



On this episode of Selling Geek, we talk to CNET's Brian Cooley about the best cars for sales pros.

Welcome to Selling Geek, the show about the latest gadgets, gizmos, and technology resources for sales professionals looking for a competitive edge. Our toll-free voicemail line in the United States is (877) 345-7763. Everywhere else in the world, dial 1-(404) 418-4970, or comment on our blog at SellingGeek.com. And now, here's your host, the Selling Geek - Tim Sullivan!

Thank you, Ruth, and welcome, everyone. I hope this finds you happy, healthy, and ahead of your sales goals. We've got a content rich show for you today, so let's dive in.

First here's a brief summary of our most recent news items from the SellingGeek.com blog.

In the spring of 2008 renowned entrepreneur Guy Kawasaki launched Alltop, a summary of top blogs organized by topic. We're flattered that Selling Geek has been selected for inclusion in this prestigious listing. If you're not familiar with Alltop's sales blog aggregation, be sure to check it out at sales.alltop.com.

If you just woke up from a coma and have been shielded from all forms of human communication recently you may not know that Apple officially launched the new iPhone 3G, making it available for sale at Apple and AT&T stores in the U.S. and through authorized carriers worldwide.

Early reviews of the new iPhone have been moderately positive with some significant caveats identified including a lot of initial problems with phone activation due to the heavy demand. Apple's new Internet e-mail and backup service, MobileMe, also failed to operate at first. In fact, Apple issued an apology for the botched beginning of MobileMe to iPhone customers. Battery life is a bit short, only between 5 and 10 hours between re-charges; No ability to copy and paste across applications; no multi-media messaging service; limited memory with no ability to expand; no stereo Bluetooth wireless headset capability; no ability to use your iPhone as a tethered Internet modem for your laptop; and still no real time turn by turn GPS route guidance.

However, the iPhone 3G also includes significant improvements such as the fantastic multi-touch interface, as it was on the original version; phone call quality is much better; Internet browsing is significantly faster; the new iTunes application stores provides more options for mobile computing; a flush headphone jack allows more choices of headsets; improved volume on music playback; and that undeniable cool factor that still permeates the device.

In the first week Apple reported over one million iPhone 3G units sold and over 10 million downloads from the new App store. That's a successful new product launch by any standard.

Two blogs dedicated to following developments for the RIM BlackBerry line of mobile phone and messaging devices -- BlackberrySync and Crackberry.com -- both released details on RIM's yet unreleased new device codenamed "Thunder", also generally known as the 9500. Unlike past BlackBerry interfaces which have all used physical keyboards, Thunder will use a touch-screen interface optimized for text entry.

For example, the Thunder will provide haptic feedback, which means that when you press on the Thunder screen you'll hear an audible click and feel a buzz in your finger where you actually pressed on the display. This is different from the Apple iPhone's multi-touch interface which provides no physical feedback.

When you hold the Thunder in landscape mode it will display a full QWERTY-style keypad, but you can also hold it in portrait mode for a BlackBerry SureType keyboard. Further, you can change the screen and keyboard orientation at any time, even in the middle of typing a message. The latest rumor is that the 9500 may be released as early as October of this year. For pictures of the new device see our story on SellingGeek.com.

Intel officially released their new Centrino 2 product line. More than just a new family of central processing units for computers, the Centrino 2 platform is designed to maximize computational power on mobile devices, especially laptops, while also conserving power and thus greatly extending battery life.

Some of the Centrino 2 platform features include faster and more efficient memory and disc storage; higher clock speed; improved graphics; faster wireless networking; good processing power, although not as fast as Intel's highest end processors. Laptop computers have always been less powerful than their desktop-bound cousins but Centrino 2 represents a very nice compromise between mobility and power. That means that salespeople can expect thinner and lighter laptops with longer battery operating times.

In fact, after Intel's release of Centrino 2 laptop designed based on the new platform were immediately announced by Lenovo, Toshiba, Fujitsu and Sony, and many more are

expected very soon. Salespeople looking for fast, reliable laptops with longer battery life should definitely consider Centrino 2 based systems.

And that's the latest Selling Geek tech news for sales pros. Go check out SellingGeek.com for all the details.

