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**Sent:** Wednesday, August 24, 2005 5:22 PM  
**To:** tshircliff@carolina.rr.com  
**Subject:** Connecting Building Bathrooms to the Network!

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#### TOPIC

Smart Bathrooms  
Vol. 4 No. 33  
8.24.2005

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- Woodward Labs
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#### RELATED TERMS

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*Every once in a while an automation application comes along that just stares you in the face as simple, one that makes sense and one that everybody can understand. The topic of Commercial Real Estate Technology is a complex one and the discussion of integration, implementation, adoption and return-on-investment can leave the traditional industry professional confused. But then, a basic, easy to understand and possibly humorous application comes along and the lights begin to go on.*

Talk with any property manager about their biggest challenges and the topic of bathrooms is sure to come up. Keeping them clean, replenishing supplies, monitoring water and sewage problems are just a few of the issues associated with bathrooms found in commercial buildings. In most tenant satisfaction surveys, bathroom conditions come up time and time again as one of the top five issues related to dissatisfaction. **Something as simple as keeping bathrooms clean and stocked continues to plague landlords.**

If you examine why this task continues to be a problem you will find that historically there has been little attempt or success in automating any of the maintenance processes. To date, the best process put in place has been to set a maintenance schedule, manually inspect each and every bathroom, stock the appropriate items, repair the items in need of attention and move on. From time to time, a call from a tenant stating that water is coming through the ceiling (every property manager's fear) will bring the maintenance crew to the scene post haste.

The problem that this physical maintenance routine presents is that through the process of inspecting each and every bathroom on a regular basis, time is spent on bathrooms that need no attention, while those that do may not get handled in a timely fashion. We have all been there when the paper towel, soap or other required supplies are missing at the time most needed. And in many cases, the routine schedule approach alerts us to problems (water leak) much



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too late to prevent the most serious of damage.

This year at Realcomm we were introduced to the concept of **Intelligent Hygiene Appliance Monitoring** by Irvine, California based **Cognos Systems**. The idea is to wirelessly connect all active devices (ones that need attention) found in the typical building bathroom to a network controller. What this means is that all of these devices can be electronically accessed over a building network via the Internet using a simple browser. The devices that one might consider "connecting" are a soap dispenser, paper towel and toilet paper dispensers, trash receptacles, water leakage monitors and, in cases of hygiene management (requiring people to wash their hands), devices monitoring this activity.

The way it works is actually pretty simple; wireless devices are attached to the appropriate dispensers, a remote wireless access point picks up the devices and connects them to the network. From this point any property or facility management professional can monitor the status of these devices (are they out of paper?) from any location in the world. This flexibility adds validity to the concept of centralized building operation centers, a concept that many major building owners have moved to or are seriously considering.

The real power of this concept is not the simple connection of these devices or the ability to monitor them remotely, but rather the ability to program intelligence into the process. Cognos believes that you will no longer need people to monitor these bathrooms, waiting instead to be alerted in the event of a need. For example, the last paper towel is dispensed, the remote device is triggered, the signal goes out, the main system receives the data, an e-mail, text message or page is sent to the on-site maintenance personnel and the paper is replaced. Initial findings by the vendor show that the return-on-investment for this system is relatively short when considering the time and inefficiency associated with bathroom maintenance and repair. Additionally, tenant complaints drop dramatically when you manage a bathroom with NASA precision.

We have been talking about the **Intelligent, NextGen, Smart, Internet, Connected Commercial Building** for over five years now and it is exciting to finally see simple, make sense, effective, cost-justifiable applications beginning to arrive. That is not to say that these applications are perfect or don't need adjusting. However, it does indicate that creativity is present in our industry and there is a group of people ready to reconsider every aspect of how we design, build, lease, manage, transact and use Commercial Real Estate. **Hats off to Cognos for introducing us to the "Intelligent Bathroom"!**

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