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Sherman+Reilly's Michael Dunn: The Utility Expo is Where We Go to Share Our Story With the Industry

By: Association of Equipment Manufacturers (AEM) staff

The utility industry is changing rapidly, and there's no better place to find the tools, trends and technologies driving its growth and development than The Utility Expo. With more than 850 companies and more than 200 product lines on display, there will be no shortage of cutting-edge products and expert insights at what's become the largest and fastest-growing trade show in the utility industry.

As exhibitors and attendees prepare for this year's show, we caught up with Mike Dunn, chairman and CEO of show exhibitor Sherman+Reilly, to discuss his organization's plans for the show, why prospective attendees should be there and much, much more.

What is Sherman+Reilly excited to showcase and share with attendees of The Utility Expo 2023?
Dunn: For this year's show, we're going to be showing more new products than any time in Sherman+Reilly's history. We're expanding our new Heritage line as well as our new and unique electric line of products. Quite frankly, we have a lot of products to showcase that have yet to see the light of day. And we're very excited to share them this coming September at The Utility Expo.

It's no secret exhibiting companies are always excited to share the latest and greatest product offerings with show attendees. And for us, The Utility Expo gives equipment end users a uniquely valuable opportunity to compare offerings by allowing them to get up close and personal and see for themselves. They can try out the unit, experience the user interface and understand the benefits of each piece of equipment. I would say that's probably the single driving force behind why we at Sherman+Reilly feel The Utility Expo outperforms any other show in the country.

It's been two years since The Utility Expo was last

held in Louisville. What are you most looking forward to about this upcoming edition of the show?

Dunn: The thing I look forward to most about this particular show, more so than anything else, are the reactions our customers have to what we're showing.

One example of what we're planning to share is a new concept on help videos that we've produced and embedded in our electric equipment. We came up with this concept recognizing that operators often neglect to read the manual and yet we still need to provide a method for them to learn the correct way to use a particular piece of equipment. Our solution is a new learning tutor... essentially, a series of 15-to-30-second videos covering approximately 20 topics key to equipment usage. So, when end users go to the display and need additional information, it gives you what you need to know to operate the unit safely and effectively. I'm pretty certain you won't see that anywhere else at The Utility Expo. We're also adding learning tutors as an option on our Heritage line of equipment.

We see it, frankly, as a game-changer in terms of how we support our customers, contractors and rental companies – all of whom being faced with significant challenges related to liability and safety. And, for us at Sherman+Reilly, safety has always been at the root of our product designs. The Utility Expo is always growing and changing with time. How does your organization grow and change with it to ensure you get the most out of exhibiting at the show?

Dunn: The show has changed, but I'm not certain that our role has changed in terms of what we're at the show to accomplish. We'll have 38,000 square-feet with a whole lot of equipment on display. For us, there's no other opportunity anytime



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during the two years between The Utility Expo's where we can display a significant amount of equipment that allows us to tell our story. And when we tell our story to attendees of The Utility Expo, you can just see lightbulbs go on about how they can be smarter about what they're doing. We're thrilled to be able to exhibit at The Utility Expo and help make our customers more informed buyers.

You've shared why Sherman+Reilly will be at The Utility Expo this September. But why should prospective attendees make sure they're in attendance at the utility industry's largest trade show? Dunn: It's simple. If you're interested in researching and purchasing equipment, the Utility Expo is where you need to be. It's the show where everyone in the utility industry is at their best. It's an opportunity for companies to put their best foot forward and showcase the latest and greatest, as well as give the customer the opportunity to try out and compare different offerings. To me, it's one of the most exciting parts of our business. Utility infrastructure professionals can save 20 percent off their badge by using code NEWS20 when they register by September 25, 2023.

*About the Association of Equipment Manufacturers (AEM)
AEM is the North America-based international trade group representing off-road equipment manufacturers and suppliers with more than 1,000 companies and more than 200 product lines in the agriculture and construction-related industry sectors worldwide. The equipment manufacturing industry in the United States supports 2.8 million jobs and contributes roughly \$288 billion to the economy every year.*

About The Utility Expo

The Utility Expo is the largest event for utility professionals and construction contractors seeking comprehensive insights into the latest industry technologies, innovations and trends. The biennial trade show, known for equipment test drives and interactive product demonstrations will be September 26-28, 2023, in Louisville, Kentucky. For more information, visit www.utilityexpo.com.

