Passion and Ideas POWERING CHANGE

IN THIS ISSUE

Enhancing cyber security in Ontario’s energy system
Good ideas made real
...And more
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Cover photo courtesy of Greater Sudbury Utilities
Ontario’s dynamic and evolving electricity industry presents distributors with numerous challenges and opportunities. We provide strategic legal advice on a broad spectrum of energy matters to some of Canada’s leading distributors.

A Fresh Approach to Ontario’s Energy Industry

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Chair’s Message

A passion to innovate powers change

Vinay Sharma

Often when we are faced with a challenge – an obstacle to overcome, or an opportunity to make the most of – our passion for problem-solving and creativity truly shines and can lead to beneficial transformations. It’s really a simple formula: challenge + innovation x passion = positive change.

Ontario’s electricity distribution sector is a living example of this recipe for success as we stand on the cusp of truly great innovation. Admittedly, we have been grappling with many challenges over the last few years, such as cost pressures, new and sometimes disruptive technologies entering the market, cyber security, changing policy direction, climate change and increasing customer expectations. It is a lot to deal with at once, but local electricity distribution companies (LDCs) and their partners have turned these challenges into opportunities by leveraging their highly-skilled teams, deep community ties and creativity to conceptualize, develop and implement long-term solutions.

In the last issue of The Distributor, we profiled smart grid success stories with the Ministry of Energy and highlighted many other innovative efforts by LDCs from the EDA’s vision paper, The Power to Connect. These stories demonstrated that LDCs, some with support from the EDA’s commercial and affiliate members, are essentially transforming themselves from one-way distributors of electricity to operators of dynamic power networks within their communities. And, judging by the growing interest among energy stakeholders, academics and the media in our vision paper, we are increasingly being seen as thought-leaders in the future of distribution.

“Ontario’s electricity distribution sector is a living example of this recipe for success as we stand on the cusp of truly great innovation.”

Vinay Sharma

Recognizing that innovation across an organization delivers better outcomes, this issue of The Distributor offers a snapshot of innovation and the resulting success stories from different areas of the utility business.

FEATURE STORIES:

Recognizing that innovation across an organization delivers better outcomes, this issue of The Distributor offers a snapshot of innovation and the resulting success stories from different areas of the utility business, including public relations, customer service, operations, technology and human resources. In celebration of innovation, some of these topics will be addressed at the EDA’s new Energy Business Innovation Conference on October 25, 2017. Seven compelling member stories are featured in this issue, showcasing the sector’s forward-thinking and innovative capabilities in all areas of business:

• ENW/IN Utilities’ Powerful Partners Campaign is an example of how to effectively build stronger relationships with the community by employing multiple, credible voices.
• As part of its innovation policy, Greater Sudbury Utilities (GSU) has allocated substantial physical space to support innovative team projects that can grow the company and maintain GSU as an efficient, productive and interesting place to work.
• The Hydro Ottawa app provides customers with easy access to their accounts right at their fingertips. Personalized insights on energy usage, conservation tips, billing history and outage information are just some of the features this app offers.
• Veridian Connections’ new GIS viewer web application – known as my.alerts – allows system operators to recognize outages and restore power faster. It also communicates key information to staff, customers and community officials.
• Alectra’s decision to deploy PowerAssist, a 24/7/365 call center, ensures customers can always speak with a live agent during an outage.
• Oshawa PUC, with support from technology partner Hexagon, made strategic investments in its outage management system and mobile software to support field crews and improve communication with customers.
• Oakville Hydro is benefitting from Energy Ottawa’s state-of-the-art cable testing technology, which helps utilities assess the health of their aging assets and stretch their asset management budget by deferring unnecessary replacement.

We are also pleased to feature an article from the Ontario Energy Board on its Cyber Security Framework. Our members provided input into this major initiative to ensure the sector can leverage the power of data while ensuring its systems, networks and customer information are protected.

I hope that reading these accounts will inspire new ideas that turn challenges into opportunities. As long as the passion for innovation stays strong, we can deliver lasting change and contribute to a stronger, more resilient electricity system for our communities and for Ontario.

“As long as the passion for innovation stays strong, we can deliver lasting change and contribute to a stronger, more resilient electricity system for our communities and for Ontario.”

Vinay Sharma
Ontario’s energy sector is continually evolving with growing reliance on new technology and automation to perform business transactions and system operations. Together with the increased use of third-party service providers and the increasing number of external entities that interface with the distribution system, Ontario’s energy sector is becoming more exposed to cyber-risks.

