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The Revolution Will Not Be “Productized”: Notes from the First M2M Expo and Conference

The M2M / Pervasive Internet era has now officially begun. Ultimately, it will be much bigger and more profound than the PC era.

But it will also be a harder sell, partly because you won't be able to see it, touch it, or look at pictures of it in a catalog.

You could feel the pioneer spirit in the air last week at the inaugural M2M Expo and Conference in Dallas, TX. People who had worked long and hard without much public glory suddenly found themselves in the midst of the first-ever formal event devoted not only to their dream but to the real-world market for their dream that is rapidly forming. It really was like watching history in the making, or being present at the birth of an era.

More than a few people compared it to the feeling of major revolution that they remembered from trade shows in the early days of the PC, thirty and more years ago. It did feel like that. But regarding that comparison to the PC, there are vital differences that should not be forgotten:

- ▶ M2M technologies will penetrate the world far more deeply—and change the world far more profoundly—than did the technologies of the PC era. But it will do so pervasively, ubiquitously, invisibly, and that's a much different thing.
- ▶ M2M does not arrive in the world as a distinct, perceivable product operating in a distinct, controlled environment. You don't buy into it the way you buy a PC running a specific desktop OS. In fact, M2M doesn't arrive in the world as distinct or perceivable, period. It “hits the market” in about a million different ways, most of them designed not to be directly perceivable by humans.

That said, the excitement was real and justified. M2M Expo left all the dreamers pinching themselves and finding that it wasn't a dream. A revolutionary new technology “space” full of amazing opportunities really does exist, and things in that space are finally beginning to move forward. M2M has “tipped” and begun to roll.

That does not mean, however, that it will now snowball massively, all by itself. The M2M / Pervasive Internet era is all about automation, but there's nothing “automatic” about the way it will happen. It will arrive in the world as a pervasive “cloud” of new technological and

business synergies. They will come into existence by careful design, not by sheer momentum. First of all, the major technology building blocks of those synergies must be brought into alignment. And so far, only the very first of those building blocks—networkable devices—has received sufficient attention. The building blocks include:

- ▶ **Intelligent, networkable devices** which are the result of product innovators making the decision to build sensing, intelligence, and connectivity into manufactured objects—cars, medical devices, the concrete walls of buildings, you name it.
- ▶ **Global network access** geared specifically for autonomous devices rather than human-operated products.
- ▶ **New middleware** created specifically for the management and mining of billions and trillions of daily device-generated data-points.
- ▶ **New applications** that will at first enhance and then replace existing enterprise knowledge apps. These new apps will flow middleware-massaged machine data into existing and new IT infrastructures to "automate the enterprise."

In the world of M2M / Pervasive Internet suppliers, the alignment of these major elements will require many creative business alliances to seize at least the most obvious value-add opportunities, and to provide end-to-end real-world solutions.

The whole idea of connected devices automating the world has been so long in coming that the basic plumbing task of getting devices connected has dominated the agenda and discussion. As we've said here before, this has led to a kind of tunnel vision that has often kept suppliers from seeing the world from the adopter perspective.

Devices talking to and controlling each other will someday bring us to the next great Wonder of the World—complete global automation. But from the perspective of an adopter CEO, "talking devices" are not much more than a high-tech parlor trick until they actually change the way a business operates in the real world.

Last week's M2M Expo and Conference was designed to bring together many diverse constituent groups across the landscape of pervasive computing and device networking. It accomplished that goal admirably. We predict that the Expo's reverberations will be felt throughout the year in the form of key partnership and licensing announcements, not just "new product" announcements. ◀

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