

Volkswagen, Audi, and Porsche are getting their own in-car app store – and yes, that includes TikTok

If you've long felt like the one thing missing from your Audi was in-car TikTok, fret no more. Volkswagen Group is the latest to join the in-car app party, and it's doing it in a big way. And it's a preview of the conglomerate's big plans for a unified in-car software platform that will govern how its cars operate for years to come.

The world's second-largest vehicle manufacturer announced today that it will soon roll out an app store designed to serve its wide portfolio of car brands. Inside, drivers will find familiar third-party apps optimized for car-friendly usage.

The initial rollout includes big names like TikTok, Spotify, Yelp, and more, all optimized for in-car use and designed to run from an infotainment system screen. The app store will launch with certain new Audi models this year and will be rolled out to additional cars and brands, like Porsche, Lamborghini, and Bentley, later on.

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In doing so, VW Group joins in the increasing proliferation of a smartphone-like experience in the car. Last month, Mercedes-Benz also announced that its new cars, starting with the 2024 E-Class, will include built-in apps for TikTok, Zoom, the

Vivaldi web browser, and more.

The VW Group's app store launch is even more extensive. The apps available at launch span a wide range of categories, including music and podcasting, video conferencing, weather, parking, EV charging, gaming, news, smart home integration, and more.

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However, Hilgenberg said the app store is crucial to VW's plans for exactly that – a network of connected vehicles running on the same software platforms, even if they range from humble Volkswagens to expensive Porsches.

"If you talk about 40 million connected vehicles by 2030, this is relevant for developers to say, hey, why not [curate] my application also in that ecosystem?" Hilgenberg said.

In TikTok's case in particular, it's yet another sign of the explosive, almost overnight popularity of the often-controversial social video platform. VW's move speaks to the ubiquity of the app with Gen Z users, especially in China, which is also the world's largest car market. In Mercedes' case, that directly informed the decision to add the service to its own upcoming cars, *TechCrunch* reported.

The VW Group is in talks to add native Google Maps integration to the system

Given TikTok's data privacy and security concerns, Hilgenberg said Cariad has been "very strict" on this point and said third-party apps are not able to write to the automotive software itself. And unlike the Mercedes-Benz E-Class, there won't be an in-cabin selfie camera for recording TikToks in

any VW vehicles. "For now, the TikTok App can only be used to consume content," a spokesperson said.

The app store rollout is also a big software test for Volkswagen Group, which has struggled in that regard for years despite an aggressive push toward electric and connected cars. Specifically, the company's Cariad division has been tasked with unifying previously disparate initiatives and platforms, all to serve a new generation of EVs that will rely heavily on software for charging, updates, automated driving, and more.

It's a difficult balancing act. Though it faces tough competition from Tesla, BYD, and others, VW seeks to be the world leader in EV production. Previously, however, this has led VW to rush cars to market with software that wasn't quite ready for prime time, even though advanced features like over-the-air updates and battery management are crucial to their success. The current VW Group CEO's immediate predecessor was ousted in part over these problems.

Cariad spokesperson Fabian Lebersorger said the division's plans this year include debuting new software platforms and improved driver-assistance systems for upcoming vehicles like the electric Porsche Macan and the Audi Q6 E-tron.

"We have adjusted our roadmaps to more realistic time schedules," Lebersorger said. "2023 is the year of delivery for Cariad."

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