

BLOG

Defining the Smart Grid

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Celebrities dominate a sizeable chunk of public attention, whether garnering fascination or spurning lively criticism. Arguably less controversial, but perhaps equally as enigmatic, is an on-trend celebrity of the energy world, the smart grid — with the buzz of an ingénue and staying power of a classic leading actor.



Here are 5 things about the Smart Grid that make it a compelling lead:

1) It's a work in progress, constantly evolving.

Reinvention isn't exclusive to the world of celebrity, where taking on a challenging role or shifting genres is often lauded and expected. The smart grid, too, is a sort of working version 2.0 of "the grid," an extensive, but old network that can't always withstand changing demands and doesn't listen to its audience of consumers. The smart grid brings the traditional grid up-to-date by introducing a two-way conversation to the picture. It does this by digitizing the flow of energy and information between the utility and consumer. This means that energy use and need can be assessed digitally, in place of rolling a truck out to see what's going on. Devices can be adjusted and controlled accordingly from a central location.

2) It's not a singular entity.

What's a celebrity without her "people"? The smart grid also does not work on its own to maintain and improve its visibility. Similar to the traditional grid with its network of transformers, wires, and switches, the smart grid is a network, too. It's a network of technology, computers, controls, and equipment that provide digitally informed responses. The players involved create smart grid technology with things like "smart meters," fancy meters that allow people to see their electricity use, cost, and time of use. [New applications](#) for smart phones even allow customers to manage and control their energy use — of air conditioners for example — remotely, or give consumers an insider's look to the wholesale electric market ([yes, there's an app for that](#)).

3) It's difficult to typecast.

It can be difficult to separate actors from roles that have captured our imaginations and accept portrayals of other characters — characters that may be outside type and may not be the most positive or likeable. Sometimes this even leads to the kind of viral anti-fan hype that antagonizes others to jump ship.

In the smart grid's case, there is no singular portrayal of its relationship with energy efficiency and clean energy. This lack of clarity can make it something of an enigma — even to industry experts. This complex dynamic can draw a legitimate amount of skepticism from and polarization in consumers as well. The technology behind and around the smart grid has the potential to impact our lives in a number of ways, by enabling the integration of more clean energy like wind and solar power into the grid, reducing response times to power outages, providing consumers more power over their electricity use (and in turn their bills), and heightening national security and resistance to attacks or natural disasters. Concerned consumers, however, might not be so convinced by the smart grid's link to saving money and energy in these numerous ways. Instead, they might pose questions about the threat of invasion of privacy, health concerns, and the real cost of what achieving all of this might be.

4) It has a wide and growing fan base.

Sometimes those bold roles and risks generate new fans, which can be a positive asset to a growing career. In industry, companies outside of energy are jumping on the energy efficiency bandwagon, which means investing in smart grid technology. Consumers may not be familiar with the smart grid yet, but once they understand what it can do for them, they're generally on board. A [Smart Grid Consumer Collective \(SGCC\)](#) survey shows that while over half of people surveyed were unfamiliar with the smart grid, of those who were familiar with it, only 13% felt negatively about it.

While the smart grid isn't a brand new face on the scene, it's a recognizable one, and there's certainly room for that support to grow. (Think Matthew McConaughey: once primarily just a handsome face appreciated by a small set of romantic comedy fans, now a Golden Globe winner and serious player that continues to impress and gain recognition.) Increasing opportunities for consumers to be able to control their household devices via their smart phones and computers, and manage their energy use through a click here or there, will help to create a more smart grid-engaged public.

5) It's newsworthy.

Celebrities are invariably keenly aware of the impact they make with every wardrobe, hair, or branding choice — and the importance of each change. Similarly, the developments in smart grid technology yield daily discussions about who is doing what and how, and what that means for the market and industry. Whether that means the development of more grid-facing technologies to help utilities manage the grid better, or the proliferation of smart thermostats and other customer-facing technologies that encourage consumers to make their homes smarter and smart grid ready, the smart grid shows no signs of fading or waning in influence or impact.

Want to learn more? These sites offer a good starting point:

[The Smart Grid: An Introduction](#)

[Smartgrid.gov](#)

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