

Construction Management Oversight and Engineering Design For Electric Utilities with Large Transmission Lines



David Grooms
Founder and CEO

CEOCFO: *Mr. Grooms, would you tell us the vision when you started Power Consulting Associates?*

Mr. Grooms: John Kemp and I founded the company over a decade ago and he has since retired. In starting the company, we knew we could provide construction management and engineering design just as well as other people were and we knew we could do it better in our areas of expertise.

CEOCFO: *How has that developed?*

Mr. Grooms: Our starting focus was construction management oversight and engineering design for electric utilities. We were providing oversight construction management of a large 35 mile 500 kV lattice tower transmission line in Georgia at the time for someone else. The opportunity developed to take over a contract and we were very fortunate enough to do that and it kick-started the company. John and I are both engineers by trade. In starting the company, I focused on building the engineering design area and he focused more on the construction and inspection oversight side.

CEOCFO: *What types of projects are currently of focus for you?*

Mr. Grooms: We are currently performing engineering design on transmission and distribution lines for several electric utilities. We also are designing transmission lines for wind farms and solar farms where they connect them into the grid. We have partners who call upon us to help with engineering and the design of those lines. We also perform environmental and surveying services and have numerous inspectors providing oversight and construction management throughout the United States.

CEOCFO: *For people who are not familiar with transmission lines, what are some of the challenges surrounding them and what might you understand because of your expertise that not everyone realizes should get attention during a project?*

Mr. Grooms: I think some of the challenges surrounding transmission lines are the location and finding optimum routes. Most utilities have already selected a route before we start the design therefore we have to design around the route instead of vice versa. As power needs of the public increase, the need for additional power lines also increases. Think of the big transmission lines as the interstates highways of the country. As the population grows, you have to add lanes. The same is true with the power grid. Smaller distribution lines that go to your house are more like the streets and the roads. They do not have as much traffic so they do not have to be as big. The major challenges are getting lines located and having the public accept those big power lines on their property. We work diligently with property owners if we are putting the lines on their land as this may affect their view or normal use.

CEOCFO: *Is it more challenging in certain states or in rural areas as opposed to the cities?*

Mr. Grooms: They all have their challenges. When working on wind farms out in the grasslands or on farmland, we may have to place twenty structures on one person's land. If you ever see a transmission line that is not straight or it is going straight for a while then all of a sudden it takes a turn and then goes a mile one way and two miles back in the same direction, that is usually a good indication that a property owner did not want a power line on their property. As professionals, we work with those landowners, attempt to negotiate or look for other design options. In the city, you are working with multiple landowners so there are a lot more people involved. Oftentimes we have meetings in the communities to explain the reasons for the transmission lines and different route options. In the cities, the lines can be more of a challenge due to more fences and right-of-ways and you are working with several property owners.

Environmentally, you are also trying to get the property back to what it was beforehand. Everybody wants electricity but not many people want it in their backyard.

CEO CFO: *How do you reach potential clients and how would someone find you in a search?*

Mr. Grooms: People can find us by conducting internet searches. A great deal of our work is done by visiting potential clients, word of mouth, and trade shows. Our work is relationship based and trying to develop more of those relationships is key to success in this business. It takes a while to obtain these clients. Some work is bid such as for municipal utilities or government work. The other work you may bid but typically, against some incumbents, so it is difficult at times to get an opportunity to introduce your services to a new client. When given the opportunity, it is essential to give that client as much attention as you give your best client. Every client wants to feel as though they are your only client.

CEO CFO: *Are there particular types of projects you would prefer to work with, given a choice?*

Mr. Grooms: Some projects are often impeded by regulatory rules or opposition by specific groups. These projects tend to be the most difficult because there is a lot of stopping and starting up again. I enjoy the challenge these types of projects generate.

CEO CFO: *Do your people go to the location or do you work with partners throughout the country?*

Mr. Grooms: Yes, we often travel to projects sites throughout the county and oftentimes work with contractors and wind farm developers who need engineering services as part of their work. We also work with companies similar to our own who have different areas of expertise that we do. It is a business-to-business partnership where we do work for them that they cannot and they do work for us when we need assistance. We have found that teaming up on projects allows us to provide our clients with top-notch customer service and a higher quality product.

“Our clients are our most important resource second only to our employees. We aim to treat our clients in a way that makes them feel as if they are the most important client we have at any given time.”- David Grooms

CEO CFO: *How is business?*

Mr. Grooms: Business is good.

CEO CFO: *Are you able to ramp up if several projects come in at one time?*

Mr. Grooms: Our reputation in the industry as being a great place to work, keeps people knocking on our door. Oversight continues to be a big portion of our work and with the number of resumes we have on file, we are able to ramp up quickly when necessary. With engineering, environmental, and surveying services, we also have the ability to ramp up but are careful not take on projects just to take on projects. We want to make sure we can do it successfully. The worst thing you can do is promise something to a client and not be able to deliver it. The utility industry is a small community and word can get around quickly that PCA did not perform very well so do not use them in the future.

CEO CFO: *You are advocates for team member happiness and success. Why is that important?*

Mr. Grooms: It has always been a goal of mine to treat people the way I want to be treated. It is the golden rule. Everyone nowadays wants higher pay and more benefits, so at PCA we strive to take care of our employees the best we can and create a family atmosphere. I never use the term that this person works *for* me; I always use the term they work *with* me. I am a lucky engineer but without my employees, I do not have very much. One key to being a successful business owner is employing people you can trust, having a structured system that works and allowing those employees to follow the systems you have put in place. I do not micromanage. I put people in positions and make sure they know what is expected. That one thing is paramount.

CEO CFO: *Why choose Power Consulting Associates?*

Mr. Grooms: We treat our clients, as we would want to be treated. If the shoe were on the other foot, I would expect the same. Our clients are our most important resource second only to our employees. We aim to treat our clients in a way that makes them feel as if they are the most important client we have at any given time. We have quality and knowledgeable people at PCA. Even though we might be small, we can bring the best staff to a project.

For more information visit: <http://www.powerconsulting-llc.com/>

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