

Smart meter should save you money, but it's not free

BY SERENA WILLOUGHBY
Staff Writer

The McGuinty government wants to make you smarter.

A smarter energy consumer, that is, through legislation expected to become law next week that will see 800,000 smart meters installed in Ontario homes and businesses by 2007.

The Energy Conservation Responsibility Act legislates the use of smart meters, along with a pricing structure reflecting the cost of power production at certain times of day and year.

This means by monitoring your energy usage with a smart meter, you can cut usage during peak times and save money on your energy bill. It also means if you use a lot of energy during peak times, you will pay more for it.

The idea is to promote a culture of conservation," said John Sanderson, vice president of metering and CDM at Powerstream, the electricity distribution company for Markham, Vaughan and Richmond Hill.

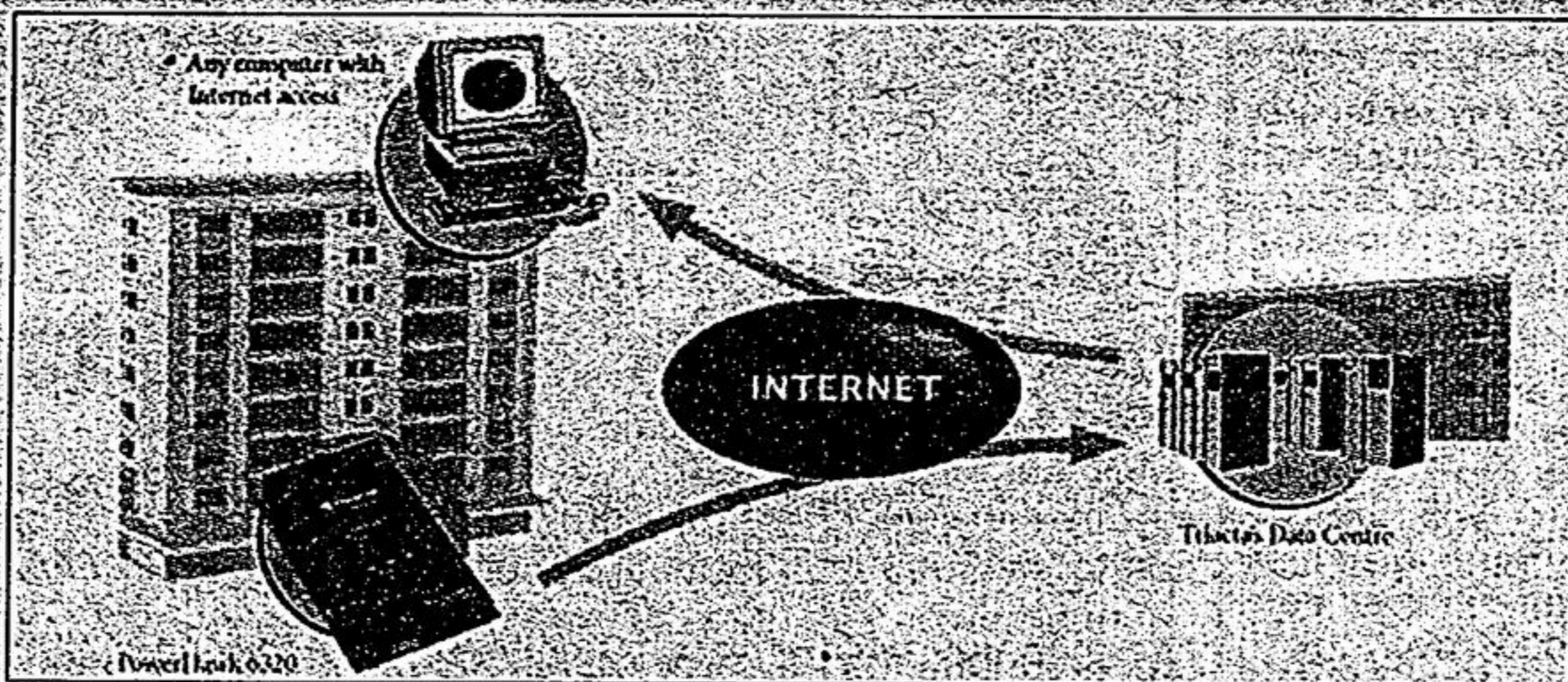
Mr. Sanderson is working on a smart meter pilot project — involving three smart meter manufacturers hooking up to about 100 homes — expected to begin in the next month.

