

Thought Leaders Speak Out 2023

ENGAGING CUSTOMERS WITH TECHNOLOGY

Key Takeaways: Scaling Flexible Demand Management Solutions to Meet Customer and Grid Needs

Fireside Chat with Ameren Illinois and Google (March 2023)

The Institute for Electric Innovation's *Thought Leaders Speak Out 2023: 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 scaling flexible demand management solutions to meet customer and grid needs and featured a discussion between Leonard "Lenny" Singh of Ameren Illinois and Aaron Berndt of Google. Ameren Illinois partnered with Google to scale up low-to-moderate income (LMI) customer participation in energy management programs through community partnerships, no-cost smart thermostats, and a streamlined online marketplace. Within the first three months, more than 40,000 customers signed up in smart thermostat programs.

Adam Cooper of IEI provided welcome and closing remarks, and David Hutchens of Fortis, Inc. moderated the discussion. Key takeaways are summarized and highlighted below.

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

[Watch Fortis, Inc's Opening Remarks Here](#)

Using data and technology to identify and assist low-to-moderate income (LMI) customers manage their energy bills.

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Ameren Illinois outlines the drivers shaping their comprehensive customer billing and energy management vision. A key step in the customer journey includes increasing customer access to technologies like smart thermostats that on average provide immediate cost savings of 10 to 12% on heating costs and 15% on cooling costs.

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Google describes how Ameren Illinois used zip code level data to tailor messaging and be more targeted and how senior leadership played key roles in coordinating companywide efforts to get the message out to customers.

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Google states that smart thermostats are still early in market adoption with a current market penetration of 15% to 20% in the United States. There is ample opportunity for electric companies to deliver energy and capacity savings through smart thermostat programs.

Personalized, community-based approach to get customers engaged in energy management programs.

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Ameren Illinois highlights how the combination of offering no-cost smart thermostats and installation, *plus* effective multi-channel marketing, *plus* community partnerships was critical to delivering more than 40,000 smart thermostats to customers within three months.

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Google emphasizes the importance of a streamlined marketplace paired with strategic marketing to get customers engaged in energy management programs.

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Ameren Illinois discusses the importance of building community partnerships and how they partnered with a local group, Peoria Guild of Black Artists, to promote energy efficiency programs through a portfolio of artwork and billboards.

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Google shares lessons learned to scaling up energy efficiency programs. Setting an ambitious goal and having leadership stand behind it can motivate the team to accomplish the goal. Regular stakeholder meetings to align efforts help with program execution and achieving desired results.

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Ameren Illinois discusses the importance of combining weatherization with energy management technologies to deliver durable energy savings to disadvantaged communities.

Closing Remarks

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Ameren Illinois emphasizes the importance of customer-centric program design. Considering how customers use energy versus just energy usage is key to better understand customers and influence customers' behavior on energy usage.

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Google explains LMI customer programs have traditionally relied on direct install. Exploring new channels, a simplified user flow, and target outreach is key to quickly scale up energy management programs for LMI customers.

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IEI summarizes the key success factors for scaling up customer adoption of energy management programs.