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T&D Identification Products: Expectation Shifts to Lifetime Readability

By Del Williams

Utilities require critical safety signs, markers, and tags that are readable decades later, despite punishing environmental exposure

Whether at substations or in the field, electric utility transmission and distribution identification products such as safety signs, tags, and markers are critical to safe, efficient operation, maintenance, and repair. These brief warnings or instructions, comprised of letters, numbers, and symbols, must effectively convey key information to personnel. This is crucial not only to identify the location and type of equipment but also to protect utilities from the risk of personnel injury and litigation.

Unfortunately, traditional painted and laminated identification products frequently fade or delaminate when continually exposed to outdoor weather or punishing conditions. Solar UV, rain, snow, ice, and windblown debris as well as humidity and seasonal temperature fluctuations inevitably degrade these identification products in a matter of years.

Over time, outdoor exposure can cause painted and laminated numbers and symbols to peel or fade. Even supposedly durable products designed for this purpose can become unreadable over ten years or more. Consequently, when safety warnings, asset location, or identifiers are needed most, technicians may make mistakes or waste time.

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Given what is at stake, utilities are now increasingly shifting away from identification products that are marketed as long-lasting and durable but that have the potential to fade or peel, to those designed to withstand decades of abuse without becoming unreadable.

The Importance of Safety Signage

In the electrical utility industry, identification products are utilized just about everywhere.

In substations, signs often warn of arc flash and shock hazard, which OSHA states can result in “serious injury and even death.” Markers and tags typically specify when Lock Out Tag Out (LOTO) is necessary before the set-up, maintenance, service, or repair of energized equipment. Substation structure numbers are also necessary for rapid identification and servicing.

On large, high-voltage transmission towers crossing and direction signs signal trouble areas. Phase tags are also commonly used to indicate phase polarity on the towers, which is important because connecting the wrong phases can lead to dangerous

explosions, serious injury, and extended downtime. Transmission towers also utilize aerial observation pole tags for rapid identification and better visibility to aircraft.

Smaller, lower-voltage distribution lines deliver power to homes and businesses on smaller poles. Pole identification products, such as tags and markers, are used to track and identify assets, data, and other vital information. Pole tags can also be used to identify the pole’s owner, maintenance history, and other valuable data.

Transformers, whether in the substation or on poles also indicate phase with tags. Similarly, markers and signage are used to indicate LOTO situations.

Not Good Enough

Too many in the industry believe that their current identification products are “good enough” even as legibility becomes compromised over the years. However, the paint will fade and the laminate will peel on these products usually within five to ten years, requiring replacement.

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Yet inspecting and replacing illegible products seldom – if ever – occurs on a comprehensive and timely basis because it can be a time consuming, laborious process that is shortchanged in deference to higher priorities. Neglecting to do so, however, can lead to dangerous safety lapses as well as inefficient operation.

Designed for Lasting Safety

So, how can safety signage be designed and constructed to ensure readability after decades? The answer requires a shift in thinking. For applications with the longest lasting requirements, impermanent paints and laminates should be avoided in favor of much more durable solutions. The signage should also be constructed using robust substrate or embossed characters that can take a beating from Mother Nature.

As an example, one type of sturdy signage system developed for the industry, called EVERLAST by Tech Products, Inc., a leader in the manufacture of industrial identification products for 75 years, is made of thick, high impact polyolefin plastic with copy and pictograms that are permanently embedded through the entire thickness of the substrate.

Tech Products, Inc., which serves electric and gas utilities, telecom and cable companies, oil and gas pipelines, and OEMs, offers five legacy brands and approximately 10,000 diverse products for these industries.

The polyolefin plastic is impervious to sun, wind, rain, humidity, salt water, and temperature variations as well as fumes and acid or alkali solutions. The characters can be seen from a distance and have sharp contrast. The signage can be cut, scratched, even shot through with little or no effect to the embedded characters, which helps to ensure readability decades later.

