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## Microsoft partners with Blue Line Innovation for Hohm-compatible monitoring device, we go hands-on

Microsoft's [Hohm](#) service has been going wild on the internets for just over a year, letting people who have signed on with partner utility companies to track their usage straight from the source. But, if you didn't find yourself in one of the 4.5 million homes currently covered by one of those utilities you were stuck counting electrons on your own. No more. Blue Line Innovations has launched its \$249 Power Cost Monitor WiFi Edition with the ability to feed directly to Hohm, and we have all the details, plus some early impressions, after the break.

Out of the box, onto the meter

Blue Line Innovations has been marketing its Power Cost Monitor setup for years now, a simple device with an LCD (the Monitor) that wirelessly talks to a device that clamps onto your power meter (the Sensor) and displays real-time, peak, and average information about energy consumption. Of course, stat hounds want more, so enter the Gateway, a donut-shaped device that connects wirelessly both to the sensor and to the internet via WiFi to constantly beam information to Hohm.

Installation is easy -- well, relatively easy at least, compared to the circuit breaker dissection required when we [tested out the TED 5000 last year](#). Unlike then we never felt that our life was at risk, nor did we consider spending the money to call an electrician. The sensor clamps onto your power meter and uses an optical pickup to monitor your usage. It takes a little finagling to get it right, somewhat tricky when it's pushing 100 degrees outside and you're swimming in humidity, but we had it up and running quickly and soon the gateway was blinking green and happy.

The gateway itself needs to be connected via USB before it'll start pumping its bits wirelessly, providing you with an ID that you punch into your Hohm account. That's really all there is to it. After that everything happens automatically, presented in a chart like the one above. It shows what a 15 minute game of *Limbo* looks like prior to shutting down the entertainment center for the night. Then the air conditioning kicked on and off for awhile before finally going quiet at a little after 10:00.

After that it was spikes and drops as... something pulled down power. Water heater? Refrigerator? Unfortunately the service won't help you figure out what. Other services, like those offered by TED, can detect what appliances are kicking on and when after you teach it what their consumption signature looks like. Hohm unfortunately can't do that, and Microsoft's Troy Batterberry explains that the intent is instead to offer an open platform that would allow devices to wirelessly submit their own usage data. That sounds ideal to us, but the problem is those appliances don't exist right now, and when they do come along we can't say we're going to be keen on buying them immediately anyway -- unless our ice cream maker happens to be on the fritz.

Right now Hohm also can't track electricity generated in your home, through solar or wind or that generator you attached to your stationary bike, but that feature is said to be coming in the not too distant future. A necessity that, we think, as those folks feeding power back to the grid are likely going to be the ones most interested in tracking exactly how many electrons are flowing and in which direction at any given time.

Finally, early talk of a dedicated Hohm apps for mobile devices have apparently been shelved in favor of the mobile version of the site, which we found to be useful and easy enough, but unfortunately lacking in some of the control allowed through the full site. However, that full site worked just fine on all the mobile browsers we tried it. It gives you (near) real-time usage as well as charts for various time intervals that show you how many watts you're pulling down, what your carbon footprint looks like, and even how many dollars per hour you're spending on electricity.

The whole package, with the sensor and the LCD monitor, will set you back \$249 (\$159 for the gateway alone if you already have the rest of the kit), which is right on par with its most direct competition, the \$239 TED 5000. That device talks to [Google's PowerMeter](#) service which, at this point offers even less info than Hohm. But, TED does offer a separate, comprehensive monitoring site visible from your local network that delivers reams and reams of statistics not found on Hohm.

Which is the better option? For ease of installation and use we have to give it to the Power Cost Monitor -- if you don't have to do any bushwhacking to get to your meter, at least. The same goes for simply keeping track of your energy usage, as at the moment neither PowerMeter nor Hohm will knock you over the head with data like the TED 5000 can. Whether or not that's a good thing depends on your affinity for information.