

The "Smart Grid Social Network"

Social networks have changed the way today's world communicates and brought about dramatic societal events. A smarter grid holds the potential to dramatically change tomorrow's world by incorporating information and communications technologies into our national energy system. So how do we realize a smarter grid's potential today? We need to link the concept of a smarter grid with the concept of the social network—in other words—create a "smart grid social network."

What's a Smart Grid Social Network?

The smart grid social network will function in essentially the same way as the actual smart grid—with open, collaborative, two-way information flow between consumers, the ultimate deciders of smart grid—and utilities, the ultimate providers of smart grid.

Educating consumers about the economic and societal benefits of a smarter grid will be the first step in creating the smart grid social network. This responsibility will fall upon utilities to start. Using well thought out communication and consumer education programs, utilities can act like pioneers planting the seeds of information in a new field of knowledge, helping consumers understand how a smarter grid can empower them to better manage their energy usage, saving them energy by making informed and therefore wiser energy decisions.

The Educators Become the Educated

Using simple communication tools such as informational notices, surveys, and town hall meetings to educate and interact with consumers, utilities will also be learning about their customers' needs, expectations, and demands. The educators become the educated. Operating like a "societal demand response" system, utilities can use information garnered from consumers as they move forward with development and deployment of more refined and effective pilot programs. The open two-way communication flow of a smarter electrical grid can actually serve as the role model for utilities and consumers in creating the smart grid social network.

Consumers will need to understand that their participation and collaboration in developing a smarter grid is as important as any technical component of a more intelligent electrical infrastructure. And as utilities move forward with consumer-empowered pilot programs, consumers will actually begin to see that the changes they've learned about, suggested, and demanded have resulted in a more modernized, efficient and reliable energy system that delivers lower prices, fewer outages, and lower emissions.

Societal demand will ultimately drive the decisions to revolutionize our energy system, and the "smart grid social network" can ultimately drive that demand.