

Internet of Things Consortium

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IOT LEADER PROFILE: KURT HOPPE

Our second IoT Leaders profile is of Kurt Hoppe, Global Head of Innovation / Connected Car at General Motors and board adviser to the IoTC.

Kurt brings over 15 years' experience leading connected consumer product and service innovation, new business model creation, and go-to-market initiatives leveraging strategic partners. He's led dedicated and cross-functional matrix teams in ideation, design, development, marketing, and sales with a focus on the intersection of consumer experience, connected IoT devices and cloud-based analytics.



1. Where did your career start?

I joined the military when I was 17 and shipped out to Canada's equivalent of West Point: RMC. In addition to the great Computer Science education and a complimentary (but mandatory) 5:00am "workout regime", the military taught me leadership, mentoring and teambuilding skills, as well as discipline and responsibility, all at a young age. What other job do you know where 21-year olds can lead 500-person, high-intensity projects for 6 months, or run daily operations of a 15-site IT organization spanning 2000 miles? So, the military is where it all began and I learned a lot during those years, yet I am disappointed that the skills and

abilities of our military veterans are typically not recognized when they transition to the private sector. That's a worthwhile cause that I would like to dedicate more time toward in the future.

2. What was your introduction into the IoT sector?

Connected Consumer IoT has resonated with me since my youth. I had all the gadgets of that era. That's why I studied AI-driven User Experience (UX) at UBC in Vancouver and pushed portable ruggedized communication devices while in the Air Force. After I left the military, and got "free agent" status in the private sector, I started the always-stimulating, never-ending pursuit of "the next connected thing". Thankfully, that means I've been able to collaborate with visionaries for dramatic business shifts like e-commerce, mobile data (5 years before iPhone), broadband home gateways, Internet-connected set-top boxes, IPTV and OTT streaming video, Smart TVs, Smart Home and now Connected Car. So, it sounds like I have been in the "IoT sector" since I was born. (laughs)

3. What are you most excited about in IoT?

I am probably most excited about “Automation” or, as some might call it, “Cognition”. For mass-market consumer adoption, the tech UX must be simple and intuitive. I have been asking my teams for over ten years: “can my mother in Toronto use this new thing, and can she use it without reading an instruction manual?” I say the same thing today to my colleagues at General Motors, whether they are striving to launch our next-generation in-dash services or update our mobile car apps. That’s why I was such a huge proponent of natural, conversational voice when driving Smart TV and Smart Home Input Technologies at LG Electronics. Now that the awareness of AI Assistants like Alexa, Google Assistant and Siri is leading to increased usage and improvement, what’s next? Is there anything better than voice to turn on your lights or remote start your car? I think next will be the Invisible or Automatic UX, where everyday life patterns are detected and interpreted and proactive actions are helpfully taken or at least suggested. In spirit, this user modeling is increasingly possible thanks to machine learning and all the sensors. If my user model constantly gets updated by IoT devices I interact with like my Chevy Bolt EV, my Fitbit, my Xfinity Home system and set-top, my iPhone and my Google searches, then I can be pleasantly surprised when my home or car “automatically” welcomes me at the right time, with the right temperature and lighting, and with the right music. That kind of “cognitive future” is what excites me about Connected Consumer IoT.

4. Are there any sites/people/articles or books that have really inspired you lately?

I enjoy reading biographies, personal development, and business/innovation books, and I am trying to add creative novels to the mix as well. Recently, I found myself inspired by Brian Jay Jones’ “George Lucas: A Life”. The parallels of the late 60’s - early 70’s SoCal movie makers that were disrupting an established industry resonated with me, given my transition last year to the longstanding automotive industry. Lucas’ adventures with Spielberg and Coppola were actually Lean Innovation, 50 years before we all came to love that term. Speaking of Spielberg, he is making a film now of a book that I just finished yesterday: “Ready Player One” by Ernest Cline. That one definitely resonates with our tech crowd that grew up in the 80s, while also raising some interesting social questions around VR/AR work and relationships in our near future. In terms of a person that inspires me consistently, it’s Mary Barra, my CEO at General Motors (GM). Mary’s pragmatic and common-sense approach to decision-making and guiding this massive, 100+ year old, automotive “hardware company” to the forefront of the industry in the most disruptive time ever in personal mobility, is energizing and is a big part of why I personally chose to join the GM team last year.

IoT Insiders Newsletter: Featuring Leader Kurt Hoppe of General Motors

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