

Mphasis Digital POV

Using Node-RED for building IoT workflows

A PoV by
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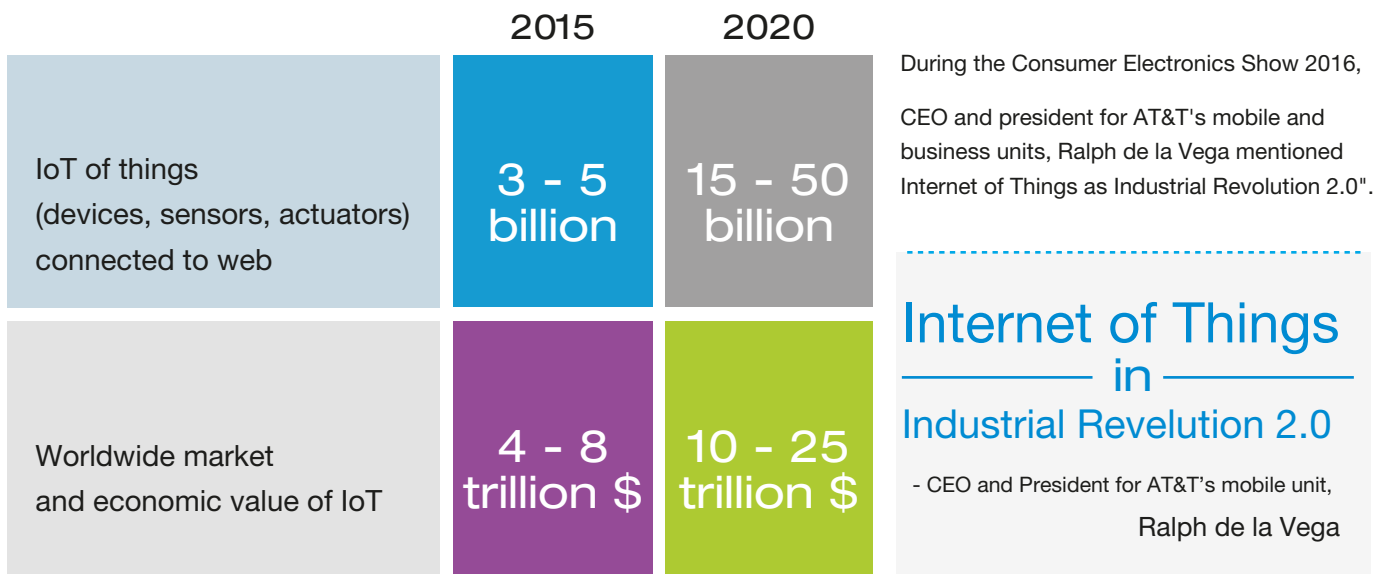
Executive Overview

Internet of Things or IoT is well positioned as the largest opportunity for software, IT industry, hardware vendors and other organizations. The worldwide market and economic value of IoT is currently \$4 to 8 trillion and this number is supposed to grow to somewhere between \$10 to 25 trillion by 2020. If the sheer number of IoT “Things” and myriad of network protocols are the challenges on one side, storing the large amount of data generated by “Things” and making a sense from it are the challenges on other side. “System of Record” and “System of Engagement” type of IT systems and apps have been using Workflow and Business Process Management tools for long. A new generation of Workflow tools are emerging, which makes wiring up IoT “Things”, APIs and online services easy and intuitive.

This POV discusses IBM’s Node-RED which is a visual tool for building IoT focused workflows and processes and suggests to use Node-RED for building IoT flows.

Introduction

Internet of Things or IoT is a key element of Digital along with Cloud, Mobility, Analytics, BigData and Cognitive Computing. IoT, also called Industrial Internet of Things or Industrial Revolution 2.0, already has a profound effect. It has disrupted, and would continue to disrupt, many industries including manufacturing, high tech, healthcare and insurance.



Workflow(s) are one of the key components of a successful IoT solution along with IoT Analytics, IoT Security and IoT Device/Things Management. Node-RED is a visual tool for building workflows for IoT scenario. It allows chaining or wiring IoT devices and services the way IFTTT does it, mostly for web apps, APIs and services.

