

Post

Smart Cities



M2M For Cities: What it Means, and Why City Leaders Will Have the Biggest Impacts They've Had in History

Wednesday, 13 November 2013



When you hear the phrase M2M (Machine to Machine), what do you think of? If you're like me, the first time you hear it you might picture a complex futuristic-like factory with machines interacting and connecting with one another. And although M2M *is* about the communication between machines, it's so much more than the name suggests. With the name M2M, you have to read between the lines (or in this case, the machines): the power behind M2M is the data that enables insightful, actionable information. And, perhaps the most life-changing M2M impact is that of our cities speaking to us.

Most people would agree that good communication is key to any relationship. And yet, we've lived in cities for years without being able to communicate with them. Do we still adore them? Yes. Do we still feel bonded to them? Yes. Do we still identify with them and feel pride for them? Yes. Do we know what's really happening in them? Not even close – or at least, not in real time until a citizen, commuter, visitor reports an issue, or in the worst case, not until it's too late (think infrastructure.)

I'll admit that having a city talk may sound strange in theory (What would it say? What would it sound like? Why does it matter?). In reality, it is going to drastically improve our quality of life. And when you compare it to other living and non-living things you try to talk to – your pets ('Come over here, Fluffy.' or 'Why are you barking?') to your car ('Why are you making that noise?' or 'Turn on the radio, please'), it's actually really not that far-fetched at all to recognize how neat it would be if we could communicate with our cities. If we could talk, they could talk, we could listen to each other, and we could fix a problem – or find a solution to an inefficiency that we didn't know previously existed.



There are so many inefficiencies, significant amounts of money wasted, quality of life impacts, and even strong safety concerns from a lack of the two-way communication and action with our cities. M2M lets our cities become connected so that they talk to us, we talk to them, and city systems talk to each other. It releases our cities from dependence on other people so it *can tell its own story all on its own*. The connected M2M city is a city that is proactive rather than reactive and takes care of problems either on its own – or by alerting us immediately.

What does this look like, exactly? It means that transportation systems – from buses, to parking spaces, to trains, to cars – all talk to each other to make the most efficient schedule to move people through the city as quickly and safely as possible. It means that if a streetlight turns off or carbon monoxide in a home is detected, city personnel are instantly dispatched. It means the fire hydrants can unleash water before firefighters arrive on the scene. It means citizens and visitors feel safer walking alone at night. It means that garbage trucks know which cans actually need to be emptied. It means that air quality can be monitored continuously. It means we know when a building isn't structurally sound.

We're just beginning to start the new revolution of our cities and our lives. It is a revolution that shifts the city from being speechless its entire existence – one that must wait for others to report actions, or for people to discover issues by the time it is too late – to an intelligent system that predicts issues before they occur and responds immediately.

Today, sensors are becoming cheaper, people are more aware, and there are real M2M solutions happening right now that are making our cities talk. You could almost make the claim that cities are moving from their dependent childhood state into their independent adulthood. But, how do we get there?

M2M is the Door, But City Leaders Hold the Key

The technology is here. But we are not there. Why? So much of the possibilities available via M2M lie within the power of our city leaders.

Local is key for impact. Grass roots action and improving issues at a local level are often the biggest ways to impact positive change. And the biggest way to do that is to know what is happening, in real time, and make locally based decisions instantly.

City leaders have always had a direct role to improve people's lives. However, with a lack of information flowing to and from the city, the city itself was preventing leaders from reaching their full impact.

Now that M2M is here, we can expect a better quality of life and more economic growth. But we need local leaders and citizens to embrace, believe in, and pursue what is just starting to unfold in front of us. We're in the process of seeing whom the early adopters are when it comes to M2M. My advice to city leaders is this: welcome M2M technology. It can be your and your citizens' best friend. But you need to start. It's not where you start, but *that* you start.



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