Third-party certification validates the durability of this approach. UL performed numerous durability tests on the signs in compliance with UL and ASTM standards. When the signs were subjected to the equivalent of 43 years of UV exposure, salt spray, vibration, abrasion, and temperature variation, the test results showed no change in color or legibility.

Another effective method of creating permanent signage is to utilize embossing. Embossing creates raised characters in metal materials to improve legibility even when covered in dust, dirt, or even paint.

When lasting transmission and distribution markers are required, for example, deep embossed pole badge, pole inspection, and pole markers can be constructed of unpainted, embossed aluminum, brass, or stainless steel. The highly defined characters remain legible for the life of the pole.

Alternatively, on metal reflective pole tags, black characters can be screen printed on construc-



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tion-grade yellow or silver reflective sheeting so that it is durable, and UV stabilized. These tags can be used anywhere in areas that need to be seen with a flashlight.

For tight, confined spaces where close up reading is required, miniature markers with raised, 3D characters, called FastTags by Tech Products, Inc., can also be designed to remain legible even in low light, oily, or dusty environments. The raised, 3D characters are hot stamped with high quality UV stable foil and

are nonconductive and non-corroding, which is ideal for environments exposed to water such as utilities, offshore rigs, and sewer systems.

No replacing physical signage

Another reason these identification products need to last decades is they are sure to remain as valuable tools for utilities even as new technologies for asset management and maintenance are employed throughout the industry. Even with state-of-the-art technology like geographic information systems (GIS) and global positioning systems (GPS), electrical utilities will continue to require traditional physical identification products such as pole markers, for example.

Although pole tags are not mandated by regulations, many utilities choose to use them to assist with recovery efforts after a regional outage by still posting serialized GIS or GPS pole marking and numbering correspond to a pole's geographic location using GIS/GPS coordinates. During emergencies like hurricanes, mutual aid situations often arise where utility trucks from different regions are called on for assistance. These trucks may not have access to GIS or GPS location information, making pole tags essential for proper identification and location guidance.

Although electric utilities have long utilized identification products in the field or in substations, the potential that critical information could become obscured or unreadable in a matter of years is no longer acceptable as a standard. Even when not strictly mandated, utilities that opt to use innovative products designed to last for many decades can significantly improve safety and uptime, while reducing potential liability and litigation risk.

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By Del Williams

SCADA Master Serves as Data “Hub” for Enterprise Software Integration

To meet the requirements of small municipal utilities and co-ops, a leading SCADA substation automation platform has evolved to serve as a communication and coordination “hub” with third party enterprise software systems

For smaller municipal utilities and co-ops, it can be a challenge to upgrade and automate existing distribution substations and support infrastructure due to constraints in space, budget, labor, technical skills, and system compatibility. Many still have not installed SCADA systems for the remote management and control of multiple substations. Others have SCADA but seek to incrementally adopt increasingly essential enterprise software solutions such as outage management systems, dispatch software, advanced metering infrastructure, geographic information systems, and automatic line sectionalizing, adding to the difficulty. These enterprise systems are typically available from multiple third-party vendors, complicating integration with the existing systems typically found in small utilities. Large, investor-owned utilities (IOUs) can avoid integration issues since they generally procure comprehensive

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enterprise software packages...but these systems are too costly and complicated for smaller utilities. Co-ops and munis need affordable, scalable enterprise solutions that can access and share any of the data from the substation, seamlessly.

In response to that need, leading communication, and automation platforms – which for decades have served as the substation “hub” of SCADA systems – are now serving up valuable substation status information to third-party enterprise software through the adoption of established communication protocols such as MultiSpeak. In doing so, municipal utilities and co-ops can utilize the

enterprise software they need to increase system efficiency and reliability on their own timelines and budgets.

“By incorporating an established industry protocol like MultiSpeak, the SCADA master can disseminate critical information at the substation level that can improve the effectiveness and accuracy of enterprise software. This provides small municipal utilities and co-ops with a solution that facilitates the integration of third-party software into their overall operation that is ready and able to communicate with their SCADA system,” says Ray Wright, Senior VP, Marketing for NovaTech

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Automation, a substation automation company that has served the power transmission and distribution market for more than 40 years.

