

# Thought Leaders Speak Out 2024

ENGAGING CUSTOMERS WITH TECHNOLOGY

## Key Takeaways: Smart Neighborhoods and Flexible Load Opportunities

A Fireside Chat with Southern Company and SPAN  
(August 2024)

The Institute for Electric Innovation's *Thought Leaders Speak Out 2024: Engaging Customers with Technology* series brings together electric company executives with customer responsibilities to share lessons learned and the results of successful customer engagement strategies.

This dialogue focused on how Southern Company is collaborating with SPAN on its Smart Neighborhood program and other innovative smart home technologies and featured a discussion between Dr. Mark Berry of Southern Company and Arch Rao of SPAN. Adam Cooper of IEI provided welcome remarks, and Dave Hutchens of Fortis, Inc. moderated the discussion. Key takeaways are summarized and highlighted below.

[Click Here for the Agenda and Speaker Bios](#)

[Watch Fortis' Opening Remarks Here](#)

***Leveraging cutting-edge technology solutions to enhance load flexibility and reliability.***

 [Video Clip Here](#)

Southern Company details the evolution of its Smart Neighborhood initiatives. Propelled by its organizational culture to embrace innovation and learning by doing, Southern Company is expanding its Smart Neighborhoods in Mississippi and Illinois with a focus on more sophisticated energy management solutions and affordability.

 [Video Clip Here](#)

SPAN explains how their smart electrical panels can support the addition of more efficient appliances and electrification at homes without costly service upgrades through real-time flexible load management, enhanced visualization, and control over energy usage while ensuring customers' comfort and convenience.

 [Video Clip Here](#)

SPAN explains how its proprietary EV charger optimizes EV charging based on the usage of other appliances to ensure multiple appliances can operate within the service limit.

 [Video Clip Here](#)

SPAN has designed its energy management app with simplicity at its core, allowing customers to easily manage appliance usage and track cost savings through a user-friendly interface. Moreover, SPAN highlights the importance of a robust, long-lasting panel that can be upgraded and customized throughout its decades-long lifespan. This adaptability ensures that the panel evolves with changing customer needs and advances in home energy management solutions, reducing the need for frequent panel replacements.

***Prioritizing customer choice, experience, and affordability.***

 [Video Clip Here](#)

Southern Company underscores the need to balance pioneering technologies with practical commercial availability when choosing technology solutions for Smart Neighborhoods. Other key considerations include affordability, functionality, and the ability to customize to deliver more choices, savings, and positive experiences to customers.

 [Video Clip Here](#)

SPAN prioritizes affordability and accessibility, including efforts to reduce costs for low-to-moderate-income households through partnerships with home builders and rebates offered through the Inflation Reduction Act.

 [Video Clip Here](#)

Southern Company is partnering with SPAN to collect data to quantify the system benefits of flexible load enabled by new technology solutions deployed in Smart Neighborhoods to garner regulators' support for new technology investment and pass down the benefits to customers.

 [Video Clip Here](#)

Southern Company explains the role of natural gas in achieving a clean energy future and how it will be an integral part of its Smart Neighborhoods projects in Illinois, where natural gas is cheaper and widely used. These homes will feature highly efficient innovative electric and gas technologies, such as dual-fuel or gas-absorption heat pumps, to offer customers more choices while keeping energy costs low.