How do you prepare your contact center for solar and electric vehicle demand?

An Ask E Source answer
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Q:What utility contact center best practices can you implement to reduce calls and better support customers during the anticipated growth of solar and electric vehicle (EV) demand?

A:Here are some of our recommendations to help prepare your contact center for a projected increase in customer demand for solar and electric vehicle products, programs, and services.

Maintain a customer-friendly website with relevant solar and EV information

Offer user-friendly web pages that describe the pros and cons of purchasing solar energy and EVs. Avoid utility terminology and jargon when possible. When you need to use technical language, include a PDF or web page as supplemental information. By keeping the information on your website easy for customers to access and understand, they're more likely to self-serve about questions on solar energy and EVs, limiting calls to the contact center. See the sidebar for more-detailed solar website design advice.

Update the IVR to address solar and EV calls

Your interactive voice response system (IVR) menu needs to clearly and quickly direct customers to a solution. We've created a sample utility IVR menu with customer-friendly options that you can use as a guide to updating your IVR menu with solar and EV options (**figure 1**).

Figure 1: Sample utility IVR menu

An ideal utility interactive voice response system (IVR) menu would place the five most urgent and frequently used options at the front (shown under the welcome greeting). Circled numbers indicate the numbers customers can press on their phones or say to reach that option. For example, to get more time to pay a bill, a customer would press or say "2" in the main menu for "billing and payment," then

“3” in the submenu for “more time to pay or to spread payments over time,” and finally “1” for “more time to pay your bill.”

Some utilities also use announcements in the IVR to deflect calls or shorten the length of a call. By placing announcements in the IVR, you’re preemptively providing customers with information they might be calling about, such as a recent press release. It’s best practice to place announcements with a related IVR option when possible, rather than at the beginning of the main menu or the front end of a submenu.

Develop and maintain a knowledge base for employees and customers

These can be internal web pages that contact center agents can use to quickly locate information or public-facing pages that both employees and customers can see. You’ll want to work with EV experts to get the information right. But be sure to translate any highly technical terms into customer-friendly language.

The blog How a Knowledge Base Helps Call Center Agents in Problem Solving by ProProfs, a smart tools software company, describes how a well-designed knowledge base can help contact center agents reduce hold times, offer concrete solutions to customers, and standardize their responses to avoid legal problems.

And the report Creating & Maintaining a Knowledge Base: The Ultimate Guide by HubSpot, a developer and marketer of software products, presents best practices for customer service organizations interested in developing a user-friendly knowledge base to meet customer expectations for self-service.

Proactively promote solar energy and EVs

Use your unique role as the grid operator and power provider to present customers with helpful resources that relate to renewables and EVs.

With growing interest in solar, more and more residential customers are looking for reliable sources of information on solar options. You can take the role of a trusted energy advisor for customers by providing objective tools and education on solar and EVs. Use your unique role as the grid operator and power provider to present customers with helpful resources like individualized costs and benefits or direct them to programs and resources that relate to renewables and EVs. The E Source data snapshot Utilities Must Act to Remain Residential Customers’ Preferred Provider of Solar Information provides more actions utilities can and should take to retain the role of the trusted energy advisor on solar.

Prepare for questions from business customers

With workplace charging as the second most used form of EV charging, it’s important to support business customers in buying and installing electric-vehicle supply equipment. In your messaging to business customers, you should touch on the top reasons for installing charging stations and address the challenges up front. You should also proactively provide solutions to overcome any barriers.

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