

Post

Utilities and Sustainability



Smart Metering: towards a sustainable economy

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Smart meters will be the foundation of the smart grids, smart homes and smart cities. And if we get it wrong, from a consumer engagement and technology perspective, then we will severely hamper the transition to a sustainable, low carbon digital economy. In order to get it right, players from the communications and utilities industry will meet at [SEDC 4th Annual Smart Metering UK & Europe Summit](#) to share experiences, ideas and strategies.

On the 12- December the British Government published documents for consumer engagement and data privacy for the UK Smart Metering Programme ([DECC Website](#)). This is a welcome step forward on what is the single biggest risk to delivering the successful rollout of over 53 million smart meters and the enablement of a Smart Future.

Consumer engagement needs to take the customer on journey beyond the obvious, which will be difficult. Governments and Utilities aren't top of the list of consumer trust tables so it is vital that any person, business, NGO etc who has an interest in a sustainable future, plays a role in understanding and spreading the message of what benefits this programme will really enable.

The programme isn't just about delivering accurate and timely meter readings for consumers and helping them to make energy savings, which will undoubtedly be how it's initially sold, but it is a key piece of the jigsaw in allowing the following, which will benefit us all:

- The development of a dynamic smart grid and demand management at the consumer level.
- Energy Suppliers being able to offer customers more choice and innovative tariffs (Mr Cameron's recent announcement on simpler tariffs notwithstanding!), improving consumer loyalty and embracing the greater value for both parties that will be generated from the wealth of data available from the meters.
- The integration of more intermittent renewable generation at a national and local scale; reducing our reliance on externally sourced fossil fuels, reducing our carbon footprint and helping the UK meet its carbon reduction targets.
- Allowing greater uptake and integration of Electric Vehicles.
- The development of value added services beyond pure energy activities; e-health, offender tagging, security, home and family monitoring are all possibilities through the smart metering infrastructure.



If we are truly going to deliver the above then the smart metering infrastructure currently being procured needs to not only be able to handle the basic core meter reading services but also have the scalability and interoperability to handle the future value added services. A cellular solution is the answer here.

Consumers need to be engaged in a way which moves beyond treating the smart meter as a product. The data privacy, security and health aspects are vital to get right but beyond that the consumer needs to understand why smart meters are important and not necessarily what they are. They need to understand what the benefits to them are beyond accurate bills.

Utilities need to really innovate and change the way they engage with consumers, take a leaf out of the Telco's book and how they have changed their approach and driven loyalty and trust – O2's Priority Moments is a great example.

Only when we get consumers engaged and get the meters on the wall will we really be able to develop a smart future. If the smart metering programme isn't a success then our sustainable, low carbon digital economy will be on a very unstable footing.



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