

lingua business

Th!nk Again!

By Paul Gibson



The time has finally come. The stage is set and the main players are awaiting the arrival of a major product launch. Will it be successful? Will this new product change our lives the way the mobile phone did? Th!nk.

For decades we have all read articles about the technological advances in the automotive industry. Yet we have never been so close to the launch of a revolutionary product that could change the way we live. Some believe that such technology is dangerous. Still others see it as an absolute saviour of the environment.

What are we talking about? We are speaking of the new electric car about to be launched on a massive scale this summer in Norway, called "Th!nk". The brand name is certainly original, and speaks volumes about the importance of this event. The situation we are in right now, certainly does make us "think"!

What grabbed our attention, was the financial backing of General Electric (GE) and Silicon Valley Venture Capital giant Kleiner Perkins. I suppose we were not surprised to find advertising used in the marketing campaign, speaking of 'an inconvenient truth' and shouts of 'save the environment' reminiscent of the fury of green technology. Even less when you consider the new senior associate at Kleiner, Mr. Al Gore.

Nonetheless, the prototype fits the profile for most consumers. However, the size and shape may not impress the aesthetic demands of many drivers, in search of space and aerodynamics. On the other hand, the vehicle already reaches 100 km per hour in less than 9 seconds and can travel distances of about 200 km without having to recharge. Plus, the Scandinavian design features are certain to dazzle and delight the budget of families looking for ways to save money and cut down on everyday expenses. (*Th!nk Ox* for example seats five passengers and costs less than 19,200 Euros)

The only downside may be a breakdown due to battery failure. This could lead to a series of complaints on the part of the customer. To resolve this situation, the engineering department has developed a backup system using hybrid fuel. Recent advances include the use of new sodium- or lithium-based battery packs and auto-rechargeable batteries that allow the machine to function for longer periods of time and longer distances.

Still, there are other less apparent consequences that could seriously affect the balance of power on a global scale. Critics cite the potential rift that could develop among Arab nations and the Western world due to the revolutionary nature of the energy source. However, other experts argue that money from the oil industry can be invested in this new business venture and will actually contribute to, not deter, the success of the product launch in Europe this summer.

Still, there are many hurdles to overcome until we see the use of the machine on a massive scale. Many opponents think the cost of development and infrastructure is too expensive. Others simply refuse to change consumer behaviour and preferences by dictating to them what they need, and when they need it.

The future promises to be an interesting one, involving repercussions in other sectors, not just the energy sector. By altering the bottom line that most businesses have to deal with across the board, some say we are headed for a time of less financial stress. The mainstream will find it more difficult to adapt their habits to this new reality, but in the end, the Earth will be a cleaner, healthier place to live in - for us and for generations to come.

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