

Tesla and Toyota join forces to develop electric cars

By ANTONIO PEREZ
Epoch Times Staff

Startup Silicon Valley electric car-maker Tesla Motors, Inc. has joined forces with Toyota Motor Corp. to develop electric motor vehicles in California, the companies said.

In the agreed deal, Toyota would inject \$50 million of capital into the Palo Alto, Calif.-based company. In turn, Tesla has purchased the recently shuttered New United Motor Manufacturing Inc. (NUMMI) assembly plant in Fremont, Calif. to build its upcoming Model S and future cars.

Tesla applied to become a publicly traded company in January, and this partnership with the world's largest automaker could be the first step in launching Tesla into a household name.

A partnership with Toyota builds instant credibility for an automaker some experts doubted had the skill and capital to be a major player in the electric vehicle market to become more than a niche manufacturer.

The company currently makes a single model, the Roadster—a plug-in electric sports car that sells for \$110,000.

"I've felt an infinite possibility about Tesla's technology and its dedication to monozukuri (Toyota's approach to manufacturing)," said Toyota President Akio Toyoda in a statement.

"Decades ago, Toyota was also born as a venture business," Toyoda said. "By partnering with Tesla, my hope is that all Toyota employees will recall that 'venture business spirit,' and take on the challenges of the future."

Indeed, Toyota has been anything but edgy and cool these days—it has overtaken GM as the world's biggest automaker. Its Camry sedans and Corolla models are solid, reliable people-haulers but the company today is a world apart from its entrepreneurial roots in post-war Japan.

UNION OF TWO INNOVATORS

Tesla, with its recent IPO, is looking to grow. So far, it has delivered only 1,000 units of its Roadster model to



Electric car maker Tesla Motors have announced development deal with Toyota. JUSTIN SULLIVAN/GETTY IMAGES

customers, a paltry amount if the company wants to be a major player in the automotive industry.

"Tesla's goal is to produce increasingly affordable electric cars to mainstream buyers—relentlessly driving down the cost of EVs," the company said in a statement last week.

The Roadster is an eye-catching car. But with its high-performance track-record and a high sticker price, it's anything but affordable to mainstream consumers.

Tesla's vision inevitably starts with the Model S, a sedan that will sell for around \$50,000. It would be built in the NUMMI plant. NUMMI, not so coincidentally, was the birthplace of another Toyota alliance—that with General Motors, which extends back 25 years. GM and Toyota collaborated in the 80s to build a slew of small, compact vehicles, which were considered as fresh and out-of-place back then as

electric cars are today.

In turn, Tesla will hire around 1,000 workers at the NUMMI plant, though the number is far fewer than the 4,700 recently laid off after GM and Toyota idled the plant.

For Toyota, at one glance it might be odd that the world's leading hybrid car maker is looking for some electric know-how. But looking around the industry, while Toyota is the leader in hybrids, it might be behind its rivals Nissan Motor Co. and GM in plug-in electric cars. Nissan and Chevrolet both plan to offer all-electric vehicles by next year in the form of the Nissan Leaf and the Chevrolet Volt.

MORE ISSUES TO IRON OUT

While the ink has barely dried on their agreement, the Tesla-Toyota venture is already facing potential issues.

The United Auto Workers

union asked that Tesla hire back the workers recently laid off from the NUMMI plant. "Our union's hope is that this venture will give first hiring preference to former NUMMI employees who are already trained and highly skilled," said UAW in a press statement. "Please do not let the unions ruin what Tesla has [done] thus far," commented one reader on MarketWatch. "Nothing could make an electric car company go down in flames faster, than letting the UAW in the door. See GM, Chrysler ... for proof."

And we haven't even gotten to the type of cars the alliance would build in the new plant. The \$50,000 Tesla Model S is still around \$20,000 more expensive than Nissan and Chevrolet's offerings, and state and federal authorities are still debating over development of a network of recharging stations across the country.

How social media has changed small businesses

Real estate brokers benefiting from using social media to market themselves

By CHARLOTTE CUTHBERTSON
Epoch Times Staff

NEW YORK—Michele Portnof updates her status every day on Facebook, enticing clients and marketing herself to the 115 people who "like" her page. A broker in New York City, Portnof says social media is a must.

"I definitely think social media is the way of the future," she said. "Twenty- to thirty-year-olds; social media is the way they communicate."

Which is a perfect fit for Portnof who says she is a specialist for first-time renters and new graduates.

Her Facebook page sat dormant for a year before she started utilizing it; it was after she attended training on social media that she decided it was too important to ignore.

"For the past month or so, I have updated it every day, with photos, listings, and articles people might find interesting," she said.

Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, blogs; these names are a mystery to some, but to more and more brokers and small business owners, they are the tools that are helping them succeed.

