

How Toyota Breaks Ground While Looking to the Horizon

July 25, 2019

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With over a century of innovation embedded in its DNA, Toyota is channeling its expertise and embracing new tech-savvy companies that are entering the market — startups with a mission to change the world. Where some see disruption, others see an opportunity to collaborate and accelerate the discovery of the next seismic idea.

[Toyota AI Ventures](#), a standalone venture capital subsidiary of the Toyota Research Institute (TRI), is plotting a course forward for innovators looking to transform the world around us. The team is constantly on the lookout for those who have the ideas and vision to tackle important challenges, bringing new technologies and mobility businesses to market. Based in Silicon Valley, Toyota AI Ventures invests in entrepreneurs from around the world who are developing disruptive technologies and business models in the areas of artificial intelligence, cloud, data, robotics and autonomous mobility.

“What we’re doing is watching the experiments that are being conducted by startups in this marketplace and, quite frankly, learning from the failures and celebrating the successes,” says Jim Adler, founding managing director of Toyota AI Ventures and executive advisor at TRI. “That’s how we learn to be more resilient and adaptable to change.”

Giving Startups a Leg Up

Since launching in 2017, Toyota AI Ventures has invested in 22 startups, including cognitive AI company, Intuition Robotics, and May Mobility, a self-driving shuttle company. In May of this year, the firm announced a [second \\$100 million fund](#) to continue investing in early-stage startups, bringing Toyota AI Ventures’ total assets under management to more than \$200 million.

The strategy behind aiding early-stage startups is to offer funding, validation, and mentorship. In other words, the mission at Toyota AI Ventures is to help innovative ideas go further faster. And while many groundbreaking innovations may take time to mature, Toyota AI Ventures has been quick to build a portfolio aimed at speeding that process.

According to Adler, the challenge with autonomous vehicles is calibrating them for specific conditions and environments. After all, as Adler explains, an autonomous car “is just a really, really, big wheeled robot.” “It shouldn’t drive too fast, it shouldn’t drive too slowly, it shouldn’t be too aggressive, shouldn’t be too conservative. That driving behavior could be different in Riyadh or Amsterdam.”

Painting the bigger picture

That’s where Toyota AI Ventures comes in, not only to assemble the building blocks but also paint the bigger picture. Whether working with a large legacy company like Toyota or a smaller startup like May Mobility, Adler understands that the goal can’t be innovation simply for the sake of innovation. It must serve a larger purpose. By investing in startups, Adler and the team at Toyota AI Ventures are bringing big ideas to an even bigger stage and giving innovators a chance to shape the future.