

GlobalData: LPWAN still has much to undertake

With a number of rollouts of 'low power wide area network' (LPWAN) in 2017 by a majority of mobile operators offering internet of things (IoT) services, things are optimistic, but not fully, according to GlobalData.



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According to the GSMA, there have been 48 launches of either narrowband IoT (NB-IoT) or 'long-term evolution for machines' (LTE-M) networks by 26 operators as of April 2018. Of these, 31 launches were for NB-IoT. There are some operators that are building out both or are planning to do so in the near future as each technology has its own benefits when it comes to issues including bandwidth costs and voice support.

Kathryn Weldon, research director of global IT managed and hosted services at GlobalData, says: "As the operators that have deployed the technology can attest, the expectation is that the lower costs and extended battery life of LPWANs will draw thousands of companies.

"In particular, use cases for utility or energy management, asset tracking, and smart cities, which often require only sporadic or periodic remote sensor readings of far-flung equipment or assets, would provide the bulk of opportunities."

Missing strategy

However, in a lot of the public marketing and monetisation plans, a strategy has been missing to go beyond connectivity to offer higher-value services such as device/connectivity management, application enablement/management, bundled hardware/software/connectivity packages and support for seamless low-cost global roaming.

The conversation about LPWANs, on the other hand, has centred on low-cost connectivity which is supposed to draw such a vast number of connections to the IoT, that despite the low average revenue per user, the networks would pay for themselves.



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Weldon concludes: “To be fair, we are still at the beginning of the LPWAN era. But the first rumblings about whether we are seeing traction and monetisation are starting to be heard and the reviews are mixed.”

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