IoT Solution Components

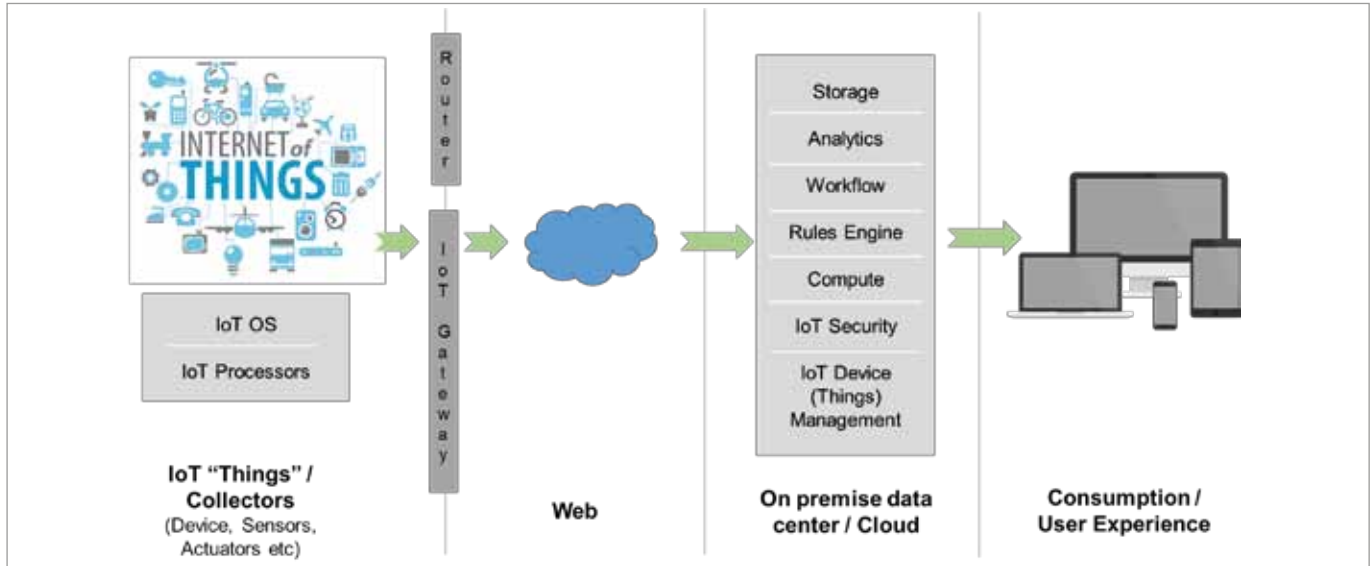


Figure – Typical IoT Solution Components

IoT “Things”/Collectors: This layer consists of the IoT Things, which are the devices, sensors and actuators embedded in all sort of components and instruments. This layer also consists of the IoT Processors and Operating Systems (running on these tiny devices and sensors). The devices, sensors and actuators primarily collects and emits contextual data.

