

MAY 2025

BUTANE-PROPANE NEWS

BPN

Biopropane Production
Could Save a Small Town

How to Train Propane
Technicians to Anticipate
Customer Needs

THE 2025 SOFTWARE & TECHNOLOGY ISSUE

From industry tech trends to cathodic protection, data conversion, disaster recovery & GPS tracking, here's the latest in propane's digital sector

+ SPECIAL SECTION:
PARTNERING
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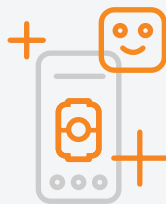
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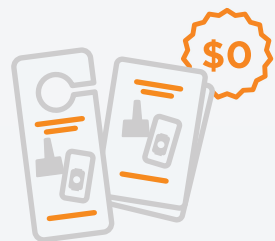
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Dear Readers,
It's that time of year again! Change is in the air, new opportunities are blossoming and you may think I'm talking about spring right now. But surprise! I'm actually talking about BPN's annual Software & Technology issue.

I spoke with several software solutions providers at the NPGA Southeastern & International Propane Expo in early April. In one particular conversation, someone expressed satisfaction that our Software & Technology issue would be coming up in May, because this is the best time for propane marketers to evaluate how their software fared during the heating season, i.e., the challenges that arose and what types of solutions could help improve operational efficiencies the next go-around.

With that in mind, you're probably in the beginning stages of assessing your digital platforms and potentially exploring new options. The articles in this issue are designed to help you on that journey. From pages 24 to 40, we've got several options for you, including an analysis on what's trending in propane tech this year, the important innovations behind cathodic protection for underground tanks, best practices for a smooth data conversion process, everything you need to know to protect your company's data from a potential disaster and how to mitigate theft of your assets using GPS tracking. I hope this robust section covers aspects of the technological side of the propane industry that will help you make plans for the remainder of the year, and particularly next winter.

I also want to point out our Across Industry Lines special section on page 42, which highlights how the propane and electric vehicle industries — often depicted as rivals in a fight for energy dominance — can actually work together for the good of both sides. Though we don't want electricity to hurt propane's future, articles like this demonstrate — as I've heard the Propane Education & Research Council's Tucker Perkins say on many occasions — the value and viability of a wider path to clean energy.

Before I wrap this up, I want to express how much the BPN team enjoyed seeing you all at the NPGA Southeastern Expo this year. I hope your company had a successful show and will see your attendance pay many dividends in connections made. Tune in next month for coverage of the event, as well as profiles of Cetane Associates' Barrett Conway, the winner of the inaugural Young Professional of the Year award, and his fellow finalists, Allison Platz-Velazquez of Delta Liquid Energy, Joseph Figueroa of Ferrellgas, Garrett Sager of Henley Propane and Curtis Sobottka of Ferrellgas. Congratulations to Barrett and all of the finalists! It was a pleasure to present them all with your well-earned accolades.

Until next time,

Jessica L. Phillips

JESSICA GRAHAM PHILLIPS

Editor-in-Chief

Left to right:
BPN Account Executive Landen Franklin, Managing Editor Johnny Nickel, Editor-in-Chief Jessica Phillips and Associate Editor Christina Miller at the 2025 Expo.



Editor's Note: We would like to acknowledge a few errors in BPN's March 2025 print magazine.

- On page 1, an outdated ad was printed for Otodata. The correct ad should have covered "Accurate, Uninterrupted Service — Whatever the Weather."
- On page 33, there was a misprint of Worthington

Enterprises' SureSense product image that left the ad incomplete.

- On page 58, the QR code on Cetane Associates' ad was printed on the edge of the page. In a small portion of the printed magazines, this QR code was cut off. The QR code should lead to cetane.com.

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BUTANE-PROPANE NEWS

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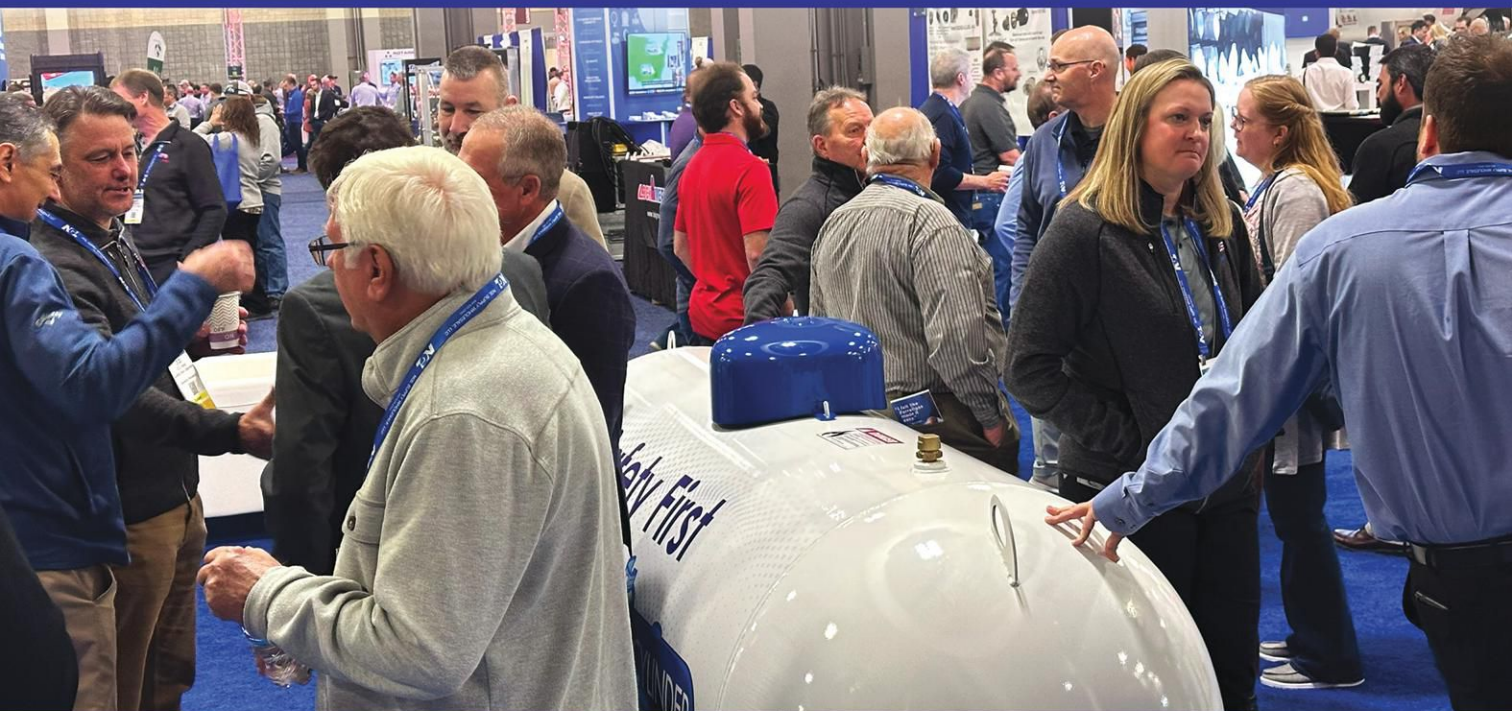
VOLUME 57 ISSUE 5



Tanks You Know People You Trust

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On the Cover

The latest propane tech trends to help your business flourish.

Image source: Adobe Stock.



Protecting Our Communities and First Responders

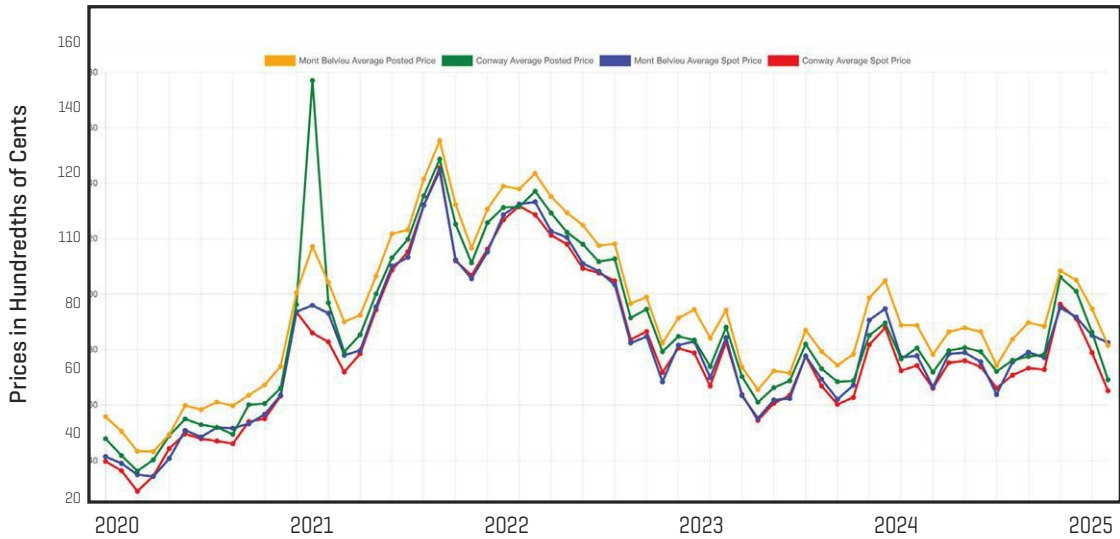
Propane safety is a core industry value and starts with each propane provider's commitment to protecting their customers, employees, and communities. Building relationships and engaging with local first responders help ensure they are prepared to respond and safely work with industry experts if a propane accident occurs.

SHARE THE ESSENTIAL TRAINING FOR MISSION-SPECIFIC RESPONDERS

Help first responders be prepared with the foundational knowledge needed to recognize fundamental propane characteristics, risks, regulations, safety, and indications of potential concerns when dealing with propane.



MONT BELVIEU & CONWAY AVERAGE THURSDAY PROPANE PRICES



at a glance During the latest mid-month period, prices at Mont Belvieu, Texas, decreased. The posted prices decreased 13.25 cents/gal, from March mid-month to April mid-month, and spot prices decreased 5 cents. Conway, Kansas, postings decreased 17.124 cents/gal and spots decreased 14 cents over the month.

MID-WEEK AVERAGE POSTED/SPOT PROPANE PRICES [Cents per Gallon]

	3/13/25	3/20/25	3/27/25	4/3/25	4/10/25
Mont Belvieu					
posted	94.730	95.897	100.730	100.480	81.480
spot	85.000 - 85.250	86.750 - 87.500	90.250 - 90.750	87.250 - 87.500	80.000 - 85.000
Conway					
posted	86.250	84.500	91.350	88.238	69.126
spot	78.500 - 79.250	79.000 - 81.000	84.500 - 85.000	77.375 - 78.000	64.500 - 65.750

at a glance

Canada's primary underground propane inventories decreased by 43.6% in March, according to the Canada Energy Regulator [CER]. The total represented a month-to-month decrease of 314.9 Mcm. Compared to a year earlier, stocks were lower, with 370.8 Mcm, or 47.7%, less product on hand.

[Editor's Note: Due to BPN's publishing schedule, March inventory data is the latest available from the CER.]

CANADIAN INVENTORIES [Thousand Cubic Meters]

	Mar 2025	Feb 2025	Change	Mar 2024
PROPANE				
Propane-East	125.4	216.7	-42.1%	216
Propane-West	281.6	505.2	-44.3%	561.8
Total Propane	407.0	721.9	-43.6%	777.8
BUTANE				
Butane-East	187.4	241.7	-22.5%	127
Butane-West	221.9	264.3	-16%	238.8
Total Butane	409.3	506.0	-19.1%	365.8

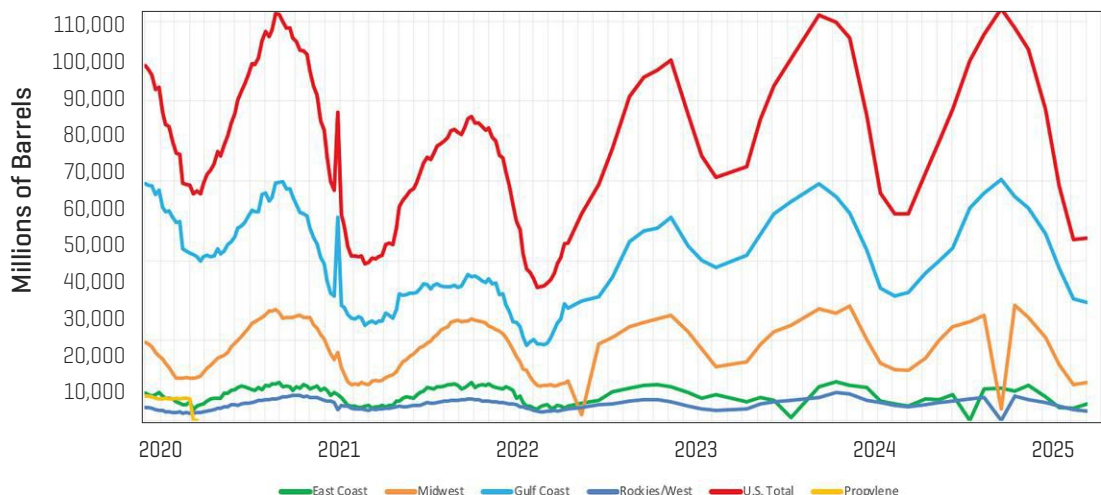
Source: Canada Energy Regulator

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U.S. PROPANE INVENTORIES



at a glance

United States propane stocks experienced a 392,000 bbl decrease from March to April. East Coast stocks increased 1.026 MMbbl, the Midwest increased 540,000 bbl, the Gulf Coast decreased 840,000 bbl, and the Rocky Mountain/West Coast decreased 335,000 bbl. Compared to the same time in April 2024, the April 2025 stocks were 6.054 MMbbl lower.

U.S. PROPANE INVENTORIES

March 7 – April 4, 2025, and One Year Ago [Thousand Barrels]

	3/7/25	3/14/25	3/21/25	3/28/25	4/4/25	4/5/24
East Coast	3.083	3.316	3.846	3.583	4.109	3.602
Midwest	9.041	8.709	9.040	9.432	9.581	12.490
Gulf Coast	30.395	28.615	27.875	28.683	29.555	32.112
Rocky Mtn & West Coast	2.740	2.710	2.398	2.444	2.405	3.501
U.S.	45.259	43.349	43.159	44.141	45.651	51.705

U.S. RESIDENTIAL PROPANE PRICES

[Mid-Month, Cents per Gallon]

	Mar 2025	Apr 2025	Apr 2024
East Coast [PADD 1]	361.5	358.6	343.5
Midwest [PADD 2]	223.3	218.4	208.5
Average U.S.	273.2	269	257.6

Source: "This Week in Petroleum," Energy Information Administration

Find out more:

For commentary on mid-month prices and Canadian inventories, visit bpnews.com/news.

Editor's Note: The Energy Information Administration will release its U.S. Residential Propane Prices once a month through September. The data listed here reflects the data available at the time of publication.



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EDP APPOINTS NEW CEO



Kevin Pollack

EDP, an experienced owner and operator of locally managed propane distributors across 24 states, appointed Kevin Pollack as the company's chief executive officer (CEO).

Pollack most recently served as CEO of HALO Branded Solutions, a distributor of branded products and technology solutions. Prior to HALO, he spent 17 years at Stericycle, where he played a key role in the company's growth to greater than \$3 billion in revenue. Tom Knauff, who founded EDP in 2012, will continue as executive chairman and a member of the board of directors. Current CEO Boyd H McGathey, who joined EDP in 2019, has announced his retirement.

