

Home Area Networks Jeff St. John **September 1, 2009**

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Control4 Seeks Utility Partnership in TX

The maker of high-end home automation systems – including energy monitoring systems – has landed its first utility partnership with the 65,000-member Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative.

Control4, one of the many makers of home energy management devices, already has a direct retail channel into people's homes through sales of its high-end home automation systems.

But it wouldn't mind if utilities wanted to give away its home energy management gear for free, either.

That's the goal of a contract Control4 has landed with the 65,000-member **Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative**. The Texas-based utility has applied for an **\$18.8 million grant from the Department of Energy** to fund a smart meter deployment that will include installing Control4's new energy controller at about 35,000 of Bluebonnet's member-customers over the coming years.

That would make Bluebonnet the first utility to publicly take up Control4's offer of partnerships to spread its new product, which is an energy-specific version of its broader line of gear to control home entertainment and security systems as well as lights and thermostats.

The Salt Lake City-based company wants to sell the energy controller for about \$200 through its distribution networks and possibly through Best Buy stores, a few of which already sell its broader home control system, which costs \$500 and up.

Control4 raised \$17.3 million in July to push those plans forward, following the lead of the host of others seeking to bring energy management to homes through hardware and software offerings (see **Control4 Gets \$17.3M to Expand Home Energy Management**).

Some of those companies, such as **Tendril**, **eMeter** and **Sequentric**, are primarily focusing on utility partners as the channels into homes (see stories [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)).

Others, such as **AlertMe** or EnergyHub, are seeking direct sales channels as well as utility partnerships (see **Green Light** post). Others are seeking utility partnerships while planning to

offer free web-based energy management services – **Google** and **Microsoft** are two big players pursuing that course (see stories [here](#) and [here](#)).

And then there are others, such as **OpenPeak** and **Intamac Systems**, looking to piggyback on systems being installed in homes by telecommunication companies (see [The Telco Home Energy Invasion](#)).

How much homeowners may be willing to pay for energy management is an open question, although one recent survey said it's likely to be no more than about \$50 for most American homeowners – a price that would preclude most home energy systems available today (see [\\$48: A Threshold Price for In-Home Energy Management?](#)).

While Control4 has installed its higher-end home automation systems in about 60,000 homes around the world, the company also has "huge opportunities in the utility channel, and we're certainly focused on capitalizing on that with a product that works for them," said Susan Cashen, vice president of marketing for Control4 Energy Systems, said of Control4's Bluebonnet partnership.

The company has already been testing its energy management capabilities in pilot projects with Xcel Energy's **SmartGridCity** project and other undisclosed utilities.

Of course, the timing of Bluebonnet's project with Control4 is dependent on getting its grant from the DOE's Smart Grid Investment Grant Program – and with hundreds of utilities already seeking more money from the program than it has available, that may not happen (see [Green Light](#) post).

"If we don't get the grant, we'll have to revisit our deployment strategy," Bluebonnet spokesman Will Holford said.



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