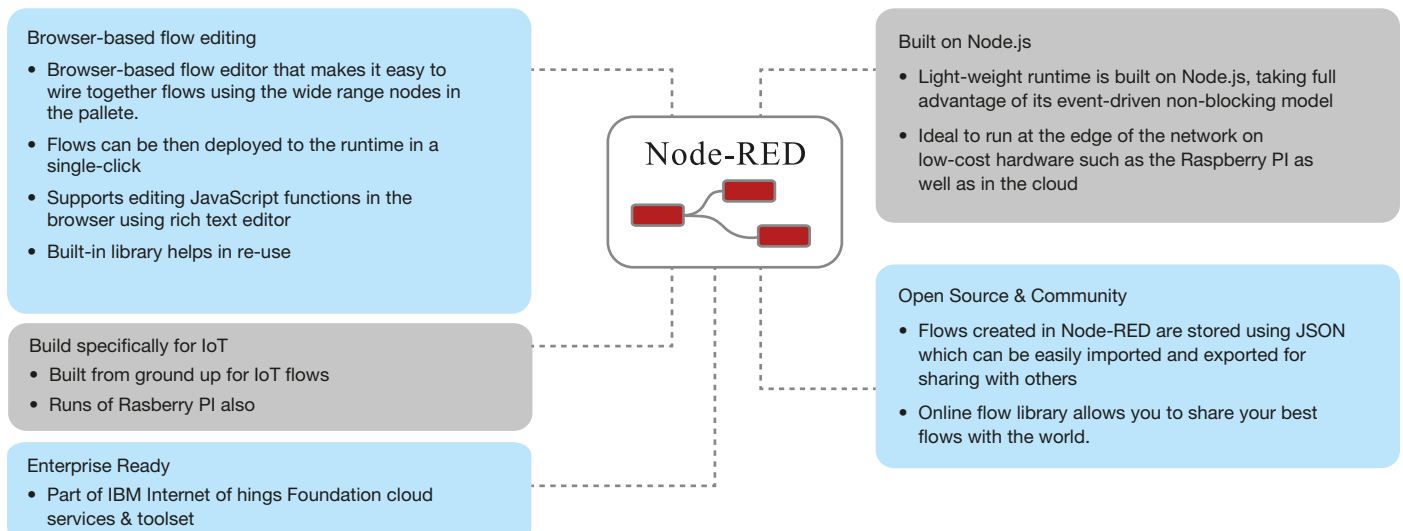
Network, Router and IoT Gateway: This layer consists of the network, network protocols (IoT has a myriad of network protocols like 6LowPAN, CoAP, MQTT, XMPP, Thread, ZigBee, Z-Wave to name a few), routers and gateways. Gateways are used to convert IoT specific network packets to Web and TCP/IP standards.

On premise data center/Cloud: This is the brain of the IoT solution and runs on the servers in on-premise data centers and/or cloud (like AWS, Azure, Bluemix or Pivotal Cloud Foundry). Once the data collected from “Things” reach on-premise data center / Cloud via web, it’s stored (typically in NoSQL databases) and analyzed (with BigData Analytics). Workflows, batches and long running processes on the server use this data to get a sense and then take decisions accordingly. This layer also constitutes other compute capabilities, IoT Security and IoT Device/Things Management.

Consumption/User Experience: This layer constitutes of laptops, desktops, tablets, mobile phones, smart watches and other wearables. This is where information, notifications and actions are presented to the user.

Overview of Node-RED

Node-RED is a visual tool for wiring together hardware devices, APIs and online services in new and interesting ways



It's build by IBM Emerging Technology team from group for IoT, though it's not limited only to IoT. Following are the major features of Node-RED -

Browser-based flow/workflow editing

- Provides a browser-based flow editor that makes it easy to wire together flows using the wide range nodes in the palette.
- Flows can be then deployed to the runtime in a single-click.
- JavaScript functions can be created within the editor using a rich text editor.
- Built-in library allows you to save useful functions, templates or flows for re-use.

Built on Node.js

- Light-weight runtime is built on Node.js, taking full advantage of its event-driven, non-blocking model, which makes it ideal to run at the edge of the network on low-cost hardware such as the Raspberry Pi as well as on the cloud.

