

A Computer Bulletin Board Service for Energy Professionals

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Introduction

The Pacific Northwest is actively pursuing energy efficiency in the commercial and industrial sectors as a strategy to encourage development of least cost electrical resources to meet future energy needs. To accomplish this, the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), state energy offices, utilities, and other energy professionals have implemented diverse and innovative programs to promote demand side management in the building industry. A key component of most energy efficiency programs is development of mechanisms to transfer current and accurate technical information. The computer bulletin board has proved to be successful in the northwest region. The bulletin board service (BBS) is an electronic information network that can be accessed with a computer and modem. The BBS fills a need for fast technical information that is readily accessible for the utility and building industries. Up-to-date information on technologies, services, and products will streamline implementation of DSM programs.

Electric Ideas Clearinghouse

The Electric Ideas Clearinghouse is a technology transfer service that was established to ensure fast and easy access to current technical information about energy efficiency in commercial and industrial buildings. Utilities and energy professionals require technical information to meet the volume of activity required to accomplish aggressive megawatt acquisition targets in the Pacific Northwest. BPA funds the Clearinghouse program and WSEO provides the staff and management. The computer bulletin board is one of an array of services offered by the Clearinghouse including technical assistance, literature searches, document retrieval, product information, training information, and referrals. Energy professionals in the region can access information by calling the toll-free hotline to talk to technical staff or by connecting to the electronic BBS to communicate with Clearinghouse and other energy professionals.

Clearinghouse BBS

The Clearinghouse BBS was developed to support utilities and design professionals working with BPA's Energy

Smart Design (commercial new construction, remodeling, and retrofit) and Energy Savings Plan (industrial building and processes) programs. The BBS provides convenient and no-cost means of accessing and sharing commercial and industrial energy efficiency information. The BBS service reduces barriers to information transfer and fills a niche, twenty-four hours each day, for those energy professionals with the required computer, communications software, telephone line, and modem. Access is toll-free in the Pacific Northwest, while users in other states and countries must pay the telephone charges.

Major Features

The major features of the BBS include special interest groups (interactive discussions), electronic mail, software library, access to a technical librarian, job listings, teleconferencing, training calendar, and referrals directory.

BBS Activity

For over two years, the BBS has encouraged energy technology transfer. There are over 1000 registered BBS users sharing energy information: including 150+ utility staff; 300+ engineers, architects, and consulting firms; facility managers, building owners and operators, and government agencies. The BBS logs over 200 hours of activity each month, averaging 8-hours per work day. In a two week period, thirty percent of the users access the system.

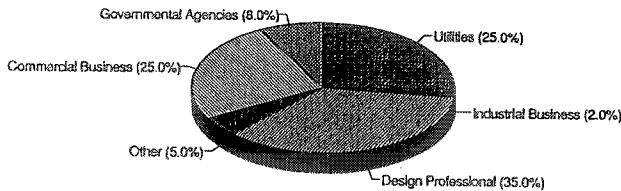
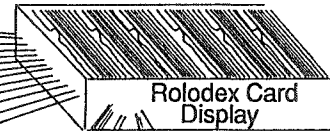
Special Interest Groups

Special Interest Groups (SIGS) are interactive discussions among users on selected topics. The SIGS include discussions of building commissioning, simulation software, environmental issues, lighting, and other energy topics. The SIGS have grown more popular as the user base has increased because more professionals are available to offer diverse and specialized experience. SIG discussions regarding real-life successes and challenges allow all BBS users to learn about new technologies and practices.

Bulletin Board Service for Commercial and Industrial Energy Professionals

**ELECTRIC IDEAS
CLEARINGHOUSE**

Jobs Listings
 Technical Assistance
 Product and Vendor Information
 Information Sharing
 Peer Networks
 E-Mail
 Library Access
 Special Interest Groups
 Training Calendar
 Teleconferencing
 Energy Software
 Interactive Conferences
 Utility Program Information



Total of 900 Users

The Clearinghouse establishes a SIG for appropriate user groups upon request. For example, the Washington Association of Maintenance and Operation Administrators (WAMOA) and the Power Quality Interest Group have dedicated SIGS that are managed by a representative of those groups. WAMOA has marketed the SIG to members statewide, providing access to state school districts. WAMOA members use the BBS to share solutions for operational problems, identify efficient and reliable equipment, and encourage energy conservation activities.

