

## IoT in practice

Currently, IoT technology for water dispensers is focused largely on the collection of maintenance data. Improvements in technology mean that many water dispensers - whether bottled or POU - have the capacity to report back to operators in real-time – communicating service updates, technical issues and more. This ensures that machine downtime and associated loss of service can be kept to a minimum, with any faults reported to service engineers and fixed as soon as possible.

Gemma Tuxford, UK business and account manager at Zerica, believes that next year will be a pivotal one for IoT in the water sector. "In 2023, there will be an explosion of solutions using IoT technologies coming on to the market," she told *Refreshment*.

"Initially these solutions will most likely be focused on the gathering and displaying of information about the main machine parameters. This functionality will help better manage the levels of consumables such as filters and CO<sub>2</sub>," explained Tuxford. "The information provided will also help plan preventative maintenance and result in more effective interventions with less time wasted on diagnosing the problem."

Phillipa Atkinson-Clow, general manager of the Water Dispenser & Hydration Association (WHA), has a similar outlook, linking IoT to improved functionality and also sustainability.

"IoT allows a remote connection to monitor the performance of dispensers and maintain the level of consumables," she told *Refreshment*. "In this way, there is a reduction in the cost of maintenance and servicing and a reduction of the number of service and engineer visits. This is beneficial to both the customer and the supplier as it cuts administration and logistics and prevents unnecessary visits to customer premises, which also improves sustainability. It also enables better cost controls for both parties."

For the WHA's members, Atkinson-Clow notes that IoT provides an increased ability for distributors to offer additional benefits to their customers with new product ranges, while also offering additional technology to pre-installed equipment. "It is opening the doors to many innovative dispensing products."

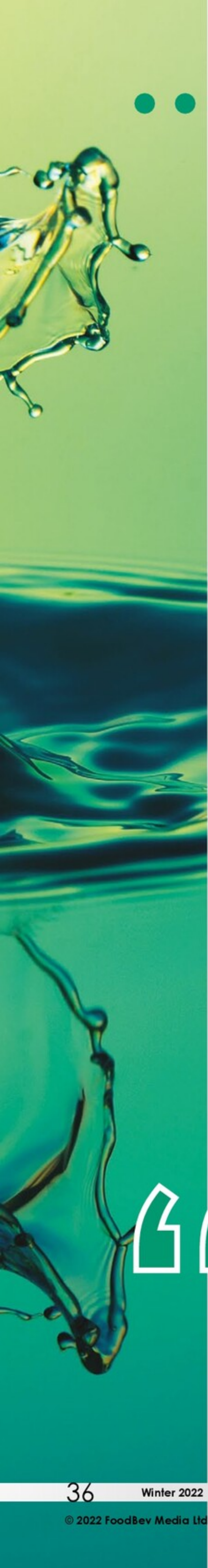
Ilaria Battistutta, marketing specialist at Blupura, similarly believes that IoT has a lot to offer water operators. "An IoT platform brings many advantages to water dispensers, including less unexpected events and greater efficiency, fewer



kilometres travelled and more saving in terms of time and money," she said.

Battistutta continued: "Some Blupura models have IoT already integrated, and this allows operators to remotely monitor the main parameters like the Stop and Restart functions, the measurement of dispensed litres, the consumption of concentrates, CO<sub>2</sub> gas usage and the depletion of UV lamps and additional alarms. Thanks to IoT, we are able to provide the best customer service and assistance, knowing exactly what the problem is and having a clear overview of the geographical position of the machine park. It's also possible to provide rapid and efficient remote consulting sessions, assisting clients step-by-step and guaranteeing longer life for the dispensers and satisfied customers."

IoT has allowed Blupura to become a service provider, in addition to a watercoolers specialist, Battistutta explained. Moving forward, it will be a necessary tool to guarantee high standards across both product and service. ▶



### Improving sustainability

Battistutta also highlighted the potential sustainability applications of IoT technology for the water dispense sector.

"2022 has seen some of the hottest and driest weather in Europe for decades. It seems clear that more than ever there is the need to ensure technological, reliable and safe water supplies," she said. "Empowering consumers to take control of their water dispenser through the visibility and automation enabled by smart IoT technologies will help to preserve the water supply. In fact the optimisation of consumptions to guarantee a green future and the attention towards clients are the pillars of Blupura philosophy and allow us to get even closer to a more sustainable and zero impact world."

This is a stance that the WHA's Atkinson-Clow also supports. "It is clear that, in the long run, IoT will reduce costs for the distributor. Fewer visits to customers also has a strong and positive sustainability impact. The water dispense sector is arguably already one of the most eco-friendly sectors and new systems technology is further enhancing this already strong reputation."

### The next generation

With a few pioneering manufacturers already placing machines with IoT capabilities on the market, they are now turning their attention to machines that harness the next level of IoT functionality.

Connecting remotely to machines via devices such as smartphones, tablets or computers allows operators to view the main parameters and overall status in real-time, and make informed decisions on how to optimally plan routine preventative maintenance routes and when to replenish any consumables.

"This kind of information is invaluable when managing a bank of machines in different locations and will significantly improve the environmental impact of servicing," said

Zerica's Tuxford. "Zerica already has numerous models available with these IoT capabilities. What enabling two-way (bi-directional) communication with machines means, at a practical level, is that parameters can not only be monitored, but also modified, remotely from any connected device, such as a smartphone, tablet or computer."