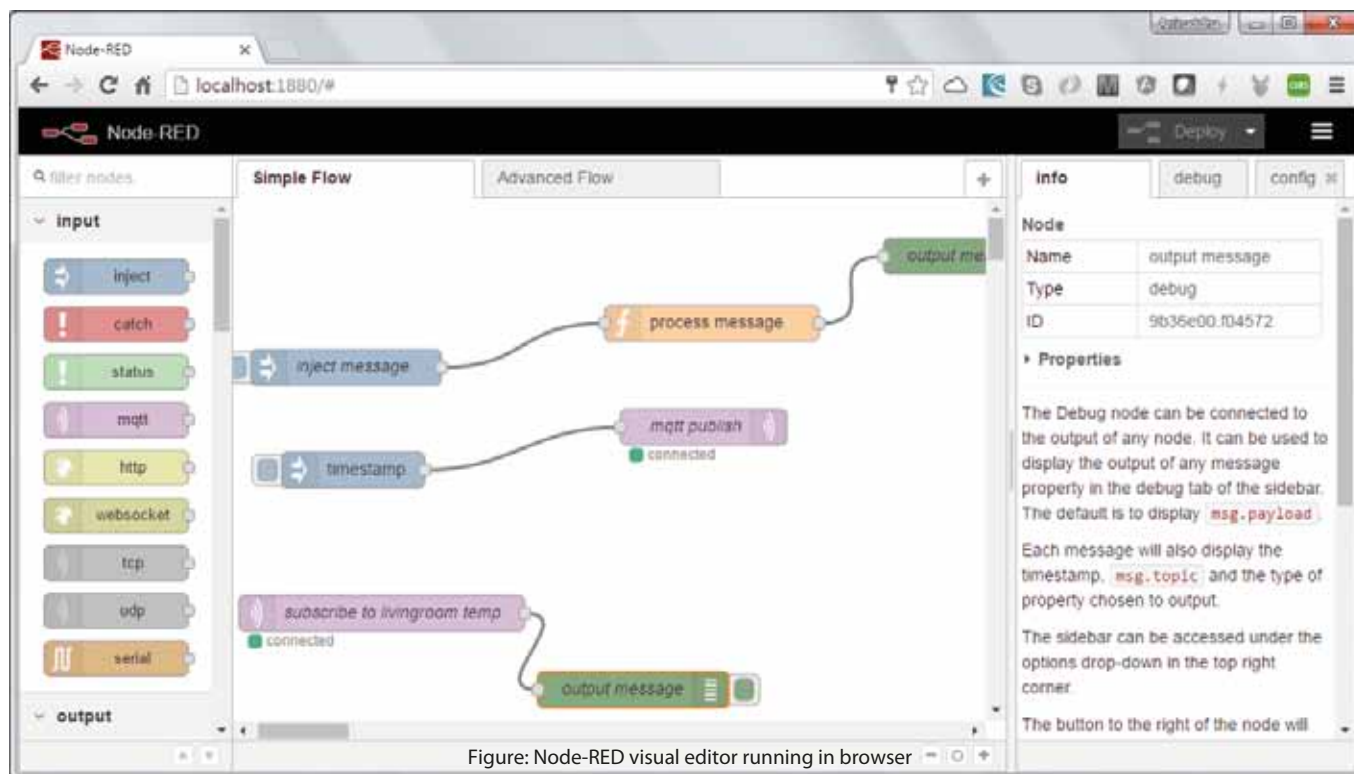
Sharing with community

- Flows created in Node-RED are stored using JSON, which can be easily imported and exported for sharing with others.
- Online flow library allows you to share your best flows with the world.

Can run on

- Local laptop/desktop/server
- IBM Bluemix public cloud
- DIY IoT Boards including Rasberry PI, Arduino and BeagleBone Black

Node-RED is open source – it's developed as an open-source project on GitHub, under the Apache 2 license. Since it uses Node.js as runtime, it could be downloaded using npm Node package manager, like any node package.



The Visual Editor has three panes –

- Node pane on the left, showing different type of nodes. Nodes are the building blocks of Node-RED and they are the activities that or tasks could be performed and chained together. Example of nodes are receiving HTTP request, TCP request or MQTT request, sending HTTP response, writing to a file, sending tweets, sending emails etc.
- Flow pane in the middle, where the flow or process is designed visually by dragging and dropping nodes and connecting them together.
- Info/Debug/Configuration pane on the right, where information regarding selected node, configuration information and debug messages are shown.

This is similar to ETL, EAI or BPM designer – messages are received, they get processed and actions are taken afterwards.

