

Editor's Corner

Don't. Say. Death Spiral.

By Barbara Vergetis Lundin

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So, I've mostly recovered from DistribuTECH, with just a lingering cold -- the gift many of you probably also brought home with you.



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Zpryme's Research Director H. Christine Richards was also there. It was she who pointed out who wasn't at DistribuTECH. Groups like Google, Nissan, Tesla, SolarCity -- those that "are [altering] or could significantly alter the industry weren't a part of the discussion," she noted, but "DistribuTECH is still very focused on the utility when there is a broader energy conversation that needs to happen."

One thing I noticed was that there were also relatively few utilities in attendance, compared to the overall number of attendees.

DistribuTECH's event website this year claimed, "the era of smart utilities is now." If that is true, where were they? Despite the utility focus of the conference, the real buzz was that out of some nearly 12,000 in attendance, only about 400 were utilities. Are the utilities representing those 400 the only smart ones? Are the rest on a downward (dare I say, Death) spiral?

Wait. Let me rephrase. If there's one thing I learned at DistribuTECH, whatever you do, don't mention the utility Death Spiral. It wouldn't really matter, anyway, if I did say Death Spiral, what with so few utilities there to hear me. But, if you don't want me to say Death Spiral, I won't say Death Spiral. Utilities are "transforming" -- at least a few of the more innovative ones. What I will put out there is, "survival of the service provider" and "without innovation and outside of the box thinking, the traditional utility will wither up and die."

The reason I say this, for utilities that weren't there, is that the notion of the customer as king and the need for utilities to become more customer-centric and service oriented, was front and center. It's not going away. Competition is building for utilities, whether they like it or not, from renewables providers to smart home services and everything in between. The message seemed clear: Innovate or die.

If that sounds like a Death Spiral, I'm very sorry. I. Didn't. Say. It.

-- Barbara L. Vergetis Lundin, Editor-in-Chief, Smart Grid News

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