

# Homeowner Electric Bills Get High-Tech Help

By Lee Mathews | Posted Jan 19th 2010 10:30AM

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For most home owners, about the only way to quickly control how much energy they consume is by cranking down the thermostat. That's certainly true my home.

That's about to change. Soon your home will be more connected and "smarter" than ever, thanks to two technologies under development. One comes from a group headed by Google, the other from Poco Labs.

While both efforts aim to give you more insight into your home's energy use, they take very different approaches. [Google Power Meter](#) (GPM) is all about reporting. The folks behind it believe that consumers who can monitor their energy use in real time will be more inclined to reduce. You'll be able to check into your

GPM stats online the way you check your [GMail](#) or [Google Voice](#). Turn off a few lights, power down that extra laptop you aren't using, then take another look at your Google report, and see how much you're saving in a matter of minutes.

Initially you'll only see household totals but eventually you'll be able to track the power for individual devices. You'll know exactly what it costs to keep your computer in sleep mode instead of turning it off and to leave lights on in rooms you aren't using. Since Google tends to be very developer-friendly don't be surprised if appliance and electronics companies start building-in GPM reporting features. In the mean time the Power Meter is meant to be device-independent, meaning you'll be able to purchase adapters that will work with your existing appliances.

For delivery, Google is initially focusing on partnerships with utility companies. They're testing the tool in a few markets now and plan to roll it out to Google employees later this year.

Poco Labs is taking a different tack by partnering with a variety of different businesses, including Direct Energy, Whirlpool, Lennox, and Best Buy. Their [Home Energy Manager](#) (HEM) software, which they [recently unveiled at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas](#), is designed to work with smart appliances and devices.

It won't just keep you informed about costs, it will also allow you to control the settings on those devices from a program on your computer. Working late on a summer night? Reprogram the timer on your air conditioner from your office so it isn't cooling an empty house.

David Dollihite, VP of product development for Direct Energy, says "The Home Energy Manager has the potential to do for home energy management what the iPhone did for communication." He adds, "[It] empowers consumers to look at energy use in a fresh, new way and modify their consumption behavior."

The Poco interface Direct Energy uses looks incredibly slick and the fact that you'll be able to adjust your Lennox wireless thermostat or Whirlpool dryer with it is undeniably cool. For select new homes - like the 40 residences in a Houston pilot project - HEM could be a perfect money-saving tactic. The product could be widely available by 2011.

Both products are interesting, but there's one thing which could give Google a serious edge: price.

Google Power Meter costs nothing, and everyone loves a good freebie - especially if it has the potential to save them money.