3Qs with Mark Johnson

Mark Johnson is Managing Director of <u>T&D World</u> and <u>Utility Analytics Institute</u>, an online community and membership organization for power utilities looking to realize desired business outcomes using data analytics. TROVE caught up with Mark to discuss his takeaways from UA Week, UAI's annual Fall gathering of utility and data-analytics leaders.

1

Mark, Utility Analytics Week seems to be on a roll. What did you see at this year's event and what did you hear from participants?

From my perspective, this year's event was our best ever in terms of attendance and content. This is definitely a growing group of professionals and a growing show. One thing I really noticed, and this is a significant change from the past: UA Week used to draw primarily IT titles, because they best understood the possibilities of data. Now we're starting to see more of the business getting the analytics bug and coming to this and our spring event. Put another way, IT and data scientists used to have to "sell" the idea of data analytics to the business – now the business is coming to buy. This is also reflected in the content of our presentations, which is 100% driven by the utilities themselves. We're moving beyond the general educational tracks that marked our early years to harder hitting "ok, we get it, now how do we really apply analytics to deliver value" discussions. The attendees love that!

2

Data analytics as a field, including a growing focus on predictive analytics, is growing in prominence at utilities. Describe "the situation" of analytics today in utilities operations.

I honestly believe we are at the tipping point. We're in our 7th year now of hosting these events, and we've seen a slow build, an accretion, of proof points delivered to utilities through analytics and predictive analytics, and it's beginning to snowball. We have watched utilities start small with predictive analytics, have success, and then apply analytics across the business. What's really happening, and it's exciting, is that analytics has moved from "push" to "pull." Utilities used to require more convincing to get out of their comfort zones with their data and now are actively asking to do so! The value of all kinds of analytics has been proven – it has taken time, but it has happened. Now the business wants it!

3

Let's look forward. Where do you see this tipping point taking the industry?

At UAI, we've developed a maturity curve, and we see utilities making tremendous progress moving up it in terms of **value**. Utilities started slow, focusing first on just the data, isolating it, then cleaning it and storing it, then reporting on it – reporting of course is great, it's a good first step – but now we're seeing predictive advances like machine learning taking flight at many utilities. It has really progressed! And when I talk to utilities that are far along the adoption and value curves, I'm finding such a level of enthusiasm and passion for analytics. At the same time, through their engagement in advanced analytics, they understand they have only *scratched the surface* of the value they can get from it. Another thing I have noticed, and this is significant, is that utilities are starting to learn faster and faster. As they embrace advanced analytics more wholeheartedly and really apply it across their businesses, the learning comes at a much more rapid pace. Which is why UAI hosts *two* events per year now – the more analytics are applied, the more we learn and the more quickly things change. It's hard to keep up. But that's a good thing! Gazing into the crystal ball, I'd say the prospects are very bright for an era of data-driven utilities.

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Note: *Utility Analytics Institute's next event, UA Summit, is taking place May 6-8, 2019 in Charlotte, NC. Click <u>here</u> for more information.*