We've received a few comments last week on our blog at SellingGeek.com. Andy Smith responded to our commentary on the dwindling value of voice mail, "I couldn't agree more that voice mail has become a very unproductive way to communicate with business associates, especially customers. Clear, crisp, concise and to the point e-mails or text messages are the way to connect with today's busy executive in lieu of a live conversation." Andy continues, "On another note, a personal pet peeve is the voice mail where people give their callback number so fast that only a professional stenographer would have a 50/50 chance of getting it right."

Amen, Andy. I couldn't agree more. In fact, I've been testing PhoneTag, a voice mail transcription service, for the last two weeks and have found it to be invaluable for capturing those all-important phone numbers and responding more effectively to messages. We'll have a complete review of PhoneTag in an upcoming episode.

By the way, Andy is our winner for this show's feedback contest and we've sent him a crisp new \$20 bill. Every show we give away \$20 to the best voice mail, e-mail or blog comment that we receive from you. So send your e-mail to Tim@SellingGeek.com; or you can still leave us a voice mail on our U.S. toll free line at (877) 345-7763, or from anywhere else at 1-(404) 418-4970; or leave a comment on the SellingGeek.com blog. We look forward to hearing from you.

And now on to our featured interview.

Brian Cooley is an editor-at-large at CNET which means he examines and evaluates just about every kind of technology and consumer electronics product available today. You can find his insightful reviews and news at cnet.com. Brian is also a car aficionado. He hosts CNET's weekly podcast Car Tech, which reports on the latest trends in integrated technology in automobiles.

I invited Brian to let us tap into his unique blend of technology and automobile expertise to get his opinions about what kinds of cars might be best suited to salespeople. As you'll hear, Brian recognizes how much today's traveling sales professionals depend on their cars and he has some strong opinions about what salespeople should look for in their vehicles. I know you'll find his point of view very interesting so it's my pleasure to share this interview with Brian Cooley.

Tim Sullivan: Brian, thanks for joining me today.

Brian Cooley: My pleasure.

Tim Sullivan: We're going to be talking about cars today and in particular how sales professionals use their cars. But I've got to ask you first about the rapidly rising price of gasoline today. It's obviously having a huge impact on the economy and on traveling salespeople's costs. Where do you see technology going that's focused on this problem and how fast do you think the technology will be able to really make this a little bit of an easier burden to bear for salespeople today?

Brian Cooley: Well, what's happening is the next generation of hybrid cars will be coming on the market probably -- I'm going to say a watershed time around 2010 when we're going to see vastly improved hybrids and a lot of electric cars from the major manufacturers, which you don't have right now. And that's going to be largely based on lithium ion battery technology which will come along and make the electric or better hybrid car both lighter, have a longer range and have an easier charge cycle, so it will take less time to charge it up.

It's important for the electric car to have a short charge time, of course, because if you're in sales or business on the road and you're using your car day in and day out you're probably driving more than the typical commute by far, so you need to have a greater range and/or a quicker charge-up ability. So if you go to a meeting somewhere for two hours, if you can plug your car in there -- if they had a couple of plug-in parking spaces -- in that two hour meeting you might come out to a fully charged car in the future. Today you wouldn't; you'd have added a little bit, but not that much to the battery. That's an electric car.

In the hybrids the benefit of better battery technology will be that the hybrid can run on electric at higher speeds or for longer before it kicks over to the gas engine, which gives you much better economy and really starts to make the hybrid pay for itself. Right now you're paying, generally speaking, thousands more for a hybrid, all else being equal. And that is a fair amount of money. That takes a while to amortize off based on the gas savings. Gasoline has gone up a lot but it hasn't gone up so much that you can justify a hybrid and it'll start paying for itself in a year. That doesn't really happy. Typical math is it takes three to seven years for a hybrid to pay for its own additional cost, so that's not a great business tool at that kind of math.

Tim Sullivan: Yeah. I saw in one of your recent episodes of Car Tech that the real cost of ownership of a hybrid is actually not nearly as good as it is for some typical gas-powered automobiles. Is that right?

Brian Cooley: Yes. Some of the most efficient cars out there -- in fact, all the most efficient cars out there in terms of being economical to drive per mile with all costs factored in -- they're all gas engine, four cylinder cars. They're the cars you might think of. They're Toyota Corollas, they're Honda Civics, they're the very lean, small, displacement, four cylinder, gas engine cars. Nothing too sexy about them, nothing unusual; they just are very efficient well-honed designs that don't carry a high-tech cost premium which a hybrid does.