THE NEW TREND

Social media marketing sounds daunting to a lot of people, but a basic plan will help most small businesses, says social media guru John Fladung. An independent marketing and advertising consultant since the mid-1980's, Fladung has seen many trends.

"MySpace was the beginning of the whole revolution," he said. The idea was not about throwing ads in front of people, but actually "being" the ad by virtue of how you presented yourself and your products.

Social media marketing is about building a community around your business, Fladung said. "The goal is to offer them compelling and engaging information—because you want them to come back," he said.

WHY USE SOCIAL MEDIA?

There are two major reasons to use social marketing, Fladung says. One is to establish yourself as an expert in an area related to your business, and through that drive traffic to your site; the end result being sales and referrals for you.

The second is to raise your Internet ranking by driving more people to your site—making you more visible in searches. "Really it's all about SEO," he said. SEO, or Search Engine Optimization, is using keywords to become more noticeable to the Internet crawlers, in turn, pushing you higher on a search ranking.

For example, the more people that visit your Facebook page, the higher ranking that page will get, as well as directing more traffic to your main site.

A 2010 social media marketing white paper, "How Marketers Are Using Social Media to Grow Their Businesses" by Michael A. Stelzner, concurs.

"The number-one benefit of social media marketing is gaining the all-important eyeball," the report says.

Of the 1898 participants surveyed, almost half were consultants or one-person businesses.

Eighty-five percent of all marketers indicated that their social media efforts have generated exposure for their businesses, the report said. Improving site traffic was the second major benefit, followed by building new partnerships.

More than half of marketers indicated a rise in search engine rankings as a benefit of social media marketing. "As search engine rankings improve, so will business exposure, lead generation efforts and a reduction in overall marketing expenses," the report stated.

More than half of marketers found social media generated qualified leads.

Broker Portnof is testament to that. "I had someone contact me yesterday about a place and they were referred to me from a friend on my Facebook page," she said. "I am hoping I will get much more of that."

THE BIG FOUR

The "big four" social media marketing tools for brokers and small businesses are Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and blogs, Fladung said.

FACEBOOK

If Facebook were a country, it would be the third most populated in the world; the site has hit 400 million active users (people who have used it in the last 30

days).

One has the ability to create a community on Facebook by offering multiple forms of content—not just blogging, but photos and videos as well, Fladung said. You can create your own pages, your own designs, with hyperlinking to your own products and services.

But Facebook is not enough on its own. "You can have all the bells and whistles on the Facebook business page you want," Fladung said, "but without content to establish yourself as the expert and engage your audience, it's never going to be more than bells and whistles."

BLOGGING

A simple blog doesn't mean you have to write all the content yourself. You can aggregate content and link it back to the source.

"Blogging is the backbone of any good social media plan," Fladung said. Blogging helps you establish yourself as an expert and provide information to your community.

TWITTER

Twitter is basically micro-blogging, and as the site says, it's a communication platform that "shrinks the emotional distance between your company and your customers."

Each "tweet" gives you 140 characters to play with; enough for about 100 characters and a link, suggests Fladung.

The white paper report found that the majority of marketers (56 percent) are using social media for 6 hours or more each week

The Twitter site has a Business 101 guide for learners that includes a how-to on getting started and best practices.

"As a business, you can use it to quickly share information with people interested in your company, gather real-time market intelligence and feedback, and build relationships with customers, partners and other people who care about your company," Twitter's website says.

LINKEDIN

LinkedIn is the business networking side of the equation—people can review your resume.

"It has grown, gotten better, but it's still a community," Fladung said. "The good thing about LinkedIn is that you can have your base of connections and you can get to their connections too."

Linking together all the social media tools you use is an efficient way to cross-update everything, he said.

"Social media networking is like a big Internet cocktail party."

HOW MUCH TIME DOES IT REALLY TAKE?

The white paper report found that the majority of marketers (56 percent) are using social media for 6 hours or more each week, and nearly one in three invest 11 or more hours weekly.

Portnof said she is on there several hours a day, but not all at the same time.

Fladung said it depends on how big they want to be. "One hour a day is a fair amount of time; it's decent," he said.

BIG BUSINESS

For consultants like Fladung, the future looks bright. More and more businesses are outsourcing their social media needs, including a quarter of mid-to-large businesses, according to the white paper.

"Because so many marketers are new to social media marketing, it may be another year before many warm to the idea of seeking outside assistance," the report said.

Fladung said he went from talking to about 12 people a week about social media six months ago, to more than four dozen per week now.

"Social media marketing is here to stay, even if the players change to some degree, it's here," he said.

Accomplish something big by doing something small

By DAVID BERKY

Many of us have big dreams, grandiose ideas, or large projects we have to or would like to accomplish. Whether it is for our job, our business, a new business, an invention, or just a personal goal, we all seem to have something large looming on our to do list.

