

[Michael Kanellos](#): June 24, 2011

Google Kills PowerMeter

It has accomplished its goals, the search giant says. Now it's off the Land of the Misfit Toys.

PowerMeter has gone to the vet.

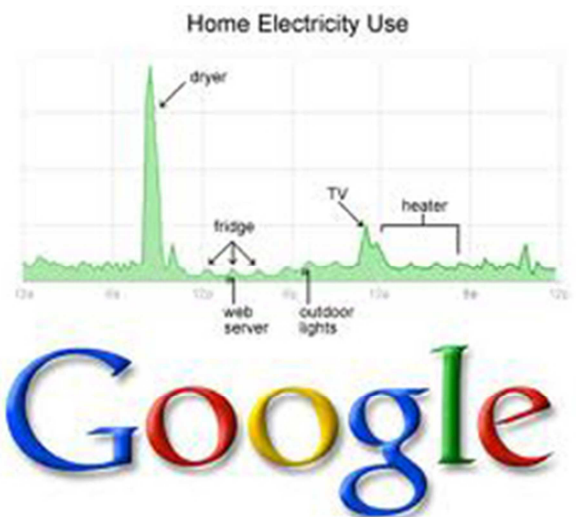
Google [said in a blog today](#) that after tremendous successes in trials and great feedback from customers it is discontinuing the software/service for managing and monitoring home energy consumption. The service will formally die on September 16. Specifically, the company said:

"We first launched [Google PowerMeter](#) as a Google.org project to raise awareness about the importance of giving people access to data surrounding their energy usage. [Studies show](#) that having simple access to such information helps consumers reduce their energy use by up to 15%; of course, even broader access to this information could help reduce energy use worldwide.

"We're pleased that PowerMeter has helped demonstrate the importance of this access and created something of a model. However, our efforts have not scaled as quickly as we would like, so we are retiring the service. PowerMeter users will have access to the tool until September 16, 2011. We have made it easy for you to download your data: simply log in to your account and go to 'Account Settings' to export to a CSV (Comma Separated Values) file. We will be contacting users directly with more information on this process.

"Momentum is building toward making energy information more readily accessible, and it's exciting to see others drive innovation and pursue opportunities in this important new market. We're proud of what we've accomplished with PowerMeter and look forward to what will develop next in this space."

Because those quotes come from a corporate blog, they do naturally sport a few notable exaggerations. The assertion that consumers will reduce their energy consumption by up to 15 percent has never really panned out in reality. It's been a favorite of PowerPoint presentations, but the actual savings are often far lower. OPower has some of the best results for reducing energy consumption via information and on average it gets consumers to reduce consumption by 3 percent or so. EcoFactor, which automates energy management, says it reduces power by around 17



percent more than demand response services: the key to EcoFactor's success is allowing machines, not humans, to handle many management tasks.

PowerMeter helped raise the profile of energy management, but Google was only one of many in the field.

Back in late 2009, however, PowerMeter looked like it would potentially threaten utilities and their relationships with customers, at least according to some people. Google tried to downplay any strategic plans.

"We are [not trying to build a business model around it](#)," said Ed Lu, the former astronaut who also served as the PowerMeter overlord back then. (Lu left in 2010 to write a book.)

Well, Ed got that right.

Google, though, can hold its head high, because it lasted longer than Microsoft. In March, Rob Bernard, chief environmental strategist at Microsoft, said the company was [ramping down Hohm, its home management project, to concentrate on commercial office space](#).

Home management has proved a vexing problem for vendors. Utilities, vendors and appliance makers all want to lower household energy consumption. But it has been a struggle to keep consumers engaged or to get them to spend the time and money to integrate an automation system. (See "[Is HAN Hosed?](#)")

Tendril, one of the leaders in the space, will soon announce some large-scale home automation deals. That should give the concept a bounce. Still, HAN remains an uphill battle.

Despite the challenges, VCs continue to pour money into the space. Recently, iControl raised another \$50 million. The company, however, bundles HAN functionality with a security system, effectively lowering the cost of energy management.

And expect soon to hear quite a bit about [Nest Labs](#), a secretive startup formed by Matt Rogers and other former Apple employees. These guys helped develop the interface on the iPhone. How and why that will make a smart thermostat a status symbol is anyone's guess, but we believe [Kleiner Perkins and others have invested](#). A firm called Brown Coat Ventures may also be involved: Nest's cryptic website now includes a quote from Bill Prescott at Brown Coat Ventures. (*Editor's note*: Brown Shirt Ventures would have been a far better name, at least from an unintended-historical-humor perspective.)