REPORT REPRINT

Amid pandemic, NTT moves its IoT platform beyond smart cities

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The IT services firm launched its platform with city deployments, including Las Vegas. It is now driving its build-your-own data platform approach to IoT into other smart space opportunities looking to help enterprises with their return-to-work initiatives.

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Introduction

With businesses seeking technology help to bring employees safely back to work, NTT has refocused its Accelerate Smart Platform – originally targeted at public sector smart city projects – with new capabilities to enable a range of back-to-work use cases in a variety of industries. The IT services arm of NTT has positioned its IoT platform capabilities broadly, allowing enterprises to collect and analyze a range of data, including from IoT endpoints and enterprise and third-party sources.

The company's initial focus was on public sector opportunities, exemplified by a wide-ranging engagement with the city of Las Vegas in support of a variety of IoT-driven use cases. NTT recently updated 451 Research on its Accelerate Smart Platform, highlighting its data analytics and application development focus while sharing new prebuilt use case templates that it believes can help enterprises better manage their workspaces and track employee health amid the pandemic.

451 TAKE

NTT's approach fits well with organizations looking to build a flexible, roll-your-own platform for collecting IoT data and generating critical insights. Its deep roots in big-data analytics and NTT-parent capabilities like IoT connectivity – alongside its services orientation and overall open approach – can address even the most complex IoT requirements. That said, assembling prebuilt templates to jumpstart a slate of coronavirus-driven use cases should help it open more customer doors while its Accelerate Smart Platform can turn those initial deployments into more varied, enterprise-wide opportunities over time.

Context

NTT's approach with its Accelerate Smart Platform is to target enterprises wanting the flexibility to build their own IoT data analytics ingestion, analytics and dashboarding capabilities. For enterprises wanting a quick and easy, single-sensor/single-use-case IoT deployment, a point application might be a better fit, company executives admit. By comparison, NTT's IoT data and analytics platform coupled with the firm's deep IT services capabilities can support a wider variety of more customized use cases.

For example, its top customer example in Las Vegas began with an intelligent transportation pilot program, leveraging optical and sound sensors and edge-based IoT processing to enhance traffic management via improved signal timing, wrong-way driver detection and better communications with safety and first-responder vehicles. With that pilot wrapped up and expanding, the city this summer launched additional IoT use cases on the same infrastructure centered around public safety in city parks.

For both the previous and new use cases, edge-based micro-datacenters are used for low-latency decision-making at the edge, while historical data is transported and stored – only as necessary – at centralized locations to enable long-term analysis and AI model training. While the Las Vegas deployment was based on NTT's Smart Platform, the company's IT services arm, NTT DATA, delivered the project working directly with the city.

Smart spaces, back to work

NTT has found new opportunities in emerging return-to-work requirements amid the pandemic. To meet the urgent and rapidly evolving needs of such customers – not only cities but also businesses in any sector needing to glean critical workspace insights – the vendor launched a program focused on small pilots of high-potential, prepackaged use cases such as crowd analytics, including the ability to monitor spaces for occupancy, overcrowding and social distancing; real-time access control and notifications for limiting and controlling access to work environments; and health check and monitoring, including remote thermal temperature scanning.

Customers can combine multiple capabilities like Lego blocks to address their unique back-to-work requirements. For instance, a business could combine the capabilities to set up a building occupancy application – checking space utilization in real time, assessing the health of a new visitor as they arrive, and granting access based on their health check and safe space availability. This is all done automatically via sensors and low-latency edge data processing to keep traffic in and out of offices both safe and quick-moving.

While public and health sector customers can obviously make use of the capabilities, NTT says commercial clients are moving more quickly and urgently to deploy such use cases, with a focus not on more public health-related capabilities like contact tracing but on automating moment-by-moment space utilization and oversight and employee and visitor safety. Early pilot deployments have taken as little as two months, with the bulk of time spent procuring and deploying hardware such as optical sensors and thermal scanners.

The pilot program of back-to-work IoT use cases is part of a larger COVID-19 Pandemic Response Portfolio of services from NTT, including offerings for health care track and trace (deployed by the city of Austin, Texas); interactive chatbots that can screen for coronavirus symptoms; a data capture and analysis application for processing Payroll Protection Program loans; and distance learning programs, including a deployment for New York City.

Competition

Every large IT services and infrastructure vendor has an IoT platform and increasingly a set of applications to aid back-to-work initiatives. IBM has its Watson Works program (451 Research subscribers can look for a forthcoming report on the program), and both IT providers such as HPE and IT services firms like Infosys have rolled out return-to-work initiatives in recent months.

SWOT Analysis

STRENGTHS

Its open platform approach and extensive big-data capabilities place NTT in good standing for complex IoT projects while the new prepackaged use cases and pilot program can jumpstart new customer deals.

WEAKNESSES

Not as well known outside of APAC as some of its most direct rivals – yet lead-focused on the US market – NTT must at times overcome name and brand recognition issues before it can tout its deep technology roots and heritage.

OPPORTUNITIES

Smart spaces can mean different things in different sectors – leveraging its initial smart cities focus into malls, stadiums and ultimately commercial spaces of all shapes and sizes greatly expands the target market for NTT's IoT platform and applications.

THREATS

Like other IT services firms trying to play the horizontal platform game, NTT risks being outflanked on both sides – 'outproduced' by best-of-breed vendors and 'outserviced' by SIs and consultants with extensive vertical industry expertise.