

A Technicianless Service Call

Some aspects of customer service just can't be automated.

By Bryan Rader / *Access Media 3*

Ford announced it will offer a self-driving vehicle by 2021. Volkswagen's head of strategy expects its first self-driving car by 2019. GM reported "2020 or sooner." Tesla, Jaguar, Land Rover, BMW – all are making similar announcements.

By 2025, the U.S. Department of Transportation predicts, "driverless cars will be in use all over the world." Uber will begin to phase out its drivers over the next decade, hoping to use only driverless cars by 2030.

In fact, Uber began testing a driverless car in Pittsburgh with a backup driver. The car is a Ford Fusion Hybrid with roof-mounted cameras, GPS receivers and a laser radar (LIDAR) system that collects more than a million data points per second. The system can navigate, accelerate, brake and steer the car.

The strong wind of innovation blowing over the automobile industry today is likely to impact many areas of consumers' lives. Driverless cars take the human element out of driving. There will be fewer accidents, less road rage and no more cutting across three lanes of traffic when the driver almost misses an exit. The driverless car's computer never gets lost, doesn't text and drive and certainly won't stop on the way home for a nightcap that impairs its driving.

A driverless world could become an attractive future reality. It would cut down on one of today's biggest headaches – traffic! But it wouldn't do a thing for another of today's big headaches – in-home service tech visits.

Or would it?

What if cable companies moved to a technicianless world? Maybe they would begin making the same announcements as the car companies: Comcast plans technicianless service calls by 2020. Charter announces it will be technicianless by 2019. AT&T claims it's there in 2021. In fact, the U.S. Department of Cable TV (I mean the FCC) could soon announce that the whole industry will be technicianless by 2025!

Does that sound like a good idea? No more human element in customer installs, service calls, work orders or help tickets. Instead, service providers send driverless cars with technicianless service robots to handle all in-home issues.

A robot will not track in mud during a service call, will not smell like the Taco Bell it inhaled between appointments and will not ask to use the customer's bathroom. It will be programmed to enter the customer's apartment or condo, take internet signal readings throughout the home, test the Wi-Fi devices and replace set-top boxes, all in less than an hour, before it jumps back into its driverless vehicle to go to the next MDU community.



How efficient. A robot won't waste time moving furniture, playing with the customer's dog or answering stupid questions about how to use the new DVR app on a smartphone. Efficient, yes. Customer service focused, no.

A robot can handle the technical items on a work order, but how does it handle unexpected questions or comments such as "I have no idea what a router is" and "I'm not sure where the HDMI cord is located." Work orders and installs are opportunities, more so than ever before.

I was in an Apple store at the mall during the holidays. (I know, a driverless car would probably have told me, "What, are you crazy? You want me to take you to the mall on Christmas Eve?") As I looked around the recently expanded store, I was amazed at how much service and support happen versus sales of new products. Apple stocks its stores with young people in bright red Apple shirts (and tattoos and earrings) to guide customers through myriad issues. Customers hovered around large tables, asking such questions as, "How do I pair my watch with my phone? Where are my old pictures? How do I transfer my contacts?"

No robot answered my questions (I mean, er, the other clueless Apple customers' questions), just patient Apple associates addressing any kind of unexpected issue. No robot could do this as well.

Apple's retail stores get it, and so should broadband service providers. Don't announce a technicianless plan in the next few years. You'll lose an opportunity to be special. And service techs in the industry will be able to breathe a sigh of relief. ❖

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