



What if the energy technology disruption cloud had a silver lining?

This week, I attended the Utilities Pan European Summit, held by the industry analysts, IDC, in Italy. The event gathered more than 45 utilities executives, representing both distribution and retail parts of the utility business. The speakers - including myself - all evoked the transformation in the industry.

“Nothing will ever go this slowly again”, said the speaker from Ericsson, ironically. Interestingly though, and perhaps the first time for a decade, the messages and stories shared were not about insurmountable change, or the demise of the utility business model. The mood from companies such as UKPN, E.ON (UK), and Edison Energia, was determined and positive.

You could wonder if the beautiful Lake Como and Italian cuisine influenced the speakers. At the end of 2014, Accenture, one of my company’s shareholders, published a report asking if energy demand disruption could be fatal. This week also, they released a new edition. Almost half (45 percent) of utility industry executives surveyed worldwide, reported that the traditional electricity distribution model is no longer fit-for-purpose. Nevertheless, while utilities warn of increasing pressure on supply reliability and prices, according to Accenture’s Digitally Enabled Grid research, executives seem to be looking the energy technology disruption in the face and evaluating how they can manage it... even embrace it.

IDC encouraged the utility participants to look forwards, and offered advice with their Seven Habits of Effective Digital Performers. A number aligned with what I shared with the audience later in the day:

Develop platforms, not products

The New York REV is showing how grid modernization and integration of an increasing number of DER can evolve towards multi-party transactions and distributed market operations. With other service providers, our US team is working with a customer on the East coast to help build an intelligent network platform to provide safe, reliable and efficient electric services, by integrating diverse energy resources.

The transition to frameworks of the future, such as those articulated in the New York REV strategy, will foster broad market activity by enabling active customer and third party engagement that is aligned with the wholesale market and bulk power system.

Create business ecosystems

My EMEA lead for Analytics often jokes with customers, “don’t do this at home on your own!” It is just not possible to transform, as fast as companies need to today, by developing and retaining the required know-how in-house. Where there is a need for solutions that meet precise utility needs, we prefer to work with partners, rather than re-inventing the wheel. As an example, we work with a Californian start-up, DataCapable, to integrate social media data-mining capability into outage management solutions.

Think differently

Are you “open for business”? It’s less about ownership and more about results. Open platforms could be a part of this, as well as open ecosystems. We are also working on open standards that enable more open architectures. Just earlier this month, the open field message bus (OpenFMB) architecture was ratified by the North American Energy Standards Board (NAESB). This can facilitate interoperable data exchange between distributed power systems devices on the electric grid’s field area networks. We have contributed to this standard development because it breaks away from traditional proprietary, centralized control concepts, facilitating greater interoperability and it will allow decisions to be made at the edge of the grid for faster responses to changing conditions.

While Lake Como was beautiful, it was too early in the season for a warm, spring day, but the sunshine was definitely there, trying to peak between the clouds. Perhaps it was a sign for the conference participants.

Get in touch

We have the skills, infrastructure and know-how to help utilities with the technology solutions needed when integrating renewables into the energy mix. Contact us today to start the conversation.

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About OMNETRIC Group

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