Machines communicate proactively, with alerts based on real-time usage for rapid response to routine issues and speedy problem identification.

"Real-time remote servicing is a game-changer, and is the ultimate sustainable solution with downtime significantly reduced, resources optimised and waste of any type minimised," said Tuxford.

Zerica has been pioneering developments in the use of IoT technologies since 2016, Tuxford told *Refreshment*, and the IoT has significantly changed the company's product offering. Most of the company's new machines produced over the last two years use IoT and Zerica's IoT platform Auxilia. "From the ergonomic and compact countertop



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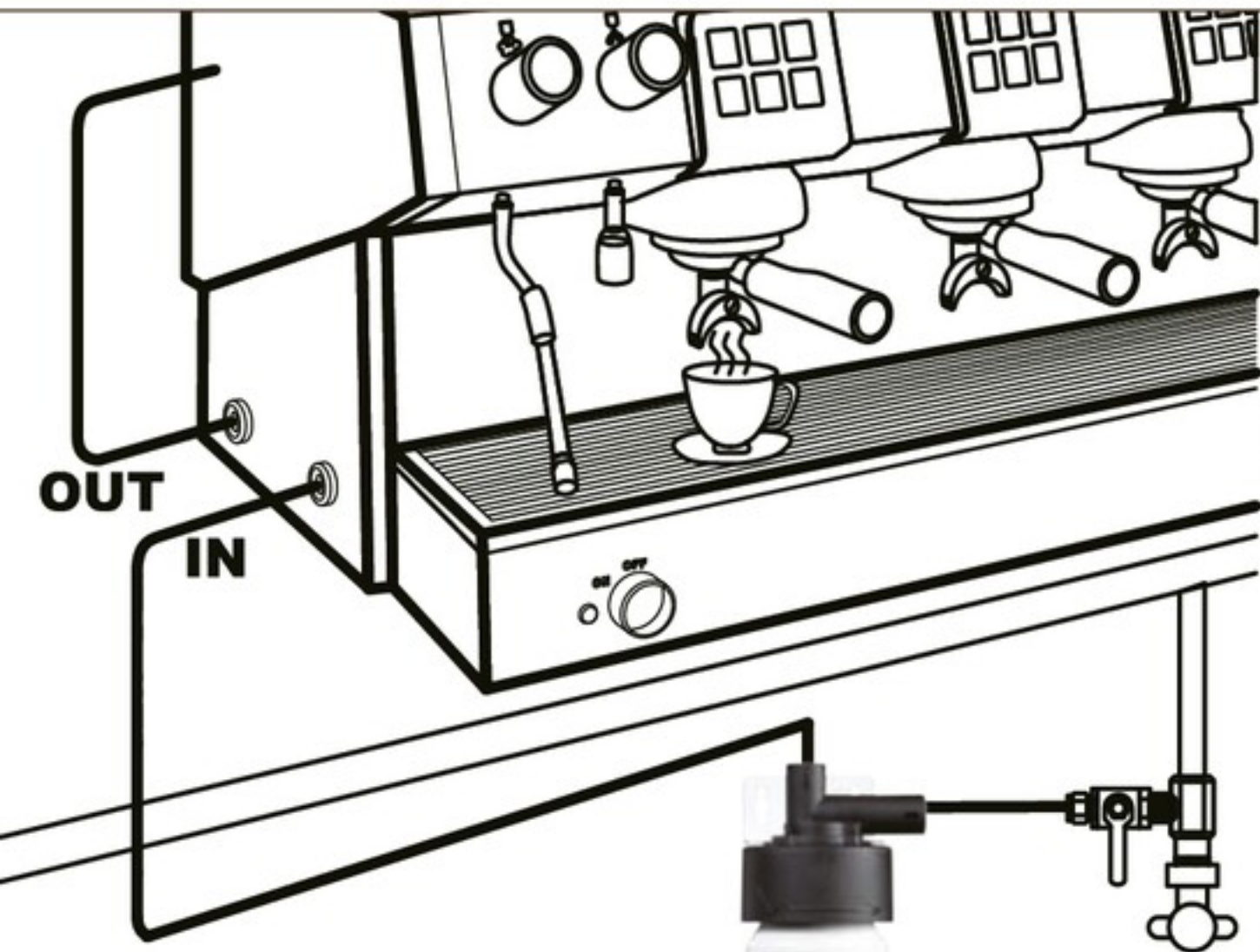
Sikélia, to the freestanding Kemonia, ultra slim countertop Kolumna, built-in i-Wall and more, Zerica's range of HoReCa products is setting new standards in terms of IoT capabilities and sustainability."

Zerica's work in the development of new IoT-enabled machines that take full advantage of the direct real-time links between product, user and technician demonstrate the significant improvement in sustainability that remote servicing is beginning to have in the water dispense sector.

### Touch-free tech

Taking into account post-Covid safety and hygiene concerns, the WHA's Atkinson-Clow identified touch-free impact sensors as a key innovation area for the future of IoT water dispensers.

"Potentially the next generation of water dispensers will not be greatly different in appearance as most of the technology is internal," she allowed. "However, one ►



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