

M2M



**M2M AND SOCIAL NETWORKS:
The Missed Connection**

**WINNING WAYS:
Avoid the Tipping Point**

A NEW SET OF WHEELS



TECHNOLOGY
BRINGS BACK THE
JOYRIDE FOR DRIVERS ...

... CAN NEW GADGETS
REINVENT THE BUSINESS
FOR AUTOMAKERS?



M2M AND SOCIAL NETWORKS: THE MISSED CONNECTION

It would seem that an industry based on communications would be among the first to embrace the newest form of this action: social networks. Yet, the crawl to the use of social networks in M2M (machine-to-machine) is measurable. Social network chatter about M2M pales in comparison to newer initiatives like smart grid. Considering that the “Internet of Things” is celebrating its eleventh anniversary this year (MIT 1999), and smart grid is celebrating its third (IDC energy conference 2007), the M2M community has been practically Luddite-like in terms of social network adoption. The net result is an inability to attract new players and innovators into the space and a lack of awareness in many related fields. The statistics tell the story:

- There were 42 M2M groups on LinkedIn as of the end of 2009. A review of some groups typically associated with machine-to-machine technology finds 3,956 for energy, 790 for telecommunications, 1,691 for manufacturing, 1,252 for water, and 89 for smart grid (the largest of the groups relating to smart grid having 5,704 members).
- A casual Twitter search finds the term M2M is associated with a band, not a technology. Smart grid, however, has multiple references and groups.
- The terms M2M and 'M-to-M' turn up a number of groups and companies on Facebook, but few are actually related to technology. A search for smart grid turns up 64 groups, most of which are related to technology.
- A Google blog search for "Internet of Things" (published anytime) turns up 24,747 blog citations, while searching for "smart grid" turns up 183,777.

Given the thousands of "traditional" technology and telecommunications companies involved with social networks, there is a disconnect between M2M companies and the rest of the world. The opportunities for sharing data, advancing the technology, and expanding the mainstream recognition of M2M through social networks are barely tapped. But are social networks really necessary for these goals? What do social networks actually have to offer?

Who's using social media? A quick look at the numbers shows a rapid rise in the use of social networks:

- LinkedIn currently has more than 5 million users representing 150 industries around the world.
- People ages 35-54 are the fastest growing demographic among Facebook users. This network has more than 250 million active users who log in at least once daily.
- Twitter may be setting new records for Website growth. Its accounts grew 1,382% from February 2008 to February 2009. Its users are primarily ages 35-49, and 62% access the service from work. Twitter also has an attrition problem, with 60% of its users failing to return a month after they've signed up.
- While blogging has greatly slowed down, the number of established, active blogs is becoming consistent. Technorati, <http://technorati.com>, San Francisco, Calif., tracks more than 100 million bloggers worldwide.

Many technology businesses have found social networks help achieve certain fundamental goals and have become very active in their respective online communities. These include customer service,



Individual blog entries can be as long or short as the blogger desires.



With only 140 characters for each post, Twitter pages feature many short messages.

market research, promotions, brand building, and sales. Additionally you'll find opportunities for technology development, potential partners, funding, and sales. Which one of these doesn't align with the business plans of machine-to-machine companies?

But social networks are also a barometer of general interest and activity. Consider the difference between M2M and smart grid again: M2M has hardly lived up to the potential that has been vainly highlighted by its hype, as epitomized by the oft quoted "\$100 billion in revenue by 2010" forecast from McKinsey and Co., www.mckinsey.com, New York, N.Y. With the number of embedded devices crossing so many industries, machine-to-machine should have easily outstripped smart grid simply on the number of people it potentially touches.

And this brings up the real untapped potential of social networks: evangelizing the industry as a whole and attracting new blood. There have been those who have actively tried to move the ball forward, but it's hard to push a boulder up a mountain with just a few hands. How many executives from companies on the M2M 100 list actually blog on a regular basis or start discussions on LinkedIn? For M2M to take off on social networks, more members of the M2M community need to become engaged online.

Social networks are easy to understand: People like to talk. But knowing how to use a social network to effectively grow business and professional relationships is another matter entirely. It's about much more than chitchat and clever status updates delivered in 140 characters or less. Success requires time and effort.

According to Robin Chase, founder and CEO, cars on-demand company Zipcar, www.zipcar.com, Cambridge, Mass., "Time wasting is an excellent source of innovation ... make time to read widely and cultivate a variety of friends and online groups." Lesson one in taking the social network plunge is this: Just getting wet doesn't make you a diver.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE SOCIAL NETWORKS:



LinkedIn: The current king of the hill in general professional social networks. LinkedIn offers opportunities to form and join groups, conduct research on specific people, survey, recruit, and review jobs. www.linkedin.com



Facebook: Always referenced as part of the big three of social networks, along with LinkedIn and Twitter. Facebook is also a good tool for tracking trends and opinions. Facebook status pages can be linked to Twitter feeds to automatically update. www.facebook.com



Twitter: The current darling of social media pundits, most of whom agree that Twitter has created a lot of interest, but has a murky future. Twitter is a micro-blogging platform that allows users to publish messages of only 140 characters. www.twitter.com



Blogs: The key to blogging success is the nature of content; it needs to be relevant to something of importance to you or your potential customer/audience. Blogs also need to be updated on at least a weekly basis.



MySpace: If you're reading this, MySpace is not for you.

Our destiny lies in finding new collaborators.

A recent paper by Harbor Research, www.harborresearch.com, San Francisco, Calif., cites a model of a "collaborative device community" as a main driver of M2M companies to social networks. According to the paper, "Collaborative device communities integrate devices, sensors, and connected 'smart' products to communities of potential collaborators." The authors admit collaboration between our current iteration of companies is both a revolutionary and far reaching concept.

The key to making M2M's potential for future growth may actually lie in the industry as a whole embracing social networks and collaborating with the rest of the world—first. In a sense, we're already there as a community, we just haven't realized it yet. A recent M2M magazine survey found nearly 100% of subscribers felt the smart grid was actually an example of an M2M initiative. Unfortunately the rest of the world didn't agree. But had our brothers in arms engaged with other communities through social networks, that data may have resonated.

The model for success lies in the M2M community drawing in collaborators from all related fields, and becoming engaged in conversations that lead back to the 'Internet of Things.' A real future finds sub groups or auxiliary group conversations in every one of the industries that relies on extracting and using data from "things." At the core the issue is psychological, not technological: Instead of the M2M community standing outside and looking in, we need to realize that the 'Internet of Things' has been the basis for many other technologies and initiatives all along, and take our rightful place at the table. ■

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