

Tuesday, February 8, 2011

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

Australia's Portus starts EV integration pilot in Queensland

Portus, a Sydney, Australia-based pioneer of the "connected home," recently began working on EV integration with Queensland's Ergon Energy. Portus CEO Tim Lindquist told us yesterday in a phone interview from Sydney. The project, to be tested in Townsville, will build on a trial of Portus' energy management system that is already underway with Ergon Energy in giant Queensland, he added.

"We were in the connected home domain very, very early," Lindquist said, noting that his firm won the "top Connected Home program in the world" that the government of Singapore ran in 2003-2004. "We were years ahead of the market."

Now Lindquist believes Portus is similarly far ahead in the EV integration domain. A number of Australian utilities are "making the first steps trialing EVs and working out what kind of impact they are going to have on their networks," but Ergon is "well ahead of the others," he said. Ergon, owned by the Queensland government, operates as a power distributor, retailer and generator and services about 680,000 customers.

Why now?

"We've got a big focus into the future around the DR side of things" and will be making efforts to "empower customers to control loads," to help Ergon customers use less power and to facilitate using "discretionary capacity in the home" as a DR resource," he said. Discretionary capacity is what people can give up without impacting their lifestyles.

The Portus Home Eco energy management system and energy dashboard lets customers monitor what power is being used by major home appliances and its use in Australia is likely to get people's hearts thumping when they see how much their power swimming pool pumps use. The system also shows how much CO2 is being produced by operating each appliance.

People can keep track of and change what is happening with appliances inside their homes no matter where they are since Portus Home Eco's user interface can run from any browser, including smart phones.

The EV trial that just started is not large, "but it is significant in terms

of what it's achieving," Lindquist said. "We will be completing actual integration in the next few months."

Ergon and Portus will seek to "provide customers deeper insight into their EV, from within the home," he noted. "We enable their monitoring of things like the current charge, controlling the charge rate and seeing at a glance what the current kilometer range is." Eventually, the technology will help consumers and utilities "monitor the consumption and export from that vehicle back into the grid -- and control when the car is charged."

Utilities need to be concerned with how many EVs are "within the footprint of a local transformer" since a transformer's capacity could be insufficient and network augmentation is "very expensive," he warned.

"At the same time, there is a huge opportunity. Suddenly, you have storage all over the place and that DR resource can help with fluctuations you'll get from other renewables when they hit the grid."

Portus' location could help it advance, at least in the short-term. "A

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DP&L smart grid plan withdrawal leaves questions

Ohio's PUC Jan 5 approved Dayton Power & Light's October withdrawal of a plan for smart grid infrastructure, Matt Butler, a spokesperson for the PUC, told us yesterday. DP&L withdrew the plan it had filed in 2008 "because unlike the other three utilities in Ohio, they got no federal money," Butler said.

DOE denied DP&L's application for a \$145 million grant toward building out its smart grid, the *Dayton Daily News* [reported in November 2009](#).

The utility had no one available to interview about the withdrawal, Emily Gray, a spokesperson for DP&L, said yesterday. In lieu of an interview, she offered [a link to the utility's website](#) that she said "addresses some of the omissions and inaccuracies" in a *Dayton*

Daily News story about the withdrawal that ran Sunday.

"We continue to work on" a system-wide smart grid plan, DP&L's web page said. "When old technologies are retired, new digital options are incorporated that provide the foundation for implementing smart meters and a smart grid." The page did not appear to address any alleged inaccuracies in the *Dayton Daily News* report.

That story said only that DP&L withdrew its smart grid plan and that "company officials say they don't know if or when they'll submit a new plan." The story did not run online and was provided to us yesterday by the reporter who wrote it.

[\[Comments\]](#)

US government offers money, support for wind power industry

The US government is pushing for more offshore wind power by offering new funding opportunities for up to \$50.5 million for projects that support offshore wind energy deployment plus setting up "several high priority Wind Energy Areas in the mid-Atlantic that will spur rapid, responsible development of this ... resource," DOE told the press yesterday. The initiatives will support President Obama's goal of generating 80% of the nation's power from clean energy sources by 2035, the agency added.

