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# ENGINEERING NEWS

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In today's world, we seem to place more importance on our need for air time, smart phones and social media connectivity than we do on those elements that are necessary for our very survival, such as water. Without water, we are doomed, yet South Africans seem to take water for granted, expecting an endless supply on tap 24/7, despite constant warnings around how water conservation is critical.

What is needed, says Larry Symington CEO of MyWater, a specialist water meter manufacturer, is for people to combine their

growing desire to utilise cellular technology to provide instant gratification and answers, with an ability to more effectively manage their water usage. "Cell phones offer us the ability to have quick access to information and have news at our fingertips. When it comes to water management, why should things be any different? I believe that linking mobile technology with water management has become a must," he says.

"What MyWater has done is combine the technologies of water metering and cellular phones. Since municipal bylaws require that home owners take responsibility for the water they consume, and South Africa has a 'user pays' principle when it comes to the provision of water services, it only makes sense for us all to manage our water usage carefully."

Symington says that with the MyWater solution, obtaining an update of the water you have used is as easy as checking your airtime balance – it is literally one click away. This is because a real-time water meter reading is relayed directly from a monitor in the home to the cell phone in your pocket. This, he says, brings a whole new dimension to the concept of being informed and up-to-date.

"We also offer an 'Early Warning' option that uses SMS to send a message direct to your phone in the event of a meter overrun. This could be caused by an undetected leak, burst pipe or geyser, or

even simply the over watering of your garden. With this feature, you are kept aware of any unusual events relating to your water supply, meaning you need never again fear receiving a surprise account from the municipality.”

Furthermore, points out Symington, paying for the water service is as easy as topping-up one’s airtime. Mobile payment is used to replace the present out-dated billing model which is costly, slow, requires special skills and is unfair in our diverse economy.

“Since there are additional benefits to remaining in good standing with regards to your water payments – namely the ability to apply for and receive a loan – we have included on the payment platform an option for the user to be able to send a ‘Letter of Good Standing’ directly to a credit provider, to complete a loan application.”

Of course, he explains, it is well known that technology today develops faster than manufacturers can keep pace. While a phone purchased today is immediately out-dated, the same principle applies to municipal officials that purchase water meters and billing systems. The trouble for municipalities is that new innovations cannot be passed on to rate payers without additional expense or further complications to supply chain procurement policies.

“MyWater overcomes this through a full-maintenance lease contract, similar to cell phone contracts. The water meters are supplied, installed and maintained, along with communication costs and insurance, for a set price and term. Municipalities only pay on success, similar to cell phone package deals, keeping manufactures and service providers competitive and on their toes to deliver.”

“The growing pervasiveness of technology needs to be leveraged in order to improve access to and conservation of Africa’s most precious resource – water. MyWater believes that the correctly applied combination of water education, cellular technology and infrastructure roll-out is the answer to safeguarding our water resources,” concludes Symington.

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