

BACnet Today & the Smart Grid

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Commentary

Buildings are A-Changing

If you've read anything about buildings recently, you know the Smart Grid is out there. You've read the primers. You may have read some early success stories. But you've also heard some cautionary tales, perhaps from pundits, perhaps from fellow building industry colleagues. The buildings, they are a-changing.

Just as the pneumatics vendors of old resisted the introduction of direct digital controls, some of today's incumbents are uncomfortable with the arrival of the new players in our space. And uncertainty in the controls industry can spill over into discomfort for building owners and operators. We all know what a "utility" is, but what exactly is an "energy service provider" and why does my building need an interface to it? And why is my accounting firm pitching glossies at me with chiller efficiency graphs on them? "May you live in interesting times." Indeed.

All of this, of course, offers opportunity. But what kind? And for whom? As with the change to direct digital controls, this current industry turbulence will almost certainly net us all benefits in the end. But if you lived through that earlier transition, you'll remember that what immediately followed the inherently interoperable air-in-a-tube was a plethora of proprietary electronic systems that "talked" among their own family members but did not play well with others.

Then came BACnet and, with it, a long fight for open interoperable products that ultimately was successful. The efforts of other standards organizations have complemented BACnet, such as a convergence of common networking technology that has allowed cost savings by eliminating redundant communication backbones. Over time, we've seen that standards benefit the customer and industry as a whole.

As the Smart Grid begins to jell, if standards advocates are not vigilant, we may enter another period of proprietary solutions that will bring back the vendor lock-in that BACnet



Dave Robin

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fought so hard to eliminate. Seeing this potential, the Commerce Department's National Institute for Standards and Technology (NIST) was charged with marshaling the large number of old and new players to create extensions to existing standards such as BACnet and to make new standards where needed. All of this is going on in NIST's many-faceted Smart Grid Interoperability Panel (SGIP), which I'm sure you've heard about by now.

This brings us to the expansion of BACnet Today to include the Smart Grid. If you roam the halls of an SGIP meeting, you'll see a lot of familiar BACnet faces. We, your advocates for standardization in the building space, are well versed in the fight for open interoperable standards and are making sure that "buildings" are not just "loads" in this new world. So don't fear the Smart Grid. With BACnet, buildings have been smart for years. Now we're joining forces with the grid to figure out how to be smart together.

David Robin, Chair,
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