

The next big thing

The Internet of Things

Picture the scene. You drag yourself out of bed after a late night and look in the bathroom mirror. Instead of just gazing at the bags under your eyes, you are presented with information on your heart rate, temperature and weight. Your mirror could even tell you how to improve your health.

A prototype of the touch-screen mirror has been created by Italian company Reply. It can link up with other devices, such as your bathroom scales or MP3 player and, according to spokesman Luigi Cicchese, the technology 'will find different uses in fields such as home automation, wellness, advertising or retail'.

This is one example of how the 'Internet of Things' could work. It is a term coined as early as 1999 by British-born MIT researcher Kevin Ashton, who had a vision of unrelated, heterogenous devices connected into one useful network system.

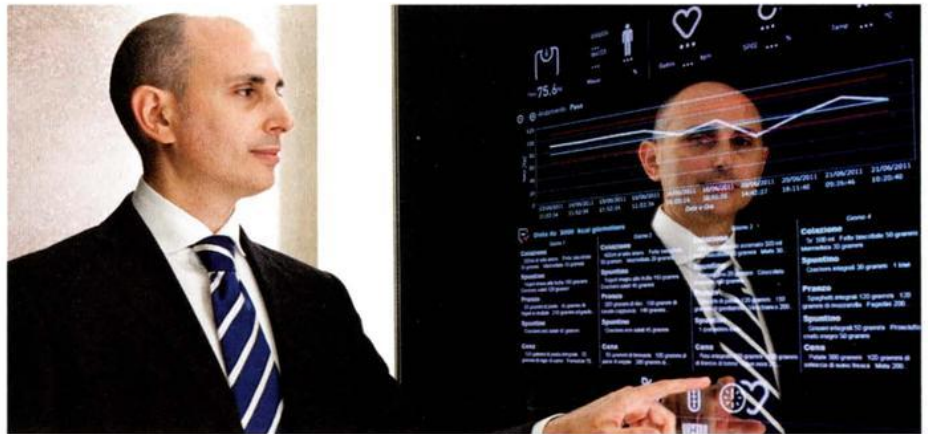
Potential applications for this kind of technology are limited only by the imagination. For example, the UK's National Beef Association recently called for the creation of a

central database of cattle information. It would link up with electronic tags attached to animals and help make rearing more efficient, cut fraud and stem the spread of diseases.

Admittedly, good-quality Internet of Things products are thin on the ground and often gimmicky in nature. A programmable robotic rabbit called Nabaztag was launched a few years ago, but the company behind it went

bankrupt and the company that took over ceased production this year.

But Alexandra Deschamps-Sonsino, partner at London firm Really Interesting Group, says the UK is well placed to create and market this sort of product due to its mix of creative and technical strengths. She adds, 'Hopefully, since everyone's getting excited about the Internet of Things now, there will be more opportunities.' ■



Mirror, mirror on the wall: Luigi Cicchese with Reply's HI Life touch-screen mirror