

CAMPOS GUIDE TO:

AUTOMOTIVE MARKETING IN A DRIVERLESS WORLD

BY JON CALLARD
CREATIVE STRATEGIST
CAMPOS INC.

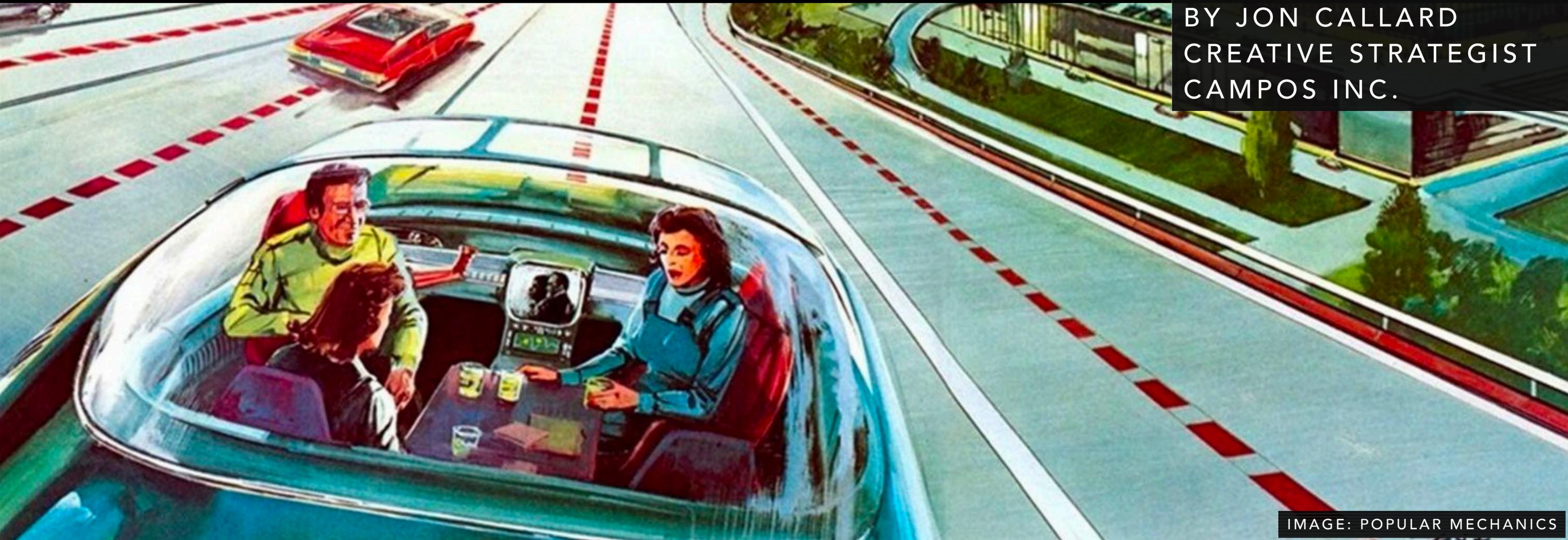


IMAGE: POPULAR MECHANICS

THE END IS NIGH

Everybody knows driverless cars will soon change the world. In addition to the many industries that will be drastically disrupted by automotive autonomy, the cottage industry of creating vehicular experiences will also see upheaval. But rather than fearing this change, marketers should embrace it. If we can adapt to the new automotive landscape, it will ultimately create more opportunities and completely redefine the automotive experience - providing endless fodder for creative agencies to dream up new marketing activations and experiences.

OUT WITH THE OLD

If we're honest with ourselves, we can all admit that automotive marketing creative has gotten stale. Think about the last car commercial you saw, and the countless different iterations of that exact ad you've seen over the years with various brands. Or, for those in the experiential realm, how many automotive events look exactly the same? Cones + parking lot = ride & drive event. Cars + wind blades = street intercept. At Campos, non-traditional creative is our bread and butter (see recent launches for VW and MINI), but it's getting harder and harder to do things that haven't been done before - especially in an industry that hasn't changed all that much in the last 40 years. Autonomous cars will change all of that, bringing a gale of fresh air to the industry and offer a fresh slate for the creatives to redefine the automotive marketing landscape.