In response, the Ontario Energy Board (OEB) has undertaken a cyber security policy consultation to facilitate the development of an industry framework leveraging distributor best practices and international frameworks to enhance assurance that Ontario’s electrical and natural gas distributors, and transmission companies with non-bulk transmission systems are taking appropriate actions to meet their security, reliability and privacy obligations. Distributors, as do other regulated businesses, already have obligations to manage cyber security and privacy, and have taken actions to develop their cyber security postures, based on their own risk assessment. However, there is a “lack of consistent cyber security postures, based on their own risk assessment”.

Key ideas in the proposed framework that are set out in the Staff Report and Whitepaper, include the innovative approach of combining three authoritative methodologies (NIST 1, C2M2 2, and Privacy by Design (Pbd) 3) that are not prescriptive; that are tailored to the electricity sector. The framework is flexible enough that other frameworks can be used by other critical infrastructure sectors and is easily mapped to it; is outcome-based, so that risks can be self-assessed and identified; and is designed to guide a distributor to assess and define their inherent risk profile. A distributor would then be able to self-assess and identify their actual cyber maturity level and any security gaps. These results would form the basis for the distributor’s plans to address cyber security threats and certify its cyber readiness. The OEB staff have indicated that the framework provides an approach that supports consistent assessment and reporting of cyber security maturity and readiness to the OEB.

The following figure provides an illustrative overview of the proposed framework methodology.

### Key Features of the Framework

- **Leverage an existing framework** that is being used by other critical infrastructure sectors and is flexible enough that other frameworks can be easily mapped to it.
- **Apply distribution business criteria** to the framework to make it directly applicable to the sector, and easy to apply through the use of a tool kit.
- **Outcome-based cyber security objectives** that are not prescriptive.
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- **Ease of use** to guide a distributor to assess and define their inherent risk profile.
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Comments on the staff report and proposed framework will be accepted until July 15, 2017. Following feedback, the framework will be finalized by the CSWG, and supporting regulatory changes will be developed and implemented.

With the sector establishing and evolving the framework to manage cyber security, distributors can employ the framework and supporting tool kit to advance and report their maturity. These activities will assure the OEB and consumers that the industry is taking appropriate action with respect to their security, reliability and privacy obligations. OEB staff is recommending that progress reporting be made by each distributor within the three months of when the final framework is issued, followed by annual cyber security certifications.

To encourage sector collaboration, OEB staff’s proposals include a requirement for mandatory participation in a “Cyber Security Information Sharing Forum” (CSIF) where the industry comes together to promote sector collaboration, awareness and training, and the establishment of an industry-led advisory committee that would assume the ongoing management and evolution of the framework and the CSIF, similar to Regional Planning for Electricity Infrastructure and the Electronic Business Transaction (EBT) standards.

Addressing Ontario’s cyber security posture in our electricity distribution system is a critical component of how we can enhance the overall security and reliability of our energy sector. The OEB has appreciated the high degree of engagement of the distributors in the development of this proposed framework. For more information on the framework process please visit: [Protecting Privacy of Personal Information and the Reliable Operation of the Smart Grid in Ontario](https://www.nerc.com/).
How do you cultivate a workplace that encourages staff to work on innovative projects, improves customer satisfaction and uses your current assets in the best possible way to build value for your shareholder and the community?

Creating a real-life answer to that question was what the Board of Directors of Greater Sudbury Utilities (GSU) had in mind when they developed and formally adopted a Corporate Innovation Policy in April 2016, making GSU one of the first Canadian community-owned utilities to do so. That framework led to The Workshop, GSU’s Innovation and Collaboration Centre, which launched on March 31, 2017.

The Workshop is a physical space inside GSU, allocated for innovative team projects. It is located in a recently renovated area of the building, brightened and equipped with various types of workspaces and development tools to facilitate cooperative work. However, The Workshop is also a physical embodiment of the process of taking ideas from origin to end-product by working in multi-departmental teams, which often include external community partners, such as local businesses and post-secondary educational institutions.

“We view The Workshop as a huge opportunity,” says Frank Kallonen, CEO of GSU. “We think it’s a great way to enhance our customer experience, eliminate pain points in our organization and increase cost effectiveness by reducing costs or increasing revenues.”

“We believe we are creating a value proposition for our staff, our customers, our shareholder and the communities we serve.”

GSU Board Chair Mark Signoretti

“Getting a project into the concept, develop software for idea submission and create a process to curate the ideas, get input from other staff and develop business cases for those that seem most worthwhile.

