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Ford and Flextronics automotive EMS

MyFord platform prompts Ford to behave like a consumer tech company. Company moves from traditional suppliers to EMS model. Attraction to EMS reference design approach drives outsourcing of infotainment platform.

"Today we're thinking and behaving like a consumer electronics company," said Derrick Kuzak, Ford Motor Company group vice president of global product development, in January, as he introduced the company's second-generation SYNC system, known as the MyFord platform.

Indeed, Ford is taking a consumer-electronics-oriented approach with MyFord, not only in the connectivity solution's features but also in the company's use of a electronics manufacturing services (EMS) provider to make the system. By employing an EMS contract manufacturer, rather than a traditional automotive supplier, Ford is behaving like most modern consumer electronics firms, which predominately outsource the production and design of their products to contract manufacturers.

With Ford increasingly seen as a trendsetter in the vehicle infotainment industry, the move could open up the automotive market to EMS providers and original design manufacturers (ODM)-and threaten the position of established automotive electronics suppliers. (See, also: "[Choosing providers: EMS or ODM](#)" and "[Top 10 contract manufacturing and original design manufacturing \(ODM\) companies](#)")

"In a break from tradition, Ford with its MyFord system has chosen to partner with Flextronics, a Singapore-based EMS provider that is not part of the established Tier-1 automotive supplier base," said Richard Robinson, principal analyst for automotive infotainment at iSuppli. "By doing this, Ford's infotainment team has taken a page from top-tier consumer electronics OEMs, developing a product that leverages a reference platform from a contract manufacturer, rather than making the system from scratch.

The EMS reference design approach has been used for years in the manufacturing of consumer devices, including cell phones and portable navigation devices (PNDs), so why not in automotive infotainment?"

In 2009, electronics contract manufacturers accounted for only 5.5% of the global automotive electronics business. This indicates there is plenty of opportunity for EMS providers like Flextronics in this area.

"The biggest question now facing the Tier-1 automotive electronics supplier base is: what happens next?" Robinson said. "If Ford establishes a trend of using the EMS / reference design approach to automotive electronics, it's likely to spur in a drastic reshaping of the market and result in an uncertain future for many established Tier-1 suppliers."

Is MyFord in your future?

iSuppli's discussions with key members of Ford's product development team revealed that future-proofing was a primary driver behind the choice of architecture for the MyFord platform. With the launch of the second-generation platform, Ford is focusing on the feature upgrade capability of its hardware to keep up with the changing connectivity trends and new consumer electronic product launches that have plagued previous infotainment system designers.

The MyFord interface makes use of steering wheel switches and voice input to control external devices employing established Bluetooth and USB protocols, rather than trying to emulate the features and functions of the external device on the vehicle's system.

Secure digital card navigation

Other critical changes in the architecture from the Ford team include an option for consumers to use onboard navigation. However the only additional hardware required for this navigation 'app' is a secure digital (SD) memory card that contains 3-D map-data, graphics and voice data from TeleNav. This movement away from dedicated hardware to a navigation app will be of great concern to the traditional Tier-1 automotive supplier base, but perhaps the most critical issue facing the current supply chain is how to service the needs of these new apps.

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