

Canadian Green Tech

An Interview with Robert Barlow, President and C.E.O., WireE

Canadian Green Tech recently spoke with WireE President & CEO, Rob Barlow, regarding the role green technology plays as an ingredient in defining the WireE brand. The following article is reproduced with permission from the author.

Enabling as Brand

Written by Lars Hansen
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One of the key considerations that often enter into building and enhancing a corporate brand for your business is to determine its focus. A secondary and often overlooked consideration is brand extension.

It is a practice borne of migrating the value of one specific product or service into a secondary product or service category. There are many examples of this tactic including the well-known ones such as Tylenol where the brand has been extended across numerous other product categories beyond pain relief or Virgin where the company has rolled out numerous new divisions offering completely different and unique service categories. Some would say that a business such as Virgin is in fact a "brand extension" factory that rents its brand out to new ventures and sectors without restriction.

In contrast however, there exists in many business scenarios a means to extend your business brand in a very immediate fashion by first and foremost considering what your brand "enables" for your clients. For the green energy sector this consideration should be made carefully to recognize and appreciate if the concept you have of your business is shared or is plausible to the customers you support. If you don't do a meaningful and objective consideration of your value in the green equation you may open yourself up to questions of "green washing" and diminish your brand value overall by being seen as opportunistic instead of genuine.

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Robert Barlow, President and C.E.O., WireE

If you achieved positive results from an objective analysis of your "value" as it relates to having a real impact on the development and provision of sustainable and environmentally friendly products and services, you may want to give serious consideration to extending your corporate brand as an enabler.

One approach to this is to understand if you have to explain how your product is an enabler that helps create a greener outcome or if it flows logically from what you are already doing. If there isn't a logical connection you may still want to extend your brand in that direction but recognize that it will take more effort and time compared to simply adding voice and volume to something your business and your customers will already recognize.

WireE is a telecommunications consulting firm who has moved their business in recent years into smart grid enablement. Smart Grids have been an integral focus of discussion around infrastructure renewal, green energy generation and distribution for some time now. However the actual operational demands for creating and managing a smart grid have received relatively less attention. The focus of WireE is to apply their wireless communications knowledge and experience to the specific challenges of creating the "intelligence or data layer" of operational smart grids.

In this role, WireE confidently sees it self as a true enabler of smart grid deployments and in effect a vital part of the equation required to bring more alternative/green energy generation online in place like Ontario.

“When we deliver a technology or service we assess our ability to include green deliverables and operational strategies in the finished product internally and to the client,” says Rob Barlow, president and CEO of WireE. “It does not affect our brand; it is built into our brand and our culture.”

One of the benefits that this affords to WireE is the way in which it makes the firm important to the green conversation for its clients who very often might have green aspirations and plans but are not well equipped to overcome on their own the challenges they face in realizing those plans.

By actively promoting their “green enabler” status Barlow feels that they are showcasing how they are a practical benefit to the challenges faced by distributors and generators looking to make their plans for smart grid deployment.

“We affirm our ability to be an important part of the conversation on green and sustainable development with our clients by presenting our services in that light,” he says. “It makes it easier for us and for our customers. We are ‘assuring’ that green or sustainable development has already been thought of, assessed as a constraint or assumption in whatever we deliver.”

Staking out this brand territory is at the same time not something that WireE leaves as an isolated consideration. The company actively engages in making its “important to the conversation” status well earned through investments in R&D that are serving to simultaneously advance the industry’s ability to successfully deploy and operate smart grids in a manner that is practical, cost effective and well planned. Smart grid deployments in themselves create a series of new and unique challenges associated with migrating power grids from the traditional mega project and base load architecture of the past into a more flexible

architecture. This new paradigm contemplates a broader use of distributed and intermittent power sources along with variable rate metering options and changing status for business and individuals as both consumers and generators of power the grid.

WireE sees these challenges as opportunities to make real their commitment to smart grid enablement and to share and communicate with customers how they can help bring sustainability to life.

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“We participate at the university research level, by participating in developing intellectual property for smart grid on boarding of alternative energy,” said Barlow. “We partner with organizations that have the same approach to sustainability and green and then actively share that research insight through blogging, tweeting and promoting our own whitepapers and activities.”

It’s an approach that has helped WireE to build a new and meaningful brand extension into a market where their knowledge base and expertise are finding new applications and creating benefits for customers in the green energy sector.

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