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**Interview with the CEO of SS&A Power
Group, Sasha Savic**



Q: What are the covid-19 impacts your customers are facing?

A: We see the same problems everyone around the world is facing right now, in almost every industry. There is a lot of delay in decision making, as everyone waits to see how this will play out and hopes for a speedy return to normal. Virtual office environments are totally new to many of our customers, and it has of course caused some disruptions, but it is really quite amazing how many businesses have transitioned from traditional office environments to online only, and they're making it work. On the project side we are seeing a range of issues. Many outages have been delayed or cancelled, and some have managed to get by on one shift instead of two with a reduced workforce. We have also seen Force Majeure come into play for new projects under construction.

Q: What is SS&A doing to help?

A: We just finished a project doing supervision for a combined cycle plant outage. The outage was of course planned long in advance, and at the start of the outage, travel was unrestricted for most of the world. But the situation changed rapidly. SS&A was onsite just before severe travel restrictions hit. Our customer was facing a lot of challenges trying to run an outage during a pandemic and ended up getting the job done with reduced manpower. We had experts on site that could support through the end of the outage, having the right depth and breadth of experience to support where the lack of skilled people was critical. Throughout the outage there were a number of issues that were likely due to the stress of the times, the reduced number of skilled personnel on site, and the reduced support available from the OEM's home office. These issues all contributed to delays, and in turn, the pressure to catch up wherever possible was growing. Our people on site were able to identify these issues early and make sure the proper procedures were followed. In the end we were proud we could help our client pull off a successful outage and keep the delays from getting out of hand.

Q: What do you think the long-term impacts to our industry will be?

A: It is difficult to say at the moment. Clearly we will all need reliable and affordable clean power, but the drop off in power demand has been dramatic in much of the world. Here in Western Europe we are starting to see economies slowly start to re-open, but a return to normal seems to be still far off in the distance. International travel may be the last piece of the puzzle to fall in place. Supply chains are disrupted across the world, as well as lower demand for product and services. If the virus impacts drag on longer term, businesses will be looking for ways to grow local capabilities. In our business that may mean developing more skilled workers in house rather than relying on outsourcing. Or, alternatively, we may be tasked to find digital solutions for problems that used to be handled in person. We may find more collaborative approaches between companies as priorities shift. For state run utilities we may see budget cuts as states shift their spending towards emergency measures and economic recovery assistance. The next question will be how the recovery will materialize and when considering new investments, how business cases will shift especially with a drop in gas prices, for example the LNG price dropping under \$2/mmbtu like we saw this week in Europe.

Q: How can SS&A help power organisations with regard to revised outlook based on the financial impact?

A: With electricity demand dropping, revenues fall too. Power generators will be looking at options to reduce costs, typically when this happens, the maintenance budget is often on the chopping block. We would advise customers to take a very strategic approach in this step rather than steep, across the board cuts. We usually



find there are smart options to reduce plant maintenance costs without impacting the long-term reliability of the plant. This is a time when a lot of managers are interested in diversification of the supply chain and targeting cost savings – and this is exactly where SS&A can bring its expertise and decades of experience to keep plants reliable and still reducing the costs.

Q: Do you foresee customers moving more towards developing new solutions in the digital area?

A: Most organizations have not really devoted resources for developing digital tools for remote meetings etc., and this is especially true in a traditional utility where employees tend to be physically located in the same area. This pandemic has made more of an impact in transforming companies than any CTO ever has. Now that we see what is possible, this could lead to a wider transformation of the workplace. We may see companies also looking to implement digital technologies to enable more flexible operations of power plants and, reducing failures by applying technologies to enable condition-based monitoring and digital collaboration with experts. These could help provide some level of prediction to avoid outages or events which could cost more money in an unplanned outage. Presently due to flexible operations, it makes the analysis complex and requires deeper knowledge. This is where real time machine learning framework will come into play with data validation, prediction and diagnostics. In the power plant and in the office, we need to do more with digital technology as this could be the new norm in our lives moving forward.

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