“Getting a project into the Workshop will be something that anyone in any of our companies can do,” says Innovation Officer Andrew Athanasopoulos. “Not all ideas will make it. We’ll pick the ones that have the greatest benefit, value or potential for success, and give teams training and finite periods of time to develop business plans for their ideas and move their projects forward, reporting on progress regularly.

“Right now, our process is open to our employees, and we’ll invite community partners as opportunities arise,” adds Athanasopoulos.

“Eventually, we expect to open the idea portal to the community.”

“As a board, we wanted to enhance our culture of innovation, creativity and collaboration within the organization—making it a dynamic company to do business with and an exciting place to work,” says GSU Board Chair, Mark Signoretti. “We believe we are creating a value proposition for our staff, customers, shareholder and the communities we serve.”

Energy Minister, Glenn Thibeault, who is also MPP for Sudbury, attended the opening of The Workshop and thought the innovation centre fit well with provincial goals to broaden energy sources. “I’ve been travelling through the province...and the way energy is evolving, it’s not just going to be about electricity anymore, and it shouldn’t be. We have fossil fuels and all of this other technology that’s happening,” Thibeault said. “It’s going to change the way we use energy.

Greater Sudbury Utilities has always been a leader in that and it’s great to see this workshop open up. What they’re going to do is actually innovate technology here.”

“We will have successes, we already have a promising project underway but we will also have some projects that don’t work out,” says Kallonen. “We expect that. But if some fail, they’ll fail early, and minimize our risk. The point is, nothing changes unless you change the way you do things. You can’t get better unless you figure out ways to be better. That’s what The Workshop is all about.”

Athanasopoulos adds, “The big story will actually be in five or 10 years, when we are talking about projects and products coming to market that were driven by our employees and our community partners, innovations that improve the day-to-day lives of our customers and our staff. The slogan fits the goal: Good Ideas Made Real.”

For more information on The Workshop, and The Workshop Innovation Video, visit www.gsuinc.ca/theworkshop.

ABOUT GREATER SUDBURY UTILITIES

The GSU Group includes regulated local distribution company “Greater Sudbury Hydro Inc.” which serves approximately 47,400 electricity customers in Greater Sudbury and West Nipissing, water heater rental company “@home Energy”, telecommunications company “Agilis Networks”, and renewable energy company “Convergen.”
Hydro Ottawa's innovative new app elevates the customer experience

By: Hydro Ottawa

There are plenty of electricity management, billing and power outage apps on the market, but few offer consumers all of these features in one, easy-to-use and customizable tool. That’s why Hydro Ottawa recently introduced a mobile app which allows its customers to monitor their electricity usage, see estimated costs, access their household billing information and find out about current power outages.

“Improving the experience of our customers is a core Hydro Ottawa business strategy,” says Julie Lupinacci, Chief Customer Officer. “Through our customer surveys and feedback, we know that many residential customers want the convenience of a mobile app that shows them how to save money on their electricity bills. This innovative app delivers the electricity conservation advice that will help them to do just that.”

Hydro Ottawa worked with a provider of cloud-based solutions for utilities and consumers, to adapt the language, look and feel of the provider’s advanced electricity management platform for the Ottawa market. The new app reports electricity consumption data in near-real-time, offering ‘High Usage Alerts’ that tell customers when their electricity usage is significantly higher than normal.

It can also pinpoint the likely cause of a spike in usage. For example, the app can help customers detect if their heating and cooling costs are high and then determine the potential culprit such as a furnace fan or an air-conditioner that’s running longer than usual.

By analyzing individual consumption patterns, the app further provides personalized electricity saving tips to customers including a “Ways to Save” button. For example, customers learn that if they use an advanced power bar with a timer to power down their computer at night or while they’re at work, they can significantly reduce the annual energy usage of their computer. They can reduce their overall home heating and cooling costs by up to 10 per cent each season: in the summer, if they set their home thermostat to 25°C when at home and 28°C when away, and in the winter by setting the thermostat to 20°C when at home and 18°C overnight.

In addition, the app uses patented analytics to enable customers to track the electricity consumption and cost of individual home appliances, without the need for any hardware, such as sensors. The app can break down a customer’s electricity usage into as many as 12 appliance categories. This feature enables customers to track the usage of each category over the course of the year and to see how their usage changes based on the season, the weather and their behaviour. These savings can grow significantly if a customer decides to reduce or shift their electricity usage. Upgrade their appliances, install better insulation or make other improvements to the energy efficiency of their homes.