RAY MURRAY INC. ADDS TOM NEVIUS TO MID-ATLANTIC SALES TEAM

Ray Murray Inc. (RMI) added Tom Nevius to its sales team. Nevius will cover the Mid-Atlantic region, serving customers in Delaware, Maryland and Virginia. In Delaware and Maryland, Nevius will focus on RMI's hearth and outdoor channel. In Virginia, his role will extend across all RMI categories, including hearth, outdoor, propane equipment and compressed gas. With more than two decades of industry experience, Nevius brings a seasoned knowledge to the role and will be a valuable resource to RMI. "We're thrilled to welcome Tom to the RMI sales team," said Mike Hopsicker, president and CEO of Ray Murray Inc.

MID-MONTH UPDATE: MID-APRIL PRICES DOWN FROM MARCH

During the latest mid-month period, Mont Belvieu, Texas posted prices decreased 10.25 cents/gal, from March to April mid-month, and spot prices decreased 5 cents. Conway, Kansas, postings decreased 17.124 cents/gal, and spots decreased 14 cents over the month. The Mont Belvieu mid-March posted price was 94.73 cents/gal. The next week, the price increased 1.167 cents to 95.897 cents, followed by a 1.833-cent increase to 100.73 cents/gal. Prices decreased 0.25 cents to 100.48

cents the first week of April. At mid-month, postings decreased 19 cents to 81.48 cents/gal. Compared to last year, the April 2025 prices were 8.584 cents lower. The Conway mid-March posted price was 86.25 cents/gal. The next week, the price decreased 1.75 cents to 84.5 cents, followed by a 6.85-cent increase to 91.35 cents/gal. Prices decreased 3.112 cents to 88.238 cents the first week of April. At mid-month, postings decreased 19.112 cents to 69.126 cents/gal. Compared to last year, the April 2025 prices were 13.41 cents lower. Mont Belvieu spots opened mid-March at 85 cents/gal. The next week, the price increased 1.75 cents to 86.75 cents, followed by a 3.5-cent increase to 90.25 cents the next week. Prices decreased 3 cents to 87.25 cent/gal the first week of April. At mid-month, they decreased 7.25 cents to 80 cents/gal. Compared to last year, the April 2025 prices were 1.25 cents higher. Conway spots opened mid-March at 78.5 cents/gal. The next week, the price increased 0.5 cents to 79 cents, followed by a 5.5.-cent increase to 84.5 cents the next week. Prices decreased 7.125 cents to 77.375 cents/gal the first week of April. At mid-month, they fell 12.875 cents to 64.5 cents/gal. Compared to last year, the April 2025 prices were 10.75 cents lower.

NEW PERC SENIOR MANAGER OF AUTOGAS BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT



Joel Stutheit

The Propane Education & Research Council (PERC) has hired Joel Stutheit as senior manager of business development for its on-road market portfolio. In his new role, Stutheit will be responsible for growing propane autogas market share for on-highway light-, medium- and heavy-duty vehicles. He will be focused on the implementation of strategic market plans that support research and development of innovative technologies, product launches, maintenance and growth in existing market segments, as well as new market expansion opportunities. Prior to joining PERC, Stutheit spent over 20 years in the education sector, including as director of Bethel School District in Spanaway,

Washington. He established the district's propane autogas school bus program, procuring \$2.5 million of buses yearly with the assistance of grants he helped secure. The program earned statewide recognition for its cost savings and progress toward clean energy goals.

TERRAVEST INDUSTRIES ACQUIRES ENTRANS INTERNATIONAL

TerraVest Industries Inc. has acquired EnTrans International, a North American manufacturer of tank trailers and transportation solutions. Headquartered in Athens, Tennessee — with additional manufacturing operations in Minnesota, Texas, Mexico and Thailand — EnTrans is a manufacturer of tank trailers, heavy haul trailers and LPG transportation equipment under the Heil Trailer, Polar Tank Trailer, Kalyn Siebert and Jarco brand names. The company serves mission-critical sectors, including petroleum, chemical, food-grade and cryogenic transport and has a reputation for engineering excellence. EnTrans was acquired for \$546 million at closing, plus contingent earn-out consideration based on the future financial performance of EnTrans in the 12-month period following the date of acquisition up to \$46 million.

WORTHINGTON ENTERPRISES REBRANDS VIKING CYLINDERS AS RAGASCO FOR NORTH AMERICA

Worthington Enterprises Inc. announced it will rebrand its Viking Cylinders composite cylinders under the Ragasco name in North America to unify the Ragasco brand globally and align with the recent announcement of a new brand identity for Ragasco after Worthington Enterprises acquired Hexagon Ragasco in June 2024. Previously, Hexagon Ragasco marketed its cylinders in North America under the Vikings Cylinders brand. The Ragasco name, established in 1996, represents a legacy of innovation in manufacturing lightweight, customizable LPG composite cylinders. Ragasco cylinders are ideal for propane-powered forklifts in industrial settings and a wide range of hospitality and leisure applications. 📌

Industry Calendar

May 19-22 Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin — North Central Convention
wipga.org
LaCrosse, WI

May 20-21 Michigan PGA Board & Capital Day
mipga.org
Lansing, MI

May 20-21 Texas PGA Board of Directors Meeting
txpropane.com
Austin, TX

May 29-31 Mississippi PGA Annual Meeting
mspropane.com
Destin, FL

June 3-6 Tennessee PGA 2025 Annual Convention
tngas.org
Orange Beach, AL

June 8-10 NPGA Mid-Year Board Meeting & Propane Days 2025
npga.org
Washington, D.C.

June 15-17 Southeast Propane Alliance Annual Convention
southeastpropane.org
Isle of Palms, SC

June 17-18 North Dakota PGA Annual Meeting
ndpropane.org
Medora, ND

June 18-20 Indiana PGA Summer Convention
indianapropane.com
French Lick, IN

June 18-20 PGA of New England Summer Meeting
pgane.org
Newport, RI

June 24-26 Colorado/New Mexico Summer Convention
copropane.com
Albuquerque, NM

June 25-27 Pennsylvania/New Jersey Joint Annual Meeting
papropane.com
Bethlehem, PA

FOR ADDITIONAL CALENDAR ITEMS,
VISIT BPNEWS.COM.

North Central Convention and Trade Show 2025

EMBRACING AI IN PROPANE

TURNING INNOVATION INTO
GROWTH FOR YOUR BUSINESS



Tuesday, May 20, 2025 | 11 AM - 11:45 AM

Want to grow your business and boost sales? Don't miss this session.

Jason Erwin breaks down how propane companies are using AI and smart tools to work more efficiently, connect with customers, and get real results, without piling on extra work.

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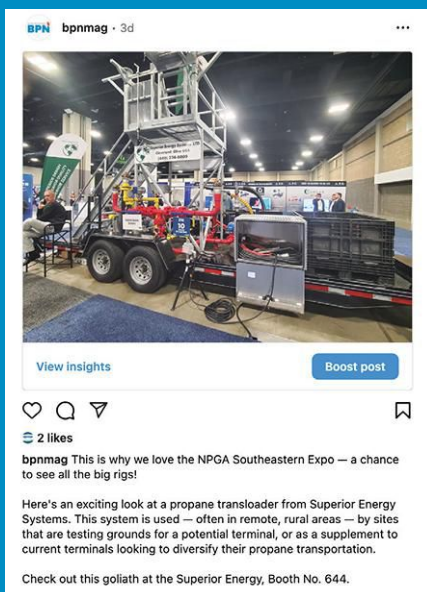
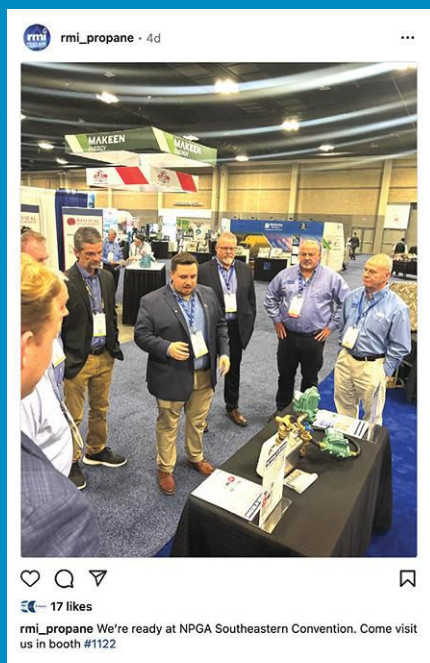
Websites • Social Media • Review Management
Online and Traditional Advertising
Sales and Customer Service Training

THE FUELING STATION



Another successful year of the NPGA Southeastern & International Propane Expo is in the books. Every year, for the past 75-plus years, the propane industry has gathered to celebrate its fuel solutions, learn about innovations in the industry and take the opportunity to reconnect with fellow propane colleagues and friends. This year was no different, as hundreds gathered in Charlotte, North Carolina, to talk shop, enjoy good company and soak in the sights of giant propane machinery.

Below, take a look at how your peers were making the most of the expo, from participating in learning sessions to showing off unique offerings at their booths to announcing the winner of the first-annual Young Professional of the Year Award.



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Nancy Coop is an industry advocate. She is a director at the M&A advisory firm Cetane Associates. Contact Coop at ncoop@cetane.com. Visit cetane.com.

IF YOU HAD A FULL YEAR OFF WITH PAY, WHAT WOULD YOU SPEND YOUR TIME DOING?

From globe-trotting adventures to heartfelt service, propane professionals reveal how they would make the most of a paid year off

Some responders found this question difficult, as it really flexes the imagination to think of a year without work and all its responsibilities. Conversely, some sound ready to implement a plan this month. Some responses may well surprise, motivate or inspire you.

In this column, adopted from the familiar “Heard on the Street” format, we offer our responders a chance to answer the question posed in the title. These are their replies reported verbatim.

TRAVEL? PROJECTS? VOLUNTEER?

This month’s question is actually an easy one for me. The first thing that I would do is take a month or two and visit Hawaii. My wife wants to spend time on every island. I figure two months should take care of that. Then, I suppose we would be headed to Iceland. Finally, I would head to Australia, since that’s on my bucket list (taking my wife of course). Then, I would make sure there is ample time for deer hunting. Any remaining time would be spent on more travel, possibly ... or a nap.

JON SHEPARD
VK INSPECTIONS LLC
MERCER, PENNSYLVANIA

Geocaching and railfanning, all across North America!

RICHARD STRYCHARZ JR.
WALTER’S PROPANE
SUNDERLAND, MASSACHUSETTS

I think I would start with focusing on diet and exercise. Probably many other things as well, like some discretionary travel, reading more and knocking out some projects I’d like to tackle. Like most of us, prioritizing work, our teams and our objectives tends to make the focus on ourselves a lower priority. For me personally, I’m not looking for a rocking chair or sleeping half the day away with precious discretionary time; I want to make the most of my time. Having unlimited time would allow for taking trips on my Harley and reconnecting with some family and friends, and that would be time well-invested.

BOYD H. MCGATHEY
EDP
PARKVILLE, MISSOURI

I would probably try to do four things over that period of time. First, spend more time with family, as I have a daughter on the West Coast. Second, volunteer to help people through a group

like Samaritan’s Purse. Third, travel and see parts of this country and abroad that I have not seen. And finally, I would work a little on my golf game. If I could balance those four things, that would be one heck of a year!

TOM KRUPA
NGL SUPPLY TERMINALS CO.
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

I guess I would take one week to sleep, recover and renew my relationship with God. Then, I would spend the next 51 weeks enjoying some time with God and spending more time advocating for this industry that I love.

JUDY TARANOVICH
PROCTOR GAS INC.
PROCTOR, VERMONT

If I had a full year off with pay, I would definitely travel and see the world. Some places (I’ve never been to these places) I would travel to are Finland, Sweden, Switzerland, Italy, France, Germany and London. If time allowed, I would try and swing down to Australia and New Zealand.

SAM FUNG
EMERSON FISHER LP GAS
MCKINNEY, TEXAS

Go through my house, purge and organize. Once the house is in order, then I'd travel with my family!

ABBY THURSTON
RURAL COMPUTER CONSULTANTS
BIRD ISLAND, MINNESOTA

If I were given a year off with pay, I would use it to test out all the things I think I want to do when I retire! I would learn how to make all the fancy coffee and ice cream drinks because I think I want to own a drink trailer. I've been reading about people who pet- and house-sit all over the world and get to experience all sorts of new things, so maybe I would test that out a couple of times. I would enroll in a couple of college courses. And, of course, I would spend extra time with my grandson!

TONYA CROW
GROWMARK INC.
BLOOMINGTON, ILLINOIS

My primary goal would be to plan to utilize this 'free time' with a variety of meaningful experiences that would create special memories. I would first sit with my wife and determine what she wanted to do with our free time together. Then, I would start with the calendar and schedule as many opportunities to spend quality time with our children and grandchildren. I would create a yearlong calendar of family-focused recreational activities and events to attend and travel as much as possible.

JERRY SCHIMMEL
P3 PROPANE SAFETY
CUMBERLAND, RHODE ISLAND

If I had a full year off with pay, I would dedicate some time to cleaning and purging every inch of my house. After

that, I would like to travel to see friends and family I don't see often enough. If I could convince my kids to take a little time away, I would want to spend as much time with them as possible, whether at home or traveling.

LAUREN CLARK
BERQUIST INC.
TOLEDO, OHIO

If I had a full year off with pay, I would certainly knock off the 'to do' list around the house and make more time to spend with family, friends and the communities I am a part of. Oh, and I'd throw in a nice trip or two for my wife and me. Underpinning all of that would be spending more time reading and learning things. Come to think of it, this is exactly my situation as a newly retired person! Well, the pay isn't the same, but I should have enough to accomplish most of what I just described.

BRUCE SWIECICKI
CONSULTING ENGINEER
TINLEY PARK, ILLINOIS

I was raised by parents who sincerely practiced service in their community. They loved to cook, and I was brought up experiencing the practice of feeding people as an act of kindness and hospitality. I began to learn to cook at a young age and eventually worked my way through college in the restaurant business. In the process, I became reasonably capable at making comfort foods in quantities that would feed

groups, small and not so small. If I could, I'd find places where I could demonstrate service through kindness and hospitality. I'd show up with everything I needed to provide a hot meal to people in need, expecting nothing in return. I would use my experience and the resources at my disposal in service to strangers, so that those people would be reminded of human kindness. Doing this would be its own reward, but I like to think that it might have a positive consequence that goes beyond a good meal. My parents have both passed on, but if I could do this once a week for a year, I'm certain they would know how profoundly grateful I am for their mindful generosity.

JOSH SIMPSON
LITTLE KAMPER LP
MANTECA, CALIFORNIA

DREAMING OR PLANNING?

"Free time" for a year is a different concept than planning a long vacation or retirement. In thinking on this question, several seemed to consider that distinction and included a component in their response that had to do with the year-long span being meaningful. Naturally, the definition of "meaningful" is always in the singular mind of the individual author.

Take some time to dream or plan with your next cup of coffee. ■

If you are interested in submitting responses, please contact Coop at ncoop@cetane.com.



David Schlee is an attorney practicing in Kansas City, Missouri. He has been representing propane and natural gas distributors in fire and explosion litigation since 1986 and has authored BPN's Propane & the Law column since September 1989. He can be reached at dschlee@dschleelaw.com.

CALIFORNIA JURY AWARDS OVER \$15.5M IN NATURAL GAS VEHICLE EXPLOSION CASE

A ruptured CNG tank during a routine fill-up led to catastrophic injuries & a major jury verdict in a high-stakes product liability trial

On Feb. 7, a jury in Fresno, California, awarded a total of \$15,498,921 to multiple plaintiffs in a suit arising from the rupture and explosion of one of four compressed natural gas cylinders that fueled a newly-purchased truck. The incident occurred during the first fill after the purchase of the truck. The case is *Johnson v. Natural Gas Fuel Systems*.

NEW TRUCK

On Dec. 21, 2018, William Johnson, the owner of B&N Trucking, took a delivery in Bakersfield, California, of two new Kenworth tractor-trucks. B&N had purchased the trucks from Pape Trucks Inc., and they included a natural gas fuel system that was manufactured by Momentum Fuel Technology.

