Smart buildings - your journey can start today

By Ettienne van Niekerk

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The global pandemic is a large, disruptive force which has impacted the commercial real estate industry and its tenancy. Widely introduced remote and work-from-home (WFH) policies have left the real estate industry with below-average occupancy rates. In some instances, owners and landlords are resorting to co-occupation of buildings in an effort to obtain at least some revenue from a wavering demand stream.

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A recent article in *Business Insider* states that 15% of the offices owned by a large South African commercial real estate owner are now standing empty. And if projections are anything go by, this will remain the status quo for the foreseeable future.

With this in mind, how can building owners alleviate the financial impact of the pandemic in a relatively simple and sustainable manner?

Smart buildings and its underlying technology now offer a feasible and sustainable answer to real estate owners' expenditure woes. Sustainably managing assets and energy usage will allow both owners and tenants to not only drive down monthly bills, but also to contribute positively to the fight against climate change.

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Where does one start? My advice; don't overcomplicate it and prioritise spending - target the action that will require the least amount of effort whilst delivering the biggest rewards. At Schneider Electric, we believe in recommending fit-for-purpose solutions through a three-step process. As an example, let us assume we want to optimise the energy usage of a building. We will have to:

- **Assess** – Gather as much meaningful data as possible. Meaningful data reveals patterns and can be used to draw great insights. With our example in mind, how much energy is the building consuming and when is this energy being consumed? Here, it would be necessary to place meters in strategic locations if none exist or to extract as much data as possible from existing metering infrastructure.
- **Analyse** – Study the data, gain insight into the current operations and draw conclusions. Continuing with our example: What does the building's load profile look like, and does it match the occupancy profile? What loads are unnecessarily running whilst the building is unoccupied? What can be done to make the load profile resemble the occupancy profile?
- **Act** – Place actions against these conclusions and prioritise it in terms of greatest reward. We live in times where every cent matters. What action will give you the greatest return on investment?

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Technology and smart buildings

The first steps towards an energy- and cost-efficient building, do not have to be an expensive exercise – it needs to be

smart. The key is to deploy the correct technology in the optimum manner to ensure maximum savings.

Fortunately, building management systems are becoming easier to deploy and more powerful thanks to innovative IoT technology enabling not only energy saving and prolonged asset lifecycles, but also the measuring thereof and resultant cost savings. Connecting devices with software and data insights to create smart buildings can unlock tremendous value, particularly in the current economic climate.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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