

IoT fleet management with Thingsboard.io

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May 19, 2022

1 Introduction

In their mobility report from November 2021, Ericsson estimates that by 2027, there will be 30.2 billion interconnected internet of things (IoT) devices. Meaning nearly every object around us: traffic lights, thermostats, electric meters, fitness trackers, water pumps, cars, elevators, even gym vests will be connected to the internet [Ericsson, 2021].

Large amounts of IoT devices - usually referred to as fleets - are often managed by one operator. I.e. Stockholm Exergi, a local energy company in Stockholm, operates a fleet of about 9000 energy monitoring devices [Andersson, 2018]. It is rather obvious, that smart solutions for monitoring and maintaining such number of devices are needed.

3 of the 5 most valuable companies in the world (Microsoft, Alphabet & Amazon) have realized the potential of this market and each offer an IoT device management tool, included in their cloud services. Other than that, there are also open source tools such as Thingsboard available, that enables companies to have a scalable management of their IoT fleet and allows a DevOps style development, without being dependant on an external cloud provider.

This essay targets to present the features and capabilities that Thingsboard offers, to help you to reduce the time-to-market of IoT products, accelerate the time-to-resolution in case of error and additionally gives you relevant data for advertising your product.

2 Thingsboard

Before discussing the advantages that arise from using Thingsboard, let's have a brief look at its architecture. Figure 1 is adapted from the official Thingsboard documentation and gives a good overview on the interconnected parts.

The left side represents the client side. There can be unlimited individual devices that are connected to on Thingsboard server individually or through a gateway. Each device or gateway gets its individual login credential in form of an access token that is needed for verifying the connection. Many different transport protocols can be used of which HTTP, MQTT and CoAP are most common with IoT devices.

The right side represents the server side. The **Thingsboard UI** can be used to administrate the server or to interface with devices through dashboards. It is important to mention, that interfaces must be specified on both client and server side. The **Thingsboard Core** is the main program, which is taking care of the communication with the devices, the UI, additional databases, as well as controlling the **Rule Engine**, which is an easy to use framework for building event-based workflows. It allows to generate server side applications, that interact with devices. Those rules can be triggered by messages from devices or other events.

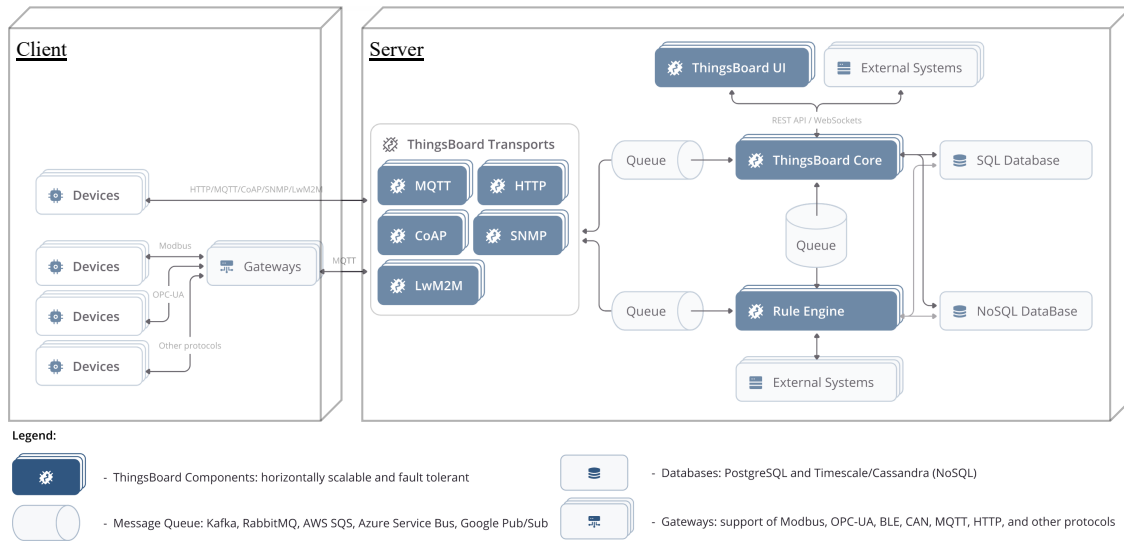


Figure 1: Architecture of Thingsboard [Thingsboard, 2022a]

3 Key features

Using Thingsboard or any other IoT device management platform should definitely be considered for any IoT project. There are many use cases, that can elevate the quality of your project by the means of DevOps. I found that these applications can be pooled in four categories (key features): Monitoring, Remote control, Server-side applications, Scalability. In the following sections, we'll look into each key feature and discuss in which ways they can help to improve your life as a developer and increase the satisfaction of your customer.