The fueling system included a behind-the-cab system (essentially a large metal box situated behind the cab of the tractor that contained fuel tanks and various components). The tanks within the fueling system were Type 4 carbon fiber compressed natural gas (CNG) tanks designed and manufactured by Carleton Technologies Inc.

'TRANSLOADED' GAS

Since the Pape dealer in Bakersfield did not have an on-site compressed natural gas fueling system, an employee of Momentum undertook a process called transloading to fill the tanks on the two trucks. He towed one of the trucks to a local filling station operated by American Natural Gas LLC (ANG) in Buttonwillow, California, where he filled it with compressed natural gas.

That truck was then driven back to Pape, where enough fuel was siphoned into the second truck from the first truck so that the second truck could be driven to the ANG station to complete the filling process.

It was at this point that William Johnson took delivery of the trucks on behalf of B&N. He drove the second truck straight to the same ANG station where the first truck was fueled. He connected the fueling hose to the truck, and the fueling process started. When the truck's cylinders had been fueled to almost a full load, one of the carbon fiber tanks in the behind-the-cab system ruptured, causing an immediate release of pressure and a significant explosion.

INJURIES & DAMAGES

As a result of the explosion, Mr. Johnson sustained catastrophic injuries, including brain damage and multiple fractures, but survived. He was hospitalized for 34 days and spent over two months in rehabilitation facilities after that. His medical expenses were \$807,411. The explosion allegedly caused portions of the truck and the filling station to fly hundreds of feet in every direction, resulting in significant structural damage to the ANG facility.

Johnson and his wife filed suit, alleging causes of action for strict products liability and negligence. ANG's property insurance carrier, Markel American Insurance, paid ANG \$498,921 for its losses and then joined the Johnson suit for this amount from the defendants. The defendants were Momentum, Pape and Carleton.

ALLEGATIONS

The plaintiffs alleged that the carbon fiber tank that ruptured, as well as the CNG delivery system, were "defective" and "unreasonably dangerous." They contended that the defendants "were



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aware of feasible alternative designs which would have minimized or eliminated altogether the risk of injury posed by” the tank, as well as the delivery system.

The plaintiffs also contended that the defendants were negligent in the design and manufacture of the tank and system, and that they breached their contractual warranty in the sale of the items.

Finally, they argued that Momentum was negligent in the “selection, hiring, retention, training, education, supervision and/or management of” the employees who “assembled and/or inspected the CNG system and connected” it to the truck.

‘REASONABLE EXPECTATIONS’

The plaintiffs claimed that the tank and system did not meet the reasonable expectations of the ordinary consumer:

“Here, the subject cylinder was designed to be part of a compressed natural gas fueling system to be affixed to the subject truck. The sole purpose of the subject cylinder was to hold natural gas pressured to 3,600 psi [pounds per square inch]. The

first time it was filled (on the date of the incident) the subject cylinder ruptured well below 3,600 psi. The subject cylinder failed to perform its singular function. Ordinary consumers are well acquainted with the concept that a tank of any kind should not explode unless over-pressurized, which did not happen here.”

The plaintiffs also argued that Momentum failed to follow its own pre-delivery procedures and fill the truck with gas to 3,600 psi before delivering the truck to B&N Trucking. In addition, they claimed that both Carleton and Momentum had prior knowledge that Carleton was producing lots of tanks wherein some tanks leaked. In the lot of tanks comprising the tank that ruptured in the incident, three of 28 tanks allegedly leaked; a fourth tank was allegedly found to be defective at Carleton.

The defendants denied all of these claims and allegations. Momentum and Carleton pointed to each other as the cause of the incident. Pape apparently blamed them both. There appeared to

be no evidence of fault on the part of William Johnson and American Natural Gas.

TRIAL & VERDICT

Trial began on Jan. 13. Four days later, on Jan. 17, the parties entered into a stipulation that the Johnsons’ damages were \$15 million, and the damages of Markel Insurance were \$498,921. The trial then continued until Feb. 7.

Since the parties had stipulated to the amount of damages, the jury only had to decide the percentages of fault, if any, for each of the defendants. The jury found that Momentum was 70% at fault for the incident. Carleton was assessed 20%, and Pape was assessed 10%.

The trial court then issued its judgment applying these percentages to the stipulated damages, entering judgments against Momentum for \$10,849,244; against Carleton for \$3,099,784; and against Pape for \$1,549,893.

The court record does not indicate that any of the defendants have sought an appeal. ■

ENHANCING CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT THROUGH DIGITAL PLATFORMS

2 tech milestones sparked a digital shift that propane dealers can harness to boost efficiency & meet customer needs

BY ROBERT KULAWIEC

I often like to start a presentation by asking the audience two questions:

1. What happened on April 6, 1991?
2. What happened on June 29, 2007?

I usually don't get many answers, but to be fair, these are just dates out of the blue for most people, and I really don't expect answers.

On April 6, 1991, the first website went live. That website is still accessible today at <https://info.cern.ch/hypertext/www/theproject.html>. It's a very simple site that explained how the World Wide Web would work and opened a giant door for what would follow. According to businessdasher.com, today there are approximately 1.88 billion websites, of which close to 200 million are active; 71% of small businesses have a website.

On June 29, 2007, Apple released the first iPhone and put the power of the internet in our pockets. It's difficult to imagine life today without these devices. It's rare to venture out in the world and not come across at least one person checking their phone. According to businessofapps.com, today there are around 3.3 million Android apps on the Google Play Store and 2.2 million iOS apps on the Apple App Store.

These two events forever changed the way we communicate, work, learn, seek entertainment and do business. The magnitude of their impact on our daily lives cannot be understated.

To be successful in business today, using the tools of digital platforms isn't just a good idea to explore and consider — it's a necessity. Today's consumers

don't just think of placing an order online as a convenience; it's what they do, and it's how they do business. Their first inclination is not to take their phone out of their pocket and call a service provider; instead, they either check a website from their phone or computer or download an app.

THE DIGITAL TOOLS PROPANE DEALERS NEED

The good news is that tools exist to help propane companies not just navigate through this digital world but to thrive and prosper. Beyond their own website, propane dealers can meet the expectations of today's consumers with many digital tools that are readily available. These tools can help propane dealers service and communicate with



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their customers, onboard new customers and in the process make their own business operations more efficient.

I'm guessing every propane dealer reading this article already has a corporate website. If you don't, there are many companies that specialize in building websites and providing digital marketing services specifically for this industry. Today's consumers will search the web to find propane dealers in their area. An easy tool to add to your website is chat. There are numerous chat software companies, and your website designer will be able to assist you with implementing chat. Online chat will give your customers another convenient way to communicate with you.

The place where you can really start taking significant steps to improve operations is with your enterprise resource planning (ERP) software. Powerful ERP systems exist to help propane dealers manage customer account data, including optimizing delivery routes and forecasting deliveries. Customer communications and billing can be automated and paperless. Automatic scheduled payments can be implemented to reduce collection issues and help manage cash flow. Often these systems include support for text messaging, helping you stay in touch with your customers with timely, useful notifications about their account.

To take forecasting a step further, tank monitoring technology is better than it's ever been. Adding tank monitors not only lets the customer monitor their fuel level, but also provides the propane dealer with precise information to better plan delivery routes and avoid runouts.

THE VALUE OF A WEB PORTAL

At the heart of the digital tools available is a web portal. A web portal is a secure website that allows customers to log in and access information that is specific to them. Web portals are typically accessed via a link on a propane dealer's homepage. Web portals today are widely used and available across industries.

To be successful in business today, using the tools of digital platforms isn't just a good idea to explore & consider — it's a necessity.

Visit your bank's website and you'll find a login link somewhere. That link allows you to access your own personal account information and is private to you.

Web portals allow your customers to do business with you 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This is not only convenient for your customers, but it also reduces the load on internal staff. Web portals allow customers to check their account balance, view transaction history, view invoices and statements, check their tank monitor reading, pay their bills, enroll in programs such as auto-bill pay and paperless billing, place fuel orders or request deliveries, sign up for fuel contracts and more. Web portals effectively allow customers to self-service their accounts.

Web portals can also go a step further, providing the ability for noncustomers to create accounts and place orders or to manage your new customer application and onboarding process with integrated credit check and electronic signature. New customer onboarding can be a huge time saver, building logic into the application review process, making onboarding documents electronic and reducing the data entry process.

THE FUNCTIONALITY OF A WEB PORTAL

Many ERP providers have their own web portal product. Others provide an application program interface (API) that allows third-party portal providers to

safely connect to and exchange data with the ERP. A robust API allows propane dealers to maximize the benefits of a web portal by allowing for two-way communication between the portal and the ERP, minimizing data entry, saving time and reducing input errors.

The portal can often be extended by deploying a corresponding app. Most portal providers also offer an app that uses the portal for setup and configuration information. An app is especially attractive to the younger generation of consumers and offers the benefit of added convenience to customers while providing additional marketing exposure for propane dealers by placing branded apps in the Apple and Google app stores.

Other fuel ordering programs and apps exist that don't necessarily connect to an ERP as fully as a portal. These products are self-contained and do not rely on the ERP for customer account data. These products provide a convenient ordering tool for "will call" businesses to allow noncustomers, as well as returning customers, to order propane.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF DIGITAL TOOLS

Here are some real-world examples of propane dealers deploying digital tools:

"We have drastically improved our accounts receivable with [cash on delivery] customers by sending them digital messages via email and text messages when their tank monitor reads 20%. This then prompts them to go to their account online to order and pay for their propane delivery. This process has alleviated a customer service representative calling the customer, collecting payment, entering an order and following up."

— Ann Hess, Rahn's Oil & Propane

"AI-powered customer service tools can certainly change the way propane companies are interacting with customers by offering the ultimate convenience. Today, consumers think of something,



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pick up their phone and expect an answer. Chatbots, virtual assistants, mobile apps and customer portals working in unison can offer the ultimate convenience.”

— Brent MacKenzie, MacKenzie Fuels

“Townsend Energy uses tank monitors and a [fuel delivery] platform ... to optimize propane deliveries. Real-time tank data feeds into [the platform], which predicts delivery needs based on usage and weather. Automated daily ticket generation targets optimal fill levels. Our team then uses these tickets to create efficient delivery routes, ensuring timely service and preventing runouts, even with unpredictable weather. This blend of automated data analysis and human expertise allows us to provide reliable, customer-centric propane deliveries, demonstrating the power of digital platforms in enhancing operational efficiency.”

— Amanda Rivers, Townsend Energy

“We offer contracts for propane and diesel, and our typical propane contract process before the portal involved several employees and weeks of time dealing with mailings, paper and digital forms, and manual data input. With our ... online portal, customers, or a [customer service representative] on behalf of a customer, can fill out contracts through the portal, and all the manual data entry is completed automatically by the system. Customers love the fact that they can fill out the contract directly on their phone or computer and that they can view that contract at any time to see remaining gallons and pricing through the portal. On our end, utilizing online contracting means hours and hours of manual data entry is removed and that the data being entered is much more accurate. It really is a big win-win for us and our customers.”

— Davis Flogel, Mulgrew Oil & Propane

“A common goal for all propane companies is to improve the efficiency of delivery routes, and most would agree that will call deliveries can negatively

affect efficiency. Our wireless tank monitors are directly connected to our customer portal, which we use as a tool to sell more monitors to our will call customers. We are now able to be transparent and create engagement with these customers, as they can see their tank level right from their cellphone. As we continue to gain trust with will call customers and add more monitors, we are able to make our routing more efficient.”

— Nick Piliero, Rural Fuels

“Lots of companies are transitioning to the ‘Amazon way’ of doing business. Things like deploying tank monitors, having a backend system that forecasts usage, sending notifications to the customer ahead of the delivery or service, using online platforms like web portals and apps, implementing ‘chat’ so customers can communicate with CSRs without having to pick up the phone, providing text-to-pay as an option to make it easier for customers to make payments, are all good examples of digital tools. Having all of these as part of your value proposition is key to being successful.”

— Bruce Spiridonoff, Tevis Energy

“One of the most exciting new innovations in online digital systems is integration of ‘smart’ marketing systems. These are marketing tools that track the products and services purchased by consumers and identify sales opportunities that can be taken advantage of utilizing real-time online marketing, as well as email marketing. It’s possible the AI technologies may play a future role in this exciting new area of development.”

— Gary Sippin, Sippin Energy Products

HOW PROPANE DEALERS CAN MITIGATE RISK

Along with all the many benefits digital platforms like the internet and websites bring to business, they also come along with some hazards, and I would be remiss if I didn’t spend a few words on the

important topic of security. Ransomware, data breaches and other criminal attacks can be debilitating at best and at worst ruin your business. Any point in your network that touches the outside world is a vulnerability. For example, email provides an easy way to communicate with customers and vendors, but it also creates an entry point for criminals.

If you don’t have the resources to manage your internal systems in-house — and even if you do — there are vendors that work with this industry that can assist you with reviewing your network security. Another good practice is to enlist in training programs to make sure your CSRs and staff are familiar with common techniques and methods used by criminals to hack systems. Security is only as good as the weakest link.

In addition, you may want to consider a cloud hosting environment. Cloud hosting with reputable providers will have hardware and software in place to maintain barriers against criminals. Finally, you should make sure the vendors that touch your systems or have access to your customer data follow industry standard protocols and best practices. It’s a dangerous world, but there are dedicated professionals available to consult, with a full-time focus on keeping systems and data safe.

In closing, the challenges that confront propane dealers today are numerous, but working in the digital world doesn’t need to be one of them. There are many capable service providers in this sector available to help. Embracing the technology that exists today will have long-term benefits for your business. 📌

Robert Kulawiec is chief operating officer of Destwin, a web portal provider for energy marketers.



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SPEND MONEY TO MAKE MONEY: ENERGY'S TOP INVESTMENTS FOR 2025

The results of the annual *'Top Technology Trends in Fuel Delivery'* survey show where your company should be investing in hardware & software solutions

BY FARID WIDJAYA



Since 2019, Cargas Energy's "Top Technology Trends in Fuel Delivery" (Tech Trends) report has gathered data about how energy companies use technology. Based on data collected over the past six years, it's clear that technology's capabilities and usage have only expanded in the fuel delivery industry. Companies of all sizes are actively investing in additional technology, prioritizing new business software and keeping a close eye on cutting-edge features that could play a key role in future deliveries.

Software Diversification

Fuel dealers are bringing accounting, tank monitoring and payment processing in-house to keep data accessible and

simplify decision-making processes. The 2025 Tech Trends survey found that 93% of respondents use two or more solutions — in addition to fuel delivery software — to manage their business. More than half of respondents reported using payroll and HR systems, credit card gateways and processors, accounting solutions, and customer web portals. These top solutions prove that energy companies are investing in both internal operational systems and external relationship management systems.

On the customer relationship side, the Tech Trends survey noted that fuel dealers primarily use two or more systems to communicate with customers. Phone and email communications are still the most widely used and personable

options, but social media usage and chat tools play important roles in pushing out company messages and building brand familiarity and expertise. These relationships are further bolstered by self-service options like online bill pay, autopay and account management, which have only grown in popularity since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

While ensuring a positive customer experience is crucial, the most desirable self-service tools and internal software prioritize revenue. Fuel dealers reckon daily with rising costs and shrinking supply, which creates demand for accurate and immediate financial data. Tools for payroll and bookkeeping satisfy this demand and provide businesses with a snapshot of cash flow. When external variables create concerns, fuel dealers can use this data to quickly pivot, adjust their strategy and make the best possible decisions for their business.

Prioritizing New Solutions

Strong tech stacks for fuel dealers require breadth and depth; this means energy companies have a vested interest in upgrading outdated systems to keep pace with the diverse tech they're acquiring.

