

Focus on: *The Smart City Dream*



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‘Smart City’ dream still on hold for many municipalities

New survey conducted by Johnson Controls reveals the obstacles facing smart city implementations

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The proliferation of IP cameras and other Internet of Things (IoT) sensors in recent years has led an ever increasing number of municipalities around the world to explore how they can leverage these devices to make their cities operate more intelligently. But while some civic leaders and residents have thrown themselves and their dollars wholeheartedly into these smart city initiatives, others have barely gotten such efforts off the ground.

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Globally, 22 percent said that they were implementing their strategic program, while 29 percent had published their strategy. North American cities tended to be a bit further along in their implementations as 29 percent said they were in the process of implementing their strategic program and another 37 percent indicated that their strategy had been published. Only three percent of respondents globally said they had no smart city initiative underway and that figure was zero as it pertained to North American participants in the survey.

While deploying municipal surveillance networks, intelligent lighting and traffic sensors may seem like a no-brainer for today's metropolises given their expanding populations, Hank Monaco, Vice President of Marketing for Johnson Controls, says that every city is different when it comes to the types of problems they're trying to solve with technology and that there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach that can be easily replicated for every smart city project.

"It starts with this notion of what the ambition of a city is and what are the important elements of what they're trying to accomplish?" Monaco explains. "For example, this can revolve around public safety, we want resiliency for our water utility system, or we are trying to drive efficiency or smart connectivity with our street lights and drive cost savings or we want more greenspace. It really starts with the ambition of the community and from there once that has been articulated, identifying who are some of the partners in the ecosystem and some of the key stakeholders... and then establishing checkpoints along the way to determine what success looks like."

Obstacles to Implementation

Unsurprisingly, funding remains one of the biggest hurdles for cities implementing smart city initiatives, however; the survey also found a number of other obstacles. Among some of the top barriers to investment cited by North American respondents included; lack of city leadership (18 percent); lack of state/federal government support (18 percent), and security concerns (14 percent). Additionally, the survey found that the biggest barrier globally was lack of proven business cases, which considering that the idea behind smart cities is to drive greater efficiencies and improve the lives of residents was a surprising finding, according to Monaco.

"I think it gets back to this notion that each community is different in some way and so the business models at this point do need to be created around the unique requirements of an individual city and sometimes getting a city to see the benefits of business model with a city that perhaps is somewhat comparable is not as easy," he says. "Secondly, we still are in the early stages, so while implementations have occurred and certainly there are proven results that we can point to and we have any number of case studies; oftentimes there is a desire to have more and there is a degree of diligence that folks are using that would say, 'hey, we really need to see more.'"

Even for those municipalities that are thoroughly committed to making smart city technology a reality in their community, securing financing remains a struggle for some. The most popular method for financing smart city projects, according to survey, were either through city funding efforts or via the state/federal government (55 percent for both), followed by public-private partnerships (43 percent), utilities (17 percent), private sector (six percent), and user funded (three percent). Thirty-six percent of respondents also said that the unavailability of appropriate financing options was their top financial barrier.

The Role of Integrators

Given that the survey identified systems integration, data analytics, artificial intelligence (AI)/machine learning, cybersecurity, and the IoT as the top technology trends that would most impact smart city projects over the next five years, security integrators are going to play a key role in the deployment of these intelligent systems moving forward.

"Being trusted advisors is really important and I think it is up to us, as integrators, to develop a strong level of exper-

tise and it starts with listening. It is listening to the needs, desires, problems, and aspirations of these city leaders and in what way do they feel compelled to accomplish their objectives,” Monaco says. “If we listen well and we bring subject matter expertise to the table and then we look at the approach holistically, there’s no silver bullet – it’s not a technology solution or an integrator solution – it’s a number of different elements and we have to make sure we’re thinking broadly and getting feedback from a variety of key stakeholders.”

Many of those surveyed indicated that their communities are already in the implementation phase of various smart city applications, including physical security technology. For example, 86 percent of respondents said that they are already deploying smart public safety solutions, which includes video surveillance/analysis products.

“Getting insights from, leveraging and protecting data is critical. This is really an important element of the world we live in today and not just for cities but all end-users in any environment,” Monaco adds. “And this is somewhat of a daunting road we’re on in preparing for the future and leveraging technology that is changing very, very rapidly. But you can take some steps to get ready – you don’t have to do everything at once – and that’s another important take away that I think both city leaders and integrators need to be thinking about.”

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