

The Last Byte

The Internet of People

Scott Davidson

■ **MORE AND MORE STUFF** in this world is connected today. Our thermostats, our lights, our TVs, our traffic lights, all connected. It is the Internet of Things. And people are things too, so we should expect to be connected.

One of the issues of remote sensors is that they collect lots of information. Say you have sensors distributed throughout California's forests to find the next forest fire before it gets too big. An inexpensive sensor will not have much storage or battery, so storing or transmitting all its readings is impractical. The solution is to put intelligence into the sensor so that it sends an "I'm alive" signal every so often and only reports on detected fires or fire-prone conditions.

Well, we're putting sensors near and inside ourselves. The article by Bhat, Deb, and Ogras in this issue of *IEEE Design&Test* notes that wearable health monitors have the same problem as sensors. Bulky monitors are bothersome to wear, which I can testify to, and small monitors have battery charging and storage issues. Therefore, devices on the Internet of People have the same problem as devices on the Internet of Things.

We want to know the location of things on the Internet of Things. This goes double for people. If you keep location turned on for your Android phone, you can go to Google and look up exactly where you were at specific times. Scary. Big Brother had nothing on them.

But this isn't enough. If you are inside a building or a store, the net loses track of you. The article by Tiku and Pasricha talks about dealing with this

problem. The benefit is to help you find things inside a store, but I suspect the real benefit is letting the owners of the store track you.

We all know that when you wander around the traditional Internet and look at bicycles, bicycle ads will follow you everywhere. Think of the fun we'll have when the same applies to our movements within stores. Visit Macarget, get lost, wind up in the crib section, get a call so you stay there for five minutes, and the data powers that be will be sure that you're having a baby soon, and you'll be deluged with ads for onesies and diapers.

Wait until the data analysis gets fast enough to be interactive. Ask your phone where the shirts are, and it will tell you to turn left at the next aisle because it is high time you bought some new jeans.

You can avoid this by just going straight to what you want to buy without consulting your phone, right? Not a chance. We'll lose the ability to find our way in stores just as we've lost the ability to find anything without our GPS; and if stores are smart, they'll either move merchandise or block aisles so you have no chance of finding anything without your phone. We might lose the concept of autonomous shoppers about the time we get autonomous cars.

You laugh, but Ikea is almost there. Do away with the line on the floor and put in some more short cuts and see how you do without an Ikea Positioning System. You'll be crawling past the bookcases panting "meatballs, I need meatballs." ■

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