A smart meter is a small device that attaches to your electricity meter and transmits information that can be read by customers, either online or through a printout. "The smart meter will allow us to start to measure consumption on an hourly basis," Mr. Sanderson said.

The smart meters will tell households how much energy is costing at any time during the day.

They will also help encourage people to use energy-gobbling appliances like ovens, washing machines and dishwashers during off-peak hours when there is less stress on the provincial power grid.

The \$1-billion cost of installing smart meters across the province is passed on to users through a \$1 to \$4 monthly charge on electricity bills.



Smart meter users can use the Internet to see how much power they're consuming. A Woodbridge company sells similar units to apartments and condos.

Once Powerstream's pilot data is finished, it will help advise the province on how best to implement smart metering.

However, a Woodbridge company has already made smart meters available to

condominium and rental properties.

Stratacon Inc. contracts out to building and condo owners to install, bill, and service smart metering and sub-metering technology.

Once smart meters are installed, buildings see a 15 to 20 per cent drop in consumption almost immediately, Stratacon president Ian Stewart said.

In order to promote a culture of conservation, rental apartments and condos need to be included in the smart metering mandate, he said.

Currently about 85 percent of rental properties and condos in Ontario have energy costs factored into their rent.

That means there is no incentive for renters and condo owners to conserve, since the landlord or condo board foots the energy bill.

"I've walked into apartments where the thermostat is set to 25 or 30 degrees and the windows are wide open in the middle of winter," Mr. Stewart noted.

However, once sub-meters and smart meters are installed, tenants see a drop in their rent and they get control over their energy consumption.

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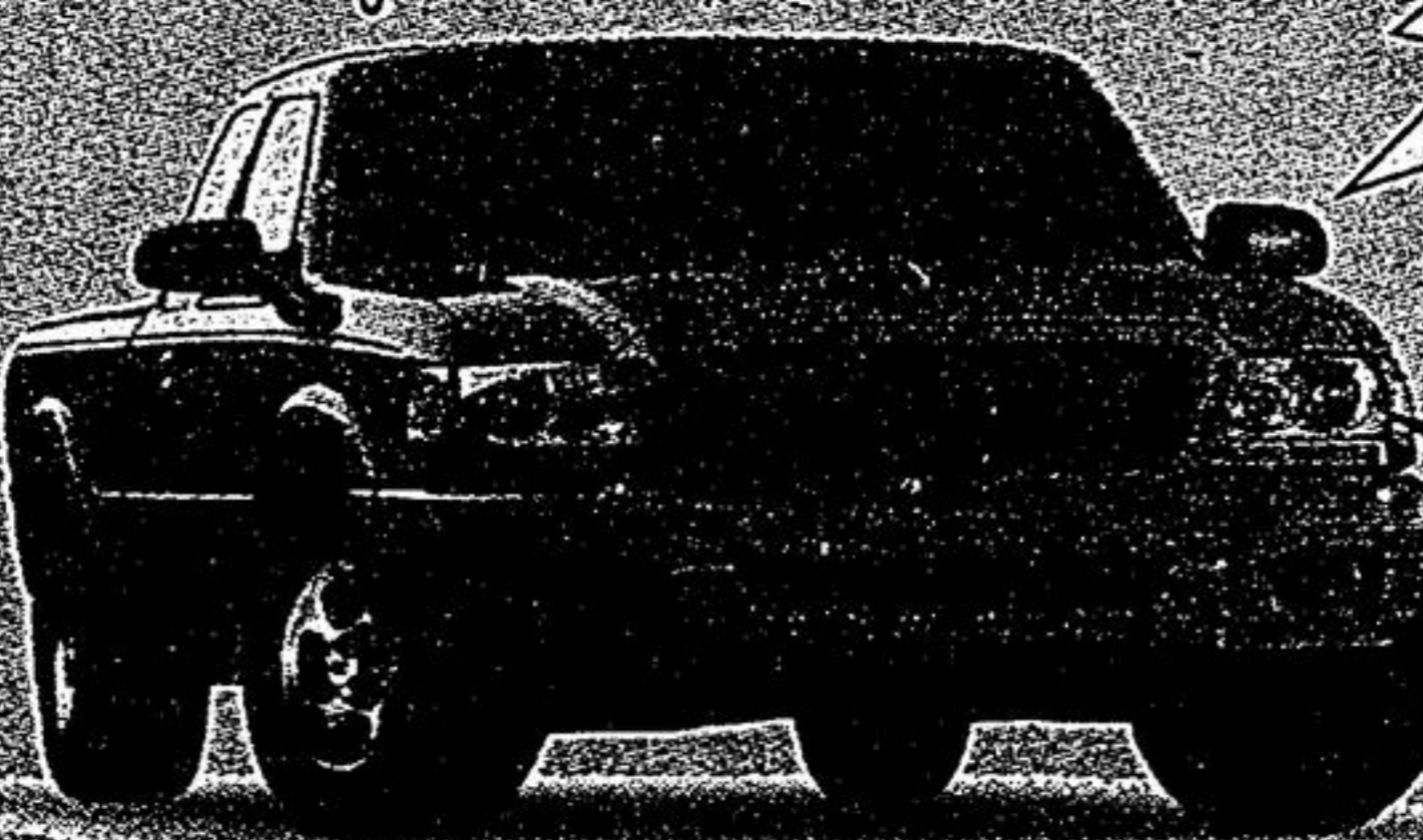