The app provides immediate insights as well. As soon as customers log in, for example, they can view their ‘Always On’ usage – a summary of the electricity consumed by devices even when turned off, such as computers, phone chargers and televisions. With the ‘Neighbourhood Comparison’ feature, customers can also benchmark their usage against that of similar homes in their area.

In addition to these electricity management insights, the Hydro Ottawa app allows customers to see the estimated cost for the electricity portion of their bills, which is updated daily based on their home’s actual usage. Customers can also access their account balance and review their billing history over the past two years to discover trends in their usage from bill to bill.

Hydro Ottawa’s power outage map is available for viewing on the app as well. This map is updated every 15 minutes with information on power outages affecting ten or more customers living within 200 metres of each other. It details the location, type of outage, number of customers affected and the estimated time when power will be restored. It also confirms when crews have arrived at the site of the outage.

Hydro Ottawa customers who have downloaded the new app report that they find it intuitive and helpful in understanding how they use electricity and how they can reduce their costs. “Moving forward, we will continually enhance the app’s features based on customer feedback,” says Lupinacci. “That’s vital to giving our customers an exceptional experience.”

The new app is available in English or French to Hydro Ottawa residential customers and can be downloaded for free through the Apple App Store and the Google Play Store.

ABOUT HYDRO OTTAWA

Hydro Ottawa delivers electricity to more than 324,000 homes and businesses in Ottawa and Casselman. For 100 years, Hydro Ottawa has reliably supplied its customers with power, building and investing in the local electric grid. Proudly municipally owned, Hydro Ottawa contributes to the well-being of the community we serve. Its innovative services help customers manage their account and energy use.
Innovating sensibly

By: Hexagon and Oshawa Power and Utilities Corporation

Highly detailed and accurate real-time data – that’s exactly what Oshawa Power and Utilities Corporation (“Oshawa Power”) needs to consistently deliver on its promise to be one of Ontario’s lowest-distribution rate providers.

“We pride ourselves on our ability to ‘innovate sensibly’ and that means we insist on proven technology that delivers the promised results,” says Ivan Labricciosa, CEO, Oshawa Power. “True innovation is doing something better with existing, low-cost technology.”

Implementing technology must involve collaboration between our highly specialized staff and vendors to ensure that we are providing our customers with the best service,” adds Roger Ersil, Manager of Metering and Operations, Oshawa Power. “Hexagon worked with Oshawa Power to implement an outage management system (OMS) that works and meets our needs.”

Oshawa Power is one of the few utilities that has brought SCADA, and smart meter data and full asset information in real-time into a single OMS. Oshawa Power’s outage management activities and statistics are driven directly from Hexagon’s OMS using all sources of accurate, real-time information.

“We get it done right and on time thanks to Hexagon, whose experience in our industry is evident in the technology they’ve built to meet our specific needs,” says Labricciosa. “Most effective technology has been around for years now. Hexagon provided the integration and support that allowed us to apply that technology in innovative ways that benefit our customers, stakeholders and shareholders.”

At Oshawa Power, data is recognized as the knowledge that drives every decision. As Labricciosa points out, truly innovative thinkers rely on advanced analytics to get the most out of infrastructure that may be old, but still useful - unlike those who systematically justify extraordinary expenditures using the “run-to-fail” and “aging infrastructure” arguments.

Unfortunately, utilities are struggling with capital programs and tend to use failing infrastructure statistics to support their replacement “asks”. They are being asked to do more with the same – precisely what Oshawa Power is trying to do.

“Good data ensures you make the right decision at the right time and for the right reasons,” says Labricciosa. “The solutions provided by Hexagon help us identify lower-cost, preventive actions in one place to ensure predicted functionality well into the future.”

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DRIVING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION EFFICIENTLY

Hexagon’s technology helps Oshawa Power improve customer service at a lower cost. It allows the utility to better predict issues that can be resolved before they escalate into outages and efficiently allocate human and other resources. It also provides accurate, real-time status reports on a broad range of information, from usage to repairs.

“Confidence in our outage predictions has led to more confidence in how we use automation. Oshawa Power dispatches crews directly from our system and our crews have all of the information they need to locate the cause of an outage and make the repair,” says Ersil. “Dispatching crews is normally done by control room staff. With Hexagon’s technology, our field crews can communicate to our customers.”