Now, a lot of hybrids are going to get very good gas mileage but they're going to have high purchase price. They may have a higher insurance cost. They typically have a higher rate of depreciation and there's always this question mark lingering out there when I get to the point that the battery is starting to get tired -- around 100,000 miles, let's say --

Tim Sullivan: Right.

Brian Cooley: -- and I need to replace the battery pack, which is a large part of the car, what's it going to cost for the battery? I believe it's \$2,000 or \$3,000 to re-battery a Prius. And what's the disposal cost to get rid of the battery? I think the manufacturers right now are taking care of that, but in the future there may be so many hybrids on the road that you may have to be somewhat on the hook for a disposal fee which could be expensive. So there are a lot of costs involved in a hybrid that you don't have with a good old plain, lean, efficient, four cylinder, gas engine car.

Tim Sullivan: So we're really going to have to wait until about 2010 before we see some technology that's going to address the current fuel crisis.

Brian Cooley: Yeah. That's what I'm seeing in terms of really big announcements of dramatically changed hybrid cars that are vastly more efficient than today's, and/or electric cars. A lot of car makers are talking about this. Nissan is talking about an electric car in 2010. Mitsubishi is as well. Chevy's Volt, which is a very aggressive hybrid, that'll be out in 2010 they keep promising. And there are several others. So we're seeing a lot of targets in the major auto makers' design rooms for 2010.

Unfortunately, that seems like a long time. We're talking a good two years, maybe two years and change from right now. But in auto maker cycles that's actually very short; that's about as quickly as a major auto maker can turn on a dime. There's some little companies out there but those may not be around in 2010, let alone be a good idea now.

Tim Sullivan: I've got five criteria in mind that I think salespeople are looking for in cars today. Let me run those by you and then have you come back to us with cars that you think might fit those criteria. Number one, comfortable to drive on long highway and short city trips. Number two, a sedan that can seat at least four people; salespeople have got to be able to entertain and take people out. Number three, sufficient luxury to present a successful image but not too luxurious, if you know what I'm saying. Number four, reasonably priced and affordable to maintain; really important, especially in today's times with fuel costs being what they are. And then number five, technology that's helpful to sales people like user-friendly GPS, Bluetooth, either embedded or readily available.

So given those five criteria, Brian, what vehicles do you think salespeople might consider today?

Brian Cooley: Well, let's start with the comfortable for either highway and/or short city trips. You're talking here about a good all around car.

Tim Sullivan: Right.

Brian Cooley: Luckily that is a market that is pretty hard to goof in if you're buying a car. So cars that come to mind there are the ones that are the highest volume selling vehicles right now. You're looking at the Honda Accord, which is an obvious one. Everyone thinks Accord. Everyone thinks Camry. Those two are easy.

I would also steer your listeners, though, toward the Chevy Impala. And I'm not even sure we've reviewed an Impala, but I've been in several of them on rentals on business trips and I'm very impressed with the overall driving, both highway and city. The car is nimble in the city and quiet; and also stays very quiet on highway driving as well and has sufficient power. I don't feel like I'm driving a slow, big car.

The reason I point to quiet is because if you're going to be using any kind of a hands-free phone, which is becoming so common now -- legally required -- it's great to have a quiet car, otherwise your hands-free device, whatever kind you have, is always fighting road noise. And that is so frustrating when you're out on a business trip trying to make calls while you're getting around to appointments and you just can't make the calls professionally. People feel like they have to cut you off or they feel like, "Let's talk later. I know you're on the road," stuff like that. You don't want that kind of pushback. You want to get on the call and you want to do business and so you want to look for a quiet car.

And I must say, I've been impressed on how quiet the Impala is. Again, it competes with Camry and Accord, and those are by no means any slouch, but I would point out the Impala as an additional choice to go with those two really known vehicles. And if you look at those three you're going to find the one that appeals to your tastes, which is really what it comes down to. They're all really outstanding cars for general driving of any kind.

Tim Sullivan: You know, all those cars, I don't think of them as being laden with a lot of technology today, though. I guess the Accord EX has got GPS and some other features, but would you consider those to be really cars with a lot of technological options today?