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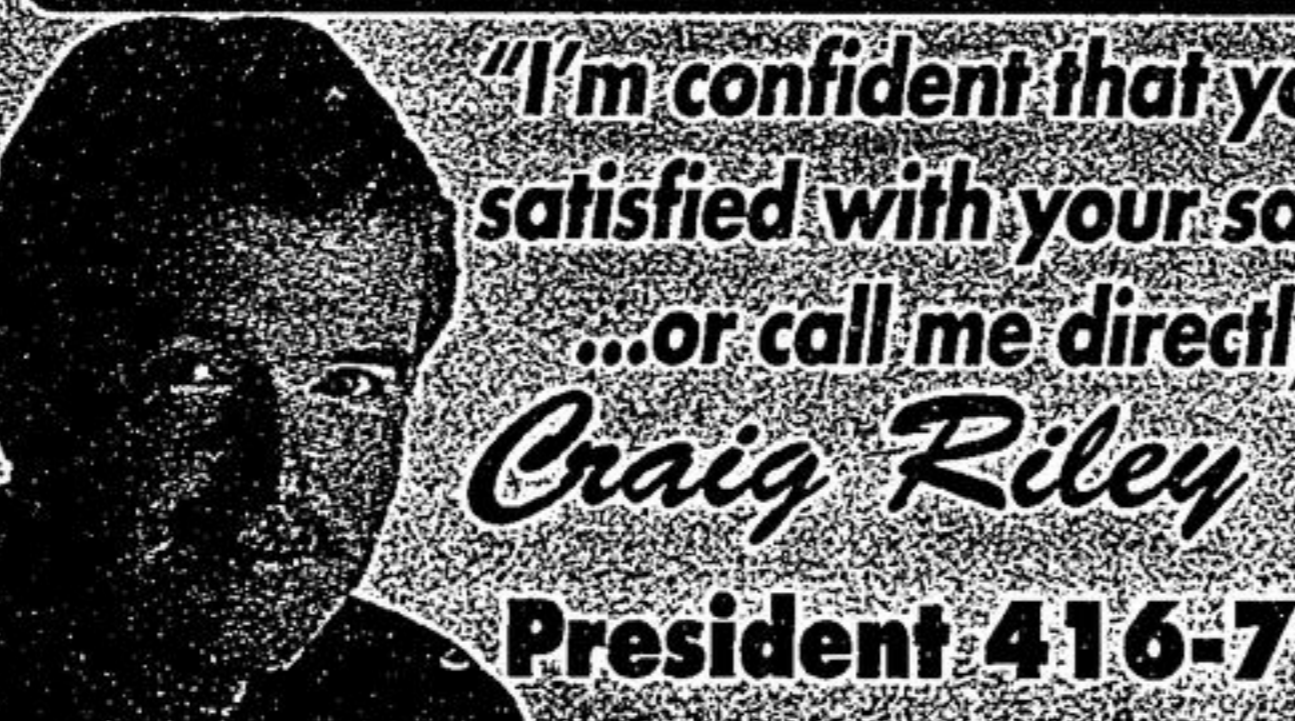
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