

# SOLVING VOLTAGE OPTIMISATION'S REPUTATIONAL PROBLEM



Sadly, voltage optimisation's reputational issues have over shadowed a rather important point – the technology itself really does work. In fact, the results achieved through voltage reduction in terms of decreasing carbon emissions and cutting energy costs on voltage dependent loads are largely unchallenged – so what has gone wrong? Andrew Hawley, founder of VOICE & Fellow of the EMA, explains

**M**any early adopters who were wowed by the claims of savings up to 25% found the providers took no account of other energy savings measures, whether behavioural or other technology implementations. For years, the technology providers have over-promised and under-delivered which has made engineering consultants and energy managers shy away from the technology. More recently, installations have been backed up with 'guaranteed savings'; but, fundamentally, if the technology does not deliver the benefit in carbon reduction, the financial security is of little benefit and the methods used to 'prove' savings are often open to interpretation.

In addition, there has been a lack of consistency in the way that potential VO sites are surveyed, leading to further uncertainty. It is absolutely imperative that any site survey is conducted by a trained electrical engineer and that a full load profile of the building is obtained. It is not sufficient to base a savings prediction and therefore ROI/payback period on historical data alone. The client must be able to see exactly how the VO provider believes they will save energy and to which electrical loads they are applying the savings.

The industry now has a new VOICE that should spark a new beginning for the industry with the formation of the VOICE – a new national 'council' that is taking on the challenge of tidying up the industry and

re-launching the technology, creating a positive and exciting future for VO.

To survive, the voltage optimisation industry has to accept that it has all but destroyed its own reputation and it must change. The challenge in recovering the industry's reputation must start by tackling the way the technology has been sold and marketed, not just the technology itself.

It is against that backdrop that Lord Redesdale, CEO of Energy Managers Association (EMA), asked me to set up a new, self-governing body for the Voltage Optimisation Industry. The Voltage Optimisation Industry Council for Excellence (VOICE) is a technology agnostic body tasked with creating a set of standards to help improve the reputation of the industry.

VOICE will also create a much needed code of conduct for all member companies and produce independent savings guidelines to engender widespread trust in VO.

The plan is to produce an accepted standard that all manufacturers work to that includes predicted savings and also lays out how savings will be proven once equipment is installed.

First among my tasks as founder of VOICE was to write the EMA's very first Buyer's Guide that was launched at EMEX (The Energy Manager's Exhibition).

The guide is designed to offer some very basic information and guidance on how to approach Voltage Management & Optimisation, helping create a better

understanding about the available technologies and how best to apply them.

Basic starting points include: how to begin to assess the potential for savings; choosing the correct equipment based on available technology; and making the right decision in choosing a supplier.

The guide also consists of a comprehensive Q&A covering all topics that anyone exploring the idea of committing to VO should need to ask or know about.

The document stresses that – in being put together by an independent and vendor agnostic body – it does not suggest or promote any single supplier or technology. It does, however, recommend that buyers choose a supplier that is a member of the VOICE group.

Companies that are part VOICE are able to use the VOICE logo, which indicates that – as a member – that supplier will operate within our agreed Standards and Code of Practice.

We now have nine of the UK's VO manufacturers signed up to VOICE, and we are keen to hear from any UK based manufacturer of voltage management technology that wishes to join VOICE contacting us via email ([info@voice-vostandards.com](mailto:info@voice-vostandards.com)).

It might take some time to solve voltage optimisation's reputational problems, but it is a nettle we need to grasp as quickly as possible to help safeguard the long term future of the technology.