How PG&E applied findings from the E Source Website Benchmark study to achieve digital equity

Research and advisory case study
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Key takeaways

- On its journey to making its website more digitally equitable, PG&E wished to research and benchmark the content and features that performed well on other utilities' websites.
- Through its E Source membership, PG&E consulted a variety of E Source tools to perform its own research and used findings from the E Source Website Benchmark to inform its website strategy.
- With data and insightful recommendations in hand, PG&E is giving its website a major refresh, improving readability and making it easier for customers to find what they need. For example, recasting longer-form sentences into bulleted lists resulted in a 47% increase in click rates.

The challenge

PG&E's website was long overdue for an update. Containing more than 1,600 pages of content, the website was becoming cumbersome and difficult for customers to navigate. When the utility looked closely at the data, it found that only 200 pages accounted for 97% of the load. PG&E needed to find ways to simplify the website.

With a goal of radical simplicity, PG&E wanted to consider every step of the customer website journey and figure out how to make that journey easier. As the utility began the project, it used in-house data, reviewed examples from other industries, performed benchmarking research, and spoke with digital consultants like E Source.

Time for a website redesign but don't know where to start?

Contact our team to learn more about our expertise and how we can help.

The solution

PG&E turned to resources available through its E Source membership. Some of the E Source tools PG&E used while researching website design improvements included:

- **The E Source Website Benchmark.** An assessment of PG&E's website (included in its E Source Digital Self-Service subscription) revealed which changes would have the biggest effect on the customer experience.
- **The E Source Utility Website Design Center.** Design guides showed PG&E feature-by-feature best practices that it could use to benchmark its redesign project.
- **Ask E Source (PDF).** While using the E Source website and tools to research a design strategy, PG&E was able to ask E Source experts specific questions about results and metrics.
- **Custom advisory session.** PG&E participated in a custom advisory session with E Source experts to dive deeper into the results of its website benchmark results. Thanks to E Source's vast knowledge of utilities and their customers, PG&E discovered the most effective way to achieve digital equity and better serve its customers.

The results

With data and insightful recommendations in hand, PG&E is giving its website a major refresh, improving readability and making it easier for customers to find what they need. For example, by rewriting website copy in plain language, PG&E is eliminating jargon and lowering the reading level to between fifth and eighth grade. This ensures that most customers can understand the information.

The utility is also using more bulleted lists instead of paragraphs to deliver important content, greatly improving engagement. After testing this change on its current website, PG&E saw a 47% increase in click rates.

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PG&E also recognized that not all customers have high internet bandwidth, particularly in rural areas. This becomes especially challenging when power outages strain cell phone towers. To make receiving outage updates easier, PG&E can now identify lower-bandwidth connections and give customers the choice to move from the full outage map page to a simpler text-based page.

Looking ahead, PG&E plans to incorporate text-based search into the primary outage landing page. This new feature will allow customers with slower connections to access the same information and functionality as the utility's more-connected customers.

PG&E continues to make progress with its website redesign project. Next, the utility will take a "recommendations not research assignments" approach to its content. In the first phase, the utility will focus on its rates analysis tool. Instead of requiring customers to perform their own analyses to learn about possible savings, PG&E plans to use available data and perform the analyses for customers. By alerting customers of potential savings up front, it hopes to reduce the number of steps required to explore a new rate, easing the customer burden.

The importance of accessible web design: PG&E’s journey to radical simplicity

An interview with Eryc Eyl (E Source) and Lori Geoffroy (PG&E).



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