the arguments which claim that autonomous vehicles will not be accepted by consumers, legislators, and insurance companies. There are some strong arguments, which may apply to certain situations. However, there is one over-riding factor that supports the inevitability of its immersion into our society. That one factor is Money.

Money tends to be the ultimate determining factor for any new product or industry. Will consumers spend money? Can suppliers make money? Can a government ensure that the economy of their citizens will thrive with this new industry?

So, how do we know that consumers will spend their hard-earned money on autonomous vehicles? There are four benefits of autonomous vehicles that will appeal to consumers. Let's look at each one. First and foremost is Safety.

## Safety

My son got in the car last year, but this time he was getting in the driver's seat for the first time. He is learning to drive and this is arguably the most stressful time for a parent. You really understand how many things can go wrong during a car ride when you put your child in the driver's seat. Your first wish is that they return safely and don't cause a crash.

This vulnerable time for parents will lead to them becoming the eager adopters of autonomous vehicles. "I know it costs more for that car, but their safety is worth it."

More than 30,000 people die in the United States each year, and this past year that number reached 40,000. World-wide, that number reaches 1,000,000 per year! These numbers are astounding. If any new product or industry came to market with those numbers, there would be widespread protests, boycotts, and industry investigations. Yet because personal transportation is so engrained in our culture, we accept the dangers and casualties as a necessary downside. We won't give up the freedom of personal transportation to offset the negatives of personal transportation. But what if we can offset the negatives, without giving up our freedom? That's a benefit that consumers will pay for.

If consumer demand exists for vehicles that provide higher levels of safety, manufacturers will get them to market quickly.

As advanced safety features become more common on vehicles, we will see more and more illustrations of how they have a direct impact on our safety. Our neighbors will give us first-hand accounts of how their lane departure warning kept them from hitting a tractor-trailer full of heavy equipment. Or how their daughter avoided a collision with a deer standing in the middle of the road, due to the collision avoidance feature on her car.

The consumer attitude toward the benefits of autonomous vehicles will strengthen, story by story. And our wallets (or whatever we are using to pay for things) will speak for us, as we give our money to this evolution of transportation.

## Convenience

The second factor which will drive consumer attitudes is Convenience. It is no secret that in our wealthy American economy, convenience sells, and selling convenience warrants a high profit margin for suppliers.

But convenience is not only attractive to wealthy buyers. Convenience also allows governments to be more efficient in providing services to its citizens. Which makes a local government's region more attractive to businesses and residents.

Right now, the limits of public transportation mean you are bound by the bus schedule or train schedule. Imagine public transportation without those limits.

A local government will be motivated to pass laws allowing the use of autonomous vehicles. Businesses thinking about moving their headquarters to your city will find this kind of infrastructure very attractive. They can promise easy commutes for employees. And a more efficient public transportation system means less of your tax money will be required to provide the transportation needs to the public.

## Productivity

The third factor to drive consumer behavior is Productivity. Ah, yes! Every company wants to be more productive. This is their bottom line. "The more productive we are, the more money we make." The figures regarding the increase in productivity for businesses since the advent of the personal computer are staggering.

Your sales team, like many sales teams, are road warriors. Driving from customer to customer, they plan their travel schedule to make their week as efficient and productive as possible. But the fact remains, much of their time is spent holding a wheel and pressing a pedal.

If I told a business that I can save each member of their sales team 10 hours per week, what would their reaction be? Pretty positive.

## Environmental Enhancement

In the 1980's, Robert Fulgham wrote a book called "All I Really Need To Know I Learned in Kindergarten". One of the important things he learned was, we should leave every place that we go just as we found it, without leaving trash or a mess. If you spill some juice, you clean it up so whoever comes after you will not have to deal with your mess. It's a fairly basic concept that most reasonable people can identify with. Don't litter and don't pollute. Those of us who drive cars though seem to over-look this rule, because there have not been many solutions for us to leave our transportation path as clean as we found it.

With the advancement of new, innovative technologies, we are moving toward a time when we can follow Fulgham's kindergarten rule. We have vehicles that leave no mess behind. Electric vehicles of course result in zero emissions. And autonomous vehicles use even less energy no matter how they are powered.

Safety. Convenience. Productivity. Environmental Care. There's at least one factor here that appeals to just about everyone. And given that most people will have a strong motivation to adopt, the future of autonomous driving will be strong.