THE WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN

From product marketing strategy to the fundamental ownership paradigm - all aspects of the industry will be altered, especially the relationship between manufacturers and consumers. Many experts expect the concept of vehicle ownership to eventually become a novelty. Why buy a car that will spend 95% of its time parked in a garage when you can just press a button on your phone and have an autonomous taxi service take you wherever you need? No need to find a parking spot, pay for insurance, maintenance, etc. This will be especially true in urban areas. With fewer and fewer urban residents buying cars, how will the dealerships survive? Won't it be better for the manufacturers to set up a vehicle subscription service directly with consumers? Or launch their own versions of Lyft and Uber?

Without spending too much time trying to predict the future, it's clear to see an upheaval is in the works. And with this will come new challenges for the industry and new opportunities for marketers.

REIMAGINE THE COMMUTE

Without the burden of driving, imagine what we can do with that time in the car. A commute is no longer something to dread, but something to look forward to. Your new in-vehicle experience can be as diverse and as dynamic as your interests.

- Workaholics can work. Or video conference. Or nap, when they need to.
- Gamers can game. In their own virtual world, or in an augmented reality shared world where they play in real time with other commuters.
- Streamers can stream. Imagine all the great TV you could catch up on during your daily commute.
- Shoppers can shop.
- Readers can read.

In short, autonomy gives would-be drivers the gift of time and few limits in how we spend it. This opens up a world of opportunity for marketers, experience creators, and a slew of industries with no former automotive association.

FIT AND FINISHED.

Marketing strategies focused on vehicle performance and the emotion of driving will be the first victims of autonomy (with the exception of perhaps some driver-focused brands like BMW). Likewise, once the public overcomes its initial anxiety about the technology, strategies focused on vehicle safety will likely disappear as well (along with almost all traffic accidents). In fact most of the car ads we've been seeing ad nauseam for the last 30 years are likely to disappear.

So what will replace these pillars of automotive marketing? *Technology* and *amenity*, and how they are deployed to improve your in-vehicle experience. Unlike those car ads that try (in vain) to differentiate *their* infotainment system and show how cool and connected it is, new strategies are likely to somewhat resemble airlines. Where Fiat might be like Southwest, and Rolls Royce is a Virgin Atlantic first-class cabin experience. Expect to see marketing approaches that lie on the same *emotion/utility* spectrum (emotion = luxury, utility = economy, with premium brands falling in between).

An autonomous Rolls Royce and an autonomous Fiat will both get you from point A to B in about the same time, but style, comfort, connectivity and entertainment will be the differentiating factors. The size of a vehicle's HD screens and the comfort and versatility of its interior will likely be the lowest-hanging fruit for marketers. Like an airline seat, we're not selling a product anymore, but a travel experience.

SHIFTING PARADIGMS

As noted above, the nature of car ownership will see drastic changes after autonomy become ubiquitous. This will affect the entire sales and revenue infrastructure for the industry and change the relationship between manufacturers and consumers. While this may be disastrously disruptive to entrenched industries like car dealerships, it will present tasty new opportunities for marketing and experiential firms.

Imagine a scenario where consumers can switch their vehicle subscription service as easily as switching insurance - changing from a Ford to a Toyota as seamlessly as switching to Geico is today. This is just one potential scenario but if agencies can remain flexible and stay focused on serving their clients' evolving needs, there should be abundant opportunities to create experiences to connect with consumers.

ARE WE THERE YET?

New challenges (opportunities) and strategies will emerge as society elevates through the five levels of autonomy. We've seen the early stages already - with most major manufacturers showing ads about their active cruise control, automatic emergency braking, parking, and lane keeping assistance. Many brands are also eager to demonstrate these features at training and consumer test drive events. But as the automation advances, the driver experience will change more drastically, requiring different thinking on how we communicate product messaging and brand experience.

The first major challenge will be to make the public comfortable without a steering wheel. Right now, the most advanced systems available to the public are somewhere between level 2 & 3 (Tesla Autopilot). But even Musk-worshipping technophiles feel very skittish the first few times using Autopilot on a busy freeway. Mass adoption of automated systems will take a lot of effort and marketing dollars. The industry will have to clear this first hurdle before it can dive into the new *hands-off-the-wheel, eyes-off-the-road* vehicle experience. But every step of the way, the industry will rely on marketing, experiential events, and training to bring consumers along for the ride.

EYES FORWARD

It won't happen overnight, but the auto industry will soon undergo radical changes. Many other industries will be drastically affected, some destroyed, but there will always be a place for marketing. Indeed, it's an exciting time to work in this business, in this industry, and those of us who can remain nimble and creative should thrive.