



MOBILE

AT&T Incubates Technology to Connect Devices

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In a historical building in Palo Alto, Calif., decorated with century-old switchboards, crank telephones and other objects from the annals of telco history, AT&T has developed something that it hopes could be as vital to modern communication as the icons on display.

The technology, called “Cascade,” routes a wireless

subscriber's calls and messages to an array of devices — flowing from a smartphone to a wearable device to the car. Theoretically, you would be able to leave your smartphone at home while jogging with your smartwatch or wearable and still remain in touch.

The development of the working prototype comes from **AT&T's Foundry** innovation labs and seeks to address a familiar problem in an increasingly connected world: How do you get your calls and messages on any of the growing list of devices when you leave your phone behind.

The technology is key for AT&T and other carriers hoping to convince people to carry more devices capable of calling and messaging.

Currently, each device — the smartphone, tablet and, soon, a wearable or smartwatch — carries separate identities. In other words, a call made or a text sent to a smartphone would not be accessible across other wirelessly connected devices on the same network.

But with Cascade, AT&T would be able to keep track of a person's myriad connected devices so long as they all reside on AT&T's network. Each gadget still needs its own subscriber identity module, known as a SIM card, or chip that contains a unique number that identifies it to AT&T. But the consumer doesn't need to memorize its assigned phone number — or share it with friends and family. To the subscriber, all the devices carry the same identity.

Incoming calls or messages appear on an individual's smartphone, then bounce to any other connected device associated with that person — be it a smartwatch or, presumably,

a car. Think iMessage, but for both calls and texts and across all manner of devices.

It's a big step above call forwarding — currently the best available method of managing multiple devices.

“What we're saying here is we are able to provide you with an identity across these devices,” said Eric Sundelof at AT&T's Foundry research facility in Palo Alto. “We know how to do identity, and how to get those [calls and messages] from one device to another.”

AT&T Emerging Devices Chief Glenn Lurie has made the case that **many wearables will sport cellular connections** and acknowledged to **Re/code** that this kind of identity management was a necessary precursor for such devices to take off.

AT&T has since launched the first connected watch — the **Timex Ironman One GPS+ smartwatch** — though that one doesn't make calls itself.

Connected tablets didn't really take off until AT&T and other carriers were able to allow customers to have shared data plans that they could use across their phones and tablets. Such plans, now ubiquitous at AT&T and Verizon, have led to a surge in sales of tablets with cellular connections.

Sandro Olivieri demonstrated how the user might authorize, say, a smartwatch to display messages sent to the individual's smartphone. There's a pairing process, similar to how two devices connect via Bluetooth. Once the authorization code is entered on the smartphone, messages flow seamlessly between devices.

The same process might work for cars with built-in wireless connectivity.

“What is important for us is to provide an experience that is seamless and secure for our customer,” said Olivieri.

Additional reporting by Ina Fried.