Messages have the following properties –

Message Property	Description
payload	Main message content or body of the message. The payload could be – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • string • number • boolean • timestamp • json
topic	Topic of a message - similar to topics in pub/sub or message broker
_msgid	Unique ID of the message - set by Node - RED

Node-RED provides some out of the box actions (called Nodes) that can act on messages. Nodes or actions receive the message, process it and then provide the output. Below are the supported out of the box Nodes -

Input Nodes -

Node Type	Description
Inject	Injects a message, with a payload
Catch	Catches error from other nodes
Status	Sends status messages from other nodes
MQTT in / subscribe	Connects to a broker and subscribes to the specified topic
HTTP in	Input node for HTTP requests
Web socket in	Input node for web socket requests
TCP in	Input node for TCP requests
UDP in	Input node for UDP requests
Serial	Reads data from local serial port

Processing Nodes –

Function	JavaScript function block
Template	Sets a property based on the provided template.
Delay	Introduces a delay into the flow
Trigger	Creates two output messages separated by a timeout whenever any input msg arrives.
Comment	Allows to add comment in the flow (supports markdown format)
HTTP Request	Makes HTTP requests.
TCP Request	Makes TCP requests.
Switch	Routes messages based on property values. Similar to switch statements in programming languages

Output Nodes –

Node Type	Description
Debug	Outputs message object to debug pane
MQTT out/publish	Connects to a broker and publishes to the specified topic
HTTP out	Sends responses back to HTTP requests received from an HTTP Input node.
Web socket out	Sends responses back to web socket requests
TCP out	Sends responses back to TCP port
UDP out	Sends responses back to designated UDP host and port
Serial out	Sends data to local serial port

Social Nodes –

Node Type	Description
Read Email	Reads email from an IMAP server
Read Twitter	Reads or searches tweets
Send Email	Sends email with Subject – msg.topic Body – msg.payload
Send Twitter	Tweets msg.payload
Sentiment Analysis	Performs sentiment analysis of the msg.payload and adds a msg.sentimentobject that contains the resulting AFINN-111 sentiment score as msg.sentiment.score.

Storage Nodes –

Node Type	Description
Read File	Reads the specified file – content of the file gets populated in msg.payload
Write File	Writes msg.payload to the specified file (e.g a log file)

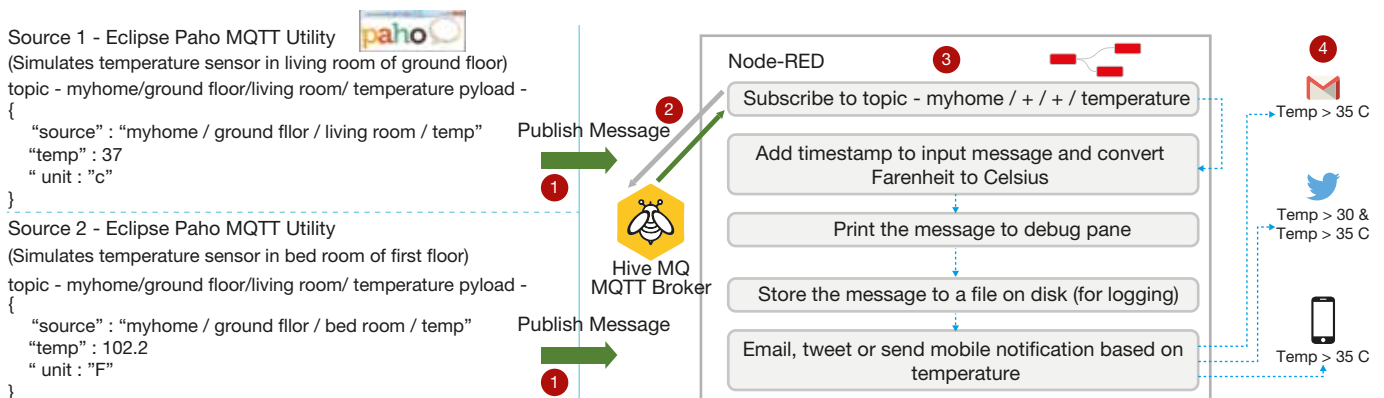
Advanced Nodes –

Node Type	Description
Watch	Watches a directory or file for change
Feed parse	Monitors RSS/Atom feed for new entry
Exec	Executes a OS system command

Node-RED: Proof of Concept

This POC depicts how Node-RED can receive input from IoT devices and things, have specified rules and workflows run based on the conditions specified and then output messages to different channels like email, mobile notification, tweets etc.

