Collaboration

Steelcase, Sprint + Ericsson Explore 5G, IoT at Work

Industry leaders work together to discover how 5G and IoT will help transform the workplace and manufacturing.

Read 5 minutes

5G (Fifth Generation) and IoT (Internet of Things) are expected to dramatically impact every aspect of our lives. As commercial 5G networks are progressively being rolled out this year, these technologies are changing the smart + connected workplace and our work lives.

At the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona earlier this year, Ericsson CEO Börje Ekholm said North America and Asia are leading the world with 5G. As one of the world's leading providers of information and communication technology to service providers, Ericsson works closely with Sprint. In May 2019, Sprint announced the launch of its True Mobile 5G service. Sprint's initial 5G launch will cover areas of nine cities. Sprint 5G is ready to power new experiences for wireless customers, including IoT and business applications in covered areas.

As Steelcase continues to study how IoT, big data and cloud computing enhances the ways people work, it's collaborating with Sprint and Ericsson to discover how 5G will impact the office by deploying Sprint's 5G service in its Atlanta WorkLife Center. Steelcase is also in the early stages of exploring with Sprint and Ericsson how digital transformation efforts can advance aspects of manufacturing including safety and predictive maintenance.

"We have a long history of experimenting on ourselves before deploying solutions to our customers. Our work with 5G in Atlanta will give us an opportunity to uncover how this advancement will change behaviors at work," says Steve Miller, Steelcase CIO. "By working with industry leaders like Ericsson and Sprint, we can develop and test prototypes of future solutions for the office and our factories that have the potential to change the way we support our customers."

WHAT IS 5G?

5G is the latest generation of cellular mobile communications. Certain to be a disrupter, changing the rules around how things work, it will be a leap forward in how fast networks operate. There will be larger bandwidths, lower latency and unlimited amounts of data that can move across these networks. 5G brings with it a whole new way for devices to connect to one another, fueling the rise of IoT.

When it comes to manufacturing, operations and logistics, 5G is a game changer. "5G is going to rewrite the rules to help us improve accuracy, streamline delivery and allow us to be more agile," says Miller. "It's also going to change the way people work. 5G and IoT will have a tremendous impact on how AI, VR and AR are adopted within the workplace, and that's just the beginning. We want to be the early adopters and add to how we're exploring the ways place and technology work together to improve people's future work experience."

5G + IOT: A TWO-PRONGED APPROACH

Today, the Steelcase WorkLife facilities in Atlanta are the testing ground as the three companies explore a 5G-enabled office environment. Bluetooth and WiFi connections have the potential to be unreliable or intermittent. Ethernet cables are costly to install and cumbersome. 5G and IoT have the potential to dramatically lower the barrier to connectivity and innovation.

“Sprint 5G is a platform for innovation that will create new opportunities and growth across a wide range of industries,” said Mishka Dehghan, vice president of 5G Development for Sprint. “We are excited to be working with Steelcase and Ericsson to develop new use cases in the office environment.”
In addition, Steelcase and Ericsson have started to explore IoT for the workplace in collaboration with Sprint in the U.S. and other providers in China and Europe. Currently, Steelcase is able to help customers develop a Smart + Connected Workplace that acts as an interconnected layer of technology supporting digital wayfinding and room scheduling. These capabilities will only continue to grow as technology advances. Now, Steelcase is exploring how the low-latency, high-speed, well-connected technology IoT and 5G promises will enhance these solutions.

Steelcase, Ericsson and Sprint are also currently working on what the impact of IoT and 5G could be in manufacturing. Vibration sensors attached to legacy machines, data collected through Cat-M with the Sprint Curiosity IoT* platform, and analysis by AI algorithms provide insights on the performance and productivity of machines. Steelcase plans to test these platforms to determine if they can help predict when a machine needs maintenance before it breaks down. The technology has the potential to save money, time and further bolster one of the most reliable operations systems in the industry.

“This collaboration is about bridging the gap between digital and real experiences,” says Miller. “By working with leaders in the field of technology – both hardware and cellular networks – we’re able to discover what the future will hold faster and support our global efforts to scale up where the opportunities prove valuable.”

“Our strong collaboration with Sprint has already been recognized as an innovative, award-winning IoT platform. IoT is, no doubt, driving change in industrial environments like Steelcase factories, but it is exciting to see that change spill over to the Steelcase employees who work in their WorkLife Centers,” says Kiva Allgood, Head of IoT, Technologies and New Businesses, Ericsson. “Our aim is to make it easy for Sprint and Steelcase to harness the power and the value of connectivity and 5G in the Steelcase factory and the workplace. The insights that will be gained from connecting and analyzing the data from the factory and office will improve industrial processes as well as our daily lives.”

Sprint Curiosity™ IoT works with Ericsson’s IoT Accelerator and Cloud Core platforms, featuring a virtualized core network and an IoT operating system specifically designed for rapid enterprise IoT deployments.*

**Ericsson’s IoT Accelerator is a global IoT connectivity, device and data management platform used by more than 30 telecom service providers worldwide to provide managed connectivity services to over 3,700 enterprises in more than 100 countries. It enables enterprises to easily and cost-effectively manage IoT devices on a national, regional or global scale with full control throughout the entire IoT device lifecycle – with one easy-to-use dashboard.