

Even Buildings Have Twitter Accounts

By John Gartner

umissgym: Is it just me, or is it hot in here?

The social media craze has hit building automation, as the campus at the University of Mississippi will soon be broadcasting its energy consumption via Twitter and Facebook updates.

In partnership with smart grid company SmartSynch, Ole Miss has created online feeds (also via RSS) detailing several of its main buildings' energy use, ostensibly to "alter behavior to reduce electricity consumption and carbon emissions." The UMiss project will study consumption from lighting, temperature controls, and appliances. The organizations have created an online application to monitor and report the energy draw so that building operators can learn where energy is being wasted and implement new conservation strategies.

Ole Miss' extending the data from grid to the public web showcases (albeit in questionably productive manner) the merger of energy and IT worlds. Let's just hope that some computer science student with hacking skills doesn't think it's cool to set the gym temp to 95 degrees.

Companies such as SmartSynch are adding IP technology to energy management equipment as part of the massive smart grid upgrade that is now beginning. These companies are unleashing data management tools crafted during the digital music era on an industry that by comparison functions with the sophistication of electricity innovator Thomas Edison's cylinder phonographs.

Smart grid companies such as SmartSynch, GridPoint, and Echelon are on the cutting edge of figuring out the many possibilities in which internet, communications and networking technologies can make the grid more efficient. By harvesting the billions of bytes of information about the energy that flows across the grid, these companies, as well as big dog players such as IBM, Cisco, Google, Microsoft and GE, will invent a whole new world of applications that will drag the energy industry into the 21st century.

How we use energy in 2015 will look nothing like what we do today -- thankfully. We already have several iPhone apps for managing energy consumption, and appliances that will reduce or cut power to avoid blackouts or when energy gets pricey. Having the dryer turn off and the flat-screen reduce its brightness momentarily to prevent the neighborhood from going dark is not only cool, it's practical.

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