3.1 Monitoring

In modern software engineering it is understood that **software testing** is its own discipline and not something that is only applied ad hoc when software is not working. Testing needs a lot of expertise, planning and mostly goes side-by-side with every step of the software engineering process. In DevOps, where software life cycles usually goes beyond the initial delivery, it is of great benefit, when testing can be continued even after deployment.

Thingsboard can be used as a central point to collect test results, general monitoring data to evaluate the system's performance, as well as sensor data measured by the embedded IoT device. This data can then simply be store in a database server-sided and be used for **long-term analysis**. This is valuable i.e. to the marketing department, which can use the data for advertisement. Other than that, also the work of business analysts is dependent on such data.

Just as relevant as long term data collection is the feature of **real-time monitoring and visualization**. Thingsboard offers an advanced tool to create dashboards as part of its Thingsboard UI component. Figure 2 shows the dashboard from a smart metering demo example.

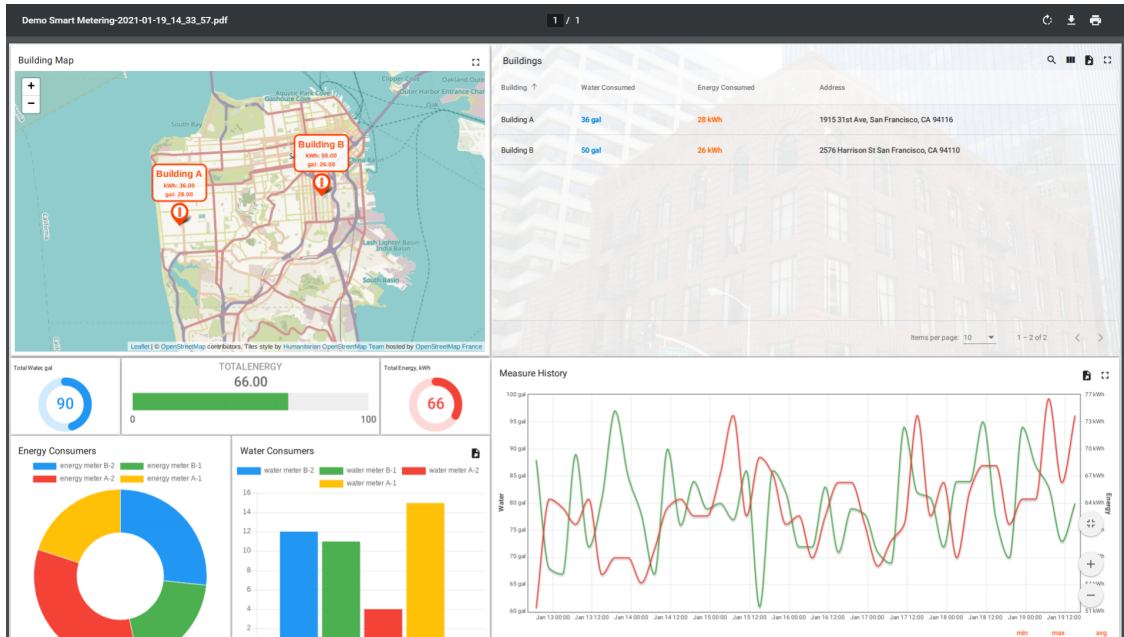


Figure 2: Smart metering demo dashboard [Thingsboard, 2022b]

3.2 Remote control

3.3 Server-side applications

3.4 Scalability

4 Use cases

5 Summary

References

- [Andersson, 2018] Andersson, A. (2018). Stockholm exergi och telia i samarbete för effektivare energisystem i smarta fastigheter - stockholm exergi. <https://www.stockholmexergi.se/nyheter/stockholm-exergi-och-telia-i-samarbete-for-effektivare-energisystem-i-smarta-fastigheter/>. Accessed: May 17, 2022.
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