

ENERGY BABBLE

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ABSTRACT

Energy Babble is something like an internet radio appliance, designed for domestic and public spaces and dedicated to the topic of energy demand reduction. The devices are networked, drawing content from online sources and allowing responses using a built-in microphone.

DESCRIPTION

A batch of 30 devices will be installed at domestic and community sites around the UK for a number of months during the spring and summer 2013. Devices will also be installed in galleries and event spaces over shorter periods of time, Nordes 2013 will be the first opportunity to show the design outside of the UK.

Synthesised speech files are published from a server for immediate playback by the devices. These sound files are derived from texts from a range of sources, including twitter accounts and policy and activist news publishers. Speech files are also algorithmically generated by the system drawing on historic utterances, also triggered by energy events, and taken from user contributions via the devices' microphones.

The appliance is designed using mixed materials including glass and rapid prototyped plastic. Along with the speaker and microphone, each device includes a Raspberry Pi mini-computer and a WI-FI dongle for network connectivity. Embedded software enables user interaction, audio behaviour and network tasks, and is written in Python running under a Debian distribution of Linux.

BACKGROUND

Energy Babble is a design outcome of Energy and Co-Designing Communities, a research project based in the Interaction Research Studio at Goldsmiths, University of London. This three-year project is supported by Research Councils UK, whose energy communities call was a response to government support for groups undertaking energy demand reduction measures.

The project has followed a trajectory that includes initial fieldwork with communities in the UK, participant workshops, a cultural probe study, and a series of design workbooks. Finally, following a period of design and

development, the devices will be given to the initial fieldwork subjects and others, for a period of further investigation focusing on the deployment of the platform.

The Nordes exhibition is seen as an opportunity not only to show and discuss the final device, but to show material relating to those phases of development described briefly above. We welcome a conversation with curators about how to shape a format that is sympathetic to other exhibitors, and which helps establish the theme of the event.



Figure 1: Render of the Energy Babble appliance

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

There follows a series of images from the research archive, to provide indicative material related to project phases, which would support the exhibition of the physical device.

