Google Partners on Device to Monitor Home Energy

by Laura Isensee and Bernard Orr

Editor's Note: On a related note, I'll be moderating the "smart grid" rap session at APEC 2010 [1].

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) - Google Inc is partnering with privately held Energy Inc to provide households with free energy management software, bypassing utilities' smart meters and potentially boosting energy efficiency, the company said on its blog on Monday.

Google launched in February a Web tool called PowerMeter, which lets consumers monitor how much electricity they use at home. The catch was that they had to have a smart meter installed by their utility. For the past few months, a few hundred customers have tested the software.

Now, consumers can buy Energy Inc's power-usage measuring device, called TED 5000, costing about $200, and use Google's software on top of it, without ever needing a smart meter.

The partnership between Energy Inc and Google's philanthropic arm is intended to expand the consumer market. While more and more utilities are moving to install smart meters, they still account for a small percentage of all U.S. electricity meters.

The partnership is nonexclusive and does not include financial terms, the company said. Google will continue working with its partner utilities, which include Sempra Energy's San Diego Gas & Electric and Germany's Yello Strom.

Internet behemoth Google is widely known for its online advertising and search engine, but it is also making forays into clean technology.

Its projects include ways to write software to connect plug-in hybrid vehicles to the power grid and a mirror technology that could reduce the cost of building solar thermal plants by a quarter or more.

Technology companies like Google and IBM Corp are shifting into the world of building a smart grid, envisioning a more efficient electricity grid that uses more renewable energy and powers up 'smart' appliances.

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