The most prominent system for energy companies is fuel delivery software. This solution serves as a centerpiece for operations, often connecting to and synchronizing with hardware such as flow meters, driver tablets and tank monitors, plus other software like accounting systems and customer relationship management (CRM). Fuel delivery software purchases doubled between the 2024 and 2025 Tech Trends surveys, with 12% of respondents to the most recent survey reporting a fuel delivery software investment for the year. To add to this, fewer fuel dealers are willing to wait seven or more years to make a fuel delivery software purchase.

Given that more than half of respondents purchased their current fuel delivery systems within the past seven years, it's clear that the days of

green screen software are long gone for a majority of energy companies.

Fuel dealers are integrating these modern fuel delivery solutions with software for accounting, sales and marketing, and customer experience to build data-rich reports that measure key metrics like total sales, profit and gallons delivered. However, to synchronize this data to the fuel delivery system, fuel dealers need other solutions with powerful integration capabilities; the best way to ensure seamless data transfer is to invest in contemporary software across the entire organization.

Cutting-Edge Features

What does the future of fuel delivery look like? While the next few years aren't set in stone, fuel dealers have theories about the role emerging technology will play.

Cloud computing is one of the three main areas fuel dealers are tracking. One-third of respondents to the 2025 Tech Trends survey said they struggle to gain business insights from current data and systems. Whether this is due to clunky interfaces, poor data synchronization or a combination of both, it's bothersome enough that fuel delivery companies seek the power to pull data from across the business and generate reports. Specifically, they want to reduce the manual labor associated with critical business tasks, including data entry and report generation, by implementing workflow automation.

Workflow automation is one of the top ways a fuel delivery outfit can cut wasted time and aim for increased revenue. For instance, if a customer asks a visiting tech for a repair or installation quote, the tech can enter this information digitally and generate the quote immediately. That information is then stored in the fuel delivery software and can be referenced by the sales and customer experience teams during future interactions. Data automation ensures that no valuable information is left behind, and the decrease in required manual entry simultaneously reduces

data errors — no more misplacing paper tickets, hastily scribbled quotes or other important information.

Cloud computing and workflow automation already exist in modern fuel delivery software to some capacity. But artificial intelligence (AI) — the biggest business buzzword since 2023 — has fuel dealers feeling equal parts curious and cautious. AI covers an array of solutions and capabilities, and fuel dealers wonder what role it will play in generating and adjusting routes, improving K-factors and communicating with customers. AI may not drive a bobtail or refill a tank, but energy companies are certain it's coming to their industry.

The Future of Fuel

The biggest issues impacting the fuel delivery industry are bigger than any tech stack can manage. From low hiring and retention to government regulations and inflation in the face of fluctuating inventory, fuel dealers have plenty of concerns. However, it seems fuel delivery companies have decided to focus on the things they can control — primarily, saving time and money while keeping customers happy.

The key to stability during a time of turmoil is efficiency. And whether that means investing in better software, expanding business toolkits or experimenting with the latest technology, fuel delivery companies are more willing than ever to pay top dollar for a higher bottom line.

The full report is available at cargasenergy.com/tech-trends-2025. ▀

Farid Widjaya is the energy product marketer at Cargas, and he has been with the company since 2008. Widjaya helped develop the user interface for Cargas Energy and has assisted with data conversions, project implementations and technical support. Today, Widjaya has served as a liaison between the product and marketing teams, using his expertise to plan go-to-market strategies and act as a brand ambassador.



THE IMPORTANCE OF CATHODIC PROTECTION FOR UNDERGROUND TANKS IN THE PROPANE INDUSTRY

Technological advancements in cathodic protection monitoring prevent dangerous & costly incidents that erode the public's trust in the safety of propane

BY KEVIN JAFFE

Underground storage tanks are widely used for storing petroleum products, chemicals and other hazardous materials, including propane. However, these tanks are highly susceptible to corrosion, which can lead to structural failure, environmental contamination and severe financial consequences.

To mitigate these risks, cathodic protection is a critical method used to prevent corrosion and extend the lifespan of underground tanks.

Why Is Cathodic Protection Important?

Corrosion occurs when metal reacts with environmental elements such as moisture, electrical current and different chemical compositions, which attack the steel structure of the tank, resulting in rust and pitting and weakening the overall structural integrity of the tank.

Cathodic protection works by altering the electrochemical environment of the tank to prevent corrosion. There are two primary types of cathodic protection systems:

1. *Sacrificial anode systems*: These systems use highly active metals (such as magnesium or zinc) that corrode in place of the tank, thereby protecting it from deterioration.
2. *Impressed current systems*: These involve an external power source that delivers a controlled electrical current to counteract the corrosion process. For this article, we will not focus specifically on this system.

By implementing cathodic protection, underground storage tank owners can significantly reduce maintenance costs, enhance safety and comply with environmental regulations. Within the propane industry, the focus is around sacrificial anode systems and tank coating.

Cathodic Protection in the Propane Industry

For underground propane tanks, cathodic protection is not just a recommendation — it is a regulatory requirement. Propane tanks are made from steel, which is highly susceptible to corrosion when buried underground. The application of cathodic protection ensures that the structural integrity of the tank is maintained over time, reducing the risk of gas leaks and explosions.

NFPA Guidelines & Regulations

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 58 guidelines set the foundation for cathodic protection requirements, but it is important to recognize that these standards represent the minimum requirements for compliance. Industry best practices often go beyond these baseline regulations to ensure enhanced safety, extended tank longevity and reduced risk of failure. Proactive maintenance and more frequent monitoring of cathodic

protection systems can further safeguard against potential hazards. By exceeding NFPA standards, propane marketers and tank owners can achieve greater reliability and operational efficiency.

The NFPA provides key regulatory guidance for the propane industry, particularly in NFPA 58: Liquefied Petroleum Gas Code. This code outlines specific requirements for the installation, maintenance and monitoring of cathodic protection systems for underground propane tanks:

- **Cathodic protection system installation:** NFPA 58 mandates that underground propane tanks be equipped with a cathodic protection system, including a sacrificial anode and OEM-approved tank coating at the time of installation.
- **Periodic testing:** The regulation requires that cathodic protection systems be tested at the time of installation, 12-18 months after installation, and then at least every 36 months to ensure they are functioning correctly.
- **Minimum protection levels:** The cathodic protection system must maintain a minimum voltage potential to effectively prevent corrosion, typically measured at -0.85 volts or more negative, with reference to a saturated copper-copper sulfate half cell.
- **Recordkeeping requirements:** Propane tank owners must maintain documentation of cathodic protection system inspections and testing results for regulatory compliance for at least the last two inspections.
- **Anode replacement:** When sacrificial anode systems are used, they must be periodically checked and replaced as needed to maintain protection levels.

Failure to comply with NFPA 58 regulations can lead to fines, legal liabilities and increased risk of propane leaks that could result in catastrophic incidents.

Overlooking Cathodic Protection

Failure to install or properly maintain a cathodic protection system can have devastating consequences. Some of the major risks include:

- **Catastrophic costs:** The financial implications of failing to monitor and respond to corrosion issues can reach into the hundreds of millions of dollars due to legal claims, regulatory fines, cleanup costs and reputational damage.
- **Structural failure:** Over time, corrosion weakens the tank walls, making them prone to leaks and collapse.
- **Propane leaks and explosions:** Unlike petroleum leaks, propane gas leaks pose an immediate explosion hazard if exposed to ignition sources.
- **Environmental pollution:** Corroded propane tanks can release hazardous substances into the soil.
- **Legal and financial penalties:** Noncompliance with NFPA 58 and other regulatory standards can result in hefty fines and liability claims.
- **Loss of business and reputation:** Propane suppliers and distributors risk severe reputational damage if their tanks cause safety or environmental hazards.

Real-World Examples of Corrosion-Related Failures in Propane Storage

Several incidents highlight the dangers of failing to protect underground tanks:

- **Residential propane tank leaks:** Cases have been reported where improperly maintained underground propane tanks developed leaks due to corrosion, leading to fires and explosions.
- **Commercial propane storage failures:** Businesses that store large amounts of propane have faced regulatory penalties and financial losses due to tank corrosion.
- **Legal actions:** Property owners have filed lawsuits against propane suppliers when underground tanks failed due to insufficient protection.

Technological Advancements in Cathodic Protection Monitoring

Traditional cathodic protection systems require periodic manual inspections, which can be inefficient and prone to human error. However, modern technology now allows for real-time monitoring and automated maintenance of cathodic protection systems. Key benefits of this technology include:

- **Real-time data monitoring:** Allows operators to track the effectiveness of cathodic protection systems remotely via cloud-based platforms.
- **Automated alerts:** Sends notifications when protection levels drop below optimal thresholds.
- **Twice-daily cathodic monitoring alerts:** A major differentiator for marketers, providing frequent updates and allowing for quick response to potential issues.
- **Increased accuracy:** Provides precise measurements, reducing the risk of undetected corrosion.
- **Cost efficiency:** Minimizes the need for manual inspections and reduces maintenance expenses, protecting one of your most expensive — and valuable — assets.

Financial & Legal Benefits of Cathodic Monitoring Technology

Implementing advanced cathodic monitoring technology can provide significant financial and legal advantages for propane marketers and tank owners. By maintaining continuous monitoring and detailed reporting, businesses can:

- **Save thousands of dollars:** Proactively proving compliance and responsible tank management can help reduce insurance premiums and legal liabilities.
- **Provide documentation for legal and insurance purposes:** Detailed monitoring records serve as evidence of due diligence in preventing corrosion-related failures, which can be crucial in legal disputes or insurance claims.
- **Avoid catastrophic costs:** The financial impact of failing to

monitor and respond to cathodic protection system failures can reach into the hundreds of millions of dollars due to legal claims, regulatory fines, cleanup costs and reputational damage.

- **Enhance business reputation and customer trust:** Demonstrating a commitment to safety and compliance reassures customers and strengthens business credibility.

By integrating innovative cathodic protection technologies, propane industry professionals can enhance their corrosion prevention strategies, ensuring the long-term safety and efficiency of their underground propane tanks.

Safety & Peace of Mind for Marketers & Customers

Beyond regulatory compliance, ensuring the integrity of underground propane tanks through cathodic

protection provides peace of mind for both marketers and customers. For marketers, a well-maintained cathodic protection system minimizes liability, prevents costly environmental cleanup and protects business reputation. For customers, it guarantees their propane supply is stored safely, reducing the risk of hazardous leaks or failures.

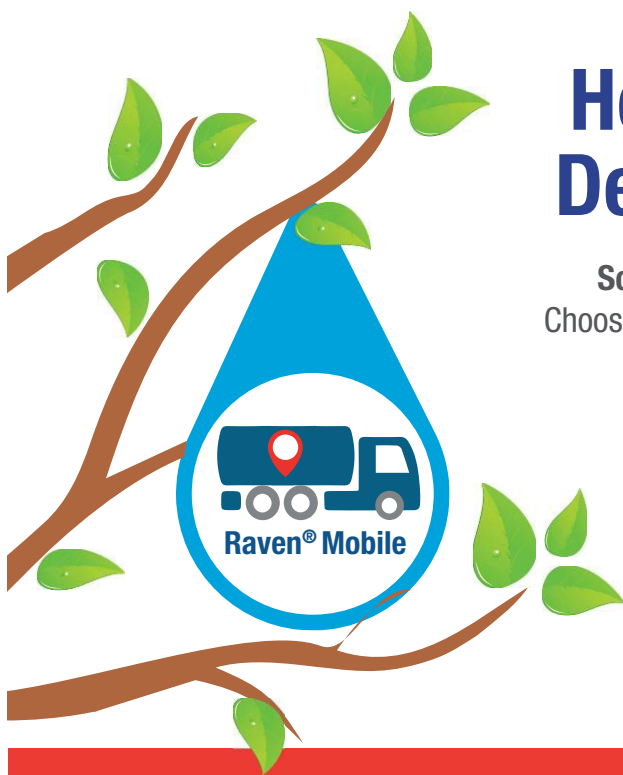
Investing in advanced cathodic protection measures fosters trust between suppliers and consumers, reinforcing the commitment to safety and reliability in the propane industry.

Cathodic protection is an essential measure for safeguarding underground propane tanks from corrosion-related failures. Without adequate protection, underground storage tanks pose significant environmental, financial and safety risks. However, with the advent of modern cathodic protection monitoring systems, propane tank operators can now

ensure continuous protection monitoring with greater accuracy and efficiency.

Compliance with NFPA 58 guidelines and investing in robust cathodic protection solutions are not only regulatory necessities, but also crucial steps toward sustainable and safe propane storage operations. ■

Kevin Jaffe is the co-owner and chief operating officer of Mopeka Products LLC. Mopeka has actively engaged with industry leaders to drive awareness and best practices in cathodic protection. The company has hosted several industry-leading panel discussions, bringing together representatives from leading propane marketers, regional associations, legal experts and insurance representatives. By fostering dialogue among key stakeholders, Mopeka continues to improve industry safety standards and operational excellence.



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DATA CONVERSIONS: BEST PRACTICES FOR A SMOOTH TRANSITION

Ensure a seamless transition by planning carefully, cleaning your data & testing thoroughly

BY REGINA BALISTRERI

You just acquired a new company. How do you successfully fold their data into your back-office system? Or maybe you just purchased a new back-office system. How do you move the data from your old system to the new? You are about to embark on a data conversion — the process of transferring data from one system to another. A clean data conversion is key to a smooth implementation process, but thorough preparation and an organized process is paramount to an efficient and clean outcome.

Data Availability

The first step to preparing a data conversion plan is finding out what data is available. During this discovery phase, the goal is to locate all available information so you can make an informed decision about what data to convert and how. Is data being kept in a database, or is it maintained manually on index cards or in paper files? Manually kept data equates to a manual conversion, but most often, at least some portion of the information is in a digital format.

Look for files that contain primary customer data — perhaps the most important data file, including things like name, address, balance, billing information, credit information and customer notes. This is the minimum information needed to service the account, and sometimes it is the single file that is chosen to convert. Also, look for transactions, tank information, service information, equipment information or other data that reflects changes made to the account.

Manual vs. Automatic

After the data has been located, the most basic conversion decision is whether to perform a manual or an automatic conversion. Even if there is useful data in a system, if the number of accounts is below a certain threshold, some companies will opt to do a manual conversion. That number is often 1,000 accounts, but this needs to be weighed against the manual labor needed to input those accounts by hand, as well as the potential for human error during the input process.

With automatic conversions, data can be exported and imported automatically. The first step is extraction, and often the software vendor for the old or new system can assist. This can happen through direct access to the old database, a dump of the data into files or by running reports from the old system. Whatever method is used, the goal is to successfully pull the data out for the next step.

Data Forensics

Once the data is extracted, it's time to look closer to better understand what is available and determine the quality of the data. This phase requires some forensics to determine what the fields truly mean. Even when an acquisition uses the same back-office system as the purchaser, the fields can be used differently, so it's best not to make any assumptions.

Melissa Spahr of Dead River Company, a fuel provider in Northern New England, has been part of multiple acquisitions over the years. "We actually go on-site to the company and go through their software, looking at each field and what their definition is. You'd be surprised at some of the answers that you get."

In addition, data integrity is a concern. Often, systems have been used for years, and while the current staff does things one way, there may still be remnants of old methods in the data. For example, creditworthiness may be indicated by credit codes today, but it may have previously been stored in a text field, and some accounts may still hold it there. Also, older systems may not

have enforced business rules as well as modern ones, so the data could contain many inconsistencies. All of this needs to be investigated and understood in order to set up a clean mapping to the new system.

Map the Data

Now that the data is understood, it's time to set up the mapping from the old to the new system. The key to this stage is making sure you are ready for it. "A deep understanding of the data in the old system helps limit assumptions in the mapping and leads to a cleaner conversion," shared Daniel Legault, conversion team leader at ADD Systems, a propane software provider.

For some fields, mapping will be straightforward, like customer name, but some may be more complex or even missing and will require logic or calculations to pull across correctly into the new database. For example, important information saved in a text field may need to be parsed and then mapped to a new field in the new system. Other fields, like k-factor, are sometimes kept manually outside a system, so calculations on the last few deliveries can be used to determine and load a k-factor in the new system. The mapping process can handle these needs as well.