Brian Cooley: You know, they have enough tech is how I -- it depends on how you get them trimmed, as you mentioned. There are certain trim levels that have a lot more tech, that offer navigation, let's say. Honda has been doing very well in terms of how they engineer their navigation as being very easily usable.

Although, the one thing I would look at for any car that you're going to buy is determine if the navigation system will accept a destination entry while you're moving. A lot of these won't. It's a real drag to have to pull over somewhere to enter or change your destination, and this happens a lot when you're on the road if you travel far and wide to areas that you haven't been regularly. You're going to be entering destinations frequently and to pull over -- especially if you're on the freeway and you're in the stream of traffic and you're making good time and all of a sudden you just got a call and you've got to go to someone's office -- you've got to pull way off the freeway, get off on a side street, enter the destination, get back on the freeway, maybe lose your access to an express lane or what have you; that's just really a drag.

So I look for systems that allow you to enter on the fly. And that'll vary by manufacturer and sometimes even varies by model year. So that's something that you want to pick up as you go do a test drive, look for that.

But these cars have sufficient tech if you equip them right. The Bluetooth is one. The navigation is the other. Those are the one-two punch, I think, for the traveling business or sales professional.

Tim Sullivan: You know, I've also heard that it's maybe not so smart to have built-in GPS, rather buy a Garmin or a TomTom or something like that. How do you feel about that?

Brian Cooley: I would recommend that, especially for the traveling sales pro because you are going to be sometimes traveling in a plane and you're going to get a rental car. And there you're going to be without navigation unless you rent one of theirs which you don't know; it's a different interface, you have to learn it, it's an additional expense.

I would really recommend getting one of the portable nav devices. They in many cases do a better job than what the factories put in cars and in all cases do at least as good a job as what you can get built in. The downside of course is a much different screen size. The portables are much smaller, so you've got to be comfortable with that; and you also need to be comfortable with the fact that you're lugging a gadget around that needs to be suction-cupped, that needs to be charged, that needs to be not lost when you're traveling, going through airport security and all of that.

So there is a lot of friction around a portable, things you've got to maintain and manage; where the built-in dash unit, it just takes care of itself, but whenever you change cars you don't have it with you. So I think for the sales pro who's on the road, unless you only do in-car driving in your own car I would really recommend a portable.

Tim Sullivan: You know, I see that Chrysler just announced the first Internet connectivity option built into the car. Let me ask you, how useful do you think that is really and do you think that's the beginning of a trend?

Brian Cooley: I think it is going to be a big trend because it's a natural extension of services that we use when we're either in the office or in the airport waiting room with our laptop. To suddenly be without Internet connected services and information is starting to seem really odd in the car.

Now, it's not for the driver is the thing. There's no technology that will allow the driver to use the Web. You still have to be driving while you're behind the wheel. So this is more for the other person in the car so that's why it's not a direct link where you say, "A-ha. Business professionals are going to eat up these in-car Internet devices."

What I've heard from the company that is powering the Chrysler system -- a company called Auto Net -- is that their initial market pop has been by parents whose teenagers want them to have wireless in the car so they can use their portables whenever they're driving, their 3G or wi-fi devices. Now, 3G works anywhere, but wi-fi devices in the past have not worked in the car. Your laptops, your

smartphones, now we're going to be able to do that with systems like Chrysler offers and I think there will be a lot more of that. But it isn't necessarily a business professional's thing immediately.

The nice thing about it is when you do pull over you've got a hot spot right there and you are online immediately with broadband with your laptop. So there is a little bit of an accommodation you have to make when you want to use your in-car hot spot when you're traveling alone, but that's not bad. That's better than pulling off the road and starting to drive around a neighborhood hunting for an open hot spot that isn't yours.

Tim Sullivan: You mentioned a little earlier that these cars that you recommended have enough tech. Is it possible for auto manufacturers to over-tech the cars? I mean, is it possible for them to cram too many gadgets into these things?

