

In Their Own Words:
**Clients Explain Why They Value
The Doble Client Committee Meetings**

“ ... I honestly believe what I heard at the client meetings helped us avert a catastrophic event.”

--Terry Albers, Roseville Electric

Terry is referring to the Doble Client Committee Meetings (the next one is scheduled for Phoenix, Arizona, September 24-29, 2006). Although tutorials are scheduled and attendees can earn CEUs, these gatherings are not seminars, nor is there an accompanying EXPO. So, what makes these meetings meaningful enough to warrant a statement like the one above?

It's all about who comes – and who doesn't.

For one thing, the meetings are open **only** to utility clients and testing/maintenance organizations. No manufacturers or vendors are permitted.

Next, the meetings attract a diverse group of utility maintenance engineers – some, with decades of experience and others who are newer to the industry and eager for feedback from industry veterans. Over a week-long period, they have a chance to interact, comfortably and productively.

Danny Bates of Alabama Power Company describes his experience:

“What I like best about these meetings is the informality. It's an opportunity to be part of a forum where people speak openly and honestly, *with no concerns about being overheard by manufacturers.*”

The format of these meetings definitely encourages a connection with industry colleagues in a relaxed atmosphere. As **Tom Kydd of Hydro One Networks, Inc.** maintains,

“The way I look at it, this is absolutely the only chance to talk with, maybe, 180 utilities – all under one roof, all in a single week. And because it is just utilities and not manufacturers, it's an open forum, with comfortable discussions.”

Danny Bates agrees:

“... you have more time to address issues, since the meetings are the whole point – they are not being squeezed in around conference presentations.”

And it's about access to the experts: the "best of the best."

The mix of attendees includes multi-decade veterans and newcomers alike, and, all tolled, engineers benefit from *hundreds of years of accumulated experience* on specific subjects. **John Troisi of New York Power Authority** describes his take on the meetings:

"We started attending the Client Committee Meetings about 25 years ago – obviously, we find them extremely useful. First of all, there's a wealth of information awaiting you at these meetings. The maintenance information alone is tremendously valuable to our company."

Topics covered and discussed in the meetings range include such inherently critical and timely subjects as:

- Apparatus Troubles and Failures (Transformers, Bushings, Circuit Breakers);
- Best Practices in Maintenance and Testing; and
- Utility Safety Practices.

Now that many prominent industry experts are nearing retirement, the meetings represent an *irreplaceable* opportunity to capture some of their acquired knowledge – before it is no longer available.

Funneling the knowledge.

With hundreds of utilities represented, the meetings become a funnel for a vast amount of general knowledge and first-hand experiences. **Steve Larson of Snohomish Public Utility District** puts it this way:

"A specific example where Doble meetings helped our company is through learning how to use Dissolved Gas Analysis (DGA) to diagnose Load Tap Changer (LTC) problems.

"In early 2006, we successfully used the DGA diagnosis to take several LTCs off line based on DGA results, and found significant coking that may have led to LTC failure if allowed to remain on line until their regularly scheduled maintenance came due."

He explains further:

"...in the meetings, we also learned about the new technology of Swept Frequency Response Analysis (SFRA). We purchased a Doble M5200 SFRA test unit recently and are taking baseline measurements on transformers when they are off line for maintenance. Just a few days ago, we had the chance to use SFRA as a second test to diagnose a failed transformer using a previous baseline test for comparison."

The range of information presented and shared is immense – and immensely practical. Knowing about an inherent apparatus problem before a failure occurs can save weeks of work, and contacts with industry peers can uncover resources which can help identify and resolve complex problems quickly and efficiently.

The value of knowing in advance.

The very structure of the meetings guarantees that utility maintenance engineers get advance notice of critical industry concerns and problems as they are beginning to take shape. While it may be years before there's a need to take action, you can return to work, armed with information that lets you research whether or not you may be facing a potential problem in the future.

Larry Weathington of Georgia Power shares his experience with the meetings:

“The discussions are open and free from distractions, so you hear a variety of issues that utilities are experiencing – which gives others a ‘heads up’ on emerging industry concerns.

“A prime example would be the corrosive sulfur issue which I'd first heard mentioned at the 2002 Client Committee Meetings. This prompted our company to start assessing our equipment, leading to the unexpected discovery of corrosive sulfur.”

Hard-to-duplicate, job-relevant training

In the electric power industry, training is more than just continuing education or learning something new – it's an essential part of sustaining and growing the business. **Carl Pankratz of Lower Colorado River Authority** has this to say:

“The utility business is in transition right now. It's old school versus young school, with the young school starting to take the reins. Training is more important than ever. That's why I budget for two people a year to participate in the September meetings.”

Opportunity to influence

More than anywhere else, these meetings give clients the opportunity to contribute ideas and influence outcomes. They set the agenda for the next International Conference of Doble Clients – and, to a great extent, help set the direction for the industry itself.

According to Tom Kydd, the meetings let companies “participate in an issue, instead of waiting for an outcome, and behave proactively, instead of simply observing.”

John Troisi sums it up this way:

“*Maybe it's only once a year, but it's priceless:* a chance to listen to papers, participate in choosing the topics I feel are most interesting and relevant, and decide on a agenda that addresses the needs of my company as well as the industry.”

Practical, ready-to-use information and solutions

What makes the Client Committee Meetings valuable to any results-oriented business, however, is the *immediate return on investment*.

According to Steve Larson, one example of direct value has to do with the guides produced by the committees: "The Circuit Breaker Committee put out an excellent guide on lubricating and maintaining circuit breakers – something extremely practical that we could use right away."

Others cite the chance to bring home lessons learned and knowledge accumulated that can be passed around to others in the company and implemented immediately – sometimes even before they return.

Terry Albers attended the meetings for the first time in 2005. He had gone to Salt Lake City hoping to get information that he could bring back to his company, but got even more than he expected. He expands on his original statement:

"Several presentations addressed equipment similar to ours. I made a note to check for the same problem when I got back, and, sure enough, I found the same problem starting. I was able to take the equipment out of service before a failure. **I honestly believe what I heard at the client meetings helped us avert a catastrophic event.**

Averting a catastrophic event is indeed a most compelling cost-justification.

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