"Offshore wind energy can reduce greenhouse gas emissions, diversify our

energy supply and stimulate economic revitalization,” Energy Secretary Steven Chu said in prepared remarks.

The government’s National Offshore Wind Strategy, publicized yesterday, focuses on overcoming the relatively high cost of offshore wind energy, technical challenges surrounding installation, operations and grid interconnection and the lack of site data and experience with project permitting processes.

The government is preparing to spend up to \$25 million over five years for technology development, including “innovative wind turbine design tools and hardware to provide the foundation

for a cost-competitive and world-class offshore wind industry” in the US, it said.

Uncle Sam also plans to spend up to \$18 million over three years on removing market barriers and up to \$7.5 million over three years on the development and refinement of new designs for wind turbine drive trains.

The Wind Energy Areas are designated to foster coordinated environmental studies, large-scale planning and expedited approval processes to speed offshore wind energy development.

[\[Comments\]](#)

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lot comes down to regulatory regimes in place and to awareness in the community,” Lindquist said. “In Australia, there is this awareness and concern about ecological footprints, possibly more so than in the US. When in recession, people are more concerned about having a job. Australia on the other hand is in the midst of an iron ore and coal mining boom.”

Since Australia is not sharing the recessionary times with the US, “we’re in a completely different situation. So there does seem to be more awareness about environmental issues, in part because of schemes set up by the government to promote renewables, energy efficiency and rapidly escalating electricity prices. But it’s very early days.”

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9 stories in 3 minutes

A123 sells 20 MW

battery to Chile: Lithium-ion battery-maker A123 Systems, of Watertown, Mass, will sell a 20 MW unit to AES Gener for use in a spinning-reserves project in northern Chile, it told the press yesterday. The installation, at a new 500 MW power plant called Angamos, will correct frequency deviations, A123 said. This will be A123’s second installation in Chile. It said last month it plans to put in a 12 MW unit, also for frequency-regulation purposes (SGT, [Jan-31](#)).

Telkonet offers

wireless thermostat: Telkonet, of Milwaukee, yesterday publicized a line of energy-management products including a wireless thermostat. The EcoSmart product suite includes multiple backlight color choices, a motion sensor and a voltage range of 12-40 volts DC and 12-277 volts AC without need for configuration, Telkonet said.

Phasor measurement

grows across US: About 250 phasor measurement units had been installed and networked across North America’s transmission systems as of early 2010, with another 850 due for installation by 2014 through SGIGs and

SGRDGs, said a free study publicized last month by transmission-industry trade group WIRES (the Working Group for Investment in Reliable & Economic Electric Systems). The 36-page report, titled “[Smart transmission: modernizing the nation’s high-voltage electric transmission system](#),” said numerous synchrophasor projects -- including dedicated, high-speed communications networks -- are under way including those by American Transmission, Duke Energy, Dominion Virginia Power, Entergy, ISO-New England, Midwest ISO, New York ISO, PJM Interconnection, SoCal Edison and the Western Electric Coordinating Council.

Avante Logixx ends

in-home display pilot: Avante Logixx, of Toronto, Ontario, Canada, completed a residential energy-management pilot with the Ontario Power Authority, it told the press yesterday without describing the outcome. The trial, begun in September, tested the Avante NRG Smartboxx, an in-home display that gets data through a cellular connection.

Control4 starts

raising \$25 million: Home automation firm Control4 of Draper, Utah, is raising \$25 million in equity with \$15 million sold already, said a [Jan](#)

[31 SEC filing](#). It began selling the shares and warrants Jan 21 to three investors, the filing said.

China’s Haier Group teams with Honeywell:

Appliance-maker the Haier Group, of China, last month signed a memo of understanding with Honeywell calling for the firms to work on technology that will make appliances, HVAC and mass-transit systems run more efficiently, they told the press. More than half of Honeywell’s products are related to energy and energy efficiency, Shane Tedjarati, CEO of Honeywell China and India, said in prepared remarks. No further details on the agreement are available, the firm told us yesterday.

