

Is there anything a smartwatch can't do?

BIOMETRIC DEVICES & AUTOMOTIVE

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- Developments in wearable technology extend the use of hands-free functions
- Voice-activated personal assistants drive innovation in the connected watch market
- Connected watches in Korea and across Asia are making young children more independent, safely.

If you've ever taken public transportation and spotted a 6-year-old sitting alone, your first reaction has likely been a few panicked glances around the metro, wondering where the child's parent or guardian might be. But, in a handful of Asian countries, this is a pretty regular sight. While this behavior is mainly credited to the overall higher level of safety in Asia, there is another element at play: connectivity.

A safer world for children

The world over, Korea, Japan and China are seen as trendsetters when it comes to technology and a new trend is burgeoning in these countries: connected watches designed specifically for children. While it is already commonplace for children as young as 5-years-old to go to school, music lessons or other extracurricular activities on their own, these tiny GPS-equipped, connected watches are further easing the minds of parents.

But why a watch and not a smartphone? First off, a watch strapped onto a child's wrist is harder to lose, waterproof and more sturdy. But more importantly, the watch allows children to have the essential features of a fully-equipped phone -- phone calls, GPS tracking, voice-activated directions in case they get lost, pocket money in a preloaded wallet for public transportation, taxis or vending machines -- while avoiding overexposure that could lead to addictive gaming or internet browsing.

All the convenience, always at arm's length

While this particular example is very regionally relevant, connected watches impact the everyday lives of users around the globe. As recently as five or 10 years ago, you could go on a run and just be okay with listening to the sounds around you or music and disconnecting for an hour or so. But being a part of today's hyper-connected culture means that you can't afford to miss a call or an email; you need to track your heart rate, the distance you ran, your average speed -- and then you need to share it with your followers on social media. After all, if it didn't happen on social media, did it really happen? But as smartphones grow larger and larger to meet our web browsing and movie watching expectations, they become increasingly difficult to take on a run. Enter the connected watch. With eSIM technology, you can leave your bulky smartphone at home because today's connected watches can operate independently. Put in the spotlight with the launch of the Apple Watch 3, this groundbreaking embedded connectivity technology is likely to become increasingly mainstream in the years to come. Device makers and mobile operators can rely on IDEMIA's eSIM solutions to accelerate its deployment. These benefits don't only appeal to the avid runners among us. Think about the last time you had your hands full with grocery bags and couldn't get to the ringing phone in your pocket. Or when you were packed into a crowded subway car and couldn't take your phone out to change the song on your playlist. Or maybe your smartphone simply didn't fit into your purse. Today's connected watch brings all the connectivity you need right to your fingertips...or in this case, your wrist.

A new and improved personal assistant

It's a bit of a symbiotic relationship -- the more we rely on connected watches, the more the industry will keep churning out innovations, and vice versa. One area where we are seeing -- and will continue to see -- significant development is voice-controlled personal assistants (think Siri and Alexa). Given the small size of a connected watch, more and more services will be accessible with our own voices rather than touch screen. Today, we can send a text or control devices in our smart homes by simply speaking to the virtual assistant housed in our connected watches. Tomorrow, our assistants will get an upgrade. They will be able to automatically translate conversation when we're traveling in a foreign country and much more.

While we may not ever choose to completely replace our smartphones with connected watches, we will surely have more opportunities to downsize when we feel like it -- freeing ourselves from our smartphones. And IDEMIA will be there to ensure the same level of streamlined security that we have all grown to expect.