

Working together for the greater good

Victoria Montag, Gambica's sector head* for industrial automation, why members of her association from rival companies are prepared to work together to produce objective technical guides that are available to anyone, free of charge.

Why would I want to be in the same room as my competitors?" This is a question I am asked from time to time by potential members. "If all of your competitors are sitting in one room, why would you want to be anywhere else?" is my usual reply. A slightly cheeky response perhaps, but behind the comment is a serious point.

Trade associations in general – and Gambica, in particular – exist for the mutual benefit of an industry. As it was once put to me, not to make an individual company's slice of the pie bigger, but to make the pie

bigger for everyone. And the ways in which we go about trying to make that pie bigger – whether it's political lobbying, shaping standards or shaping public opinion – is dependent on one thing, our members.

Cooperation and collaboration between our members is absolutely vital to the work we do. It is their stories we tell ministers and civil servants, it is their knowledge that helps to shape industry standards, and it is their experience that helps us to form our outreach strategy. Such is the importance of our member participation in our activities that "Knowledge" and "Community" are two of Gambica's three pillars.

the product of many hours of collaborative work between individuals who, under normal circumstances, are competitors. So, why do they do this? As very experienced individuals in their fields, why not just write the guide for their own company, rather than share the fruits of their labour with the rest of the industry?

Gambica's technical committee members know that beyond their own knowledge, there is a phenomenal amount of additional experience and application know-how, sitting at that table with them. Equally, or perhaps more importantly, the collective nature of the work lends a neutrality to the

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The members who get the most out of their membership are those who understand this: those who recognise that it is not just Victoria Montag who is "Gambica", but that they are too.

One of the most effective forms of cooperation I have witnessed in my three years at the organisation is the work of our drives and controls technical committees, particularly on the guides they produce. The Gambica technical guides set out industry best practice and the correct application of standards and regulations, and cover subjects as diverse as lifting low-voltage switchgear and controlgear assemblies, internal arc fault capability of assemblies, and the application of the Atex Directives to power drive systems – to mention only a few.

These guides – which are freely available from the Gambica Web site at www.gambica.org.uk/publications – are

message. The members recognise the importance of these guides being written by a cross-section the industry. So, with their "company hats" on, they can point a customer to guidance, for example, on the correct application of a standard, without the perception of vendor bias. In short, they see the mutual benefit.

The guides are often published to coincide with the release of a new standard or regulation. Frequently, they are the result of a question being asked by the public (either of Gambica or of a member), but the decision as to what gets written and the message that goes into the guide is always driven by the members.

If there is a topic that you would like to see covered in a Gambica technical guide, or if you would like to know more about the VSD or controlgear technical committees, please get in touch. ■

* Gambica is the trade association for the automation, control, instrumentation and laboratory technology sectors in the UK. For more information, please contact Victoria Montag on 020 7642 8094 or via victoria.montag@gambica.org.uk