

Women In Automotive Interview Series

Part of Informa Tech Automotive Group's Summer Festival of Automotive.

In partnership with:



Meet Diptii Tiiku, Senior Director Marketing, Ridecell Inc.

1. Why did you get involved in automotive?

After spending 15 years in financial services marketing, I decided to pursue a Master's degree in business at Stanford. Going back to a student budget meant I didn't have a car at the time. Luckily, new services like ZipCar, Uber, and Lyft were emerging, which made moving around easier than ever without a car.



The first time I used the app to order a car service, I knew this was just the beginning, and there would be a massive re-invention of transportation over the next 10-20 years. I thought to myself; the rapidly changing MaaS industry would be a great place to apply my skill and knowledge next. I love building things from the ground up, and I knew automotive would be an exciting industry to help re-build.

About that time, I met Aarjav Trivedi, who had founded Ridecell. He was a true visionary. His company was built to help usher in this new wave of transportation now and over the next 20 years. I knew that was the kind of company I wanted to join—one that is innovating in a way that will change how people move and get from place to place. Being able to move is essential to people's lives. It's how they get to work, visit family, seek medical care, and take in new places and experiences. I felt Ridecell was really going to impact people's lives, and I wanted to be part of it.

2. What do you think is the biggest obstacle/challenge facing our industry?

I think MaaS is facing 2 major challenges:

Industry Dynamics – The transportation industry as a whole is in flux, making it hard to hit a constantly moving target. Innovation needs to keep up but be agile enough to adjust as the market shifts. For example, ridesharing was supposed to lead to autonomous driving by now. But autonomous vehicles require technological advances along with regulatory, city, and consumer behavior changes. Therefore, ridesharing needs to adjust to being profitable in the short-term and the long-term. And then COVID hit, disrupting public transportation and ridesharing as people looked for safer, more isolated ways of traveling. While COVID also left many car dealerships with an excess of cars on their lots, it gave way to new business models such as contactless sales and test drives, short-term leasing for gig and delivery workers, and an uptick in carsharing services. Having fast reflexes to adjust to these kinds of swiftly changing market dynamics is key to survival today.

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Evolving Ecosystem – Many of the new market entrants do not come from the mobility space. They are the auto manufacturers and dealers whose businesses have been disrupted by carsharing, ridesharing, and even scooters and electric bicycles. They have no previous experience running a mobility business but need to adapt to changing consumer needs. Technology providers like Ridecell can help them navigate this new world by identifying both challenges and opportunities. The new ecosystem isn't just about co-selling and traditional partnerships. We need to act as consultants and help newcomers succeed.

3. What is the biggest opportunity in autotech right now?

While the COVID-19 pandemic has hurt many businesses, it has also created new opportunities. Consumers may be less likely to take an Uber Pool, but they will order take-out or other delivery services. During the economic uncertainty, consumers may prefer to rent a vehicle for short-term leases, from an hour to a month, rather than making a long-term purchase or lease commitment. New consumer behavior and demands open up possibilities for dealers, automakers, and even rideshare fleets to re-purpose excess inventory to carsharing or new short-term rental models. Technology can help these companies quickly adjust their business models to the current need. A simple phone app can transform a high-touch business to contactless, short-term, on-demand mobility services. When consumer preferences shift again, the businesses can switch back to their old models, continue the new one, or even offer a hybrid of the old and the new. Flexibility is the most significant opportunity awaiting autotech today.

4. What, if any, new business opportunities has the pandemic surfaced?

The pandemic has dramatically changed the industry. Over the last say 4-5 years, Uber has been a huge source of vehicle demand. In the last several months, that demand has shifted to services like Instacart that have seen massive growth in demand for deliveries.

At Ridecell, we are seeing a big shift in usage patterns. People want to utilize cars for longer periods. In Paris, Renault and the ZITY Car Share teamed up with the Red Cross and local hospitals to provide vehicles to medical personnel. Rather than using cars for the usual quick and short duration commutes, medical workers kept the vehicles for their entire shift, and ZITY's maintenance teams ensured that the vehicles were cleaned and sanitized between users.

In the Bay Area, GIG Car Share started Gig4Good, a service geared towards community-focused organizations that need vehicles for critical operations. The Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano uses Gig cars to distribute resources, like meals and groceries, to individuals stranded at home. Also, these providers added new plans to their offerings by presenting weekly and monthly rental packages to their customers.

Before COVID, mobility was about moving people. Now, mobility is about caring for people.

5. Any predictions you want to make for 2020/2021?

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Public transportation and ridesharing will continue to be in less demand. Also, a side effect of the shaky economy is that fewer people are committing to long term car ownership. Overall, automotive sales this year are expected to be down by double-digit percentages. I expect both consumer and dealer mindsets will shift from ownership to usership. In that context, carsharing will have a resurgence, but people will want to hold onto the vehicles for longer periods. In response to these changing consumer behaviors, mobility providers, auto dealerships, and anyone with an idle fleet of cars will start offering rentals by the minute, day, or weekend or month.

As consumers get used to these new models, we may see usership models stay long past COVID.

6. Where would you like to see women gain traction in this space?

Compared to other industries, I think automotive still has strides to make in increasing women's participation in the space. The diversity in thought and ideas that women bring can certainly help the industry move forward. From car design to car usage and new sales and business models, having women's perspective is valuable to the industry, and we need more of it. If you are looking to solve hard problems, innovate, and make an impact, women need to be part of that process. Also, I'd love to see women in leadership and hear more about their experiences and challenges. Hearing female voices helps mentor others and give credence to their successes in the industry.

Thanks, Diptii for taking the time to talk to us about your experience working in Automotive.