“Transparency is more vital than ever before and the accuracy of the information conveyed has a profound impact on our credibility and public perceptions of our customer service and operations,” says Labricciosa. “We absolutely rely on this technology to allow us to tell interested parties what’s really happening using their preferred mode of communications – that’s what builds trust and confidence in Oshawa Power.”

As a result of that transparency and the setting and meeting of expectations, Oshawa Power’s customer satisfaction ratings have averaged 92 to 93 per cent over the past two years. For example, if there is a long hold time in the customer service queue, Oshawa Power informs the customers so that they can plan based on the hold times. Likewise, Labricciosa constantly encourages employees to take five seconds to snap and post a photo to social media because customers want to know what’s happening in the field.

“When they see the size of the tree resting on that downed line, then see the progress the crew has made in removing it, Oshawa Power and its crews get the kudos from its community.”

“We insist on proven technology that delivers promised results”
says Labricciosa. “When they see what our crews are really up against, they’re much more understanding – the proof really is in the visuals and the results.”

Oshawa Power has maintained a very high efficiency ranking in its utility operation and customer service scores according to the Ontario Energy Board performance measures. This has ensured that the company’s distribution rates remain one of Ontario’s lowest. Labricciosa attributes this success to Oshawa Power’s customer-focused, innovative employees who have successfully leveraged the available solutions and support from firms such as Hexagon.

ABOUT OSHAWA POWER
Oshawa Power and Utilities Corporation is a mid-size distributor of electricity serving more than 58,000 customers over 150 square kilometres in Ontario.

ABOUT HEXAGON
Hexagon is a leading global provider of information technologies that drive productivity and quality across geospatial and industrial enterprise applications.

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The CIS - Customer Information System, MDM - Meter Data Management and ERP have a common architecture to share real-time data for decisions across the Utility Organization.

Customer driven CIS functionality, the Configurable CIS Rules Engine and Automated Templates increase billing accuracy/efficiency and reduce administrative costs.

JOMAR has implemented On-Premise and on the JOMAR Private Cloud for Electrical and Water Utilities.

OMS – JOMAR Support provides AMI Meter instantaneous voltage and current Ping for:
• locating outages • rapid crew dispatching • efficient power restoration • power quality studies

Third Party Cyber Security Software is integrated with the JOMAR Private Cloud to reduce the risk to critical private data and company facilities.

The MDM Configurable Business Rules Engine retrieves data from the MDM Repository for CIS, monitoring AMI Network Health and Meter Alarms, SCADA and GIS.

CIS and fully integrated MDM Software are designed to meet the challenges of evolving Innovative Utility Services.
Veridian’s innovative web application enhances outage communications

By: Chris Mace, Corporate Communications Representative and Maged Yackoub, Manager, Operations Information Systems

Like most local electricity distribution companies (LDCs) in south central Ontario, Veridian and its customers were significantly impacted by the severe ice storm of December 2013. While the storm caused widespread power outages and inconvenienced many people, it also served as a catalyst for a complete review of Veridian’s storm readiness. This review and the resulting initiatives are providing ongoing benefits to the utility’s customers.

Since 2014, Veridian has significantly improved many areas of its operations. These include better design standards, greater and more reliable system automation, and more robust tree trimming practices. However, from a customer perspective, perhaps the most visible improvement has been the launch of a mobile and tablet friendly online outage map, coupled with an innovative GIS application that supports a comprehensive outage notification system known as ‘myalerts’.

“Over the past several years, Veridian has successfully pursued improvements in both system reliability and customer outage communications, which together are primary drivers of customer satisfaction,” explains Rob Scarffe, Executive Vice President, Customer Services and Information Technology. “Today’s customers are demanding proactive communications with relevant, timely and accurate outage information, and Veridian is providing them with the tools and information they seek in real-time.”

When an outage occurs on Veridian’s system, a system operator uses the GIS application to highlight the affected area to capture the customers impacted by the event. The operator then activates an online form and enters the date and time of the outage, estimated time of restoration (if known), cause of the outage and the crew status (dispatched or on site). Once completed, the application immediately and automatically notifies my.alert registrants by way of their selected means of communication (email, text message and/or voicemail). The information also automatically updates Veridian’s outage map, outage hotline and twitter feed simultaneously.

More than 1,400 customers have registered for myalerts since early November 2016, and feedback has been very positive. According to Falguni Shah, Veridian’s Vice President, Operations, “Customers appreciate this new service and the efforts we’re making to improve communications during power outages. We are delivering on the promises we made to customers and communities following the ice storm – we’re upgrading our communications channels, providing more timely information, enhancing system automation and improving customer education.”

