E Source Announces Top Electric and Gas Company IVRs for 2013

By Kym Wootton
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Utility interactive voice response systems (IVRs) continue to improve, offering customers a better experience than in years past, according to the E Source Review of North American Electric and Gas Company IVRs: 2013. The top-rated US electric and gas company IVRs belong to Pacific Gas and Electric, Columbia Gas of Pennsylvania, and Portland General Electric. Union Gas Limited, Nova Scotia Power, and Hydro-Québec operate the top Canadian utility IVRs.

The E Source Review of North American Electric and Gas Company IVRs: 2013 is based on the company's assessment of 96 utility IVRs. Reviewers searched for and rated 10 key features that residential customers want and expect to find on a utility IVR. The final score for each IVR is a combination of two factors: was the feature available and, if so, how easy was it to use.

The companies in the first quartile showed significant improvement in their scores since the last review in 2011. When scoring these criteria, companies can achieve a maximum of 1,000 points. This year, all of the companies in the first quartile rated above 700 points, with the top company IVR scoring an incredible 913. In 2011, only 8 of 21 utilities in the first quartile scored above 700, with the highest rating being 809.

"The increased effort put forth to make the IVR experience positive is great news for consumers. Although more and more customers are turning to the website to conduct business, there will always be a segment that wants to use the telephone as a contact channel, at least in the foreseeable future," explains Rich Goodwin, manager of Customer Experience & Marketing at E Source. "It's very encouraging to see that utilities haven't given up on this contact channel and continue to improve it."

Several of the top-performing companies in this IVR study also scored in the first quartile in the E Source Review of North American Electric and Gas Company Residential Websites: 2013. Says Goodwin, "That just reinforces that those companies are trying to provide their customers with a good, consistent experience, no matter what channel the customer chooses."

As technologies continue to evolve, E Source noticed the emergence of well-executed open-response

speech-recognition IVRs. “Providing excellent experiences in the IVR means giving customers choice, clarity, and ease of use. Though touch-tone continues to be the most prevalent IVR technology used by utilities, we found that the handful of IVRs implementing well-executed open-response technology received the highest usability ratings,” explains Sarah Fiebiger, manager of Market Research Services at E Source.

Regional rankings are as follows:

- **Canada:** Union Gas Limited, Nova Scotia Power, Hydro-Québec
- **US, Midwest:** DTE Energy, American Electric Power, Peoples Gas
- **US, Northeast:** Columbia Gas of Pennsylvania, Public Service Electric & Gas, National Grid
- **US, South:** Duke Energy Progress, Florida Power & Light Co., South Carolina Electric and Gas (SCANA)
- **US, West:** Pacific Gas and Electric, Portland General Electric, Arizona Public Service (APS)

Rankings per utility type:

- **Electric:** Portland General Electric, American Electric Power, Florida Power & Light Co.
- **Gas:** Columbia Gas of Pennsylvania, Peoples Gas, Union Gas Limited
- **Combined gas and electric:** Pacific Gas and Electric, Duke Energy Progress, DTE Energy

For more information about this comprehensive study, please visit www.esource.com/ivr-review.

Performance ranking of US and Canadian IVRs, 2013

Functionality and average usability ratings were combined with equal weighting to determine the overall performance index, which has a maximum possible value of 1,000. The IVRs were then ranked in descending order.

About E Source

For 25 years, E Source has been providing unbiased, objective research and advisory services to over 300 utilities and large energy users. Our energy experts have answered more than 8,000 questions over the past 3 years. This guidance helps our customers advance their efficiency programs, enhance customer relationships, and use energy more efficiently.

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