



Blue Line Innovations

C.E.O. Peter Porteous

NEIA: Peter, how did Blue Line Innovations get started?

PP: Well, it's a typical Atlantic Canadian entrepreneurial story – one hatched around the kitchen table – founded the Tufts from the St. John's area. The father was interested in getting the family to use less electricity and in creating a device that tells you how much your energy costs are in real time. His sons Maurice, a recent engineering graduate, and Danny, who had a marketing and business development background, decided that no-one else was doing this, so off they went. That was back 2003. They started Blue Line Innovation.

NEIA: Tell us about the PowerCost Monitor, Blue Line Innovation's flagship product which, we also note, has made NBC Today Show's Top Trends for 2011 list – congratulations!

PP: Well, the premise behind the PowerCost Monitor is putting better information in the hands of homeowners: the more visibility you have into your electricity consumption, how and where you're spending it, the cost associated with specific appliances or devices in the home, the better access to real-time information you have instead of just one number at the end of the month on your bill, the more equipped the family is to make good behaviour changes around the home.

We're a Newfoundland-based company that's developed something unique around the world – there's no other product like ours in terms of acquiring this electricity data. And it's all about our unique optical sensor.

NEIA: Okay, so how does this optical sensor work?

PP: There are two parts to our device: a sensor that attaches passively to the electricity meter – there's no interference to the utility. And it's universal. Meaning whatever type of meter you have be it old, digital or smart, our sensor has the ability to accommodate.

NEIA: What about the homeowner. How easy is it to use?

PP: That's the important part: it's designed to be a safe, secure product for the family – one screwdriver, one screw, follow the directions and you're up and running in 30 minutes. There are other technologies, but they involve hardwiring into your breaker panel, and getting a certified electrician. Ours is geared to being a simple, cost-effective, DIY product.

NEIA: What kind of savings can homeowners expect using the PowerCost Monitor?

PP: There's been a tremendous amount of research done using our product by over 125 different Utility companies that we've worked with in the U.S. and Canada plus considerable independent academic research. And they say anywhere from 5 to 15% savings. Our own studies confirm that. We see sustained savings up to 18%, with most families falling into the high single digit. That means most families can save money and get back their original investment within six months.

NEIA: That's impressive. With this terrific uptake across North America, what's happening in Newfoundland and Labrador?

PP: Blue Line Innovations wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for the support of the NL government, ACOA and NRC – these programs were vital in allowing us to build our technology and get to the market.

On the other hand it's frustrating to know that we have a technology that was conceived in our home province – one that is a high consumer of electricity and that puts a burden on families at this time of the year. We know that our technology could be helping families across the province. And we know that utilities across province have energy efficiency programs, but for some reason they've elected not to embrace our technology. It's a missed opportunity for the Utilities and efficiency organizations to help spread the word.

NEIA: We understand there have been some exciting new developments and partnerships?

PP: Yes, by leveraging existing technology and entering new partnerships, we're able to make the data more accessible through a WiFi gateway. So now families can access their data on a wireless home monitor or mobile device.

NEIA: How did this development come about?

PP: We introduced the product in July 2010 in a mutually exclusive relationship with Microsoft and their free application called Microsoft Hohm. Then in December 2010 we added Google and their product GooglePowerMeter to our partnership. So now the consumer has choice in terms of how they'd like their online presentation of data. And that enriches the experience. It gives consumers the ability of trending, benchmarking and comparing results with peers, getting advice and tips. And this is just the tip of the iceberg in terms of where the whole sector is going.

NEIA: So what is on the horizon for Blue Line?

PP: Our go forward strategy is leveraging this unique sensing technology to make the data available to as many applications as possible.

NEIA: Meaning?

PP: Okay, well it's clear from the industry that smart meters are absolutely going to be deployed, and that means putting smart data in the hands of the Utility, *but* that doesn't do anything to get smart data into the hands of the consumer.

NEIA: So?

PP: So, we believe there's a significant opportunity for Blue Line Innovations to add value to other solutions through smart appliances.

NEIA: Can you give us an example?

PP: Sure. Take a high-efficiency clothes dryer. It's more efficient, but how can we get your family's real electricity consumption and real electricity rate structure into that smart appliance so it can adjust the settings and really help the family save energy and dollars?

NEIA: Hmm, I'm thinking this isn't just about indicating when to turn off or use at a different time. You're looking at actually changing the efficiency of that unit?

PP: That's a good point, and it works two ways. The data improves the usage of that appliance and, through our partnerships, consumers will be able to read data of key appliances around the home. So perhaps you may see an opportunity to be more efficient in how you use the hot water heater when you can track and measure the consumption and trending pattern of that particular device in the home.

The potential to be a really smart home is just around the corner. These are not future technologies. We're already testing these solutions with other partners today.

NEIA: This is exciting stuff. Thanks Peter, and we look forward to checking in with you later.