

The Apple Car will be really different ... if it exists

Written by The Conversation

It has been a week and the Apple Car rumor hasn't been denied by Apple. ([Here's the background](#) in case you have been living under a rock). So what are we to make of all this?

Much of what has been talked about is complete speculation. That it will be electric, autonomous, a mini-van (!) all seem obvious or mis-communicated hearsay. Thinking about cars is the wrong way to approach thinking about the Apple Car. Instead, you have to think about Apple's identity and how it approaches new markets. And let's face it, a car would be a new market.

First, Apple does not introduce incremental product improvements. This won't be a car with an Apple logo or something that Tesla is doing. Instead, it will be something at least ten times better (you pick the metric) than anyone else is doing. It did that with the Apple II, the Macintosh, the iPod, the iPhone, the iPad and, possibly, the Apple Watch. Apple TV was ten times better than your TV or cable box, but it wasn't ten times better than everyone's product, which is probably why Apple deemed it a hobby.

This means that if the company is working on something, whether it is electric or what have you, is unlikely to be the point. It is going to solve some problems that are major ones – so major that no one else has really tackled them. And guess what? I have no idea what those might be and neither likely does anyone in the car industry. The car industry has identified only two next-generation technologies of importance – electric motors and autonomous vehicles. Tesla leads the former, and we guess that Google leads the latter.

Second, when Apple release these products, it envisages them as part of its hub of products. For the iPod, it was part of the personal computer as a hub concept. For the iPhone and iPad, that became the cloud as a hub. I suspect we are back to the iPhone as a hub with the Apple Watch. The question is, in five years' time, what will be the device that is the hub for people. If you can answer that question, you may be able to guess what the Apple Car might do that will be new.

Third, design and user-interfaces are where these new products come from. Looking good happens, but after function. So thinking about what a new Apple Car might look like is crazy. As crazy as thinking about whether the company will ship the car for US\$29,999 for the 16GB

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model and \$39,999 for the 64GB one. Instead, think about the designers. In this case, Jonny Ive. As the [New Yorker profiled](#) (in what seems to be an article preparing us for his retirement in six months), he commutes to and from San Francisco – that’s two hours at least in total – in a chauffeur-driven Bentley. That’s lots of time to think about what’s wrong with cars. In other words, the Apple Car is likely to be something that is important for commuters. Moreover, Apple devices tend to be familiar and not require explanation. What would a car that is obvious to use look like?

That said, let me just throw another possibility into the mix. I wonder if the Apple Car is more about Disney. You know where it would be great to have a set of autonomous, mini-van style cars? Disney World. In Disney World Florida, there is a fleet of buses designed to get people around. Lots of people spend lots of time waiting for them. Imagine instead that the whole area was turned over to autonomous vehicles with no other ones in sight. Think about how they could make that type of “community of the future” work. And to do it, think about what would happen if Disney partnered with Apple on that (as Apple and Disney have historically close ties).

Anyhow, I am boldly going to say right here, right now, and for the record, that I have no idea what the Apple Car will do even if it exists. But if it does happen, the chances are it will be very, very new.

Joshua Gans does not work for, consult to, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has no relevant affiliations.

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