

We Energies

Improving Customer Service with Speech Recognition

CHALLENGES

Even with advances in technology, communication with your customers must be a two-way street. Customers need to be able to express their wants and needs, and your company must be able to effectively respond.

For Milwaukee-based We Energies, the implementation of the Syntellect Communications Platform speech-driven self-service application has led to significant improvements in customer communication. In addition to accessing account and service information from the company's customer service system, customers can now report and receive status updates about power outages. Because call volumes can spike sharply during power outages, the self-service application is an effective customer service solution for responding to callers.

SOLUTION

We Energies introduced the Syntellect voice application in July 2001 and reports that its one million customers are actively using the system. "We've seen a big improvement in call handling, particularly during power outages," says Chris Mroz, We Energies Information Consultant.

"A weather-related outage can effect thousands of customers. Since about 20 percent of customers call us in the first hour of an outage, it's important that the calls be handled quickly, efficiently, and in a customer-friendly manner."

CHRIS MROZ
Information Consultant
We Energies

According to Mroz, about 70 percent of callers now use the speech-driven system to report outages compared to only 40 percent to 50 percent who used the old touchtone system. "This way of reporting outages benefits us as well because we are better able to assess the nature and extent of a power outage as the calls come in," explains Mroz.

The self-service application allows We Energies to operate its two contact centers with smaller staffs without compromising service to customers. When a situation calls for human intervention, the application re-routes the call instantly to a customer consultant (CC).



CASE STUDY overview

INDUSTRY

Utility

CUSTOMER PROFILE

Serves over one million electric customers in Wisconsin and Michigan, over one million natural gas customers in Wisconsin and over 3,000 water customers in Milwaukee

GOALS

Improve customer communication
Handle outage calls quickly, efficiently, and in a customer-friendly manner
Accommodate significant growth in power sales

SOLUTIONS

Syntellect Communications Platform speech-enabled self-service solution with text-to-speech and integrated outage management

BENEFITS

Improved customer satisfaction
Up-to-date information
Increased agent productivity
Decreased call center costs
24/7 Support



If a caller uses the word “emergency,” for example, the call is routed to a CC who can quickly dispatch help for a downed power line, gas, leak, or other hazardous situation.

The company also reports that call times are down. “They’ve dropped from three minutes to under two minutes using the self-reporting outage management system,” says Mroz. “We handle more calls in less time and the average call length has dropped significantly as well.”

HOW IT WORKS

Mroz explains that the system uses an automatic number identification (ANI) that links the incoming phone number to an address on their outage management database. At that point, customers are guided to the IVR application. A synthesized voice created using text-to-speech technology asks the customer to confirm the outage location. “The system gathers information about the nature of the outage and also provides the customer with information about whether we’re already aware of the outage, how widespread it is and our assurance that we have crews working on it. The responses are designed to allow customers to have a conversation with our computers and get their questions answered.”

The integrated IVR application and outage management system provides a 360-degree feedback loop. Field crews can call in up-to-the-minute status reports on the service restoration and the information is updated on the IVR system so that when customers call in, they are receiving current information about restoration efforts.

Using the Syntellect application, We Energies customers also are able to access their account and make adjustments to their billing and payment plans 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Mroz reports that more customers are enrolling in the Budget Billing plan, where the customer’s energy charges are averaged over a 12-month period so that the billing amount is the same each month. “This is a valuable program,” he says. “By adding a sales-type prompt to our menu, customers can hear the benefits of Budget Billing. We’ve experienced a big increase in sign-ups.”

ABOUT SYNTELLECT

At Syntellect, we help our customers create, maintain and continuously improve superior end-to-end service for their customers. With over two decades of pioneering leadership and thousands of solutions deployed globally, Syntellect is a premier provider of enterprise-class contact center solutions for the utilities, financial services, government, high-technology, help desk, consumer products and healthcare industries.

THE BOTTOM LINE

“When customers are already being inconvenienced by an outage, holding on a phone line for 30 minutes to speak to a customer consultant only add to the frustration. This system helps minimize frustration.”

CHRIS MROZ
Information Consultant
We Energies



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