Also, it's important to think about the transition for customers. You can likely expect people to call for customer support with their old account number for a while, so plan ahead by setting up their old account numbers as an alternate on the new system. It's a simple step, but it will make for a better customer experience, especially if they are leery of the transition.

In addition, the mapping process is an opportunity to clean up data. With clear business rules in mind, data that is outside set parameters can be caught and edited or removed. For example, invalid customer types or incorrect coding can be fixed with the import. Additionally, if sensitive data like credit card numbers were kept in a text field, that data can be stripped out and stored properly.

Test, Test & Test Again

Once your data map is created, it will be used to convert the data and load it into a test database for review. That means it's time for testing, and it's important to remain deeply engaged during this stage of the conversion. It is an opportunity to pinpoint data misinterpretations, anomalies and other issues, and most importantly, make corrections before going live.

This is an excellent opportunity to investigate the data at a detailed level on individual accounts and in a broad way via aggregate reports. Spot-check customer records for accuracy and consistency. Confirm that account balances are the same in both the old and new systems. Compare the number of automatic accounts and budget accounts by product and compare aging reports in both systems.

Inevitably, this step will uncover issues that need correcting, and you could have multiple rounds of corrections and testing. The more thorough the testing, the fewer rounds you will need and the quicker the path to live data.

"Having your three T's crossed — testing, testing and testing — and not leaving any stones unturned in the verification phase will make your live conversion and transition to the new system a smoother process each and every time," shared Legault.

It's best not to rush this phase, since recognizing a data integrity issue after a few days of live processing can be disruptive and complex to fix.

Going Live!

With the data conversion approved, the final phase is to pull the data into the live database. At this point, you can make a clean cut-over to the new system, or you can run the two systems in parallel for a period of time for added confirmation that things are set up properly. No matter which method you choose, it's important to communicate it clearly. "When making the transition from the old to the new system, it's important to ensure that you have a clear, concise cut-off date and

that users are aware of it, stop entering information in the old system and begin using the new system,” Spahr shared.

Adding Efficiency

Once the data conversion is done and the new system is live, you can celebrate a job well done. When moving to a new back-office software solution, the process might be a one-and-done situation, and you won’t have to think about an additional conversion for a number of years. However, if you are a company in acquisition mode, data conversions may be a regular occurrence, and efficiency becomes paramount. Developing a clear process and procedure helps streamline future conversions.

As you become more of an expert on conversions, there are tools that can empower your company to do more of the work without the help of a software vendor. For example, there are application programming

interfaces (APIs) that allow the user to import or export the data themselves. These tools can be used for large or small conversions, granting access to specific files and fields. These tools do not eliminate the need to dedicate time and effort to understanding the data and testing, but they can cut down on the people involved in the conversion. Oftentimes, these APIs are used with smaller acquisitions, ones that would have been done manually and required hours of people’s time for data entry. Access to the API means that all that manual entry can be eliminated.

Take Your Time to Get It Right

“Conversions can be quick, long, simple or complex, but they always have many moving parts with many people involved,” shared Legault. It’s most important not to rush. Be thorough with the discovery phase and avoid making assumptions. Take full advantage of

testing opportunities to ensure that your final conversion is as clean as possible. A data conversion is more than just a necessary part of the process of moving to a new software solution or merging an acquisition into your system — it is also an opportunity to cleanse and improve your data integrity to lead to a more efficient operation in the future. ▀

Regina Balistreri is the director of marketing for ADD Systems, a software provider for the propane industry. Balistreri has also been an ADD sales representative and an implementation specialist. With 14-plus years in the industry, she is passionate about operational efficiency. Contact her at balistreri@addsys.com or visit addsys.com for more information.



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DISASTER RECOVERY PLANNING: STEPS, STRATEGIES & TIPS THAT MIGHT JUST SAVE YOUR BUSINESS

Preparing for the worst helps build your company's resilience

BY TREY NICHOLS

Picture this: It's a normal Monday morning, and you're sipping your beloved coffee, ready to tackle the week. Suddenly, disaster strikes. Maybe it's a cyberattack that locks you out of your systems, a small fire, a server crash or even a waterpipe that floods your server room. Your heart drops. What do you do? Where do you even begin?

If you have a solid disaster recovery plan in place, you'll take a deep breath, follow the plan and get things back up and running. If not, well, let's just say you might be in for an anxiety-filled, rough ride.

In this guide, we'll walk through why disaster recovery planning is essential, how to get started and what to do when chaos hits. Think of it as your survival guide for the digital age.

Step 1: Accept That Disasters Are Inevitable — & That's OK!

First things first: disasters happen. You can't predict a flood, a cyberattack or a rogue employee accidentally deleting critical files. But you can be ready for almost anything that might occur.

The key threats to your data include:

- Natural disasters: Fires, floods, earthquakes — you name it

- Cyberattacks: Ransomware, hacking and the phishing scams that are lurking in the shadows
- Hardware failures: Servers crash, hard drives die — machines aren't invincible
- Human errors: We all make mistakes, but some are more catastrophic than others

Once you accept that these risks are real, you can take proactive steps to make sure they don't destroy your business.

Step 2: Build a Disaster Recovery Plan — Before You Actually Need It

Think of a disaster recovery plan as the proactive measures you put in place, hoping you never need them, as well as a step-by-step guide that you follow if something does happen. You hope you'll never need it, but when disaster strikes, you'll be grateful it exists.

Here's what goes into a solid disaster recovery plan:

1. Identify what's most important.

Not all data is created equally, and it can be cost prohibitive to back up everything in the same manner. If cost becomes a deterrent in any way, discern what all you need to back up

and give critical data priority. You can even create different backup strategies using different methodologies for different systems and data.

Take a hard look at your systems and ask yourself:

- What data can we not afford to lose?
- Which systems are mission critical?
- How much downtime is acceptable before we're in serious trouble?

There are different methodologies for redundancy and resiliency based on your needs.

2. Follow the 3-2-1 backup rule.

When it comes to backups, redundancy is king. Stick to this golden rule:

- Three copies of your data
- Two different storage types
- One off-site backup

If you're relying on a single backup, you're playing with fire — in some cases, quite literally.

3. Set recovery time [RTO] & recovery point objectives [RPO].

- RTO: How fast do you need to be back online? Four hours? Twenty-four hours? Even longer?
- RPO: How much time lapse of data loss can you tolerate? Spoiler: Less is better. Can you lose one hour? Twenty-four hours? A week?

These numbers will shape your recovery strategy.

Pro tip: While everyone wants to be back online and productive as soon as possible, set realistic goals and expectations that can actually be accomplished.

4. Choose the right tools & strategies for your needs.

You have options when it comes to backup and recovery solutions. These options are:

- Cloud-based disaster recovery (DRaaS)
- Automated backup software
- Redundant servers and automatic failover systems

Remember, redundant/failover systems are not backups. Please make sure you still have a good backup strategy in place even if you also have a redundant failover system in place. Pick the ones that align with your needs, budget and RTO/RPO expectations.

5. Have a communication plan.

Make sure that if disaster strikes, you are aware of who needs to know, who you need to assist you and how you can reach them. Having a written and clear communications plan ensures:

- Employees get instructions quickly
- Customers are reassured (not left in the dark)
- Experienced IT teams know their roles and responsibilities
- Vendors have clear directives for specific operations that are needed to get you back up and running

Pro tip: Make sure you have alternative communication methods ready in case your primary channels are down or unavailable, and don't count on digital systems to extract these communication methods. For example, if you can't email because your email server is down, have phone numbers readily available in your plan).

6. Test, test & test again.

A disaster recovery plan that has never been tested is about as useful as a parachute with holes in it. Schedule regular disaster recovery drills to:

- Identify weak points
- Make necessary adjustments
- Ensure everyone knows what to do
- Verify your backups (actually log in and check the data integrity)

Step 3: When Disaster Strikes, Follow These Steps

Alright, the worst has happened. Your systems are down, and panic is in the air. Stay calm and follow the plan.

1. Assess the situation.

- What happened?
- What systems are affected?
- What's the estimated impact?

Before hitting the "restore" button to another server, understand the scope of the disaster. Sometimes it will be quicker to get the production systems back up and running than it will to download and restore to a secondary or new infrastructure.

2. Contain the damage.

If it's a cyberattack, immediately isolate infected systems to prevent further spread and then contact your managed service provider or information technology (IT) team. Then, depending on the level of severity, contact your cyber insurance company.

If it's a hardware failure or natural disaster, have a plan for the best course of action in order to get your systems up and running. Examples would be good service-level agreements for replacement parts or spare hardware based on your fault tolerances and RTO/RPO goals.

3. Restore your data.

If needed, use your backups to get things back online. This is why you invested in that 3-2-1 backup strategy — now it pays off!

4. Communicate updates.

Let employees and customers know what's going on. Transparency is key to maintaining trust and keeping that great reputation that you have worked so hard to earn with your customers.

5. Evaluate & improve.

Once the dust settles, conduct a post-mortem analysis:

- What worked well?
- What could be improved?
- Were there any unexpected or hidden vulnerabilities?

Use these insights to strengthen your disaster recovery plan for the future.

Pro Tips to Stay Disaster-Ready

To make sure you're never caught off guard, follow these best practices:

1. Automate your backups.

Set up frequent, automatic backups

so you're never scrambling to recover lost files. Make sure you are notified of exceptions for when files or backups fail. Make sure you verify your backups on a regular schedule.

2. Use cloud-based disaster recovery.

Cloud solutions make recovery faster, scalable and cost-effective. Don't rely solely on physical backups.

3. Train your team.

Your IT staff aren't the only ones responsible for disaster recovery. Educate employees on best practices to prevent data loss in the first place.

4. Strengthen your cybersecurity.

A disaster recovery plan won't help if you're constantly under attack.

Implement the following:

- Endpoint protection

- Patch management
- Network security
- Multi-factor authentication (when available and applicable)
- Strong user and password policies
- Consistent cybersecurity training

5. Work with experts.

If you're not confident in your disaster recovery strategy, bring in recovery experts to fine-tune your plan.

Pro tip: Please, please, please print your disaster recovery plan. I have seen multiple times when a company worked hard on a great plan, then the document with the plan was left on the server that wasn't available! Print multiple copies and store them in different physical locations to ensure you have easy access when you need it.

Store it digitally in multiple places, as well, but make sure you update each as you review and make changes.

Hope for the Best, Prepare for the Worst

Disasters are unpredictable, but being unprepared is a choice. The businesses that survive catastrophes aren't "lucky" — they are the ones that are prepared and had a rock-solid disaster recovery plan in place.

So, don't wait until a disaster strikes to think about business continuity and recovery. Get started today, run your drills and make sure your data is always protected. Your future self will definitely thank you! 📌

Trey Nichols is a co-founder of Silverline Solutions, a cloud and IT solutions provider for the propane industry and the company that created MyFuelPortal. He has been in IT for over 25 years. Prior to his time with Silverline, Nichols worked at a propane company. Visit silverlinesolutions.com.



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PROTECTING YOUR IMPORTANT ASSETS WITH FLEET MANAGEMENT & GPS TRACKING

Evolving telematics solutions ensure less risk & more successful operations

BY BILL BORKOWICZ

Managing propane industry assets has become more important than ever. Extreme weather and supply chain issues have become par for the course, so it is critical to protect these vital assets while managing an efficient and productive operation. Of course, in this industry, it's more than just the tanks that need to be protected. There are delivery vehicles, trailers and other heavy equipment — and perhaps, most importantly, your employees.

Fortunately, modern asset management technology and telematics solutions have evolved to more than just dots on a map. While many customers come to us asking about protection against theft of equipment, technology is available that can not only give you peace of mind that your assets are protected, but also vastly improve efficiencies, keep your employees safe and increase customer satisfaction.

There are three key telematics solutions that ensure you spend more

time enhancing your business productivity and less time worrying about unnecessary costs or lost assets.

Mitigating Theft

When equipment is lost or stolen, you face a loss of productivity, the need to rent or purchase replacements and time spent having to file police reports and insurance claims. And in this industry, there is powered equipment like forklifts, trucks and skid steers, along with nonpowered items like tanks, trailers and loaders, that are all expensive and vulnerable to potential theft. At a high level, GPS tracking technology provides real-time location and movement alerts that can help prevent theft. But the technology goes beyond that and can be customized to meet your needs.

Perhaps you want an alert if something moves even a foot from where it's supposed to be. Or maybe you only want an alert when it moves beyond a certain

geofenced area. Depending on the asset — the propane tank, the delivery truck, the installation tools or something else — all you need is a GPS sensor attached to the item and cloud-based software. When it comes to vehicles, you can also deter thefts and off-hours use by interrupting power to the starter. Driver ID technology lets you know which employee used a vehicle and can provide selective access to allow individual employees to start a vehicle. And with tamper protection that triggers when the back of a sensor is exposed to light, you can be alerted when a tracking device is removed from an asset.

Recovering vehicles and assets due to theft means fewer insurance claims. Insurance companies are more commonly providing discounts to premiums when asset solutions are in place. Importantly, the savings from not having to replace this vehicle more than paid for the implementation of

the telematics solution. Accurate GPS location tracking is an easy way to eliminate guesswork regarding a lost or stolen asset's location, saving you time and money and ensuring that your customers will be taken care of when they need it most.

Enhancing Safety

Your delivery vehicles and the people who operate them are critical to your operations. Ensuring the safety of these employees while they make deliveries or customer visits in company-owned vehicles is paramount. With a telematics solution, you can track excessive speeding via odometer readings, hard braking, phone usage, seat belt compliance and other high-risk driving maneuvers to trigger a discussion on safe driving tips and help improve driver safety for themselves and others. Cameras can provide proof of safe driving in the event of an accident as well.



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These solutions can also detect when a vehicle is in an accident and alert you and emergency responders, and AI-powered cameras can detect phone usage or driver fatigue and even predict collisions and alert drivers in real-time. Video footage from these cameras, along with GPS data, can also potentially help protect your company from insurance claims or lawsuits in the event of a disputed accident.

Optimizing Vehicle Maintenance & Delivery Routes

For vehicles, unexpected breakdowns can be costly and time consuming. GPS-powered asset tracking helps eliminate unexpected repair costs and downtime by scheduling proactive maintenance reminders based on engine hours and miles. It's also no secret that fuel is expensive! The technology can be used to optimize routes for fuel and mileage savings in addition to minimizing idling

time, which wastes fuel and causes excess engine wear. Operators can use the data to dispatch the closest driver in case of an emergency or change in plans, reroute drivers to help stay on schedule and meet appointment windows and respond faster to customers.

For your tanks, there are advanced tank monitoring systems that are equipped with IoT (Internet of Things) sensors that provide real-time data on propane levels, pressure and potential leaks. With this data, you can prioritize refills based on need and not on a predetermined schedule and ensure that tanks and your delivery drivers are where they are needed the most.

At the end of the day, it is all about taking care of your customers. The throughline of these technology benefits is how they can increase overall efficiency and customer satisfaction. You can ensure that your customers have a

great experience while maximizing productivity and running both an efficient and profitable business.

An integrated telematic solution is a smart addition to any company operating within the propane and energy sector, as it can easily pay for itself in a short period of time through fuel and time saving or in the event of one stolen piece of equipment. 📌

Bill Borkowicz is director of sales data and software solutions for UScellular. Borkowicz leads multiple teams providing pre- and post-sales technical support to UScellular's business, government and enterprise sales teams. He has 24 years of experience in wireless enterprise solutions across a breadth of functions, including sales leadership, solution engineering, partner selection and management, and IoT strategy. Visit uscellular.com.





