

Installing the PowerCost Monitor WIFI Edition

By Mapawatt, on March 21st, 2011



If you've read our two part series on [Energy Tools for Beginners](#), you already know the importance of monitoring your energy use as part of educating yourself on how you use energy in your home. After tracking your monthly utility bills in a spreadsheet, the next logical step is to get more up-to-the-minute feedback on your [energy usage](#). Buying an energy monitor will help you understand how different behaviors in the home directly affect the amount of energy you use.

We have reviewed several [energy monitors](#) at Mapawatt and are now testing the PowerCost Monitor WIFI Edition from [BlueLine Innovations](#). Here's a quick review of installing and configuring the PowerCost Monitor Wifi Edition using Microsoft Hohm.

PowerCost Monitor Installation

One of the nicest features of this product is the ease of installation requiring very little effort and no onsite visit from an electrician. (or risk in taking the cover off of your circuit panel box yourself) [The PowerCost Monitor \(PCM\)](#) consists of two components: the display unit and the sensor unit. Both run on AA batteries. After one look through the directions, installing the sensor unit was very straightforward. Positioning the sensor arm and eye is the same on all analog power meters with the spinning wheel. The eye is positioned over the center of the wheel and reads the notch each time it passes under the eye.

If you have a smartmeter, you should first write down your smartmeter brand and model and look it up on [BlueLine Innovations \(BLI\)](#) website in their customer support section. It has most of the popular smartmeter brands with pictures of where to position the eye of the sensor unit. The first time I set it up I made an assumption of where I thought the eye was located and was wrong and it didn't pick up a signal. After I saw the picture of my smartmeter with the arrow pointing to the correct location, I moved it to the right position and it worked right away!

Configuring the display unit requires entering a few values into the configuration screen such as the time, date, utility rate and Power Factor. The instructions were very easy to follow. Once the sensor unit was in place, you press the Sync button on the display unit and watch your live energy usage on the screen!

Installing the Wifi Gateway

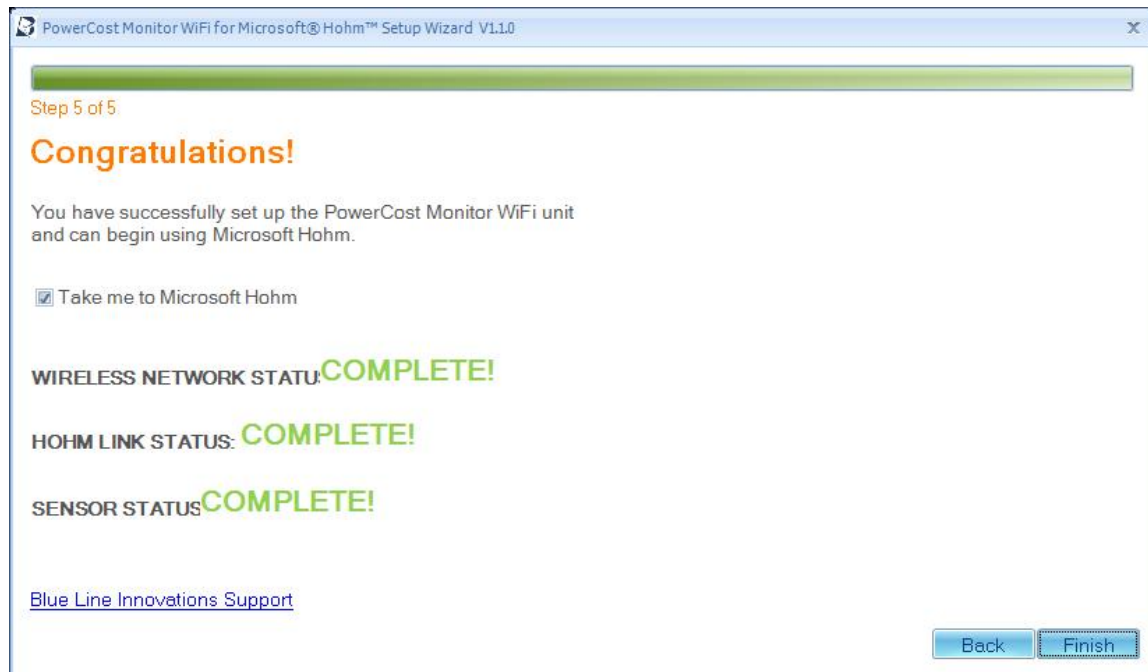
The [PCM Wifi Gateway](#) is a small plastic donut-shaped object that receives the signal from the sensor unit and broadcasts the data through your wifi router to either Microsoft Hohm or Google Powermeter. Once it is configured, it does not require a direct connection to your computer. You can place it close to a wall near the sensor unit, within range of your wifi network and near a plug since it does require 120v AC power to operate.