Brian Cooley: Yeah, they can over-tech in a couple ways. One is if they have more technology than their interface can easily handle; so in other words, if it's hard to use. If you give me Bluetooth navigation, you give me GPS, or you give me advanced audio system, the satellite radio, some SD card slots, the ability to rip CDs to the hard drive of the nav system, on and on and on, if you lay that all on there and it's hard for me to get to any of it, that's a problem. And a bad interface, a bad screen design or confusing buttons, tends to hurt all functions equally. Anything from tuning a new satellite radio station, which is pretty basic, to ripping a CD, to the internal hard drive which is pretty high-tech these days; it all suffers equally, I find, when the interface is bad. So that's when a car's over-teched.

Or when they option it in such a way that the package that you get, the option package, has everything. All you want is nav but the package that has nav includes a bunch of other things and you're spending up to thousands of dollars more than you wanted to and getting stuff you didn't really want, but because of packaging you had to take it. So those are two ways that a car can be over-teched.

Other than that, if money is no issue and if the interface is good, it's great to have these features even if you use them only occasionally.

Tim Sullivan: You mentioned three cars that salespeople might want to consider. Any other models that you find that might be your particular favorites that also might be appealing?

Brian Cooley: Well, this gets us into your second point, which is cars that seat four people comfortably. And a lot of that is going to overlap with the cars I mentioned, the Accord, the Camry, and the Impala. But at the

same time, you can go upscale from there and seat people more comfortably.

So there is where you look at one of my old favorites that is, unfortunately, I believe on its way of out production which is the full-sized Lincoln Town Car. I think that one is going to be coming to an end pretty soon except for fleet and livery sales. And that remains the best bargain for carrying people in comfort with a good styled car and one that is not going to break the bank; that and the Ford Crown Victoria and the Grand Marquis from Mercury. These are all basically the same car under the skin and I think that their lives are short because of the fuel economy situation and they just aren't hip cars.

Although, if you're in business there's a time when you want to impress somebody when you're in the field and there's a time when you just want the car to work right. If you impress them with a BMW 5-series as they walk up, they're impressed. But then they get inside and they're pulling their knees up around their chin and they're no longer impressed.

I hate getting into a car on a business trip where three or four of us are going somewhere, even if it's just to lunch, and we're all wedged in like teenagers in our first little tiny Japanese car or something. That just doesn't work for me.

So I would much rather -- if it was my money, I'd go buy a Grand Marquis or a Crown Vic or a Town Car before I'd go buy a BMW 5-series because it simply is not suitable for carrying grown adults in comfort and dignity. Yes, they fit, but it's this wedged in monkey on a tricycle feeling if you're in the back seat. So I would get over myself on that and I would go look for a car that's a little less bragadocious and a little more spacious because in the everyday world that might be more important.

But it depends on your business. It depends on your personal title and your station in the industry. If you have to have a flashy car, you have to have a flashy car. If you're a realtor and you don't necessarily sell just to the most high-end clients -- you're selling real estate in the mainstream market -- why don't you go get one of the cars that really has genuine room and is certainly a very nice car. You can equip those large American cars really well and do everybody a favor and save yourself some money.

Tim Sullivan:

Well, sometimes going a little bit more conservative certainly might present the kind of image that some salespeople are looking for. But let's talk about luxury, though. I mean, especially in the entry level

luxury class you might be getting into some of those room issues that you were talking about a little earlier, is that right?

Brian Cooley: That's the thing. The cars that are -- unless you're spending enormous money, a lot of times the luxury cars don't have as much room but you are getting a lot of power, performance, amazing chase engineering. Now, how much of that you're going to use in the day-to-day world of business I'm a little skeptical of. Just because a car will do zero to 60 in 5.4 versus 6.6 seconds, that has no bearing on business use, on being in the field and going from sales call to sales call.

Some of the best cars out there, though, if you want to do this kind of a high end car you're going to have to look at the Lexus L, the Lexus LS 460L. That's the long wheel base version of the Lexus LS. Now again, you can tell I'm a long wheel base guy. If I can get room in the back seat, I think that's a great business car. So I like the LS 460L. And by the way, I believe that is so far the only car seen that's ever given a perfect 10 to in our reviews.

Tim Sullivan: Wow. That's impressive.

Brian Cooley: It's very impressive, and that may be that way for quite a while because we don't give those out very often, like almost never. But you're spending \$71,000 just to start and you'll go well up from there for an '07. And the '08 is still about the same price; that's the last one we reviewed.