Industry representatives and Ontario’s LDC community have taken notice of the GIS application. The platform was recognized by URISA Ontario (Urban and Regional Information Systems Association) at its 2016 annual general meeting when Veridian received the Best Web GIS – Bronze award. Since then, Veridian’s Operations Information Systems department staff has responded to numerous requests for meetings with others interested in the platform. The head of the department, Maged Yackoub, has been happy to discuss the platform’s development and its capabilities.

Yackoub takes pride in the approach Veridian chose in the development of its GIS application. “The traditional method for enabling customer communication has been to engage an outage management system vendor and commission them to install large outage management solutions that can communicate with customers. These solutions can end up costing hundreds of thousands of dollars. We did the opposite, we started with communicating with customers and worked backwards, adding functionality that was required along the way.”

Veridian’s outage management suite was developed by the utility’s Operations Information Systems team using Esri’s ArcGIS Server, Microsoft’s BizTalk Server, Bing Cognitive Services and Message Technologies Inc.

Veridian’s Maged Yackoub and his GIS Team have been instrumental in building and deploying the utility’s outage communication platforms, including my.alerts.
Boosting Oakville Hydro’s asset management plan with state-of-the-art cable tests

By: Energy Ottawa

Asset managers, responsible for prudently spending as part of a utility’s distribution system plan, often seek to maximize their capital dollars. Looking to innovate, Oakville Hydro recently completed a pilot project of a non-destructive method to diagnose the health of its XLPE cable.

“Oakville Hydro’s previous practice was to replace cable at the end of its financial useful life,” says the utility’s Chief Operating Officer Mike Brown. “Continuing this process of destructive testing to find out where potential cable failures would occur seemed to be like a lose-lose game for us.”

That’s where Energy Ottawa’s state-of-the-art cable testing service comes in. Developed by the National Research Council Canada (NRC), the Government of Canada’s premier research and technology organization, this technology diagnoses the health of XLPE cables in a non-destructive way. Unlike other methods, the testing does not reduce the remaining cable life.

“With the data from this cable testing, asset managers can make a more informed decision on what assets need to be replaced first,” explains Glenn Magill, General Manager of Infrastructure Management with Energy Ottawa. “It is non-destructive in its nature of testing, it is traceable to an accuracy of plus-or-minus one per cent, and it is very fast to complete.”

Age is not the only indicator of an underground cable’s condition. Soil type, geography, circuit loading, water, and weather are all factors that, in addition to the infrastructure’s vintage, impact whether a cable has reached the end of its useful life or is not yet ready to be replaced.

“Replacement based on age is not an option,” says Magill. “So, utilities need more data to determine asset condition.”

NRC’s experts have been developing the technology for more than 30 years, and conducted over 10 years of testing and research on it for Hydro Ottawa, Energy Ottawa’s sister company. This extensive research and trial period was an important factor in Oakville Hydro’s consideration and part of the reason the testing technology stands in a league of its own in the industry.

“The features of this technology make it unique,” says Magill. “It is essentially the only type of testing of its kind that I know of globally.”

Unlike other cable testing solutions that deliver a pass-or-fail outcome, Brown says the health score from this technology means cables in good health can remain in service beyond their financial useful life, and funding can be optimized for maximum risk reduction.

“It was perfect because we have a lot of underground development, similar to Ottawa, and it’s at the age where we really don’t want to wait for failures to occur and create outages; we’d rather have more predictive capability,” says Brown.

“The unique, non-competitive space in which LDCs operate facilitates the sharing of best practices and working together...”

Oakville Hydro now has finite cable health indexes for about 80 cable segments on its distribution system. “Using these results, the team can now plan a mitigation strategy for how to deal with either replacement or rejuvenation of the cables that are at an advanced state of condition,” says Magill.

To that end, Oakville Hydro is equipped with the health score to inform a long-term cable investment strategy that optimizes both spending and risk reduction. Brown says they plan to incorporate this quantifiable score into their Asset Management Process for project planning and optimization – a pre-emptive approach unavailable to them using the former model.

What made the recent pilot with Energy Ottawa even more of a win was the level of collaboration among the peer utilities throughout the process – a model easily replicable by neighbouring LDCs facing similar asset woes.

The unique, non-competitive space in which LDCs operate facilitates the sharing of best practices and working together, says Brown. “This is absolutely one of the best examples of a fulsome, high-scale level of collaboration,” he concludes. “This is the way it should work in our industry and this, I think, is a really telling example of that.”