To configure the gateway, install the software, plug the donut into your computer with the usb cable provided and enter your wireless network information into the configuration screens. Once it's configured, unplug the cable and position the donut to the wall nearest to your smartmeter and plug it into an outlet.

You're done.

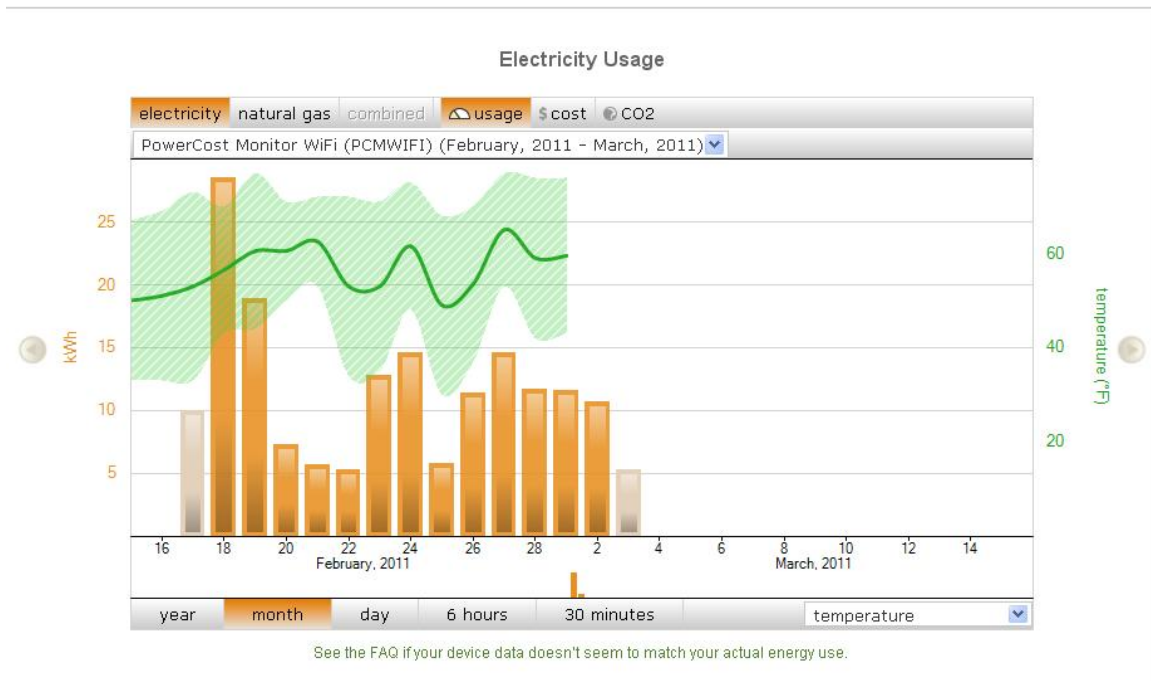
Configuring the Wifi Gateway for MS Hohm

The PCM Wifi Edition comes with instructions on setting up Microsoft Hohm. Once you have a Windows Live ID, you log in and configure MS Hohm. It recognizes your PCM device ID and starts receiving data shortly after configuration.



PowerCost Monitor - Status Page

Our lead engineer will be installing the PowerCost Monitor in his home in Asheville, NC for more extensive testing over the next few months. We'll post an updated article once we have more data on living with the PowerCost Monitor in your home.



MS Hohm Chart showing PowerCost Monitor data

Overall Experience

The [PCM WIFI Edition](#) was easy to install and integrate into MS Hohm. Installing the PCM into Google Powermeter is also an easy task. (we've done this before with other monitors by just specifying the device id) We recommend the PCM to users who just want the feedback from the display unit so they can experiment with turning devices on and off and watching how much energy is used.

For users that like the idea of being able to watch your home energy usage from the office or other locations, get the WIFI edition and install it in either Google Powermeter or MS Hohm. Just one word of caution: restrain yourself from emailing or calling your spouse to ask what they are doing to make the energy use spike. I did this once when my spouse was graciously doing our laundry with the washer and dryer on at the same time. Needless to say, my passion for energy efficiency was not received well.

If you're ready to take the next step in saving energy, consider buying and installing the [PowerCost Monitor](#) from BlueLine Innovations. You can install it yourself and start saving money on your utility bills!