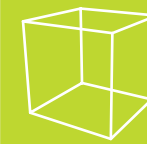


Newmarket Hydro Automates Meter Readings, Account Inquiries, and Payments



case study

Challenge

As the electricity distributor for more than 25 000 customers, Newmarket Hydro must deliver not only quality product, but quality customer service.

Keeping the lines of communications open is a challenge. Dramatic fluctuations in call volumes can overwhelm the phone lines, and unscheduled events such as outages can lead to a flood of calls. Another challenge, albeit a nice one: Newmarket Hydro's customer base is growing at an annual rate of 3 to 5%.

To become more accessible and improve service for its growing customer base, Newmarket Hydro deployed ComputerTalk's iceVoice to automate meter-readings, account inquiries, and credit card payments. Microsoft-based iceVoice delivers voice-driven self service over the phone through voice input (speech recognition) & output (digitized and recorded voice, text-to-speech), Interactive Voice Response (IVR) and optional VoiceXML.

Solution

Now Newmarket Hydro's customers perform transactions and inquiries by phone via self-service at any time of day. No longer confined to business hours, callers get through quickly, even if they call during busy periods, and they never need to hold to speak with an agent.

"It's always really busy at lunch or near the end of the day," said Sue Jamieson, Call Center Manager.

"And if there was an influx of calls due to certain conditions such as bad weather or outages, callers often got a busy signal because we could handle only a few calls. Now all calls get through and callers get what they need."

Also, notes Jamieson, Customer Service Representatives find work more satisfying and enjoyable as they no longer have to handle so many routine calls.

With iceVoice, The utility can record and insert new script messages on the fly to provide real-time updates on new developments. "If there's new government legislation and a lot of people are calling in about it," says Jamieson, "we can put an upfront informational message for it and relieve staff of those calls too.

"We can also use iceVoice to make outbound calls to notify customers ahead of time of planned power outages." A method that not only gets the word out faster, but also eliminates the time, effort, and cost of sending a staff member door to door.

Customer acceptance proved a non-issue. "At first we thought the customers might get frustrated and not use it, and that a lot of calls would still come into the CSRs," said Jamieson "But they adopted it easily." iceVoice now handles 40% of the total calls coming in to the utility.


Regular updates keeps all data current; when customers call in their meter-readings, iceVoice transmits the readings to Newmarket Hydro's database, which is fully updated by the next business day; shearing administrative tasks and paper shuffling dramatically. In the next phase of the project, iceVoice will deliver outbound scheduled outage notifications and payment reminders to delinquent customers.

iceVoice can be customized for different callers. For example if one customer wants to call in to find out how long power will be down for scheduled outages; iceVoice lets them call in for an automated time stamp.

ComputerTalk's long utilities customer list helped Newmarket make its choice. "ComputerTalk has successfully deployed solutions to several utility companies, and we chose with confidence," said Newmarket Hydro president Paul Ferguson. "We were keen to forge a relationship with a vendor on whom we can rely for consistent support."

For contact center and enterprise, ComputerTalk's secure multi-modal voice and data applications – built on VXML, SALT, IP, SIP and wireless technologies – keep callers connected while on the go.

COMPANY PROFILE



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Utility

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Benefits according to Iain Clinton, CFO	
1	Now our phone lines are freed up for more specific or critical enquiries
2	We have measurably greater customer satisfaction now - no more frustrated customers having to leave voicemails or getting busy signals
3	Increased efficiency of billing and collecting
4	Customer representatives enjoy work more because they don't have to handle repetitive calls and instead can focus on more critical tasks
5	Cash savings are more than \$100 000/year - but the improved customer satisfaction is even more valuable to us than that