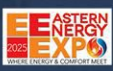
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ACROSS INDUSTRY LINES — PROPANE & ELECTRIC VEHICLES

Though often depicted at odds, these two industries have the potential to support each other on the path to a cleaner environment

BY SCOTT BRADLEY



PENGZPHOTO - STOCK.ADOBE.COM

The United States has reached a pivotal moment in its approach to energy and transportation. The increasing adoption of electric vehicles (EVs) presents both opportunities and challenges, particularly in the context of evolving political and environmental directives.

One innovative solution lies in the collaboration between the propane and electric vehicle industries, specifically through the use of propane-powered generators to support EV charging infrastructure.

This partnership not only addresses current energy demands but also navigates the shifting landscape of governmental policies and environmental considerations.

PROPANE-POWERED GENERATORS: ENHANCING EV CHARGING INFRASTRUCTURE

The expansion of EVs necessitates a robust and reliable charging infrastructure. However, challenges, such as grid capacity limitations and the need for charging stations in remote areas, pose significant obstacles. This innovative approach leverages propane or renewable propane to power a propane generator.

These generators can produce up to 250 kilowatts (kW) of 480-volt power, sufficient to power multiple EV chargers simultaneously. The electricity generated by the propane generator is used to charge the batteries of electric vehicles, providing a reliable and efficient charging solution.

Using propane in this capacity offers several advantages. Propane is a clean-burning fuel, resulting in lower greenhouse gas emissions compared to diesel or gasoline generators. Additionally, propane's domestic abundance enhances energy security and reduces dependence on imported fuels. The integration of propane generators into the EV charging network not only supports the growing number of electric vehicles but also contributes to a more resilient and environmentally friendly energy infrastructure.

UNDERSTANDING OFF-GRID EV CHARGING

Off-grid EV charging refers to charging stations that operate independent of the traditional electrical grid. These systems are particularly valuable in areas where grid connectivity is absent or unreliable. By using alternative energy sources such as propane, these stations can provide consistent and dependable charging services to EV users in diverse locations.

THE ROLE OF PROPANE IN OFF-GRID CHARGING

Propane, a low-carbon fuel, has emerged as a viable energy source for off-grid EV charging stations. Its attributes make it especially suitable for this application.

- *Environmental benefits:* Propane combustion results in lower emissions of nitrogen oxides (NOx), carbon monoxide (CO) and carbon dioxide (CO₂) compared to conventional diesel generators. In light-commercial microgrid

applications, propane offers near-zero NOx and CO emissions, along with a 24% reduction in CO2 emissions compared to diesel.

- **Portability and flexibility:** Propane-powered charging units are often designed to be portable, allowing for rapid deployment in various locations. This mobility is advantageous for fleet operators and event organizers who require temporary charging solutions.
- **Cost-effectiveness:** Implementing propane-powered charging stations can be more economical than extending the electrical grid or upgrading existing infrastructure. These systems eliminate the need for costly site preparations and can be installed swiftly, often within 24 hours.
- **Energy independence and reliability:** Propane's widespread availability ensures that off-grid charging stations can operate independently of the electrical grid, providing a reliable power source even

during grid outages. This resilience is crucial for maintaining continuous EV operations in critical situations.

Until permanent utility power can be connected, the Los Angeles Unified School District will be charging 180 electric Blue Bird school buses using propane and renewable propane. Twenty-four 175 kW propane generators, each charging eight electric school buses, will produce 23 megawatt hours (MWh), or 23,000 kilowatt hours (kWh), of energy each night using 4,000 gallons of propane or renewable propane. Annually, the units will produce almost 6 gigawatt hours (GWh), or 6 million kWh, of energy, using over 800,000 gallons of propane and renewable propane.

POLITICAL & ENVIRONMENTAL SHIFTS: FROM BIDEN TO TRUMP

The political landscape in the U.S. has seen significant shifts with the transition from the Biden administration

to the current Trump administration, particularly concerning energy policies and environmental regulations. The Biden administration implemented several initiatives aimed at promoting clean energy and reducing carbon emissions. These included stringent vehicle emission standards and substantial investments in electric vehicle infrastructure, reflecting a commitment to combating climate change and fostering the adoption of electric vehicles.

In contrast, the Trump administration has prioritized deregulation and the promotion of fossil fuels. One of the administration's early actions was the issuance of an executive order titled "Unleashing American Energy," which aims to eliminate the "electric vehicle mandate" and promote consumer choice in vehicle purchases. This order seeks to remove regulatory barriers and ensure a level playing field for all vehicle technologies, effectively rolling back

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incentives and subsidies that favored electric vehicles.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PROPANE & EV INDUSTRIES

The current political climate presents both challenges and opportunities for the propane and electric vehicle industries. The rollback of EV incentives and emission standards may slow the adoption of electric vehicles, potentially impacting the demand for EV-related infrastructure. However, this environment also underscores the importance of diversified and resilient energy solutions.

Propane-powered generators serve as a critical bridge in this transitional period. By providing reliable and clean energy for EV charging stations, propane supports the continued growth of electric vehicles despite regulatory uncertainties. Moreover, the use of propane in this capacity aligns with the administration's emphasis on energy independence and consumer choice, offering a market-driven solution that enhances the nation's energy portfolio.

Furthermore, the collaboration between the propane and electric vehicle industries exemplifies an adaptive approach to evolving policies. By integrating propane generators into the EV infrastructure, stakeholders can mitigate the impacts of regulatory changes and continue to promote sustainable transportation solutions. This partnership not only addresses immediate energy needs but also positions both industries to navigate future shifts in the political and environmental landscape effectively.

CHALLENGES & CONSIDERATIONS

While propane-powered off-grid EV charging offers numerous advantages, certain considerations must be addressed:

- **Fuel supply logistics:** Ensuring a consistent supply of propane is essential for the uninterrupted operation of these charging stations. Establishing reliable delivery schedules and storage facilities is



CASE STUDY: LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT (LAUSD)

Charging 180 electric Blue Bird buses with propane

Electric School Buses

The Clean School Bus Program has resulted in 8,500 electric school buses being awarded, ordered, delivered or currently in operation. The electric school buses typically require approximately 130 kWh of energy per day. Over a year, this translates into over 20 MWh of energy annually,

crucial, especially in remote areas.

- **Regulatory compliance:** Operators must adhere to local regulations regarding emissions, safety standards and fuel storage. Compliance ensures the safety and legality of the charging stations.
- **Technological integration:** Incorporating renewable energy sources and advanced battery storage requires sophisticated control systems to manage energy flow and optimize efficiency. Investing in such technologies can enhance the performance and sustainability of the charging stations.

As the adoption of EVs continues to grow, the development of versatile and sustainable charging solutions becomes increasingly important. Propane-powered off-grid charging stations represent a pragmatic approach to extending EV infrastructure into areas beyond the reach of the traditional electrical grid. Ongoing advancements in generator efficiency, battery storage and renewable energy integration are likely to further enhance the viability and environmental benefits of these systems.

Propane-powered, off-grid EV charging stations offer a compelling

requiring more than 4,500 gallons of propane or renewable propane to produce the energy.

A small school may have eight buses. A large school could have 200 buses. This is a sizable amount of propane that is required for charging electric school buses.

Until permanent utility power can be connected, the LAUSD will be charging 180 electric Blue Bird school buses using propane and renewable propane. Twenty-four 175 kW propane generators, each charging eight electric school buses, will produce 23 MWh (23,000 kWh) of energy each night using 4,000 gallons of propane or renewable propane. Annually, the units will produce almost 6 GWh, or 6,000,000 kWh, of energy, using over 800,000 gallons of propane and renewable propane.

solution to the challenges of expanding EV infrastructure into remote and underserved areas. Their environmental benefits, cost-effectiveness, portability and reliability make them a valuable component of a comprehensive strategy to support the widespread adoption of electric vehicles. By integrating propane with renewable energy sources and adhering to best practices in deployment and operation, these charging stations can significantly contribute to a sustainable and resilient transportation ecosystem.

The intersection of the propane and electric vehicle industries represents a strategic response to the United States' dynamic energy policies and environmental directives. The use of propane-powered generators to support EV charging infrastructure offers a practical and environmentally friendly solution to current challenges.

Amid the shifting political emphasis from the Biden administration's clean energy initiatives to the Trump administration's focus on deregulation and fossil fuels, this collaboration underscores the importance of innovative and adaptable approaches to achieving a sustainable and resilient energy future. 📌



IMAGE PROVIDED BY BRADLEY

CASE STUDY: LOS ANGELES DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (LADOT)

Charging 48 electric BYD ride transit buses with propane

Electric Transit Buses

In June 2023, the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Transit Administration (FTA) announced nearly \$1.7 billion in funding for 130 transit projects across 46 states and territories. Many of them will need to be powered with off-grid EV charging. These Class 7 or 8 transit buses, which are 30 or more feet in length, typically require about 150 kWh of charging per night. Annually, this translates into over 47 MWh of energy annually, which requires almost 7,000 gallons of propane or renewable propane. Small transit agencies may have a dozen transit buses. A large transit agency may have over 100 transit buses.

Until permanent utility power can be connected, the LADOT will be charging 48 electric 40-foot BYD RIDE transit buses using propane and renewable propane. Four 250 kW propane generators, each charging 12 electric transit buses, will produce 1 MWh (or 1,000 kWh) of energy each night using 1,000 gallons of propane or renewable propane. Annually, the units will produce over 2 GWh (or 2 million kWh) of energy using over 300,000 gallons of propane and renewable propane.

Scott Bradley is director of sales and strategic partnerships at Pioneer eMobility — eBoost. Bradley has more than a decade of experience working in and exploring technology and energy industries and is often invited to speak at national events. He holds a Bachelor of Science in electrical engineering and a Master of Science in electrical engineering — robotics and artificial intelligence.



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CREATING A PEOPLE-FIRST COMPANY CULTURE

Equipping service techs with hands-on training, vendor support & a team-oriented mindset leads to the delivery of top-tier customer service

BY KIRSTEN MCALPIN

IMAGES COURTESY OF CONGER LP GAS

“At Conger LP Gas, it’s our people that make the difference.”

In a recent television commercial shoot, Conger LP Gas President and CEO Dan Richardson spoke those words with glimpses of the company’s staff doing what they do best, interwoven over his monologue. Your company’s employees are usually the first impression that your customers encounter. When it comes to service technicians, it is crucial that they are equipped with the proper training to handle any situation that may arise in the field.

Steve Hooks, operations, safety and compliance manager at Conger LP Gas, offered an overview of training, saying, “Conger LP Gas uses classroom and hands-on training for all technicians so they will be able to troubleshoot, repair and communicate with our customers. We utilize some of our vendors to come in and give technical and hands-on training for their products. We also send our newly hired technicians to propane training classes during their first year so they can learn the skills to install, repair and maintain propane equipment safely.”

This article will dive into each of these important topics.

ONBOARDING NEW HIRES

It is always an exciting time for a new hire when they join a company. When a new service technician or service helper comes on board to



your team, there is so much information they have to take in and learn about in a timely manner. Taking the time and energy to train service technicians properly is paramount. At Conger LP Gas, new service technician hires can expect to spend anywhere from six months up to one year working under and alongside a veteran service technician while they learn the ropes before being given the responsibility of solo service calls.

Dewayne Bruce, branch manager of Conger LP Gas Moultrie and experienced service technician, stressed the importance of fundamentals and conducting training in the field. He said, “We start with the basics, from learning all the codes and how to properly size gas lines, correctly fill out gas checks, conduct pressure tests and ensure appliances are properly installed.”

He also said gas checks and leak tests are the most critical aspects of the job, so management ensures that new hires can conduct those basic, yet essential, tasks. Bruce went on to say that once service technicians are out in the field, things start to “click” based on what they have learned in the training classes and during practice with their supervisors.

ATTITUDE & SAFETY ARE EVERYTHING

As previously stated, interactions with service technicians and delivery drivers are often the main impression the public has of your company. It is crucial that service technicians know that when they say yes to working for your company, they realize they are becoming brand ambassadors.

Eric Pritchard is the service manager for Conger LP Gas Tifton and said that everything starts with a “PMA” — a positive mental attitude. “It goes with everything in life,” said Pritchard. “You should go into every scenario with a positive mental attitude and treat every customer the same. I always like to pretend that it’s my family when I go to someone’s house and think about making sure I would be satisfied with the service I give them.” Pritchard said that



he reminds his service team of that same philosophy often.

LEARN TO LISTEN

In his nearly 40 years of experience in the propane industry, Bruce said one of the biggest lessons he has learned and one he instills in his team of service technicians is to pay attention and learn to listen. He said, "A lot of times, you can just about diagnose a service call on the phone if you just ask a few questions and listen to what the customer is trying to tell you."

Bruce added that you can pick up on key things the customer might say, such as changes to their homes, i.e., a recent remodel or a problem with a gas log remote that can potentially affect their propane service.

USE YOUR VENDORS

If you are not relying on your vendor representatives to conduct training seminars with your service technicians

and customer service staff, you are missing out on a valuable resource. Multiple times a year, we will gather our entire service team in our Tifton demonstration kitchen and let our tankless water heater and product suppliers visit us and show the internal workings of their products so our service staff can be informed should a problem arise on the jobsite or a customer has a question. This time together not only helps the service technicians stay up to date with the latest technology but also garners a sense of camaraderie by being all together.

TEAMWORK

One of the most important aspects of welcoming a new service technician to your company's team is to have an atmosphere of inclusion and teamwork. It starts with the service manager.

It is important that the service manager is available 24/7 to answer

questions and be there to support their team through any situation, regardless of what time or day of the week it is. Bruce said, "Any service tech can call any other service tech in our company and know that they will be there to help. That is what makes us a great team and allows us to give the best customer service possible to our customers." ■

Kirsten McAlpin is the director of marketing and public relations for Conger LP Gas Inc. She is a PhD student at Liberty University, studying communications, and holds a Master of Science in integrated marketing communications from West Virginia University, where she is also an adjunct professor. McAlpin is the past chair of Women in Propane's communications and marketing committee. Email kirstenmcAlpin@congerlpgas.com. Visit congerlpgas.com.

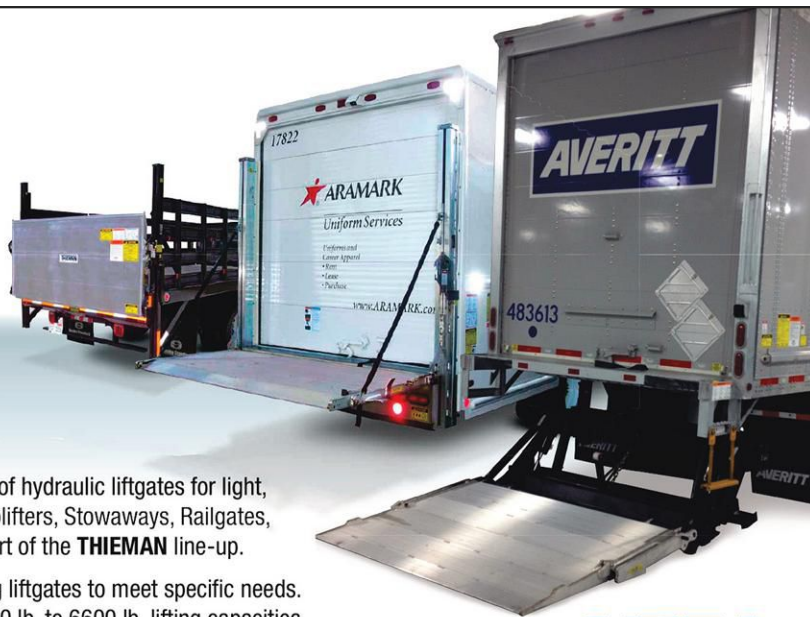


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EMPOWERING YOUR CUSTOMER SERVICE REPS: BUILDING CHAMPIONS IN THE PROPANE INDUSTRY

Exceptional customer service starts at the front desk — here's how propane companies can recruit, train & empower CSRs to stand out in a competitive market

BY MIKE PROCOPIO

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In the propane industry, where products are largely uniform across providers, exceptional customer service is often the factor that sets a company apart. Your customer service representatives (CSRs) are the frontline ambassadors of your brand, typically serving as the primary point of contact with customers. Investing in CSRs not only enhances customer satisfaction but also drives business growth. Here are four ways to cultivate top-tier CSRs and elevate your company's reputation and performance.

