

Internet of Things: Benefits versus privacy

BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT

29 September 2014, The ICC: Hall 10B, 12:30

Speakers

- Paul Waugh, editor in chief, Dods (chair)
- Ed Vaizey MP, Minister of State for Culture and the Digital Economy
- David Evans, membership director, BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT

Ed Vaizey MP, Minister of State for Culture and the Digital Economy, said privacy and investment were at the heart of the government's digital policy in a fringe event on Monday.

Introduced by Dods editor in chief Paul Waugh, the fringe panel were invited to discuss how the Internet of Things (IoT) could benefit the UK. Topics under discussion were lifestyle and health benefits, data privacy, education, business, and security.

Ed Vaizey, Minister of State for Culture and the Digital Economy, claimed that IoT - the interconnection of unique computing devices within an existing internet infrastructure - had the potential to cause as big a digital revolution as the internet.

He outlined four areas the government were working on to support the potential of IoT. Firstly, he said there needed to be wider awareness about IoT as a potential solution throughout departments.

He called on politicians to gain a greater understanding of IoT and to share their knowledge. "We have put resources behind it" he said.

Vaizey felt that the government needed to invest in researching the potential of IoT. He suggested this would create more technically skilled people for the industry. He added that chief scientific adviser Sir Mark Walport was currently generating a report about IoT, which would highlight potential issues.

Moving on, he said that if IoT were to become part of UK culture, and a digital solution for many problems, then issues surrounding data privacy would have to be rectified.

He said it was very important that standards were established that were friendly to both consumers and businesses, so they would not stand in the way of innovation.

Concluding his opening comments, Vaizey said that he was proud that computing was now part of the UK curriculum.

David Evans, membership director, BCS - The Chartered Institute for IT, agreed with Vaizey saying his members felt that IoT could potentially be as important as the invention of the internet.

He said technology was becoming more powerful, compact, and multifunctional. He used the example of sensors knowing when a household was running low on certain types of groceries and automatically ordering them from the shop. He felt this kind of device could be used to help the

elderly population.

He called on the government to take the idea of a national digital infrastructure seriously and added that broadband still needed to be made faster.

Addressing the topic of privacy, he agreed that individuals should have the right to protect their data but that it should not be at the detriment of digital businesses.

Questions and answer session

Opening the floor to questions, Waugh pressed the panel on the economic and lifestyle benefits of IoT.

Evans answered by returning to his point about IoT helping elderly people. He said it could show carers or family members if elderly people were eating regular cooked meals.

Vaizey added that an IoT culture would not just help the UK to remain competitive in the technology market. He felt it could also fulfil a wide social need.

Referring to smart meters, he said that this kind of IoT technology would help people to become more energy efficient.

With regard to health care, he claimed GPs could monitor patients in their homes and medication could be monitored to ensure it had been used.

Waugh then asked Vaizey if the government would introduce policy or legislative changes to protect data privacy.

Vaizey responded he had help establish the E-Privacy Directive and added that he had worked with businesses to make sure the directive was easy to implement.

He felt a similar approach needed to be used when addressing the question of data protection. He pointed out that data was the currency for many digital businesses, so data use needed to be business friendly.

Evans said that a culture change was needed. He felt that the public were hostile to businesses using data and that this was not constructive.

Philip Virgo, executive chairman of Conservative Technology Forum, said he had read a survey which stated that police were more trusted with data than local government, that local government was more trusted than central government, and that the central government was more trusted than internet service providers (ISPs) and journalists.

Evans said: "The public interest is not well served if corporations are not trusted."
He felt that "the world of data" needed to be rebuilt to empower citizens and help businesses.

Waugh asked Vaizey what the role of government was in helping to build-up that trust.

Vaizey said he had already been working with ISPs to find ways of protecting children from adult content on the internet. He said many providers had invested heavily in this and installed filter technology.

He said he would like to work with ISPs and telecoms companies to discuss how to foster a culture of trust.

Helen Milner, chief executive of the Tinder Foundation, said that generally politicians' digital skills were not very good. She asked how politicians and ministers could be trained quickly so they could recognise the urgent technological needs.

Evans said there was lack of understanding from both groups. He said politicians knew little about technology and the technology industry did not take enough interest in policy.

“It would be great to get more technologists into Parliament,” he added.

Waugh said the civil service had made great technological “strides”. Vaizey agreed and said that the US had copied many of the UK government’s ideas about how technologies could make processes more efficient

Adam Kingsley, head of policy at Sky, said he did not recognise the notion that the public did not trust ISPs. He said Sky had embarked upon a £25m campaign to show that trust was important. He felt that businesses would all follow Sky's lead.

Vaizey responded that businesses and politicians needed to understand each other better.

Guy Matthews, senior government affairs manager at Vodafone, said that companies had the technology to install IoT systems already. He asked how the government would help business by creating markets.

Vaizey said the government had set-up Future Cities Catapult, which helped to identify and fund technology projects that could help cities. He said they were currently using Glasgow as a test area and £25m investment had been made.

Looking to the future he said he would like to see local councils procure technology services together and share best practice.

An attendee then asked how legal website privacy policies were.

Vaizey responded that website terms and conditions played an important role in creating trust and privacy. He said he would engage with companies to ensure that terms and conditions would be meaningful, genuinely accessible, and easy to understand.

Clifford Russell said that data should be monetised so people could profit from sharing it. He asked what regulations and legislation was needed to make IoT economically viable.

Vaizey replied that there should be a debate about who owns data.

Evans said ownership of data was a tricky subject but he agreed that it should monetised.

Responding to a question on the government's long-term technology strategy from a representative of DeHavilland, Vaizey said he would like to see further and higher education in digital skills to become more “porous” so young people could learn while working.

Evans agreed, saying that technology companies needed to be more long-term. He claimed that



there was currently a “dysfunction fight” for the most skilled people.

Jessica Warner concluded the questions by asking ask if a rush for innovation would put security at risk.

Vaizey said the government has invested hundreds of millions of pounds in cyber security. He felt it was absolutely vital.

Evans said businesses needed to take the responsibility in protecting their customers from attack. He said that we needed to proceed carefully, bringing the public along, as it is used in certain fields like medical data.