But have you ever found yourself putting off that large project simply because it was so large? You may not know where to start. You may feel like you are not ready to start. You may be afraid of not being able to finish or accomplish a project so large.

How do you overcome these feelings and thoughts? How do great people or people who do great things actually accomplish monumental triumphs? Do they just wake up one morning and cry "Eureka!?" Or do they all of a sudden decide to produce their masterpiece? I say, "No." Even an inventor who comes up with a great idea still has a long road ahead. The idea in itself is usually not the monumental task. It's the process of bringing that idea into reality that is usually the "big project."

And what if you don't feel like you are ready to start? What if you don't have the resources to see the project through? How can you overcome this initial obstacle? I say, "Just do something!" A small step is better than no step at all, and large accomplishments are made up of small significant steps.

PLAN IT OUT

There are two ways to start on your project and one of those is to take a few moments and create a plan. (We'll talk about the other one later on.) Visualize the steps needed to accomplish your goal. Write each step out and put them in order. You may have some steps that have question marks. You may have some areas where you are not sure exactly what you are going to do or what you need to do. That's okay. Your plan doesn't have to be perfect.

Even if you can't see how you will accomplish the next goal, focus on the current one and concentrate on getting that done

Most plans change as time goes on, as you gain more experience, and as you try and learn new things. The main goal of your plan is just to get you started.

Once you have started, you can see the first few steps that need to be done. What if those steps are also too big to "leap in a single bound"? Rinse and repeat. Take each of those unfathomable steps and break them down into smaller steps. Write down the things that are needed to accomplish each of those steps. Again question marks are okay. You just need to get your brain thinking about the problem in manageable chunks.

Next you may want to assign a time frame or due date for each step. This gives you a series of smaller goals and a measuring stick to track your progress. We all know (and have experienced) the importance of deadlines. Most deadlines are imposed by someone other than ourselves, so a self-imposed deadline may not feel as important. But if you respect the deadline and commit yourself to accomplishing just this one little task, you will be more likely to actually do it.

As you begin to step through your plan and make your minor accomplishments, you will begin to see the project take shape. You will gain momentum and confidence in your ability to accomplish your task. Although you need to periodically review and evaluate your overall plan, try to stay focused on the next goal or step. Don't let yourself become overwhelmed with the entirety of the project.

Even if you can't see how you will accomplish the next goal, focus on the

current one and concentrate on getting that done. Often we must take a step or two into the dark before we can see the light. We may need to step out of our comfort zone or go beyond our area of expertise before we even realize how to accomplish the next step.

Also, don't get discouraged if you come to a roadblock. Imagine that your project is to develop a way to transport something from one place to another without using any of the currently known methods. (This may have been what Thomas A. Edison felt like when he took on the project of creating light using none of the known methods of his time.) Don't be afraid to plan for some testing or consultation with others outside of your field.

You may even want to have someone inside or outside of your area review your plan or talk over your progress. You never know when something someone else says or does will unlock your creativity or outright solve your problem.

JUST JUMP IN

But what if you don't even know where to start? I mentioned earlier that there were two ways to start your project. The second is to skip the planning and just start. No plan, no ideas, no worries. Just start doing something that you think will move you in the right direction. Use your knowledge of the current situation, science, thoughts, and philosophies to design steps that let you test out some ideas. Testing and trials are a legitimate set of steps in accomplishing a goal.

The software development department here at Simple Joe, Inc. is a very

small, tight-knit group of people. We don't have the resources (or patience) to sit down and completely map out every detail of the software we design. Instead, in order to save money and to create our software products faster, we often just start throwing together some ideas. We jump in and start writing the computer code and trying different scenarios.

You may ask, "Doesn't this mean that you waste a lot of time, chase a lot of wild geese and go down a lot of blind alleys?" That's one way to look at it, but we don't see it that way. We see ourselves as modern day Thomas Edisons. We don't know exactly what will work or in what ways our products will be successful until we put something together and try it out.

We have found that it is very hard to plan something to exact specifications when you really aren't sure what you want in the first place. How will you know if one way works better than another unless you try both ways? We try this and we try that. We test it this way and then test it that way and see which works better. We share our ideas and our products with people and get their reactions and ideas.

And as we see what works best and what is liked best, we begin to solidify the features and design of the software. Rather than building a product and then trying to sell it in hopes that people will like it, we already know people will like it because they have tested it and told us what they like and don't like.

The point is not to get stuck before you start. Find a way to get started whether it means mapping out each step or just jumping right in and mucking around. As the saying goes: The journey begins with the first step. And as we say here at Simple Joe software: Large accomplishments are made up of small significant steps.

David Berky is president of Simple Joe, Inc.