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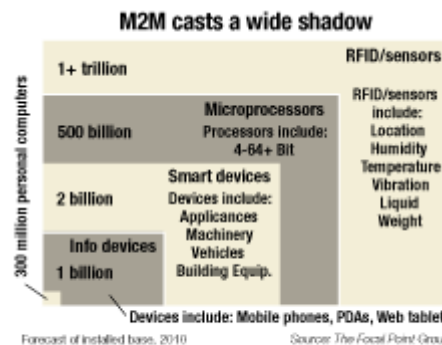
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INDUSTRIAL CONTROLS

ABB using machine-to-machine sensor technology to corral robots

Automation systems vendor **ABB** is deploying wireless machine-to-machine (M2M) control technology to simplify maintenance of its industrial robots. The technology, supplied by **nPhase**, allows ABB to transfer system data from the robots directly to ABB service centers via the Internet.



Researchers predict machine-to-machine communication could extend to more than one trillion devices by 2010.

"Robots are reliable and robust, but when customers encounter a problem, they often have a hard time explaining it to the help desk," says Steve West, director of business development for robotics North American customer service at ABB Robotics. "They have to email us the fault logs and other records from the robot controller so we can figure out the problem. They have to back up the systems. This all takes time and requires a certain amount of skill."

With remote monitoring, the people factor is eliminated. The robot itself emails the fault logs via cellular modem to the help desk, West says. The robot has an always-on connection to the ABB network and reports problems to the ABB service desk. At the same time, it sends an alert via text message to the plant manager.

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A PC capable of handling the information from 30 robots is mounted on a single unit, and the other robots are networked to it. The PC-wearing robot also carries the cellular connection and the ABB proprietary software that enables the communication with the nPhase application, called SmartService.

West envisions this service being marketed primarily to small and midsize manufacturers. "The large customers with lots of robots are pretty comfortable with maintaining them," he says. "They have people trained to do it. We're looking at companies that may have only five to 10 units. [This system] is easier for them."

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