

SVOX FORUM 06: Standards, Trends and Perspectives in the Automotive and Mobile Navigation Industry

The SVOX Forum 06, which took place in Zurich, 16-17 November, was host to 65 international experts on the possibilities and challenges of merging in-car electronics systems with portable devices.

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Looking back at vehicles from just a few years ago, it is astonishing that even today's entry- and mid-level cars often come equipped with an array of impressive electronics and technical features. Naturally, all of these elements are designed to optimize the driver's and passenger's road experiences. Such technically complex offerings might be as simple as a built-in calculator of average mileage per gallon, or they may be as sophisticated as integrated entertainment electronics such as headrests outfitted with DVD-players and flat screens or voice-controlled navigation devices and telephones. In addition, a plethora of portable gadgets is flooding the consumer technology market: cell phones, laptops, MP3-players, PDAs and portable navigation devices.

It is not difficult to imagine this abundance of automotive technologies overwhelming someone who has just sat down behind the driving wheel. In fact, the ready temptations presented by in-car multimedia systems and their operation can greatly distract the driver from his primary objective: safe driving. These concerns were the focus of the SVOX Forum "Convergence of In-Car Systems and Nomadic Devices" safety discussion. Improving devices' user-friendliness and the overall driver safety via voice enabled in-car equipment is an important task facing navigation equipment engineers and developers. One innovative solution proposed by SVOX Forum 06 participants was that in-car device navigation operate through voice input and output systems. This would significantly ease menu navigation and allow the driver to keep his hands on the steering wheel and his eyes on the road.

SVOX Forum 06 participants also undertook the matter of how to smoothly manipulate several in-car devices. Imagine that a portable navigation system's voice-output delivers its next command to the vehicle computer for processing at precisely the same time that the portable MP3-player sends its message to the car radio and starts playing some music. This could spell

trouble: in-car computer overload. Although there were no facile answers to the question of how to prioritize device operations, which is as much an issue of consumer preference as it is one of safe technology and computer harmony, there were many fruitful discussions.

Another issue looming large at the SVOX Forum 06 was the prospective competition between the manufacturers of in-car navigation systems and those of portable devices. Will automobile manufacturers ultimately have the last word on the integration, operation and standards of in-car mobile devices, leaving the portable hardware manufacturers to simply adjust accordingly? Or will car manufacturers make themselves heard by setting up the in-car computer of the future to recognize only some types of portable device and not others? In a consumer-driven market, such questions have no easy answers, for there are no foolproof predictors of consumer choice. The rapid growth in the portable and built-in navigation systems market, the heated competition between manufacturers racing to keep up with rising industry standards and the drop in the prices for compatible accessories and software notwithstanding, only complicate the picture.

The overwhelmingly positive feedback on the SVOX Forum 06 demonstrates that its expert participants, industry sector representatives, developers and project managers, were provided just the right tone for ready communication, constructive discussions and active interaction, the immediate result of which was two highly productive days.

The call for speakers for the SVOX Forum 07 will start soon. For more information, please contact Phil Lichtenberg at lichtenberg@svox.com.

About SVOX AG

SVOX AG is the leading provider of embedded speech output solutions for automotive and mobile device industries. The SVOX Text-to-Speech system, the company's signature product, is part of a full product suite of small, fast and multilingual applications that enable computers and other electronic devices to convert written text into natural-sounding and easily comprehensible speech. The SVOX focus on embedded speech allows for specifically optimized solutions. Its software architecture provides customers with a speech engine that is easily tailored to market needs and a wide variety of technical requirements.

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