



The Edison Foundation

INSTITUTE for
ELECTRIC INNOVATION

IEI Key Issues Executive Dialogue

Customer Energy Management & Engagement Strategies: What's Working to Support Customers During Covid-19

Key Takeaways
June 2020

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

Twenty-four senior executives from 10 electric companies and 7 technology companies gathered on a video conference to discuss IEI’s continued focus on residential and small business customer services and solutions. The dialogue ranged from engaging customers during COVID crisis to accelerating the next generation of energy management programs. The following takeaways are the result of these discussions.

Engaging and Supporting Residential/Small Business Customers During COVID Crisis.

This discussion focused on how electric companies quickly leveraged existing technology to successfully adapt to customers’ evolving needs throughout the COVID crisis.

- As residential customers stayed at home and small businesses closed, concerns and anxiety over mounting electricity bills increased; customers have welcomed more opportunities to engage in their energy use.
- The pull from customers seeking more control and knowledge around their energy use cannot be understated and provides electric companies a unique opportunity to create a richer customer experience using targeted offers and personalized messaging.
- Customer-focused technology investments made by electric companies over the past decade are foundational for effective, personalized outreach:
 - Advanced CIS/CRM tools that enable personalized, multi-channel messaging.
 - Data analytics that gauge the propensity for customers to either enroll in a payment program or predict arrearage issues.
 - Smart meter data that powers high bill alerts, providing customers notice that their bill is trending higher than average and a chance to take action.
 - Mobile apps that support budget setting, energy use coaching, and insights into device-level energy consumption and associated costs.
 - Home energy and rate education reports that support choice and awareness over energy costs.
- Electric companies are finding success in proactive, customer-focused communication and outreach plans that emphasize the importance of staying current with the electric bill while providing info on how to access available resources such as expanded energy assistance programs and flexible repayment/arrearage forgiveness plans.

- At some electric companies, call center resources are working targeted lists and making live daytime calls to enroll customers into a payment plan that meets their needs and ability to pay. Some companies are offering incentives to customers for completing their payment plan.
- Trove is working with Evergy on targeted outreach based on propensity to enter into payment arrangement and is using zip+4 info to support geo-targeted social media.
- ‘Helpfulness campaigns’ focusing on empathy to customers’ evolving needs has resulted in customer satisfaction scores at record highs.
- Customer behaviors and expectations are constantly evolving, and technology is providing electric companies the means to identify customer preferences and propensities down to the individual customer.
- The rapid response to the COVID crisis has proven to many electric companies and regulators that business transformation and change management strategies can be done quickly, safely, and effectively.

Accelerating the Next Generation of Energy Management Programs

This discussion focused on how electric company energy management programs are adapting in the COVID crisis, which changes will become the new normal, and what barriers lie ahead for these trends.

- COVID has been a catalyst for rapid change in the design and delivery of virtual/no-contact energy management programs and growth in “do-it-yourself” (DIY) energy management solutions that provide more control to residential customers and address growing energy burdens.
 - With an emphasis on ‘helpfulness’, Google and Uplight are working with Consumers Energy to rapidly enroll up to 100,000 customers into its Peak Power Savers Smart Thermostat program by July 31. Customers can order the thermostat through Consumers’ online energy marketplace and are given the choice to pre-enroll in the demand response program and receive a discounted (effectively free) smart thermostat; around 90 percent of customers purchasing smart thermostats are enrolling in the DR program, an unprecedented uptake by customers.
 - Oracle is supporting SCE and MidAmerican Energy, among others, to transition to “one-click” virtual home energy audits. The virtual audit has also resulted in a bump in customers setting up their online account for the very first time.
 - Xcel Energy is also seeing a significant increase in mobile app downloads, e-bill sign ups, and virtual home energy squad visits as customers are more focused on managing energy costs and are spending more time at home and online.

- The next wave of energy management programs needs to factor in carbon neutrality goals from both the customers' and electric companies' growing commitment to sustainability.
 - Electric company integrated resource plans are now solving to meet the electric company's carbon reduction targets, yet these plans and benefit cost analysis do not accurately reflect the benefits from DSM program carbon reduction.
 - Demand response programs need to be measured not only for peak shaving, but also for load shifting and managing carbon.
- Technology vendor consolidation will likely be accelerated by the impacts of the COVID crisis. Though consolidation may appear to result in less options to electric companies, this trend will likely result in much more integrated solutions.
- Electric companies need regulatory support to advance new digital program opportunities that meet customer needs. This may include customized energy subscription services or digital only customer offerings.
- The opportunity to build back stronger is at our fingertips, the technology is here, and energy management programs can play a big role in addressing the economic and social justice issues that have surfaced over the past several months.

About the Institute for Electric Innovation

The Institute for Electric Innovation focuses on advancing the adoption and application of new technologies that will strengthen and transform the energy grid. IEI's members are the investor-owned electric companies that represent about 70 percent of the U.S. electric power industry. The membership is committed to an affordable, reliable, secure, and clean energy future.

IEI promotes the sharing of information, ideas, and experiences among regulators, policymakers, technology companies, thought leaders, and the electric power industry. IEI also identifies policies that support the business case for the adoption of cost-effective technologies.

IEI is governed by a Management Committee of electric industry Chief Executive Officers. In addition, IEI has a select group of technology companies on its Technology Partner Roundtable.

About the Edison Foundation

The Edison Foundation is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization dedicated to bringing the benefits of electricity to families, businesses, and industries worldwide. Furthering Thomas Alva Edison's spirit of invention, the Foundation works to encourage a greater understanding of the production, delivery, and use of electric power to foster economic progress; to ensure a safe and clean environment; and to improve the quality of life for all people. The Edison Foundation provides knowledge, insight, and leadership to achieve its goals through research, conferences, grants, and other outreach activities.



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