ABOUT ENERGY OTTAWA

Energy Ottawa’s Infrastructure Management Division offers a range of services, including cable testing, power quality monitoring and engineering solutions. Energy Ottawa is a wholly owned subsidiary of Hydro Ottawa Holding Inc.

ABOUT OAKVILLE HYDRO

Oakville Hydro delivers reliable and safe electricity to more than 69,000 households and businesses in Oakville. Oakville Hydro received the 2015 Performance Excellence Award from the Electricity Distributors Association (EDA), recognizing the organization as an exceptional leader in the industry.

Powerline maintainer hooks up equipment to transformer to perform non-destructive test.
Customer experience reaches new heights with PowerAssist 24/7 outage call centre

By: Alectra Utilities

Today’s consumers can fill their vehicle gas tanks, shop for groceries and pick up prescription medications just as easily at four o’clock in the afternoon as at four o’clock in the morning. Online, search engines have conditioned users to expect immediate results and have their questions answered just by “Googling”. Electricity customers’ expectations for power outage communications are no different. A parent getting a child ready for school on a weekday morning, the manager of a local manufacturing facility with employees standing idle late at night, and every sports fan watching a game on television, each expects to contact the local distribution company (LDC) if the power is out, find out when it’s going to be back and get updates. To meet these expectations, many LDCs, including Alectra Utilities, have come to depend on technology to do the heavy lifting of providing outage information.

THE CHALLENGE
But there was something missing. Surveys and focus groups have overwhelmingly indicated that having the option to speak with a real person in real time is a common expectation of customers and stakeholders, despite LDCs’ best efforts to provide them with reporting capabilities and/or power restoration information through technology-based solutions.

For one of Alectra Utilities’ legacy LDCs, PowerStream, the challenge was to establish a call centre that operated 24 hours a day. After business hours, on weekends and on statutory holidays the system control room was minimally-staffed, so when the power went out, those system controllers needed to clearly focus on restoring power and not be distracted by incoming telephone calls. The technology was available, people were not.

THE VISION
The vision for this initiative was to establish a 24/7, outsourced and outage-focused, communications solution – scalable to any utility event and cost-effective – that was staffed with knowledgeable, utility-trained agents, each able to triage customer calls and provide well-informed responses. PowerAssist solution go to www.Util-Assist.com.

Since its inception, several other utilities have signed on to receive the service, including the remaining Alectra Utilities legacy LDCs. By the end of March 2017, PowerAssist was covering the entire Alectra Utilities service territory.

To ensure that high levels of performance are being achieved and maintained, Alectra Utilities monitors its technology-based power outage communications systems, PowerAssist services, and incoming call traffic on a monthly basis. Continually confirming the quality of the information stream from the Outage Management System to the Interactive Voice Recognition telephone system ensures that the majority of callers are satisfied with the automated solution and only a small percentage opt to be transferred to a live agent.

Electricity is said to travel at the speed of light, and today, so do customer expectations for information when their power goes out. Alectra Utilities is doing business better and increasing customer satisfaction with PowerAssist. At the same time that a system controller is responding to a “breaker open” condition, around-the-clock PowerAssist agents are interacting with callers and responding to customer tweets.

ABOUT ALECTRA’S FAMILY OF COMPANIES
Alectra’s family of energy companies distributes electricity to nearly one million customers in Ontario’s Greater Golden Horseshoe Area and provides innovative energy solutions to these and thousands more across Ontario. The Alectra family of companies includes Alectra Inc. (Mississauga), Alectra Utilities Corporation (Hamilton) and Alectra Energy Solutions (Vaughan).

ABOUT POWERASSIST
PowerAssist currently provides around-the-clock power outage call centre communications services to nine Ontario LDCs with a combined total of 1.2 million customers and continues to diversify by adding more utilities to their client base. To learn more about the PowerAssist solution go to www.Util-Assist.com.

"...to speak with a real person in real time is a common expectation of customers and stakeholders..."
True power lies in working together

Powerful partners add value to what ENWIN delivers

By: ENWIN Utilities

In a unique twist on building partnerships, ENWIN Utilities Ltd. is asking customers to think about the value of what the utility delivers to the community – and not just the reliable electricity and water for which the utility is known. It’s an unusual approach which engages customers in partnerships for planning, growth, innovation, safety, emergency response, education, technology, entertainment and community support.

