

Amazon Dash finally brings sense to the Internet of Things

Written by The Conversation

Amazon just announced a new product called the [Dash](#) button. Basically, it is a button with a label like Tide or Cottonelle, connected to the internet and available only to Amazon Prime members (you know, the subscription that gives you free shipping). When you need to buy the thing associated with the button, you press the button and a fresh supply turns up at your house a couple of days later.

Its usefulness to the consumer is obvious. You are sitting on the commode, notice you are running low on toilet paper and rather than having to fiddle with your phone (even if you have it there), you press the Cottonelle button and you are done. The same applies to all manner of products, from laundry detergents to sparkling soda. Currently, 255 products [are available](#) with a button, and Amazon didn't reveal what criteria determines which items will get one.

What's in it for Amazon is also obvious. This is yet another reason to join Prime and another reason to order stuff without thinking too hard about it. For instance, it will appeal to people who don't shop around for toilet paper deals. Amazon likes those people. Moreover, it seems to be closely related to Amazon's core business, unlike recent failed efforts like [Echo](#) and [Fire Phone](#).

What is more interesting about all of this is what it means for the so-called Internet of Things. This phrase has been around for a few years and was supposed to be the next big thing – connecting physical objects to the internet and allowing unspecified wonders to take place.

There has long been envisaged a WiFi-connected fridge that would work out what you are low on, or what has expired, and relay that information to you without the need to open the door. Then there were the connected toasters or coffee makers that could automatically ensure your breakfast is ready when you get downstairs. Suffice it to say, this new connected world hasn't quite happened.

Where it has been more successful is in cameras you can place somewhere in your house and occasionally look in on pets or children. It has also been successful for things like thermostats (most notably [the Nest](#), which was bought by Google for around US\$3 billion last year) that can learn your behavior and preferences and adjust the temperature depending on the weather and other factors.

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Unlike the connected toaster, these devices have something important in common: they don't require you to do much. Specifically, they don't require you to change your routine or "homeflow" (a word I'm coining here that is the equivalent of workflow in software development). The idea is that people have routines as to how they juggle tasks. Software can slot into that routine (like checking your email or twitter). The same is true of home routines.

The Dash will, I believe, become the main example of this. It is homeflow-oriented and designed to cut out a ton of stuff. Consider what we have to do now with regard to toilet paper:

1. notice that toilet paper is low (in the bathroom)
2. do your business
3. remember to go and order more toilet paper or put it on a shopping list
4. remember the list.

With dash, the homeflow turns into:

1. notice that toilet paper is low
2. press button to order more.

It is simple and time efficient (you can press the button while taking care of business), and then you don't have to spend any more cognitive energy on the rest. In this way, you'll always have "[squares to spare](#)".

To those developing products for the Internet of Things, this is an important lesson. The thing is not what is critical but how it will fit into the homeflow. Amazon has found a way to crack that. Others will hopefully follow.

Will invitation-only Amazon Dash catch on?

Disclosure

Joshua Gans owns shares in Amazon.com but can't use this product because he is in Canada

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and that is just sad.

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