1 HIRING FOR EXCELLENCE

Stellar customer service begins with selecting the right individuals. While skills can be taught, attitude and alignment with company values play a crucial role in long-term success.

Ensure cultural alignment: It's important to assess whether potential hires align with your company's culture. Clearly articulate your organization's values and expectations in job postings and during interviews. While prior experience in the home heat and propane industry is beneficial, it's not mandatory. Given that operational practices can

vary significantly among companies, a commitment to continuous learning and adaptability is often more valuable.

Understand customers: A deep understanding of your customer base is essential. Ensure your enterprise resource planning (ERP) system segments customers effectively, allowing CSRs to tailor their interactions:

- Residential customers may be working families who rely on propane for home heating. They value reliability, affordability and clear communication on pricing and delivery schedules.
- Commercial customers are businesses in sectors like construction and engineering that use propane to fuel fleets, machinery and offices. They often require customized service plans, bulk orders and proactive delivery scheduling to meet operational needs.

2 SETTING THE STAGE: DAY ONE

The onboarding process significantly influences a new CSR's success. A rushed or unstructured introduction can leave them feeling overwhelmed, while a well-planned, engaging approach sets them up for long-term achievement. Start by

focusing on three key areas:

Comprehensive onboarding: First impressions matter. How your employee is onboarded, trained and educated sets the stage for success. A structured onboarding process that includes mentorship programs allows new hires to shadow experienced staff, facilitating knowledge transfer.

Industry education: Equip CSRs with a solid understanding of the fuel and propane industry, including product knowledge and operational workflows. This foundational education enables them to address customer inquiries more confidently and accurately.

Software proficiency: Proficiency with your company's software systems is crucial. Use available training resources to ensure CSRs are competent in using these tools. Encourage them to document processes as they learn, creating valuable resources for future training.

3 ENHANCING CUSTOMER INTERACTIONS

Every customer interaction is an opportunity to reinforce your company's value. Here are three great examples of

how CSRs can elevate customer service to the next level:

Maintain accurate databases: A clean and precise database is vital for any home heat and propane company. CSRs should:

- Verify and update customer data during each interaction.
- Fill in missing information to ensure record consistency and reliability.
- Promote services by informing customers about additional offerings like budget plans, service contracts or tank protection.

Leverage communication channels:

Today's customers will expect seamless communication and service options. Introduce customers to services that enhance their experience, including:

- Customer portals that allow online fuel orders, payments and service requests.
- Mobile apps that provide similar functionalities on smartphones for added convenience.
- Text messaging that offers convenient options for delivery and service reminders, catering to customers' communication preferences.

Use ERP systems for satisfaction: Your ERP system can be a powerful tool in boosting customer satisfaction when you prioritize the following:

- Use email campaigns to collect feedback on recent services to identify areas for improvement.
- Promote Google reviews to encourage satisfied customers to share their positive experiences online.
- Leverage customer rating systems to implement metrics for evaluating and ranking customer engagement, such as timely payments and service usage, to tailor services effectively.

4 BEYOND TRADITIONAL ROLES

CSRs do much more than answer calls and process orders — they shape customer perceptions and contribute to your long-term business success in a variety of ways.

Frontline representation: As the face of your company, CSRs should embody professionalism and empathy, ensuring each customer feels valued. Customers

remember interactions, and a positive experience can turn a one-time customer into a lifelong advocate.

Proactive issue resolution: Good CSRs don't just react to problems — they anticipate them. Establish protocols that empower CSRs to address potential issues before they escalate. Proactive communication builds trust and demonstrates responsibility, whether it's a delivery delay or a billing discrepancy.

Regular check-ins with key customers: Top customers deserve special attention. Schedule routine check-ins to anticipate their needs, provide service updates and strengthen relationships. This proactive approach not only fosters long-term loyalty but also opens the door for additional sales opportunities.

Career development opportunities: Investing in CSRs goes beyond training — it's about creating growth opportunities within the company. Provide clear pathways for CSRs to advance within the organization, recognizing their contributions and encouraging retention.

GET STARTED TODAY

Investing in the recruitment, training and development of CSRs helps transform them into industry champions — and brand ambassadors of your company. Their growth directly correlates with enhanced customer experiences, fostering loyalty and distinguishing your company in a competitive market. By focusing on these strategies, you empower your employees and pave the way for sustained business success. 📌

Mike Procopio is a project operations manager in the Retail and Energy division at PDI Technologies, where he helps customers realize the value of PDI Propane and Commercial Fueling solutions (heritage Blue Cow Software Ignite products). He hosts ongoing virtual educational sessions through PDI University, speaks at industry events and regularly contributes to propane trade media. Connect with Procopio at mike.procopio@pditechnologies.com or visit pditechnologies.com to learn more.



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BIOPROPANE PRODUCTION TECHNOLOGY COULD HELP SAVE A DEVASTATED TOWN

Alkcon Corporation has big plans for a small city in northern Florida

BY LAUREN SCOTT



Perry, Florida, a small town located in Taylor County, is nestled in the Big Bend region of the state where the panhandle curves into the peninsula. Approximately 50 miles southeast of Tallahassee, Perry is part of a rural area known for its natural beauty and proximity to the Gulf of Mexico. The city has historically been a hub for forestry and logging activities, earning the nickname “Tree Capital of the South.”

In recent years, Perry has faced significant challenges due to hurricanes. Hurricane Helene, a powerful Category 4 storm, made landfall near Perry in September 2024, causing widespread damage with winds reaching 140 miles per hour and storm surges of up to 15 feet. This followed Hurricane Idalia in 2023 and Hurricane Debby earlier in 2024, marking a period of repeated devastation for the region. The economic impact of these hurricanes has been substantial.

Adding to the economic strain, the Foley Pulp Mill, a major employer in Perry, permanently closed in late 2023. The mill had been a cornerstone of the local economy, providing 525 direct jobs and supporting many others in related industries. Its closure has led to significant economic repercussions, including the loss of over 1,000 jobs in

Taylor County and a decline in local GDP by 15%. The shutdown of the mill has also impacted state-level economic activity, with estimated losses of \$571.8 million in industry output.

Taylor County faces a challenging economic and employment outlook. The unemployment rate has risen to 6.5% as of February, as the region struggles to recover from the dual impacts of natural disasters and industrial decline. Efforts are underway to attract new businesses and diversify the local economy, but the path to recovery will require resilience and innovation.

BIOPROPANE PRODUCTION: POLITICS & THE LAWS OF PHYSICS

Alkcon Corporation was formed in 2013 in Nevada. At that time, there was a growing concern over the methane gas (CH_4) releases from oil and gas production, farms and landfills. In 2014, former President Obama’s administration released the “Climate Action Plan: Strategy to Reduce Methane Emissions.” Legislation at various levels of government was being drafted to financially penalize those responsible for uncontrolled methane releases.

Methane is ubiquitous and is familiar to most of us as natural gas. Many

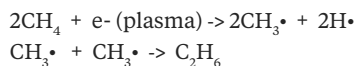
cook with it and heat their homes with it. Compressed natural gas has been accepted as a viable motor fuel. In the right place, methane is a beneficial gas. But what about the unwanted methane gas released to the environment? In 2013, the oil and gas industry flared off \$3.6 million worth of natural gas every day during the Bakken oil rush in North Dakota.

The C-H bond holding methane together is strong. To utilize methane as a chemical process intermediary, the chemical bond energy of about 415 kJ/mol (kilojoules per mole) must be overcome. For example, at temperatures of 700 C to 1,000 C, methane can react with carbon dioxide in the presence of a catalyst to produce synthesis gas, a mixture of hydrogen and carbon monoxide. In simple terms, methane is a tough nut to crack.

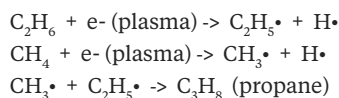
Nevertheless, it is possible to use methane to generate other fuel, such as propane. Gas plasma discharges, especially nonthermal plasmas, create highly energetic electrons, which act as an efficient “catalyst” that can activate methane under room-temperature conditions. Methane activation generates highly active radical molecular species, which can recombine into higher

alkanes. Moreover, adjusting the electron energy can alter the product distribution of methane activation via gas plasma.

For example, when methane is activated in a gas plasma discharge, a methyl group is formed. When two methyl groups combine, ethane is formed and hydrogen is released:



When ethane is activated in a gas plasma discharge, an ethyl group is often formed. When methyl and ethyl groups combine in a second reaction, propane is formed:



Propane can be produced from methane via this two-stage reaction, without the use of a complex metal or organic catalyst. Both reactions occur to various degrees in the first reactor. Ethane is produced in the first reactor as a majority product, along with a minor amount of propane and butane(s). The ethane is then oligomerized to propane in a second reactor. Propane and butane can be liquefied and separated from the gas product streams from both reactors via simple compression.

In 2016, Alkcon Corporation submitted a proposal to the Department of Energy in response to grant opportunity DE-FOA-0001417. The proposal described a small-scale gas conversion system that could be deployed globally and installed at a methane source. The system would have converted methane to propane via a gas plasma conversion process. Such a system would allow flaring gas from petroleum wells to be converted to propane, thus creating a pathway to monetize methane, which would have otherwise been flared off. The proposal was rejected.

Later that same year, the proposed bench-scale reactor was designed, fabricated and tested in a self-funded

effort. The Alkcon plasma reactor converts methane to a product stream consisting of ethane and lesser amounts of propane and butane(s). The major innovation, when compared to other plasma reactors, is the “reaction jet” design. This design allows the C_2 and C_3 alkane products to exit the reactor, thus avoiding any additional interaction with the plasma. The reactor also does not employ a metal or organic catalyst, making it suitable for use with gas streams that might contain trace amounts of sulfur compounds, which deactivate complex catalysts.



Alkcon plasma reactor
Image courtesy of Alkcon Corporation

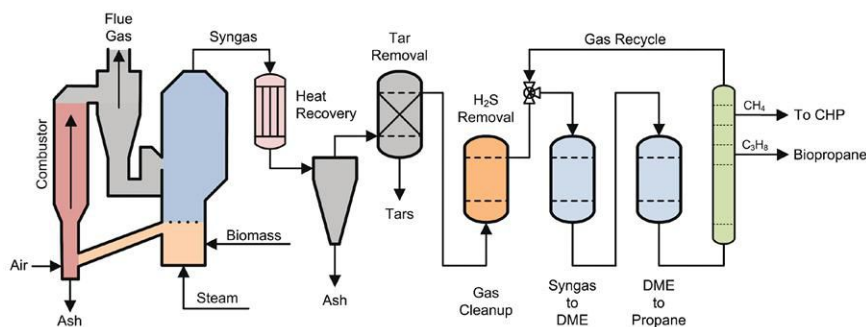
In the end, the use of an electrically-driven plasma reactor can reduce the energy requirements to activate methane when compared to a thermal-catalytic system, especially when the gas plasma

of the energy source. That being said, there may be small-scale, niche applications where plasma processing of methane may still be viable.

With the change of the administration in 2016, federal government support for biofuels waned, there was less interest in sequestering methane releases and there was no clear path to public or private funding, given the market for biofuels in the United States. Alkcon Corporation relocated to Florida in an effort to reduce costs. The relocation also allowed the company to be closer to potential business partners in Europe, where there was still a promising market for biopropane.

BIOPROANE PRODUCTION: CAN IT SCALE ECONOMICALLY?

Over the adjoining years, Alkcon Corporation continued to explore novel and alternative pathways to produce biopropane. New feedstocks, chemical processes and catalysts were considered. The capital cost, adequacy and efficiency of each process configuration were analyzed. The price of the biomass, transportation costs and energy inputs requirements at commercial scale were all considered and modeled. The gasification of biomass, coupled with a thermo-catalytic system, was determined as the most viable and efficient pathway.



The process of developing biopropane from woody biomass feedstock
Image courtesy of Alkcon Corporation

reactor incorporates a selective catalyst. However, the amount of energy required to activate methane at a commercial scale as a feed gas for the production of propane is simply impractical, regardless

Woody biomass and forestry residues from managed forests were selected as the feedstock. This type of material is readily available in North America in large volumes at a low cost per ton,

and the transportation and handling (cutting, logging, hauling and chipping) of woody biomass at commercial scale are well understood. The skilled labor and equipment to harvest, transport and process woody biomass at an industrial scale are readily available as well.

The process of converting woody biomass into biopropane is comprised of two main steps. The first is the conversion of woody biomass to synthesis gas (syngas) through gasification. The second is the conversion of syngas into biopropane via a thermal-catalytic process.

Syngas is composed of carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, hydrogen and methane. This gas mixture is a common starting point for alternative fuel synthesis. We selected a dual fluidized bed (DFB) steam gasifier for generating syngas, as the yield of hydrogen is high and the production of unwanted tars is low in this type of gasifier. A DFB gasifier employs superheated steam to break down the hemicellulose in woody biomass. The increased hydrogen production rate is due to the water gas shift (WGS) reaction that occurs more prevalently in this type of gasifier. During the WGS reaction, carbon monoxide reacts with water to produce carbon dioxide and hydrogen gas.

The raw syngas from the gasifier contains wood ash, heavy tars, hydrogen sulfide, aromatic compounds and unsaturated hydrocarbons, which need to be removed from the gas stream prior to its introduction to the catalytic fuel synthesis reactors. A cyclone is used for separating heavier particulates from the gas stream by centrifugal force. Electrostatic filters and particulate filters are used to remove fine particles of dust and ash. Wet scrubber systems are used to effectively remove tars and oils from the synthesis gas. Catalytic cracking can be employed to convert aromatic compounds and unsaturated hydrocarbons into syngas.

Syngas is then converted to biopropane via a two-step, thermal-catalytic process. The first stage consists of a CuZnAlOx

and ZSM-5 catalyst operating at 410 C and 725 psi in a stainless-steel reactor vessel, where synthesis gas is converted to dimethyl ether (DME). The second stage consists of a SSZ-13 zeolite catalyst operating at 260 C and 725 psi, also in a stainless-steel reactor vessel, where DME is converted to propylene and then hydrogenated to propane. This process was developed by Dr. Wenliang Zhu and Dr. Zhongmin Liu at the Dalian Institute of Chemical Physics in Dalian, Liaoning, China. This two-stage catalytic system exhibited excellent stability during a 200-hour test on stream.

220 tons per day (about 75,000 tons annually) of woody biomass, a system of that scale could produce from 10 to 15 million gallons of low-carbon biopropane annually. The process is rate limited by the available hydrogen in the system. Shredded polyethylene, procured from sorted municipal waste streams, could be co-fed with the biomass to also increase the available hydrogen in the system, but this may also lower the Carbon Index (CI) of the biopropane product.