You can also take a look at the Lexus LS 600H. That's the hybrid. I think that that is silly money. As we talked about hybrids being not worth their price in the hardest analysis and also the fact that you can get the same car with a gas engine for \$30,000 less to start.

Another great car to look at for spaciousness is the Audi A8. I think it presents a really good business image because it doesn't have the -- almost the excessive luxury image of a Mercedes. The S class is a pretty pompous car. You drive up in that and you're saying, "Look at me. I'm a successful C level," or whatever business you're in, whatever the title is there. The Audi is a little less ostentatious and yet it's definitely a car that speaks quietly of success, of being discerning about a car, and that car is offering just about every technology available today. So it's a great high-tech car as well.

Tim Sullivan: Very understated car, though. I like the styling on that Audi a lot.

Brian Cooley: Yeah. And that's one. I believe they also have a long wheel base version of that car. I like the long wheel base option. You're going to

thank yourself over and over if you do that. So much more civilized for the people in the back seat. If you're in the field on business, you're going to have people in the back seat if you're driving your own car. Otherwise, you'd drive a Porsche 911 everyday.

Tim Sullivan: Brian, one last question for you. We talked a little bit about the developments in technology as it relates to fuel economy. Where do you think technology is going in cars in the next few years?

Brian Cooley: You're going to see three big trends. One is the advanced electrics we talked about at the top of the show, so that's a powertrain issue for electric and advanced hybrid cars that are just much more efficient. Secondly, you're going to see a camera and visual technology. So cars today have rearview cameras fairly often for when you're backing up. A few of the high end cars have a forward looking camera to aid your night vision.

And what we're about to see in just a couple of weeks in London at the British Auto Show, I believe Opel is going to roll out the first mass production car with a forward camera that will recognize street signs. That will allow the car to alert you if you're driving too fast. It'll read the speed limit. It'll see a stop sign if you aren't looking and it might apply the brakes partially to help mitigate the collision, and also alert you if something's wrong. Things like that. So that's going to be a big area. Cameras in the car are also being used for blind spot detection today, for lane drift warning and/or avoidance. So camera, camera, camera; look for those all over the car. It's definitely going to be big.

And the third one is the hard drive is going to show up in the car in great numbers in the next year to two years. And that's going to allow you to have a faster more up-to-date navigation system because instead of having a DVD that has the navigation data on it, a hard drive is in place and that allows updates to be sent to the car frequently, as opposed to an annual DVD which is what they offer today down at the service counter. Also, that hard drive can be used to store music, video, any kind of media. I mean, bytes are bytes. Once you've got a hard drive you can put any kind of data on it and it will also allow you to have a vehicle that has much more personalization. It can have lots of customized personal information or media or settings or history of how you drive all loaded into it so it can much more comport itself to how you use the car.

Tim Sullivan: Brian, I'm really looking forward to that. That'll be great.

Brian Cooley: Yeah. It's going to be a very interesting new world in cars, literally just in the next two and three years.

Tim Sullivan: You know, it's a shame that they weren't able to anticipate the fuel crisis that we're going through now, but it sounds like the auto manufacturers are doing their best to try and catch up with that as fast as they can. And obviously with this other technology there's still a lot to go in cool cars.

Brian Cooley: Yeah. And realize that the auto makers are able to make vastly more efficient engines. They have. Because we've asked for it this way, they have made cars that are much heavier and much faster because that's what we wanted as a market. We wanted SUVs, we wanted luxury, we wanted quiet. The government demanded rollover safety and a bunch of other high collision standards. And we want lots of electronics in there. All that makes a car heavier and bigger. And we want our cars to go faster and so that's what they did. They gave us heavier and faster instead of leaner.

But the same technology in engineering that made that happen could also make a car much more fuel efficient, but it has to give on something. It has to become a little slower or it has to become lighter, but you can't have all three.

Tim Sullivan: Well, the old saying, be careful what you wish for; you might get it.

Brian Cooley: Yeah. Or what you're willing to pay for.

Tim Sullivan: Brian, this has been a lot of fun. Thanks so much for joining us today.

Brian Cooley: My pleasure. I've had a good time.

So ends this episode of *Selling Geek*. I hope you found it interesting. Be sure to tune in for our next show, when we award a sales pro value score to Adobe's most recent release of Acrobat, it's document generation and management application.

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So until next time, good luck and good selling, everyone!