Oklahoma DR pilot

is whopping success: OG&E customers with programmable thermostats cut their power use by up to 57% during peak-load periods compared to a control group, OG&E officials said last week, according to the [Oklahoman online news site](#). A study of 2,500 customers in Norman, Okla, between June and September showed an average power-use reduction of 11-33%, depending on technology in place in the participants’ homes, the site said.

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WSJ finds efficiency

winning less VC cash: US energy efficiency firms saw less VC last year than in 2009, the *Wall Street Journal* [reported yesterday](#). Total VC dropped 9% to \$689 million, the paper reported, quoting data from Ernst & Young LLP and Dow Jones VentureSource. Nexant and Opower each raised the most VC

last year: \$50 million. Silver Spring Networks raised the largest round in 2009: \$105 million. Still, total clean-technology VC rose in the same period.

Mesh Comm patent

lawsuit moves ahead: Mesh Comm, of Atlanta, won an early round in a patent-infringement case against Pepco and Silver Spring Networks, [reported Green Patent Blog last month](#).

Mesh Comm sued in the fall of 2009, alleging the defendants were infringing on one of its patents covering Bluetooth communications among electric meters. A federal court last month denied the defendants' attempt to summarily end the lawsuit, the site said. Mesh Comm is apparently a non-practicing patent-holder -- much like Sipco, which has sued numerous smart grid firms alleging infringement of its patents (SGT, [Oct-19](#)). [\[Comments\]](#)

Montana's biggest utility fights PSC's version of decoupling

NorthWestern Energy, Montana's largest electric-and-gas utility, and three consumer and environmental entities have asked a court to void a new rate structure approved last year by the PSC -- that ends up meaning residential customers who use less power would get it for less, the *Billings Gazette* [reported](#) last week. The PSC had no legal basis when it approved a modified rate structure that is set to take effect in July, the utility said.

NorthWestern and others objected to how the PSC adopted decoupling, saying the PSC modified the decoupling structure from the version NorthWestern and others had agreed to. Without the decoupling structure as originally proposed, NorthWestern said, tiered rates are not needed. NorthWestern's president, Bob Rowe, is pushing for decoupling "to put stockholders at ease that taking a fairly proactive stance is not in conflict with their interests," University of Montana economics professor Thomas Power told us in August (SGT, [Aug-26](#)).

[\[Comments\]](#)

Smart grid to benefit from Georgia Power rate increase

Georgia Power on Dec 21 won a \$562.3 million rate increase for this year that took effect Jan 1, letting the utility continue its AMI plans and other improvements, Jeff Wilson, a spokesperson for the unit of Southern Co, told us yesterday. The increase will help pay for "new power lines, substations, smart meters and environmental controls," Wilson said.

The change means a bump of \$10.76/month, or 10% for residential customers this year, and an increase of 7-8.7% for business customers, the utility said. The

Georgia PSC also let Georgia Power raise rates enough to collect an added \$189.7 million next year and another \$92.6 million in 2013. Those will mean added hikes of \$3.08/month in 2012 and \$1.48/month in 2013.

Georgia Power installed 1.3 million smart meters for its customers and expects to complete deployment to all 2.3 million by 2013 at the latest, Wilson said. The rate increase will aid that effort and was granted after hearings that began in October (SGT, [Oct-05](#)).

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Abbreviations: To see a glossary of *Smart Grid Today's* abbreviations, go to www.smartgridtoday.com/glossary.

Smart Grid Today is published 240 times/year on business days by Modern Markets Intelligence Inc. (MMI Inc.) at 4908 Hornbeam Drive, Rockville, MD 20853-1475 USA, 888-980-4446 or +1-301-769-6903 by phone, +1-301-769-6917 by fax. Standard rate for a one-year subscription is \$1,087 in US funds (plus 6% sales tax in Maryland). Significant discounts for bulk and corporate subscriptions are available including some that allow putting copyright-protected issues on a password-protected intranet site for an entire company to see. **Brett Brune** is editor; **Dan Richman**, senior reporter; **Sam Spencer**, publisher & CEO; **Season Crawford**, VP of Marketing, associate publisher & customer service director, and **Liz Yap** is production director.

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