

Interview with Mr. Scott Vazin

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Interviewee: Mr. Scott Vazin, Group Vice President and Chief Communications Officer of Toyota Motors North America

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Summary:

I had the opportunity to interview Mr. Scott Vazin, the Chief Communications Officer of Toyota Motors North America (TMNA). We discussed Toyota's vision and how technology played a role in it, and how Toyota was investing in technology to propel them to fulfill their vision. We also discussed his role as the Chief Communications Officer and how communications differed from marketing and how technology was used. This was an amazing opportunity to get exposure to a different implementation of technology and a closer look at the intersection of sports and technology.

Interview:

We first discussed the 4 main pillars of TMNA that the communications team focuses on: Manufacturing, Corporate, Product & Technology, and Investor Relations. Manufacturing includes the 10 different plants and 1000's of employees currently employed by Toyota across the country, and continent. Corporate communications encompass ensuring that all employees are aware of things going on with the company and that there is transparency between the employees and the company. Some ways that TMNA has encouraged this open transparent collaborative atmosphere is seen in their new Plano campus where there are large areas for different groups of people to get together to collaborate and numerous screens around the building where employees can glance at to see how TMNA is participating in the community or see updates about company events. Toyota invests a lot of money into ensuring that their products and technologies are effective at what they are designed to do, they are also big proponents of safety enhancements and making driving a safer more enjoyable experience. The final component is Investor Relations, and that is ensuring that investors are well informed and are aware of what is going on within the organization. We discussed in further detail how the

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communications team ensures that all these 4 pillars are properly displayed and how they work with the media to get the right message out to the public.

Throughout our discussion, I got a better understanding of Toyota's mission to lead the future of mobility in order to enhance the lives of everyone with safe and responsible mindset. Toyota aims to achieve this with their productive, efficient, and innovative advancements in technology. Toyota aims to get mobility to many different spaces not just limited to transporting people. For example, being able to have restaurants or stores be just as mobile as the people that shop at them. Toyota even has 2 subsidiaries, the Toyota Research Institute and Toyota Connected that work toward fulfilling Toyota's vision.

The Toyota Research Institute specializes in Autonomous driving safety, Robotics, and Artificial Intelligence. The work being done to enhance autonomous driving safety touches upon traditional driving dangers and looks for ways for them to be avoided including (but not limited to) blind spots and ways to detect objects in that space, radar detection for getting a virtual view of the surroundings and road, as well as enhancing cruise control to make sure it avoids accidents. Toyota Connected works with data analytics and develops new technologies to make the driving experience safer and more enjoyable.

After talking about Toyota's vision and the role technology plays in it, I got to learn more about the communications aspect of a large corporate company. Communications focus on ensuring that the vision and the work being done in Toyota is being represented properly; not to be mistaken as marketing which works with ad campaigns and different forms of displaying Toyota in the short term, communications looks at the long-term impact and the larger picture. An event that communications works on ensuring Toyota is represented properly is the Consumer Electronics Show, which traditionally didn't include the automotive industry but now with the growth of innovative technologies used in the industry.

We also discussed the primary function of communications and how they are responsible for pulling information either regional or global and presenting it properly again thinking long-term impacts (12-18 months into the future) and not just short term. Something important to consider is that anything said in the public space could be considered as advertising, and with the heavy regulation in the automotive industry it is imperative to be extremely careful with how

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and what is said. We also touched upon the challenges that come with having a large global company, where cultures can be different in different regions.

After discussing the role of communications, we went back to discussing the potential of autonomous driving and the changes it could bring. Autonomous cars could bring a change into the way they are financed, as they have the potential of being owned by a person some parts of the day and not other parts of the day; for example, an owner has the car from 8am-8pm and from 8 pm to 8 am a different party has ownership of the car - the autonomous function allows the car to go back and forth between different parties on its own. A real-life application would be a regular person using the car during the day for work and day-to-day chores while a taxi service could have the car at night and make trips back and forth to the airport and then return the car in the morning - all autonomously. Also as more cars become autonomous there could be connection and communication between the different cars to allow for a safer faster driving experience. If every car knew exactly what was going on and was able to communicate with each other, traffic would be reduced exponentially and all potential accident could be avoided and other problems that arise from human error are eliminated.

Overall, talking to Mr. Vazin was an amazing learning opportunity, as I was able to gain exposure to the use of technology within the automotive industry as well. I also got the opportunity to get a better understanding of Toyota's mission and communication within large global companies. I learned about important components in the intersection of technology and communications and got Mr. Vazin's insight on where technology could be headed in the automotive industry and how it could change the way we live.