NovaTech's Orion Substation Automation Platform has long served the industry as a communication and automation processor that can connect to nearly any substation device in its native protocol, perform advanced math and logic, and securely present the source or calculated data to any number of clients in their own protocol. The Orion system can be integrated with any equipment, including competitors.

"The automation platform has always been an enterprise hub for in-substation data. As a SCADA Master, the platform can now also disseminate substation data into enterprise applications such as outage management software, GIS, dispatch, AMI, and AMR," says Wright.

According to Wright, NovaTech decided to incorporate MultiSpeak into the Orion substation platform after receiving repeated requests from customers. MultiSpeak was initially developed by The National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) in 2000 to facilitate communication between automated metering platforms and billing systems. Over the years, MultiSpeak has been refined into a common standard for integrating myriad enterprise software systems. Today, it is used by over 800 utilities in over 20 countries.

"We had dozens of customers that said MultiSpeak was a requirement. So, we wrote the spec,

and our engineering group incorporated it. Now smaller utilities do not have to purchase a costly, 'one-size fits all' enterprise software package – only what they need and can afford," says Wright.

NovaTech is now using MultiSpeak to share information with several leading outage management systems and will create protocol extensions to disseminate data to many other enterprise packages such as Dispatch, AMI, and GIS.

For co-ops and municipal utilities, incorporating an outage management system (OMS) can expedite a response to the community's concerns when a power outage occurs. Using MultiSpeak, Orion SCADA can provide breaker status to the OMS, simplifying configuration and implementation.

Dispatch software is another popular option and can facilitate more efficient dispatching of utility trucks and crews to make repairs during an outage or for routine maintenance tasks. This may include mapping, vehicle monitoring, routing, and real-time GPS tracking. Data from Orion SCADA can provide crews with additional indication of what needs to be repaired (i.e.-relay, switch, modem, AC supply, power supply, comm card, etc.) so they can be better prepared with needed spares and tools.

Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) and Automatic Meter Reading (AMR) systems allow electric utilities to collect and harness the power of smart meters for load monitoring, load control/demand

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response, distributed generation, and customer engagement. When AMI is combined with historical load data from SCADA devices, algorithms can be developed to monitor and alert utility employees of large load imbalances and corresponding voltage imbalance that can damage grid and customer devices and equipment.

To enhance communication and decision making, assets such as meters, utility poles, and pole and feeder mounted monitoring equipment may be mapped and coordinated through a GIS mapping company. The sharing of data via MultiSpeak between GIS and Dispatch, OMS and SCADA facilitates more efficient dispatching and routing of utility trucks and service crews. When provided with specific outage data from the SCADA Master, crews can also bring all necessary tools and materials to service the equipment, shortening the duration of any outage.

Fault location, isolation, and service restoration (FLISR) can also be expedited with full coordination between substation and enterprise data. FLISR technology can be used to automatically restore power to customers in the event of a permanent fault to restore service as quickly as possible. FLISR systems require exceptional coordination between technologies such as SCADA, OMS, distribution management systems, automated feeder switches and reclosers, line monitors, communication networks, as well as grid analytics, models, and data processing tools.

Despite the single-supplier attractiveness of comprehensive “one size fits all” enterprise software systems, their cost and complexity have traditionally presented major obstacles to implementation by smaller munis and co-ops. Alternatively, using “best-in-class” packages – for OMS, Dispatch, AMI, GIS, FLISR, and SCADA – and knitting them together into a complete system via MultiSpeak, is more economically justified and manageable for smaller utilities.

“The combination of best-in-class enterprise packages, a modern SCADA data hub, and MultiSpeak enable coops and munis to implement systems that rival the functionality and value of the larger IOU systems,” says Wright. “These utilities can add enterprise packages as needed, maybe starting small with SCADA and OMS, then adding Dispatch and others. Add the suppliers of these smaller, purpose-designed packages can move faster, enhancing functionality quickly. For example, the Orion SCADA data hub is offering new options for data dissemination including the ICCP protocol (for transferring data between SCADA/EMS systems) and new techniques for exporting archived data to analysis and reporting packages. Stay tuned for more.”

For more information on SCADA solutions from NovaTech Automation, visit www.novatechautomation.com or call (913) 451-1880.

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