In this POC, Node-RED receives messages containing temperature data from two sensors (simulated by Eclipse Paho MQTT Client) – both are thermostats monitoring the temperature. One for the ground floor living room and another for first floor bed room. Based on the temperature, Node-RED either sends an email with the temperature, tweets the temperature or sends a mobile push notification.



Step 1.

In this Proof of Concept, there are two sensors (simulated by Eclipse Paho MQTT Client) – both are thermostats monitoring the temperature. One for the ground floor living room and another for first floor bed room. These sensors use MQTT to publish messages containing current temperature recorded by them to a HiveMQ MQTT broker.

MQTT is a publish-subscribe based “light weight” messaging protocol for constrained environments like IoT and M2M (Machine-to-Machine communication). MQTT uses a broker-based pub-sub architecture in the constrained IoT environment similar to other messaging protocols that exist in the Web and Client Server world. Here Eclipse Paho MQTT Clients are publishers.

In this PoC, HiveMQ running locally is used as the MQTT broker. HiveMQ is an enterprise grade MQTT broker that is used for EAI and other scenarios. MQTT provides subject/topic-based, content-based, and type-based filtering. Here we are using topic based filtering.

There’s a topic pattern that’s established so that messages could be filtered -

myhome / <<floor name>> / <<room name>> / <<sensor type>>

Examples –

myhome / ground floor / living room / temperature

myhome / ground floor / master bed room / temperature

myhome / first floor / guest bed room / temperature

myhome / ground floor / kitchen / temperature

Step 2.

Node-RED have registered with HiveMQ MQTT broker for messages related to temperature (topic is myhome / + / + / temperature - Here + indicates a wildcard). Node-RED receives incoming messages that match the topic (temperature data from a pair of sensors). MQTT in / subscribe node is used for this.

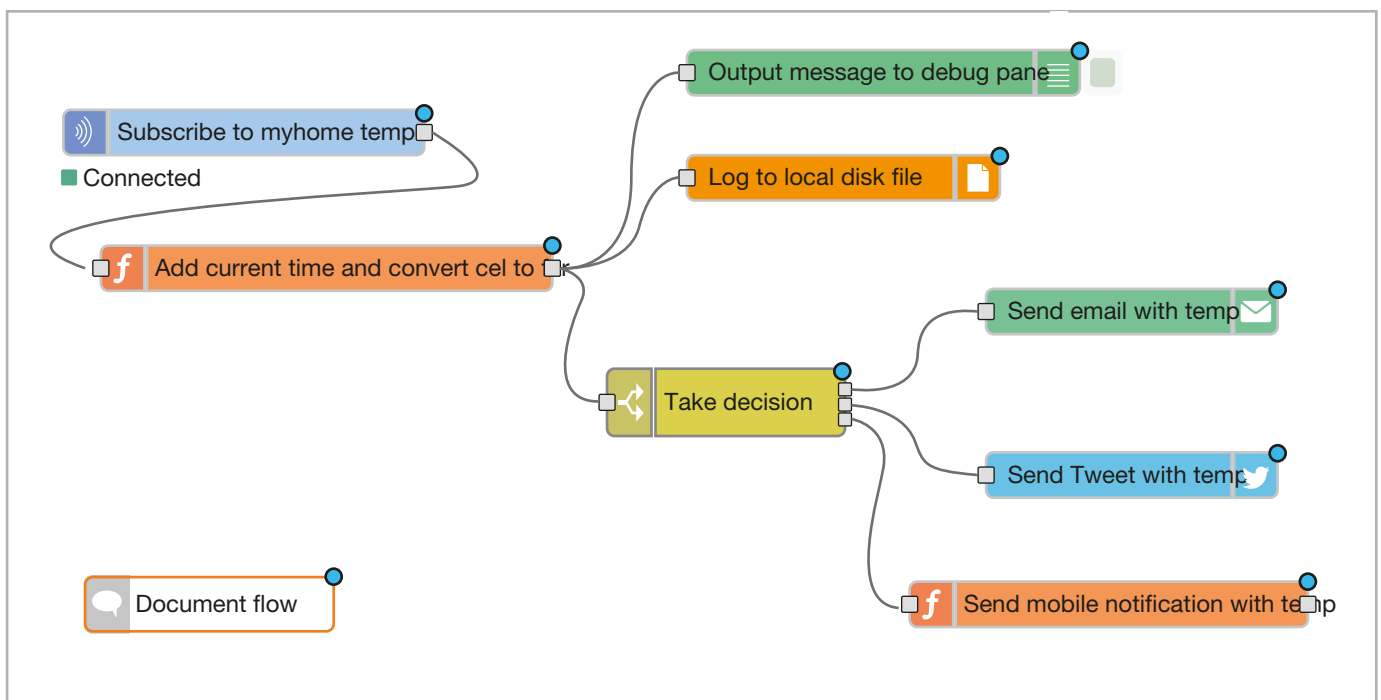
Step 3.

