

Uber adds 'valet' car rentals as it looks to rev rides

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Uber is offering a broader array of service to help people move around and get goods and services as the global pandemic eases

Uber on Wednesday added valet delivery of rental cars as part of a suite of offerings as it aims to be "one-stop-shop" for post-pandemic venturing out or dining in.

As COVID-19 vaccines make it safer for people to move about, Uber aims to be a hub for summoning rides, running errands, or renting vehicles.

"Uber wants to be and is the one-stop shop for getting to where you need to be," Uber engineer Adib Roumani said on a video briefing with journalists.

"That's really ultimately what we're after and we want to make sure that Uber speaks to all those use cases."

Use of Uber's food delivery service, Eats, surged during the pandemic as people avoided going to stores or restaurants, while its core ride-share offering stalled.

"While much of the world stood still over the last year, our team at Uber has been reimagining how the world moves to help us return—not just to normal, but to a better normal," Uber chief executive Dara Khosrowshahi said in a blog post.

Uber has been among the tech firms pitching in with vaccination efforts, and is seeing some "green shoots" as more people get jabbed, according to executives.

The San Francisco-based firm's vision has long been to get people using a combination of its services, for example enticing fans of Uber Eats to tap the app for rides or rentals.

Uber is making it possible for people taking shared rides to order items for pick-up from shops in route, or have deliveries waiting for them when they get home.

A "valet" option added to Uber's car rental feature available in the United States will let people use the app to book vehicles from Avis, with more partners to be added.

"Your rental car will be brought to your doorstep so you can hit the road sooner," Khosrowshahi said. "And when you're done, a driver will meet you to take the car back."

Uber Rent with Valet launched in Washington, DC, and was to be gradually expanded to other US cities.

"If I was Hertz, I would be worried about his," analyst Rob Enderle of Enderle Group said of an Uber alliance with Avis.

"Merged those two companies would create a fairly powerful contender in the rental space."

Avis, Budget, and Hertz were already among companies taking part in an Uber feature that lets

people rent cars for pickup.

Uber combining its services smoothly in a single smartphone app could be win and keep users, provided the experience is a good one for users, Enderle reasoned.

"The idea is excellent," the analyst said.

"But, it's going to depend on the execution and Uber's execution has been anything but even."

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