

# BLUE SKY ORIGINALS

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## How Naperville-based Grid Connect fits into the Internet of Things



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**By Kate MacArthur,**  
Special to Blue Sky

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**I**n a nondescript Naperville office park, Adam Justice is working to bring the Internet of Things to the masses. He's vice president of Grid Connect, a company his father Mike founded in 2003 that makes, distributes and sells commercial networking products. In 2013, Grid Connect launched ConnectSense, its first line of wireless sensors for home use to remotely monitor things, from your lights to your water pipes. As the company prepares to launch a ConnectSense smart electrical outlet, Adam Justice shares his vision for a connected future.

### **Q. What inspired this product line?**

A. I came up with this idea and took it to the executive team here. In 2010 and 2011, the cloud started to make more sense, and the prices of networking devices were starting to get cheaper. We had a sensor product geared toward the

IT market. I talked to a lot of customers and heard that it was too expensive and complicated. I said, “We can build this better, cheaper and have a lot more use for it.” We found that when you make it simpler and easier for people to use, it makes sense for the home as well.

**Q. How many products do you have?**

A. We have six sensors for monitoring temperature and humidity, water, security, motion, light, and dry contact, for things like sump pumps. We announced a smart outlet that will be coming out early next year. It will go over an existing outlet and allow you to remotely control and monitor anything that’s plugged into that socket. We’ll be announcing other sensors that will work with our smart outlet on very low power, long-lasting coin batteries the first half of next year.

**Q. How do they work?**

A. You can use them in combination with if/then-based rules. If there’s water in my basement, then I want to receive a phone call. Being Wi-Fi based, our sensors don’t need another gateway to talk to each other. They are easy to set up and use the functions with them. We have a Web app that can be used with any mobile device, and we’re in the process of building an iPhone app.

**Q. Were there obstacles?**

A. We had never really done a consumer product. You hope you announce it and it takes off immediately. In reality, that very rarely happens. We got it on Amazon, which was a huge thing. In 2014, we hired our first full-time marketing person. We’ve done a lot of social media stuff, which was a lot harder to do with B2B. We’re active on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. We do a lot of Google AdWords stuff. We’re going to continue to explore different opportunities to fly with the big dogs.

**Q. Did anything ease the way?**

A. Working with friends and trusted advisors. My father is a part of Vistage, a CEO peer group, and last year, I joined Entrepreneurs’ Organization and some ecommerce groups. We’ve done a lot of IoT shows. That was the suggestion of some of these peers.

**Q. How are you preparing for mass adoption of IoT?**

A. For this stuff to go mainstream, it has to be stupid-easy to set up and use these devices. Standards are still being defined. We’ll know a lot more in the next six months about how those standards and interoperability will shake out. We think Apple is a very interesting standard and we’re keeping an eye on what everybody else is doing as well. I think 2015 will be a defining year for IoT.

*Q&As are edited for length and clarity.*

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