ENWIN’s Powerful Partners campaign is based on the belief that partnerships developed over years of service to the community provide the best stories – and that the most powerful way to tell these stories is through the voices and images of those partners.

“Our partnerships are powerful,” explains ENWIN’s Manager of Corporate Communications, Barbara Peirce Marshall. “That message resonates best when we tell our stories together.”

The company’s 2016 strategic planning confirmed its focus on people — customers, partners, stakeholders and employees. From a communications perspective, that translated to a need to demonstrate the value of relationships developed and maintained over the years.

As part of the campaign, ENWIN reached out to its many partners — businesses, non-profits, first responders, educational institutions and stakeholders — asking for stories and images that illustrate the power of their relationships within the community. The response was immediate and enthusiastic, painting a vivid picture, not only of the intrinsic value of the electricity and water delivered by the utility, but of the added value of its partnerships.

The challenge, of course, was to publicly demonstrate the value of these relationships, without incurring additional expense to ensure non-essential costs were kept as low as possible.

By thinking in terms of stories, images and partnerships, rather than traditional marketing and advertising copy and placement, which can get expensive, the campaign strategy leveraged image-based feature articles interwoven with the key message that “true power lies in working together”.

ENWIN developed a communication template for its partners to ensure consistent messages and exposure levels for each story. The template facilitated efforts to deliver on earned and digital media, event-based storytelling, print advertising and joint public relations initiatives. Stories would be developed and disseminated jointly, using available resources. By combining their existing media and advertising capabilities, ENWIN and its partners would achieve maximum message reach at minimal cost to each.

The narratives would showcase a variety of collaborative efforts, such as construction and maintenance of essential infrastructure and water towers; teaching the next generation of employees through the education system; and overall community support such as volunteering and funding of important services.

ENWIN also identified educational partnerships among its most fruitful and productive relationships. As soon as the utility opened the dialogue with educators, the stories started to emerge, along with images that illustrated the power of working together.

Some of these stories speak about ENWIN’s contributions to the quality of the educational experience such as scholarships, mentorships, program development and teaching — leading to internship and employment. Others speak to the development of new technology – like a corrosion-inhibiting cold spray technology, developed by the University of Windsor’s Institute for Diagnostic Imaging Research, tested on ENWIN vehicles, and now used by ENWIN to prolong the lifespan of its Hanna Street water tower.

Kristen Morris, Acting Manager, Co-operative Education Services at the University of Windsor, has witnessed the value of these partnerships, and their impact on the students.

“Our students truly benefit from the experience and mentorship they receive...”

ENWIN believes that these partnerships are good for the students, the college, the utility and the community. St. Clair College Marketing Professor Nicole Rourke agrees.

“Our students get inspired when they are given the opportunity to help solve complex problems for real companies like ENWIN,” she says. “It is one thing to read about cases in a text, but an entirely different learning experience when students are able to interact with a community partner.”

Professor Rourke’s second year students have just finished a marketing research project with ENWIN that will benefit the local community by providing the utility with insight into customer knowledge, behavior and communications preferences related to electrical safety.

“This information is invaluable in our efforts to communicate with our customers,” says Ms. Peirce Marshall. “We will be able to serve our community better, thanks to the work accomplished by these students. That’s a story worth telling.”

ABOUT ENWIN UTILITIES LTD.

ENWIN Utilities Ltd. (ENWIN) is the licensed electricity distribution company serving customers in the City of Windsor, responsible for the ownership and operation of the local electricity distribution grid. ENWIN is also the licensed operator for the water distribution system owned by Windsor Utilities Commission.
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The Power Workers’ Union: The **Voice** Of Ontario’s Electricity Sector Workers

The Power Workers’ Union (PWU) takes great pride in representing the large majority (over 15,000) of the men and women who work in Ontario’s electricity production and delivery sector.

Our members work hard, 24 hours per day, 7 days per week to ensure that electricity customers have the power they need when they need it.

The PWU is the voice of electricity workers in Ontario. Since the initial electrification of homes and businesses in our province, the PWU has continuously worked to set and improve the standards for public and worker electrical safety. We continue to negotiate the best in sustainable wages, benefits and working conditions for the highly-skilled workers in our industry.

We work closely with our employers to help them build and operate vibrant, successful business operations in changing times and we work with government and regulators to foster electricity policy development that works for customers, electricity businesses and employees.

Take a look at the Power Workers’ Union – we think you’ll like what you see.

To learn more about us, please go to www.pwu.ca

**FROM THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO HELP KEEP THE LIGHTS ON.**