



A Smart Grid Vision for the Next Generation

Judging by surveys of their customers and illuminating testimonials, when CenterPoint Energy talks about “creating an intelligent future ... today” they are making noteworthy strides in doing so. Now that technology is a big part of their enterprise, CenterPoint Energy is demonstrating a consumer-centric approach in the development and implementation of consumer education and awareness programs as evidenced by the initiatives described below.

How CenterPoint Energy Installed Smart Meters and Is Deploying the Smart Grid for Houstonians

CenterPoint Energy embarked on a planned five-year Smart Meter deployment campaign in 2009 and completed it nineteen months ahead of schedule in June 2012. Along the way, CenterPoint Energy delivered enhanced Smart Meter functionality to retail electric suppliers serving Houston and the surrounding area as part of its “energy InSight” program.



Today, 2.2 million Houstonians have more control over their energy use, while CenterPoint Energy continues to improve electric reliability and restoration of power following weather events. Smart Meters virtually eliminate manual meter reading providing customers with more privacy and more accurate digital meter readings. Starting or stopping service now is easier, faster, and cheaper. And if consumers want to change their electricity supplier in Texas’ competitive retail market, that too is easier, helping to promote competition and save consumers money.

Encouraging Smart Energy Savings

In the summer of 2011, CenterPoint Energy and other industry partners launched the “Biggest Energy Saver Campaign” to encourage consumer engagement and development of new software applications that can help customers easily understand and use information from their new Smart Meters.

The 2011 contest winner, Mike Butler, used an in-home device (IHD) and the Smart Meter Texas portal to reduce his consumption by 36 percent. Mr. Butler praised the availability of charts comparing his usage saying it was “very easy to see the difference on consumption.”



The 2012 Biggest Energy Saver Campaign featured two components — the residential “Consumer Contest” and a new “Lighten Your Load Sweepstakes.” The 2012 Consumer Contest encompassed July, August and September. The customer who reduced usage the most compared to the same period in 2011 would be declared the winner. The Lighten Your Load Sweepstakes, new in 2012, rewarded those customers who reduce electricity usage during the afternoon on selected peak demand days.

The 2012 winner of the Customer Contest, Kawaljeet Tagore, reduced her use by 37% after being normalized for weather. The top 25% of the 2012 customer contestants averaged 21% savings. The Lighten Your Load participants — 198 of them — averaged a 5% reduction in peak usage. By year-end 2012, both contests had helped grow awareness of the value of in-home network devices; more than 8,500 households had installed them.

Engaging the Consumer Across Multiple Channels

CenterPoint Energy succeeded because it approached the deployment of Smart Meters with a well-executed strategy designed to educate and engage electric customers. That strategy included:

- Staged communications ahead of key customer touch points. CenterPoint Energy notified its customers of deployment using door hangers, small billboards, radio in retail stores and cinema advertisements. It also enabled customers to track deployment progress in their neighborhoods online.
- Thorough preparation for answering consumer complaints. The company conducted education programs for employees and contract meter installers to ensure its Smart Grid messages would be communicated consistently across all company representatives. It created an “energy InSight employee ambassador” program which required employees to pass an online course. More than 40% of the Houston-area workforce — 2,175 employees — were trained on CenterPoint Energy’s Smart Meter module. Almost 1,500 employees were trained on the company’s intelligent grid module.
- Addressing overarching skepticism. CenterPoint Energy distributed a “Mythbuster” pamphlet at community events with frequently-asked-questions addressing common concerns. The fact that less than 0.1% of customers complained demonstrates how proficient they were from the customers’ points of view.
- In-depth engagement through social media. CenterPoint Energy created five different playlists on YouTube encompassing 42 videos, targeting various audiences such as residential electric and natural gas customers. Their channel educates consumers about the services offered as well as provides knowledge sharing related to safety, conservation improvement, smart appliances, hurricane preparedness, and energyInSight smart energy technologies.

A key lesson learned: While mass media built program awareness, face-to-face interactions made progress communicating the utility’s goodwill and laid the groundwork for behavioral change.

Survey Demonstrates Value of Engaging Customers

From its 2011 survey of Houston-area customers, CenterPoint Energy found:

- 91% valued Smart Grid-enabled improvements in power restoration
- 89% valued Smart Meter-enabled energy saving opportunities
- 80% approved of the company’s Smart Grid; 6% disapproved
- 74% changed their energy use using an in-home device, a Smart Meter Texas account, and/or email/text alerts
- 71% changed their energy behavior in the pilot test while another 17% said they planned to change their behavior in the ensuing year
- 70% expressed interest in smart appliances/thermostats

CenterPoint Energy Customers Tell Their Story

Here is how a few CenterPoint Energy customers saw and experienced the value of using the Smart Meter on their homes to save money. Here are a few highlights:

Ruth Dorio

“On our own, we’ve been trying to budget as much as we can ... What we found is that we can eliminate \$20, \$30 a month of electricity we weren’t using.”



Jack Hart

“We didn’t have to go to the computer all the time. We had something up-close and personal that we could look at and understand what our usage was.”

Jo Monday

“I can be unloading groceries from the grocery store, look at the monitor and open the refrigerator door and watch the (power usage) number go up. It’s a real good learning tool for me.”



Video of testimonials are available in our resource library at smartgridcc.org:

<http://smartgridcc.org/category/resource-library/smart-grid-benefits-resource-library/success-stories>