Alien Technology

Neda Simeonova, editorial director
nsimeonova@sgcmail.com

I often wonder how our world today would seem to someone from the 1800s. In reality, the past two decades alone have made a huge impact on technology development.

We went from the dial-up Internet sound to hard-to-put-down smartphones and even advanced wearable technology, which allows fitness and health-focused consumers to chart anything from the amount of calories they burn to detailed sleeping patterns tracking the number of times they wake up while sleeping. These fitness trackers are even capable of gathering heart rate data, syncing it with accompanying smartphone apps and analyzing a person's overall progress.

This ever-persistent development of new technology is changing the way we do day-to-day tasks, including the conveniences we now expect when we go to pay our utility bills.

While not necessarily on the forefront on some of these technologies, water utilities are catching up and quickly closing the gap.

A number of water utilities around the country now are providing their customers with the ability to pay and track their bills using a simple mobile app on their smartphones. These apps take automated online payments a step further, allowing customers to pay their bill anytime, anywhere and using a wide variety of payment methods. They also come with convenient notifications and proactive alerts, improving revenue collection.

Recently, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) announced that it has implemented a new online reporting application to collect reports of odors, stream blockages and other environmental-related issues more efficiently.

The new tool allows residents to notify the district of environmental issues via a link on the MWRD website that prompts a short questionnaire about the problem. District staff then will use this information to investigate complaints and plan future work.

According to the MWRD, the next step in the evolution of incident reporting will be the creation of a smartphone application, which would make the reporting of issues even easier.

But technology developments are not just improving external communication and data management between utilities and their customers. According to Mark Nowak, vertical market development manager, water/wastewater and civil infrastructure markets, for Thomas & Betts, mobile apps are highly valuable in water treatment operations because they make a library of information available to the user. Touch-screen navigation and search functions allow operators to easily identify the most appropriate product to specify for an individual application. Mobile apps allow the user access to this information, as well as instructional or informational videos, without being tethered to a desk. Mobility can be especially helpful when the user is in a plant environment, in need of specific information.

Mobile apps, advanced data gathering and reporting are barely scratching the surface of how far technology can extend our potential.

I would have to assume that if someone from the 1800s was able to catch a glimpse of our technologically advanced world today, they might think that they are on another planet.

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