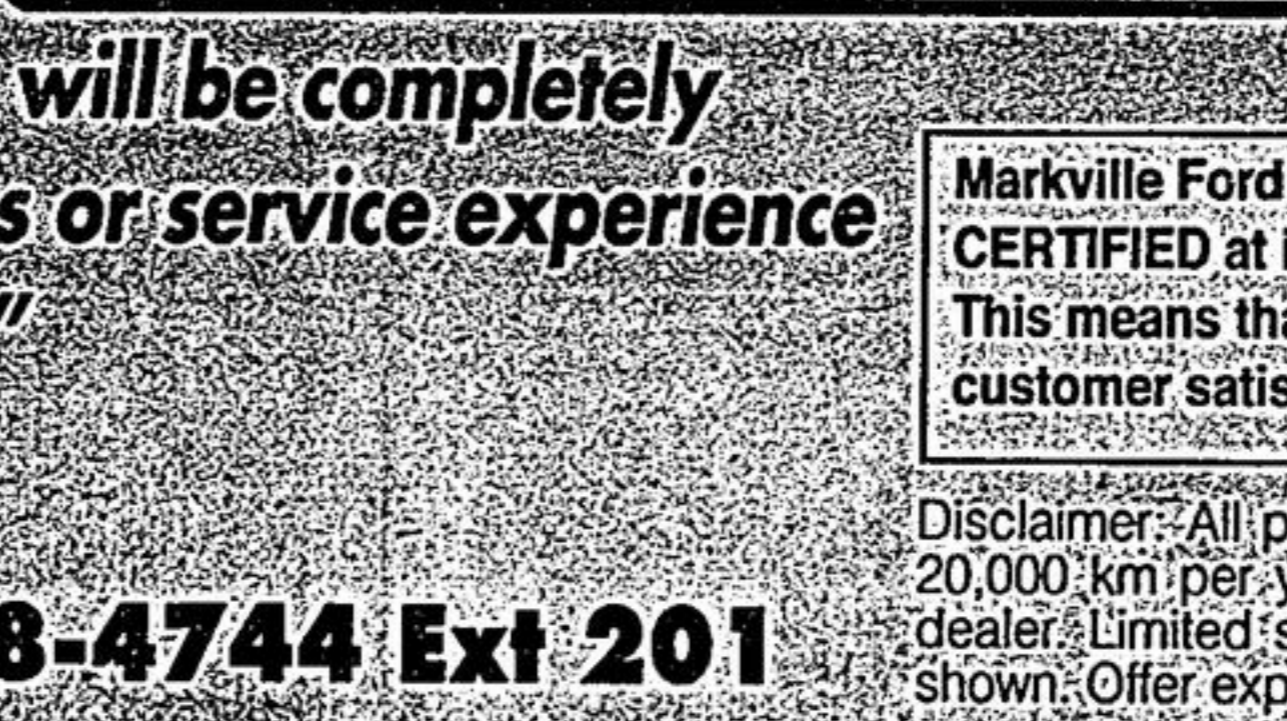


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