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Exporting Innovation: American Ingenuity In The Energy Biz

Written by Andy White



Andy White: Think smart.

With the recent [Standard & Poor's downgrade of U.S. debt](#), big currency questions and the earthquake in Japan, national economic growth in a competitive global economy continues to be a hot issue. In the United States, we expect the economy to dominate the political cycle long past the 2012 election. Countries all over the world hope to [export](#) their way out of stagnation. [Manufacturing and exporting more](#) seems like the best economic life preserver now that consumer spending has again bobbed below the waterline.

The [U.S. Chamber of Commerce](#) and the [National Foreign Trade Council](#) proposes [exporting energy technology](#) as a solution. The Obama Administration has targeted energy innovation as an area of great potential, one where we could make serious progress towards the goal of exporting “clean and green” technologies. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid will revive energy legislation in Congress this session and the conversation will surely hinge on jobs and innovation. Jobs are a top voter concern, according to a recent [Gallup poll](#), and programs like the [Advanced Manufacturing Partnership](#) have charted the way through innovation. The President has repeatedly called on [America to be a global clean energy leader](#). And even as a comprehensive, domestic energy standard remains a moving target, the industry has accepted the challenge. It is moving beyond rhetoric.

The time is right for energy innovation. Consumer demand for energy places ever-higher expectations on a grid that was never designed to support 21st century energy usage. Our devices are always on, our LCD TVs light up the night, our Google searches power huge data centers and soon our cars will want juice from the utility company, too. [According to Forrester Research](#), one of the big promises of the “smart grid” is the ability for consumers to see and manage their energy consumption. Yet a recent

Black and Veatch report entitled [2011 Strategic Directions in the Electric Utility Industry](#) articulates that the greatest impediment to the implementation of technologies to modernize the electrical grid is a lack of consumer interest and knowledge. With or without consumer engagement in their personal energy use, American innovation has uncovered value in the larger part of the network – everything utility companies manage in order to power the world. Utilities know that they can leverage smart grid innovations to better manage their complex system and also to satisfy the growing expectations of their consumers. While consumers think about their light switch and maybe the meter on the side of their house, utilities manage miles of transmission lines, networks of transformers, thousands of homes and the communications network to link it all together.

Everything we expect of a modern energy system will come not from smart meters alone, but from the critical communication technology connecting the complex system of systems together to make grids smarter and more valuable for utilities and the consumers they serve. This kind of complexity and infrastructure is the sweet spot for American innovation. Our engineers and businesses are uniquely qualified to weave the solutions and partnerships required for smart grid solutions.

The American spirit of innovation is alive and well in the energy industry. Even in an uncertain domestic regulatory environment, the industry continues to thrive. Established and emerging companies alike are positioned for success because utilities and industrial power producers are investing in these technologies.

I see some of our best growth potential overseas, in developing markets looking to build a smart grid from the start, and in developed countries seeking energy efficiency and a more reliable grid. They understand that conservation and energy-saving technology are the cheapest form of new energy. Utilities from Brazil to the United Kingdom are turning to American companies to solve energy-related challenges. As individual companies expand their energy-related exports, we create high-quality domestic jobs and increase American exports.

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