Once a message containing temperature data is received, a timestamp is added to the message for logging purpose. If the temperature is in Fahrenheit scale then it’s converted to Celsius scale. The message is then printed to debug pane and also stored to disk for logging purpose.

Step 4.

Based on the temperature, Node-RED does one of the following –

- a. If the temperature is less than 30 C then Node-RED sends an email.
- b. If the temperature is between 30 C and 35 C, it tweets the temperature with a specified tweet handle.
- c. If the temperature is greater than 35 C, it sends a mobile push notification to the owner of the house.



Conclusion

Workflow and rules engines are the keys components of a successful IoT solution, along with IoT Analytics, IoT Security and IoT Device/Things Management. Node-RED is a visual tool from IBM that helps in building IoT workflows by chaining IoT devices, APIs and services. We strongly suggest to use Node-RED for building IoT flows along with other cloud components like storage, compute and analytics.

Further Reading

Gartner Identifies the Top 10 Internet of Things Technologies - <http://www.gartner.com/newsroom/id/3221818>

Node-RED Home Page – <http://nodered.org/>

Node-RED Documentation - <http://nodered.org/docs/>

Node RED IBM page - https://www-304.ibm.com/connections/blogs/et/entry/node-red?lang=en_us

Node-RED developerWorks - <https://developer.ibm.com/open/node-red/>

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About the Author

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Aniruddha brings 17 years of IT experience spread across systems integration, technology consulting, IT outsourcing, and product development. He has extensive experience of delivery leadership, solution architecture, presales, technology architecture, and program management of large scale distributed systems.

As AVP, Digital in Mphasis Aniruddha is responsible for Presales, Solution, RFP/RFI and Capability Development of Digital Practice. Before as Sr. Manager & Sr. Principal Architect in Accenture, he led architecture & large delivery teams for one of Accenture's diamond client in Life Science vertical. He had played delivery leadership and architecture focused roles in Microsoft, Target, Misys and Cognizant. He has been Lead Architect for many large scale distributed systems.

His interests include digital, cloud, mobility, IoT, cognitive computing, natural language processing, distributed systems, web, open source, .NET, Java, programming languages and NoSQL. His industry experience spans Retail, Capital Markets, Insurance, Pharma, Healthcare, Life Science, Travel and Hospitality.

About Mphasis

Mphasis applies next-generation technology to help enterprises transform businesses globally. Customer centricity is foundational to Mphasis and is reflected in the Mphasis' Front2Back™ Transformation approach. Front2Back™ uses the exponential power of cloud and cognitive to provide hyper-personalized ($C=X2C^2_{TM}=1$) digital experience to clients and their end customers. Mphasis' Service Transformation™ approach helps 'shrink the core' through the application of digital technologies across legacy environments within an enterprise, enabling businesses to stay ahead in a changing world. Mphasis' core reference architectures and tools, speed and innovation with domain expertise and specialization are key to building strong relationships with marquee clients.

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