

"A Producer Viewpoint"

Common Look & Feel Standardized Web Site For Both
Non-transactional & Transactional Requirements

Just as the Common Look & Feel team is working on how to make non-transactional Web sites more user-friendly, GISB should "drill-down" to standardize transactional Web sites also. GISB represents the best opportunity for simplifying transactional sites (which is the desire of the FERC and more importantly, the customer or Shipper community) from how they exist today in the form of proprietary EBBs. Producers interpret the FERC responses to-date in the same way and add that end-users, LDCs and marketing company's letters have stated similar desires. This was true at the FERC Technical Conference conducted in September 1995 and is still being demanded today. We should not forget this industry's first experience with EBBs in the jurisdictional arena: the development of pipeline EBBs so different and fragmented that Shipper's had to have special training on each pipeline it shipped on. When a person filled in for another it was difficult because of the drastic differences in navigating each EBB and their operating platforms. This industry cannot afford for this to happen as non-jurisdictional companies unbundle their traditional services. There are many more non-jurisdictional companies than jurisdictionals and lack of standardization will create a completely unacceptable level of complexity which will negatively affect the industry's ability to grow. As the FERC has chosen to have an electricity industry work group (OASIS) to describe a singular transactional Web Site, producers believe the FERC's intent is to have developed a similar system for the gas industry. The reasons are: 1) administrative efficiency 2) compatibility with other company's gas management systems and 3) improved user-friendliness.

While many large companies are implementing EDI, it is clearly progressing slowly. Consequently, shippers will continue to rely on EBBs to schedule gas transportation, conduct capacity release and otherwise communicate with pipelines. Based on the current level of success of standardization achieved by GISB, producer's believe that EDI will never be totally utilized by shippers because it just doesn't make economic sense where the activity level is small and/or one pipeline's implementation is too divergent from other implementations. Consequently, the alternative solution is to simplify and consolidate, through standardization, the EBB screens. Producers do not support a solution that would force customers to use EDI or force customers to communicate with pipelines via third party service providers. Pipelines should be responsible for providing the means by which efficient, reliable and effective communications are achieved.

The FERC makes it abundantly clear that the gas industry should move to one communication modality, that being the Internet. Producers support that move, but not if today's EBBs are merely replicated on the Internet Web site. The original objective of achieving simpler, more user-friendly sites would not be achieved by such a decision. Greater value to the Shipper community will be achieved only when one gas control person is able to effectively nominate gas on any pipeline operating in N. America. The Web sites must be more functionally similar than dissimilar. It is disappointing to the producer representation at the Internet Look & Feel meetings that little progress has been made toward discussing & standardizing the content areas of the proposed Web site screens.

The producer segment calls for a clear level of standardization and simplicity which will accomplish the user-friendliness defined above. When that is achieved, moving the EBBs to the Internet makes sense and will be supported by producers. After an adequate testing period, the existing EBBs could be discarded or supported by user fees. Merely replicating the existing diverse, non-standard EBBs on Internet Web sites does not create sufficient value. The producer community would support delay of Web site implementation for transactional content past 6-1-99 in order to achieve greater standardization of TSP Web sites. A specific later date should nevertheless be adopted.

History repeated itself when GISB did not achieve standard "look & feel" for the 8-1-97 FERC deadline for informational postings on non-transactional Web sites. Jurisdictional entities were placed in an untenable position of meeting the deadline without any guidance from GISB or any other entity. When the industry achieves a standard for such sites, those companies will NOW have to spend more money to switch to the new format. We have a responsibility to prevent that from happening again.