Technology is becoming a differentiator in today's vehicles, both in terms of vehicle brand and the ability to integrate the automotive environment with the world around it through such channels as infotainment and the Web. Delivering such connectivity reliably and consistently requires partnerships that link carmakers and their traditional suppliers with experts in the world of telematics and electronics.

The theme of the SAE Convergence 2010 conference—Partnerships Driving Smart Mobility—addresses this need. This year's event on Oct. 19-20 at Cobo Center in Detroit is co-hosted by Ford Motor Co. and Microsoft Corp. Paul Mascarenas, Ford's vice president of engineering for global product development, and Kevin Dallas, general manager, Windows Embedded, Microsoft Corp., describe this month's conference and expo.

Why are non-traditional partnerships important today?

Mascarenas: Consumers today increasingly perceive their vehicles as an extension of their home or office. Providing that seamless connectivity requires technologies that are increasingly being delivered through partnerships. Many times, these collaborations involve experts who are new to the auto industry.

Ford's extremely popular SYNC system, which was developed with Microsoft and is being relaunched this autumn with next-generation capabilities called MyFordTouch, is a perfect example of the result of these types of collaboration. This is a new human machine interface whose architecture must be compatible with a wide variety of current and future electronic devices that consumers bring into the vehicle. Developing it would be virtually impossible without partners. Convergence attendees will have the opportunity to see examples of this technology during the Ride and Drive.

Dallas: Microsoft's partnerships have resulted in key benefits for auto manufacturers and suppliers, as well as consumers. With Microsoft as a direct automotive software supplier, carmakers gain a trusted and valued technical advisor, one that provides strategic guidance on product roadmaps and planning for upcoming protocols and standards. Furthermore, having a core software platform provides our carmaker partners like Fiat and Ford more flexibility and extensibility to innovate, speed up the product refresh cycle and evolve their in-vehicle infotainment systems in step with the consumer electronics industry. Fiat's Blue&Me and Ford's SYNC are just a couple examples of successful Microsoft partnerships in creating engaging in-vehicle infotainment systems.

At SAE Convergence 2010, we'll be further discussing our partnerships and showcasing new exciting offerings made possible by our collaborations.

SAE CONVERGENCE 2010

Partnerships Driving Smart Mobility

Hosted by Ford Motor Co. and Microsoft Corp.

When: Oct. 19-20
Where: Cobo Center, Detroit
What: The auto industry's premiere biennial transportation electronics event

Registration: $25-$1,095

For details, please click here or visit sae.org/convergence

How important are standards in accelerating the adoption of smart mobility?

Mascarenas: The main standards in this area, USB for hardwired connections and the Bluetooth protocol for wireless connectivity, are huge enablers. They have driven much of the progress we've seen over the past few years in making it possible to bring networking to the automobile.

What does Convergence offer this year?

Dallas: SAE Convergence 2010 is a fantastic event where automotive and technology industry leaders from around the world come together to showcase and discuss what's most important to our businesses, and ways we can partner to exceed customer expectations. It's an exciting time for in-vehicle technologies, and Microsoft is thrilled to be working with our partners to deliver innovative, connected, in-car user-experiences.

Mascarenas: This year's Convergence is two rather than three days long, so it's very concentrated and efficient.

What other areas will be addressed?

Mascarenas: SAE Convergence 2010 looks at electronics holistically as an enabler, not just in terms of connectivity for infotainment systems. That means this year's event also will address such critical developments as active and passive safety, fuel economy, vehicle efficiency, cost control and the challenge of managing electronic power consumption.

What are some special features of this year's event?

Mascarenas: Attendees will find a large number of demonstrations, static displays and several ride-and-drive opportunities. There will be keynotes, panel discussions, technical presentations and an informal "chat with the experts" event—all focusing on sharing knowledge and insight. It will be a very data-rich environment in which to gain early exposure to new technology, share the industry's vision and access suppliers and partners. A Career Fair will be held both days for engineering professionals.

Dallas: I'll be moderating a Blue Ribbon panel on the mobility ecosystem, specifically on the convergence of new technologies and applications and ways an open and flexible platform enables a seamless connected experience for the driver and passenger. Executives from Kia Motors, Sprint Nextel, OnStar and other leaders in the mobility and automotive space will be sharing their thoughts on trends impacting the industry and how they plan to respond to these trends. There also will be a discussion focused on the importance of partnerships.