

Navigating the Data-Driven Evolution in Utilities

Conversation with Southern Company's Shane Powell

By AEIC VP of Technical Strategy Elizabeth Cook

In the ever-evolving landscape of utility management, the integration of data analytics has become a cornerstone for innovation and efficiency. I recently sat down with Shane Powell, Power Delivery Enterprise Data Analytics Director at Southern Company, to discuss transforming data into actionable insights, a process that has redefined operations and customer service in the utility sector.

The Genesis of Data Analytics in Utilities: Powell's journey began with a simple yet profound realization: utilities are sitting on a goldmine of data that, if harnessed correctly, can revolutionize operations. Initially, the challenge was accessing and utilizing this data effectively. "We have all the data, but accessing it was a hurdle," he says. The solution lays in duplicating and migrating data to the cloud, making it readily available for analysis.

Building a Data-Driven Culture: The transition to a data-driven organization was not without its challenges. Powell emphasizes the importance of executive support and collaboration across departments. "It took a lot of groups coming together," he notes, highlighting the role of leadership in fostering a culture that embraces data analytics. This collaborative approach not only facilitated the integration of data but also ensured that the tools developed were aligned with organizational goals.

From Challenges to Solutions: One of the early hurdles was the reluctance to share data due to concerns over data integrity and security. Powell's team tackled this by creating a system that allowed for data duplication without compromising the original datasets. This approach enabled the team to conduct thorough analyses and develop

tools that provided real-time insights into system performance.

The Power of Real-Time Analytics: A significant milestone in Powell's journey was the development of RAMP or Reliability Analytics Metrics and Performance, a tool that provides next-day intelligence on outages. By integrating AI, RAMP anticipates common queries and delivers insights that were previously labor-intensive to obtain. "It's a speed to value proposition," Powell explains, underscoring the tool's impact on customer service and operational efficiency.

Collaboration and Continuous Improvement: Powell's personal experience is a testament to the power of collaboration. By engaging with various stakeholders, from cybersecurity to IT, his team was able to build robust tools that met the needs of the organization. This collaborative spirit extended beyond Southern Company, as Powell actively engaged with industry peers

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through AEIC's Data Analytics Council and Power Delivery committees to share insights and best practices.

Looking Ahead

As Powell reflects on his journey, he offers valuable advice for those embarking on a similar path: "Start wherever you are and start now." He emphasizes the importance of collaboration and the willingness to learn and adapt. "We will always be better together," he asserts, highlighting the collective effort required to drive innovation in the utility sector.

By leveraging data analytics, Powell has not only enhanced operational efficiency at Southern Company but also set a precedent for the utility industry. As the sector continues to evolve, these lessons learned will serve as a guiding light for those seeking to harness the power of data for the greater good. PDF

Elizabeth Cook is VP of Technical Strategy at the Association of Edison Illuminating Companies.