

Adaptive Meter: Playing the Energy Conservation Game

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Saving energy may not sound as fun as, say, [stealing cars](#), [shooting zombies](#) or becoming a [Guitar Hero](#). But Adaptive Meter, a startup that presented at our [Green:Net conference](#) last week, thinks it can make energy conservation an engaging game.



Courtesy of Adaptive Meter

The company, which makes web applications such as [StickyChicken](#) and [Twitterlike](#), is developing an interactive gaming platform in which players bet on others' energy usage. The stock-market style game, called [Lost Joules](#), will use smart-meter data from consenting players, and other participants — including those without smart meters — will be able to stake virtual cash on whether those players can reduce their energy use or not. Players will be able to trade virtual money for real rewards (and buy more virtual cash with real money), say co-founders Richard Dorsey and Danny Hu.

The idea is to encourage energy efficiency through fun, competition, and peer pressure among gamers. "Wouldn't it be cool if every time we unplugged an appliance or flipped a switch, somebody noticed?" asked Dorsey, who wore a "Batman" T-shirt for his [presentation last Tuesday](#). If you don't have a smart meter, the game will allow you to use your virtual wealth to encourage better behavior in others. And if you do have a smart meter, the game will push you to save energy, Dorsey said. "If you reduce your energy use, people will flock to you," he said, because investing in you will win them tokens and prizes.

The startup, which has been working on Lost Joules for a mere three months so far, has created a [short comic](#) to introduce its hero, also named Lost Joules. Adaptive Meter says it is working on designing and coding its pilot program.

The company is also working to select and sign up smart-meter data partners for the game, Dorsey said. He mentioned [Google's PowerMeter API](#) — and even included a superhero wearing a "G" in its comic — as well as [Fat Spaniel](#) and [SmartSynch](#) as possible partners.

Lost Joules is the company's first foray into the environmental arena. While the company is "open to funding," it hasn't yet come up with a ballpark figure of how much it wants to raise, and it plans to push on with the project regardless of whether or not it raises the cash, Dorsey said.

If it does decide to raise money, Lost Joules may need to refine its sales pitch a bit: "Why should anyone play? Because energy is absolutely boring," Dorsey said during his three-minute presentation.

It also will have to tell investors how it plans to make money. The company wouldn't detail its business strategy, but said that it would partly be based on virtual currency. Aside from people buying the tokens outright, the company has other methods of making real money in mind — "but we can't talk about it at this point," Dorsey said. Advertising and sponsorship might also be included, but also aren't the main ways Adaptive Meter plan to monetize the site, he added.

The startup's success will depend on whether it can get sufficient access to energy data, and whether it can make the game fun enough — in spite of the admittedly boring topic — to attract players. Luis Arbulo, part of [Google.org's](#) investment team and a judge at the [Green:Net startup contest](#), gave Lost Joules a 3 out of 10. "It seems like a cool feature or game rather than a sustainable product," he said. "It probably would be really well on top of a Facebook application or something [like that] rather than as a [standalone game]."

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