Electronic-Mail (E-Mail)

The Electronic Mail service on the BBS provides all users with a method of communicating region wide, at no cost. Individuals can send file attachments to other users who can retrieve them immediately on the BBS. This has proven useful when a user had difficulty with a building simulation program run. The user sent the file to a Clearinghouse engineer who was able to detect and repair the error and return it to the user via E-Mail within an

hour. E-Mail is private between users; discussions that are of interest to many users are sent to a Special Interest Group (SIG) where the messages can be reviewed by all users.

Software (Files) Library

The Files Library is a collection of energy-related text files or executable programs, and file utilities. Users can download communications software, text from energy presentations, a motors database, photometric files, and life cycle cost programs. Users can search for the files by name or by keyword, and review the description before choosing to download the software. All files in the Files Library are tested and virus-checked prior to availability on the BBS. All software is available with the author's written permission. The Clearinghouse allows users to share pertinent files in the Files Library, and will assist with downloading or uploading. A state energy office uses the Files Library to distribute the most current code compliance computer program.

Additional Features

Other features include access to a technical library card catalog and a technical librarian, job listings, an on-line users manual, training calendar, and referrals directory. The training calendar can be searched by date, location, or sponsor to identify over 450 energy events or videos related to commercial or industrial energy efficiency. The training calendar focuses on events in the Pacific Northwest although other pertinent events are included. The referrals directory is used to locate information on over 1,500 individuals or companies with expertise in specific energy issues or technologies. Product vendors, consulting firms, government agencies, building operators with specific equipment expertise, and utility staff may be listed in the referrals directory. Energy efficiency programs in commercial and industrial buildings rely on qualified energy professionals. The BBS is a quick and practical method of storing and disseminating information, as well as connecting people with available resources.

BBS Assistance

The Clearinghouse developed a detailed users' manual and a card with introductory information to make the BBS as simple as possible for both the novice and the experienced user. In addition, users can call the hotline Monday through Friday between the hours of 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. for personal assistance. Staff make BBS presentations at meetings of energy professional or other group events upon request. Since utilities are a high priority user, the Clearinghouse will accept invitations from utilities in the region for personal demonstrations and will install a free modem to those utilities without communication access. The personal assistance and presentations have encouraged a number of small or remote utilities to access the BBS and share their experiences and questions.

Marketing BBS

The Clearinghouse began operating in March 1990, with a regional toll-free technical assistance hotline and the computer BBS. The service was first marketed specifically to utilities and design professionals as a support service to BPA's Energy Smart Design program. BBS marketing tools included brochures and Clearinghouse staff presentations. From November 1991 to April 1992, the Clearinghouse Hotline was featured in regional newspapers, newsletters, and business journals. As a result, more professionals signed on to the BBS, and the hotline use increased by at least 50%.

Future of the BBS

The more users, the more aggregate experience, and the greater opportunity for information transfer. The diversity of users brings new ideas or innovative approaches to current DSM program activities. The Clearinghouse continues to informally market the Clearinghouse BBS. Fact sheets on job listings, training calendar, referrals directory, and other BBS features are available. These fact sheets are being mailed to utilities, energy organizations, associations, government agencies, and energy professionals to invite their participation. As the user base increases, more software, job listings, training events, and referrals will be available.

The Clearinghouse plans to gather government and utility program information and display it on the BBS. Job listings could be expanded to include resumes of energy professionals seeking employment. The BBS itself could be linked with other energy related, computer based, public access services. These options provide sample opportunities for expansion of the Clearinghouse BBS. Ideas from other energy professionals are welcome.

Evaluation

The evaluation cards that users have returned confirm the value of this service after two years of operation. Users rate the service as excellent. The cards also provide real time feedback and a means to suggest improvements and additions. The BBS encourages on-line comments and continuously improves the service as a result of user feedback. The on-line feedback provides for informal discussion and encourages users to play a role in the development of "their" networking system. There are over 1000 established accounts on the BBS and the number continues to grow. The success of the Bulletin Board Service indicates that energy professionals need and will take advantage of free, informal, and convenient technical information to assist their DSM efforts. Program managers, conservation staff, and energy analysts all need information to meet their DSM program goals. BPA and WSEO designed the Clearinghouse BBS as a means for energy professionals to share lessons learned, technical data, successes, challenges, and creative solutions to encourage successful implementation of their DSM programs.