Gadget Heat

By David Mantey, Editor, PD&D

Did I do it? I was hoping to match the melodramatic copy “Charge your iPod, kill a polar bear?” from the Wisconsin State Journal (WSJ) this weekend.

The short article shed light on society’s gadget-crazed consumption, and I have to admit, while I read the piece, my phone was plugged into the same jack as two laptops and a Blackberry – praise to the inventor of the surge protector.

According to an energy watchdog, gizmos are firing up power grids and our usage is skyrocketing at an exponential rate. Granted, it’s just a watchdog group and not a piece of legislation, so I realize that we’re not going to all hop on the energy-efficiency bandwagon and throw the issue above cost controls and improving productivity, but what is it going to take to make the switch? Or, in contrast, what is it going to take to satisfy these power grid requirements?

A new report from the International Energy Agency (IEA) estimates that electronic gadgets will triple their energy consumption by 2030 to 1,700 terawatt hours. According to WSJ, that’s the equivalent of the total combined home consumption of the United States and Japan, just so we can light up our nights with LEDs and televisions that are mounted above the fireplace, not to mention what's running in our plants.

Comparatively, my gadget energy consumption is below average – according to the IEA, average equates to around 15 percent of your total household electric consumption. I don’t really have anything to back that up other than my electric bill, but guys can be lumped into two general categories.

Some gentleman are obsessed with the latest phones, MP3 players, LCDs, etc. – I’m the other kind. I didn’t like James Bond as a kid; my brothers and I were more prone to playing Indiana Jones. I didn’t want to talk into my watch (and have it talk back); I wanted to swing from the hay loft in the barn with a whip (although I never landed that one successfully).

I have a dinosaur of a phone, which I can upgrade for free at anytime, but why should I? The one I have now works perfectly. I receive all of my calls, texts and photos. The alarm clock on it wakes me up every morning, the snooze function makes me late every morning and, the best feature of them all, the red button turns the phone off every time I hold it for longer than three seconds. It’s the most pleasing little vibration, a reminder that I’m not only turning off the phone, but I’m also no longer able to be poked or prodded from the world outside of the living room.

As long as those functions all remain in order, I see no reason to necessitate a touch screen or never-ending list of apps. I had games on a former phone; Fall Down was my addiction. Basically, you had to punch in the number before it reached the bottom of the screen, and the further you advanced, the speedier and more conniving the numbers became. It was Atari-simple and yet it was the reason some people thought that I was ill when I had to use the public facilities.

In order to support our burgeoning need to require a utility belt, the world would have to build an estimated 200 new nuclear power plants just to shoot enough juice into the system. Oh yeah, and according to the IEA, the global electric bill would be around $200 billion a year – right now it’s at $80 billion.

To think that anyone is going to cede their gadgets is a pretty cockamamie proposition, so here’s to hoping we can design them to run on as little as possible, while upping the energy potential of the power grid. Who knows? With energy harvesting and an ongoing interest in solar and alternative energy, maybe we’ll transform into some utopian gizmo haven in which gadgets run on body heat ...

What's your take? Feel free to sound off by e-mailing me at david.mantey@advantagemedia.com [1].

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