In areas where commercial power is available, a steam methane reforming module could be added to the system

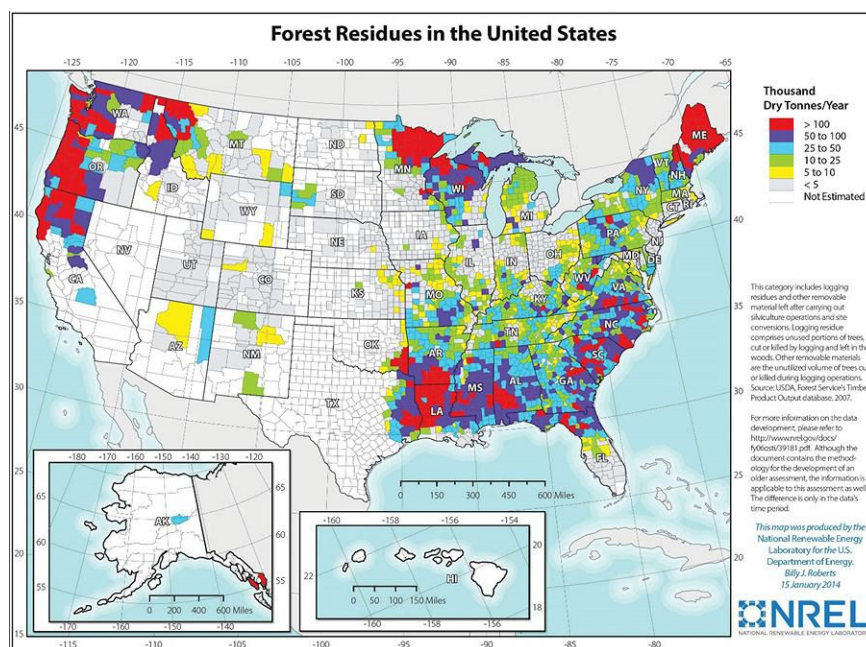


Image courtesy of the National Renewable Energy Laboratory

The output of the second reactor is passed through a distillation tower where the biopropane product and methane are removed from the process gas stream. Unreacted syngas components are returned to the first reactor for catalytic reprocessing. An odorant is added to the biopropane product to meet federal requirements. The methane separated from the gas stream is fed to a gas turbine combined heat and power system to provide up to 1 megawatt of electrical power for the system.

With the DFB steam gasifier digesting

to increase the available hydrogen by converting the methane stream to additional hydrogen.

BIOPROPAANE PRODUCTION: COMING TO A TOWN NEAR YOU

According to data available from the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL), there are millions of tons of forestry wastes readily available around the United States that could support a distributed system of biopropane production facilities. In the state of Maine, there are an estimated 3.3 million

tons of forestry wastes available on an annual basis. That is enough biomass to supply the PADD 1A region with 440 million gallons of biopropane annually. In the Midwest, NREL estimated there are 3.25 million tons of forestry wastes available on an annual basis in northern Minnesota. That is sufficient biomass to supply the PADD 2 region with 430 million gallons of biopropane annually.

On the West Coast, there are over 4 million tons of forestry wastes available on an annual basis across northern Minnesota, Washington and Northern California. That is enough biomass to supply the PADD 5 region with over 500 million gallons of biopropane annually. In central Louisiana, there is an estimated 8.4 million tons of forestry wastes available on an annual basis. Over 1 billion gallons of biopropane could be produced in the PADD 3 region with that amount of biomass.

And that brings us back to Perry, Florida. According to information available from the Taylor County Development Authority, the panhandle

region of northern Florida “has supplied over three million tons per year of pine pulpwood, chip-n-saw and saw timber annually for over 70 years.” That

Petroleum Administration for Defense Districts

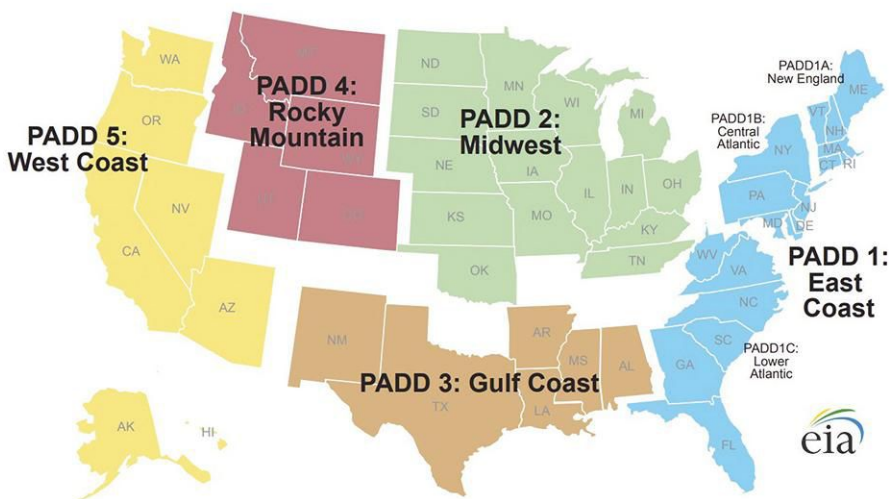


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would be sufficient biomass to supply the PADD 1C region with 400 million gallons of biopropane annually. The now closed Foley Pulp Mill likely consumed somewhere in the range of 1.7 million U.S. tons annually.

A 50-acre lot, which is owned by the City of Perry, is located immediately adjacent to the Foley Pulp Mill property. Seeing the opportunity, Alkcon Corporation created a site development plan for the 50-acre lot and a simple economic analysis, based upon the information available at the time. The plan called for the construction of a total of four gasifier and gas processing chains on the lot. Each gasifier and its associated gas processing chain were to be completed each year.

The completed facility, with four gasifiers operating at full capacity, would consume approximately 880 tons of biomass daily. Regardless of harvesting

costs and variations in wood density by region, biopropane production facilities with an annual production rate of 40 to 60 MMGPY are feasible in each region.

The recent average Mont Belvieu, Texas, spot price for propane is around \$0.90 per gallon. The Renewable Identification Numbers credits (when available for this process) and the Low Carbon Fuel Standard subsidies for biopropane with a low CI score amount to approximately \$2.10. When combined, these create a value of about \$3.00 per gallon. Thus, the total revenue for the proposed biopropane plant in Perry, Florida, would be about \$150 million annually.

The cost of delivered woody biomass to Foley Pulp Mill was about \$40 per ton. The total cost for the biomass for the proposed biopropane plant would be about \$12 million annually. The complete facility would likely employ

about 150 people, working three shifts — keeping the plant operating 24/7, with an expected uptime greater than 90%. The median salary range for the skilled labor workforce at the proposed plant might be \$45,000 to \$65,000. This puts the basic annual payroll expense at approximately \$8.25 million, plus benefits.

When Alkcon Corporation proposed the biomass-to-biopropane project to the city manager of Perry, Florida, in 2023, he replied, “I feel like we need to get more people involved, but I’m not sure who.”

Lauren Scott is the chief executive officer of Alkcon Corporation. She has previously held the positions of process engineer at Springboard Biodiesel, systems engineer at Biodiesel Solutions and electrical design manager at Plasma-Therm. Scott is also a veteran of the U.S. Air Force. She can be reached at lauren@biopropane.com.



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THE 9 CORE TRAITS OF HIGH-PERFORMING COMPANIES

Why some companies outperform — plus, how you can, too

BY SUSAN QUINN



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In today's business landscape, competition is relentless. Disruptions emerge overnight. Customer expectations evolve rapidly. Talent is harder to retain than ever. Yet, some companies consistently outperform their peers, growing faster, attracting top talent and building unshakable customer loyalty.

What sets these companies apart?

An in-depth study was conducted of companies to identify the characteristics of top performers. The findings revealed a critical truth: high-performing companies aren't just lucky. They operate with a set of core traits that drive sustained success. These organizations don't merely aim to be "best in class"; they execute a repeatable, scalable and measurable strategy that fuels their growth.

What are these nine traits, and how can your company embed them into its DNA? Let's explore them in detail.

1. A FOUNDATION BUILT ON PURPOSE & VALUES

High-performing companies don't drift aimlessly. They operate with a clear and compelling purpose that drives their strategy, daily decisions and culture. Their guiding principles — vision, mission and core values — aren't just corporate jargon. They're actively demonstrated and reinforced at every level of the organization.

What makes them different? Leaders continuously reinforce these principles in communication, hiring and decision-making. Employees understand how their roles contribute to the company's broader mission. This alignment creates a culture of accountability, engagement and trust — three factors that significantly impact performance.

2. THE ADVANTAGE OF A STRONG EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

Talent is the fuel that drives a business

forward, and high-performing companies treat their employees like their most valuable asset. They don't just offer jobs — they create environments where employees thrive.

These companies invest in professional development, employee well-being and company culture. They prioritize engagement, conduct regular satisfaction surveys and actively act on feedback. As a result, their employees become brand ambassadors, delivering superior service, innovating and staying loyal to the company.

3. CUSTOMER-CENTRICITY AS A GROWTH ENGINE

For high-performing companies, customer satisfaction isn't enough. They aim to create customer advocates. They analyze customer journeys, remove friction points and proactively seek feedback. More importantly, they take action on that feedback, refining their

offerings and personalizing experiences to create deep relationships.

Data from a global management consulting company shows that fluctuations in a company's Net Promoter Score can explain 20%-60% of its organic growth. This statistic alone highlights why top companies prioritize customer experience: it directly impacts their long-term revenue.

4. EMBRACING QUALITY AS A CULTURAL CORNERSTONE

High performers don't just meet existing quality standards — they set new ones. They deliberately integrate quality into every process, ensuring it's not just a final checkpoint but a guiding principle from the start. This unwavering commitment to excellence builds trust and also differentiates them from competitors.

Apple, for instance, isn't just known for technology but for meticulous attention to detail. High-performing companies operate with the same mindset, whether

it's in their service delivery, internal processes or employee training.

5. THE ADAPTABILITY IMPERATIVE

Disruption is inevitable. The question is, will your company adapt fast enough to stay ahead? High-performing companies don't resist change — they actively embrace it. They proactively anticipate market shifts, closely monitor industry trends and pivot when necessary.

Research has shown that many companies failed during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic not because they lacked resources, but because they failed to adapt. Meanwhile, organizations that were agile in their strategy and execution often thrived.

6. DATA-DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING

Top companies leverage data to make strategic decisions and track real-time key performance indicators through visually engaging dashboard systems. Through the use of artificial intelligence

and other software programs, they aggregate information across the enterprise for a holistic view and understanding of how all elements fit together. This ensures leaders have access to clear information and actionable insights. More importantly, they align their data collection with business objectives, avoiding "data for data's sake."

7. ECOSYSTEM INTELLIGENCE & COLLABORATION

The best companies don't just monitor their competitors — they understand the full ecosystem in which they operate. They recognize that value creation often requires collaboration. Whether through strategic partnerships, industry alliances or supplier relationships, they position themselves at the center of innovation and market shifts.

8. OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE THROUGH SIMPLIFICATION

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High performers know this and focus on making operations lean and efficient.

Steve Jobs famously said, "Simple can be harder than complex. You have to work hard to get your thinking clean to make it simple."

Top companies take this to heart. They continuously refine workflows, eliminate unnecessary steps and automate where possible. The result? A more agile, cost-effective and scalable operation.

9. THE CONTINUOUS LEARNING ORGANIZATION MINDSET

A defining trait of high-performing companies is their relentless pursuit of improvement. They don't assume they have all the answers; they continuously learn, evolve and refine their strategies. They invest in leadership development, create knowledge-sharing platforms and encourage experimentation.

These organizations view failure as a stepping stone to progress, not a setback. This mindset allows them to stay ahead

of industry changes and maintain a competitive edge.

BECOMING A TRULY HIGH-PERFORMING ORGANIZATION

If you want to build a company that stands out, start by assessing where you currently stand on the nine traits mentioned in this article.

Ask yourself:

- Are our purpose and values deeply embedded in everything we do?
- Do we treat employees as our greatest asset?
- Are we truly customer-centric, or do we just say we are?
- Is quality a guiding principle in all areas of our business?
- How adaptable are we to change?
- Do we make decisions based on data or gut instinct?
- Do we understand our industry ecosystem and leverage partnerships?
- Have we eliminated unnecessary complexity in our operations?

- Do we foster a culture of learning and continuous improvement?

Achieving high performance isn't about making one major change — it's about consistently refining these areas over time. The question isn't whether these traits matter. The real question is how quickly your organization can begin embedding them into its DNA. 📌

Susan Quinn has worked for 30-plus years with Fortune 500 to middle-market firms across the country, developing strategies that spur growth. As CEO of circle S studio, she supports companies in their quest to "better their best" and brings a keen understanding of how to create a winning strategy. Quinn is the author of "Does Your Business Show Up or Stand Out?", a leader's playbook for implementing the nine traits. For more information, visit circlesstudio.com/business-playbook.



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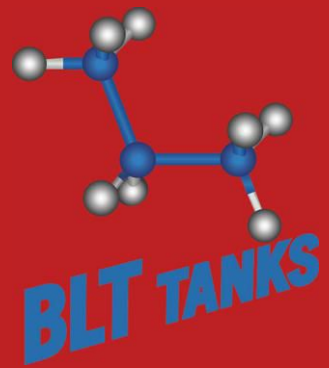


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What led you to pursue a career in the propane industry, and how did you get your start?

In my senior year of high school, I entered a work study program at Mitchell Oil, a local oil and propane company based out of Danbury, Connecticut. This program was recommended to me by my HVAC teacher, Mr. Clark, who was very influential in starting my career in the propane industry. After graduating, I started full-time at Mitchell Oil and pursued getting my license in oil and gas.

Given your role in product management, what do you think would surprise people about the work you do?

How often I am in meetings!! Product management works with a lot of various teams to develop and maintain products. It takes a lot of communication to work with various departments, including supply chain, engineering, sales, marketing and other groups. These groups all lead critical roles to ensure that we have the right resources dedicated to manufacturing a product.

What advice would you give to someone interested in pursuing a career in the industry?

For those interested in starting a career in the propane industry, there is a lot of opportunity for upward mobility. I have learned you can start as an apprentice and end your career in any role you would like if you applied yourself. I have been fortunate enough to work for a company that encourages growth and development. I have had roles in the technical and training department, prior to advancing in product management, that allowed for me to develop new skill sets. Don't be afraid to ask what's next for you in your company.

With the demands of managing product development, training initiatives and industry partnerships, how do you maintain a balance between work and personal life?

This is always a challenge for most of us! I do my best to stay away from work after hours. It is important to find hours to shut off and reset. I have learned to take vacation, meaning not work during the timeframe. I found that deleting Outlook and Teams on your phone during vacation works tremendously.

Throughout your career, who or what has had the biggest influence on your approach to innovation?

People inspire people. Along my career, I have worked with many great coworkers, mentors and friends that all have influenced my approach, both in and out of product development.

As a leader in the propane industry, how would you describe your leadership style?

I would like to think I encourage collaborative efforts and openness in my leadership style. It is important to be able to collaborate well with others as a product manager and to be able to provide my teams with the best solutions and support.

What motivates you to continue pushing for advancements in propane autogas?

It is important to us to provide the best products in the industry, especially within the autogas space. Within the OPW group, we are known for several products within the fueling space and find propane autogas [to be] an area for growth opportunities.

Can you share a memorable or particularly rewarding moment from your career?

I recently accepted an award with my coworker, Paul Courson, for our latest product, Presto-Link. This award was for excellence in value realization for the Digital Engineering Award. This was a surreal moment for two folks from the propane industry to partake in an award in the technology world.

What's the most meaningful feedback or compliment you've received from someone in the propane industry?

The most meaningful feedback that I have received is the thanks from SEPATEC [Southeast Propane Alliance Technical Education Center] for being able to support their training school through products and demonstrations. I have had the pleasure of working with their staff and see the value they bring to new prospects entering into the propane industry. If you ever meet the director of education, John Peña, he does a great rendition of 'Sugar' by Maroon 5. 🍷

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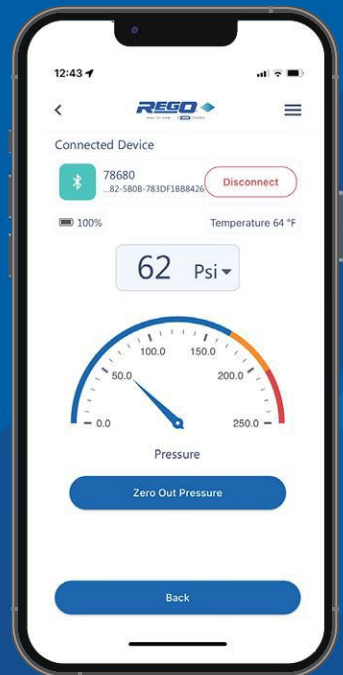
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