Connect with utility customers like they’re an audience of one

By Rachel Buckley
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During COVID-19, electric, gas, and water utilities have the unique opportunity to improve how they engage with customers in a more personal and proactive way. Utilities can use quantitative and qualitative data to understand their customers as distinct individuals—or as an audience of one—and predict which actions they’ll take. This strategy can help utilities save operational costs, while simultaneously hitting targets for clean-energy initiatives.

As our E Source executives described during the 2020 E Source Forum session Tough Questions, Candid Answers: E Source perspectives on a changing utility industry, the utility industry is undergoing major shifts, and COVID-19 has created an environment where utilities can meet the needs of their customers and start to get ahead. Connecting and empathizing with customers are crucial elements to the future of our industry. We’ve identified four main tactics to engage customers as an audience of one.

Watch the session recording

Optimize customer engagement through predictive data science

By using artificial intelligence and machine learning, you can maximize the value of your data, including advanced meter reading data, for more-precise targeting and participation in customer programs. This will help you recruit the program participants that can best contribute to your goals. For example, a West Coast utility was able to improve its demand-response (DR) event impacts by 30% by using E Source AI models to evaluate each individual DR participant daily based on weather. The Forum session “Turning customer insights into results,” one of the Top 10 sessions from the 2020 E Source Forum, highlighted Portland General Electric’s Peak Time Rebate DR program, which is one of several utility programs using the audience-of-one framework.



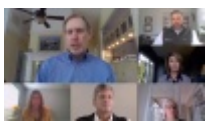
You can also apply the predictive data science model to customers who are new to arrears. Through data science, the same audience-of-one concept can identify groups of at-risk customers. Evergy Inc. was able to use these models to reach out to at-risk customers and help keep them on track. E Source members can learn more by attending the December 7 web conference Using data science to help your most vulnerable customers during and after COVID-19.

Use ethnographic research to understand customers' wants and needs

Leading utilities are layering in qualitative and quantitative ethnographic research to design intentional and personalized customer experiences. First, you need to have conversations with customers to understand what they really care about and then develop solutions through design thinking. Getting that personal customer feedback, added to predictive analytics and data science, is what the audience of one is all about.

Personalize the customer experience

Utilities are doing a lot of work to improve their customer experiences, but most of their solutions are still one size fits all. If you move away from this generic approach, you can meet customers where they are and keep up with leading consumer brands that have been successfully using the audience-of-one approach to better target and serve their customers for years. This two-minute clip from the 2020 Forum offers ideas on how to frame the utility problem in a customer-focused way and ultimately provide customers with solutions they actually want.



Engage with the cities and communities that your customers are a part of

During economic recovery, economic development, decarbonization, and clean-energy plan execution, the relationship between cities and utilities will become increasingly intertwined. If you want to reach your customers through audience of one, then you need to understand the intersection points of cities and the constituents that they serve.

Focusing on an audience-of-one approach can radically change how utilities manage the grid

To execute the audience-of-one approach, utilities have to already have met customers' basic needs for reliable service. Layered on top of that, the grid needs resiliency and sustainability. If utilities move from cadence-based operations to a predictive risk-based decision approach, they can:

- Reduce the risk of outages
- Drive affordability
- Increase reliability
- Save money
- Change the way we manage the grid

The time is right for utilities to really get to know their customers and provide more-personalized solutions to help them pay their bills, meet clean-energy targets, and reduce operating costs. The pandemic is creating an environment where you can innovate within your regulatory framework to become a trusted energy adviser.

We look forward to partnering with you to design solutions that will streamline your operations and solve your customers' specific energy problems. Contact us to discuss how E Source can help you better serve the customer, cut operational costs, improve grid reliability, and evolve your offerings to focus on an audience of one.

Contact us

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