Optimizing the new-construction experience for utilities and their partners

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Industries that came to a halt because of COVID-19 are starting to recover and bounce back as states ease restrictions. We expect the residential housing market to recover quickly. To accommodate any COVID-19-related safety requirements or customer concerns, you need to reassess your new-construction policies and processes. Take this time to become a better partner for builders, contractors, and end-use customers, and to provide an improved experience during the new-construction process.

We tackled this topic during our June 11 web conference Reduce operating costs while improving the customer experience for new construction. During the event, we laid out the case for why and how you should improve the new-construction experience. We also welcomed guest speakers from Southern California Gas Co. (SoCalGas) and ComEd. Both utilities partnered with E Source to implement improvements at their own organizations.

The case for improving the new-construction process

New construction is one of the most time-consuming and costly processes for utilities, making it the perfect candidate for improvement. These are just some of the challenges utilities experience in new construction:

- Complex handoffs between multiple departments
- Long wait times
- A lack of timely communications
- Repeat customer calls, resulting in dissatisfaction and increased costs
- Delayed revenue due to payment options that aren't customer-friendly

If you're going to reassess your process to adapt to the pandemic, what better time to also improve the overall experience?

E Source's approach to improving the new-construction process

Our approach to helping utilities improve their new-construction process starts by conducting a

thorough current-state assessment. Through this, we:

- Interview internal stakeholders from leadership to frontline employees
- Analyze your operational data and existing customer insights
- Review customer-facing materials and the digital experience
- Bring in the voice of the customer (VOC) by surveying your builders, contractors, and residential customers to quantify their pain points

Next, we conduct a customer journey-mapping exercise. We map out the entire customer journey from first call to install. We bring together a cross-functional team to review the current-state assessment, work to fill in the gaps, and start identifying solutions.

Utilities can expect to achieve upwards of 20% cost savings from enhancing their new-construction process through improved handoffs. But for most of our clients, the main focus is on improving the overall customer experience. Reducing costs is an added benefit.

One of the first steps to improving your new-construction experience is changing your perspective. You need to view builders and contractors as your customers. They're often interacting with your end-use customers; they're the face of your utility during new construction. Treat them as your customers and not just steps in the process.

How we helped SoCalGas streamline its processes

During the web conference, we welcomed Dan McNair, manager of New Business Customer Experience at SoCalGas. McNair detailed the utility's efforts to improve the experience for its large builders.

We worked with SoCalGas to interview large builder customers and SoCalGas employees. Internally, we identified opportunities for SoCalGas to improve its employee training, communication, and alignment of various departments. We also found that the builders wanted one point of contact with SoCalGas, and that the performance of the account reps was crucial to building and maintaining an enhanced customer experience.

Based on recommendations from E Source, SoCalGas has begun its transformation of the customer journey. The utility is focusing on changing how the organization works with and views its large builders. It's also implementing employee training and coaching programs to give employees the tools and skills needed to be successful in supporting builders. SoCalGas added a new coaching program for account reps and implemented a customer feedback process with clear communication channels.

How we helped ComEd streamline its processes

We also heard from Lanita Greer, customer experience manager for new construction at ComEd. We partnered with ComEd in 2018 to improve its residential customers' experience with the new-construction process. As a result of our work, we created a roadmap for enhancing customer communications, improving internal processes, and increasing customer advocacy. We detailed the work and outcomes of our partnership with ComEd in the case study New Construction with ComEd (PDF).

More recently, ComEd has been looking at how to adjust its new-construction processes to account for COVID-19. This includes moving to virtual training programs for internal stakeholders. ComEd is

considering keeping these trainings virtual even after the pandemic. Through them, the utility has seen cost savings and increased efficiencies from employees not needing to drive to in-person trainings.

Let’s discuss your challenges

E Source can help you:

- Identify inefficiencies in your new-construction process
- Assess your digital channels
- Pinpoint and eliminate numerous handoffs
- Bring the VOC into the process

Not sure where to start? Schedule a discovery call and tell us about your challenges with the new-construction process. We welcome the opportunity to help you improve internal processes, become better partners for builders, and improve the experience for end-use customers, all while lowering your operational costs.

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