

OUTAGE COMMUNICATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL:

Fall Meeting 2022 – Orlando, Fla.

Oct. 17, 2022

Members of Chartwell's Outage Communications Leadership Council met for a day-and-a-half session October 17-18, 2022, at the Renaissance Orlando to discuss outage communication successes, challenges, internal organizational structures, problem solving, auto-enrolling for outage alerts, and surveys and metrics. In addition to these topics, Chartwell conducted a brief workshop on the Nuts and Bolts of Customer-Friendly messaging.

Chartwell Director of Research Russ Henderson opened the meeting by sharing general information on Chartwell. He also recognized three Council MVPs – Alabama Power, CPS Energy, and Georgia Power – for their active engagement on the Council during 2022. Henderson and Chartwell Senior Consultant Tim Melton preceded each topic with trivia questions from Chartwell data.

Successes

During a recent multi-day outage, **SRP** activated a new process on using customer resource counselors for customer contact for the last customers to have their service restored. **DTE** is continuing its error-free communication initiative and is not communicating until the company has confirmed meter voltage through AMI. They also have auto-enrolled more than two million customers in proactive alerts. **LG&E and KU** has added guest outage reporting to their mobile app and have improved their notifications process using Smart Energy Water (SEW) to reduce success failures from 5-10% to approximately 1%. **Hydro Ottawa** is continuing to reap benefits from their backup battery project during planned outage events. They currently have seventy backup batteries for customer use. **SCE** has sent over twenty million messages during the recent heat wave. They are also seeing increased CSAT scores for PSPS customers versus maintenance and repair related outages. Improvements are attributed to better communication process and customer education. **CPS Energy** is showing improvement in pre-storm messaging. After a storm hits, they are posting pictures on social media such as the Nextdoor app. **Georgia Power** is showing improvement in planned outage communications and the quantity of alerts for this type of outage has increased significantly. Something new for unplanned outages that may last for an extended period is adding pictures to their email alert notifications. Initial CSAT results and verbatims have been particularly good. The company translates all message updates into English and Spanish. **Avista** has developed an internal communication site with dashboards that provide users with the ability to get the most up-to-date information. **EPB** has a cross-functional team focused on the digital communications especially since they are a fiber company in addition to electric. EPB has been ranked as the best midsize electric utility in the South by its residential customers for the past five years.

Challenges

Estimated Time of Restoration (ETR) accuracy was a common challenge for most utilities in attendance. Many attendees expressed the need for Transmission and Distribution Operations buy-in to the outage communication process. The challenge is getting operations to see the value of transparency and how the restoration process is progressing. The need for standardization was an area discussed because of the discrepancy of information and performance by company versus contractor staff, operation areas and specific crews causes difficulty in providing useful information to the customer. Solutions provided were to involve field staff in the improvement process, development of actionable reports that can guide good decision-making, and the adoption of technology with ease-of-effort for the field staff. Lastly, the continuous education of the customer on what is a global estimate is versus an individual ERT. The topic

of storm impact modeling was also discussed, including the utilization of Storm GEO (**Entergy**) and Oglethorpe/Ohio State University storm modeling that provide storm impact analysis (**Alabama Power**). The conversation ended with a discussion on how some companies and customers suffering from outage fatigue continue to provide and get the information according to customer expectations.

Internal Organization

Melton provided an overview of **LG&E and KU** ICS with the addition of the ERT officer and IT section chief. LG&E and KU's matrix for providing ERT information and from what source for different level storms was also reviewed. Jackie Robinson, **DTE**, talked about her company's outage transaction owners that drive continuous improvements and the need to have a cross-functional team that includes Operations, Customer Service, IT, and other relevant areas that develop and support changes across systems and the organization. It was discussed that all utilities need a process owner for Outage Communications to be successful. Also, utilities can improve efficiency by most employees having a storm role with some companies providing extra compensation or incentives for some employees working outside their normal jobs for these storm roles.

Workshop: The Nuts and Bolts of Customer-Friendly Messaging

Henderson kicked off the workshop with an overview of past customer-friendly messaging discussion and takeaways. He explained that the discussion of messaging would take place in a roundtable format covering strategy and structure, content, and methods for obtaining customer feedback. Feedback provided by the group during this discussion included:

Strategy and Structure

All utilities need to have an outage messaging process owner which usually is from Customer Service, who creates a team with stakeholder involvement from Operations, Corporate Communications, Change Management, Customer Experience, Legal and other departments as needed. The goals of the messaging are to develop two-way dialogue concerning the outage, call deflection to the company, and improve customer understanding and satisfaction.

Message Content

The focus of content is to keep the message simple and to focus on the information that customers most want, especially ETRs. Cause and crew status and other factors are nice to have but not as important as the ETR. As one council member stated, the messaging language needs to be in "neighbor speak" and not "attorney speak" or "engineer speak." Canned messages are good, but ad-hoc or customized messaging is best when more detail is needed, especially during extended outages. **Alabama Power** and **Georgia Power** are considering including a link in the message that would provide more details if the customer wants them rather than including all the information in the text. This would give customers the choice of how much information they get. To improve the quality of messaging, customer segmentation can help customize messages for specific customer groups. Also, **SCE** shared that nuances in specific languages must be considered when translating in different languages – native speakers must be employed, not "Google translate." **DTE** said that when synchronizing messages across channels the main consideration is that all messages have the same spirit. Most messages need to be tested repeatedly using many methods (online panels, focus groups, employee ambassador groups) and all messages should be reviewed on a regular basis using customer feedback for any changes.

Problem Solving

During the problem-solving session, questions from following council members were discussed:

- **Cobb EMC** – Effective ways to get crew buy-in, getting timely damage assessment data and most effective channels for communicating outage resources available to the customer.
- **CPS Energy** – Which factors are used to calculate blue-sky, storm pre-defined ETRs such as device, time-of-day and week, geographical location.
- **DTE Energy** – Developing machine-learning models for calculating ETRs.

- **SnoPUD** – Overcoming character restraints for SMS to provide customer-friendly messaging. Pros and Cons of SMS versus MMS.
- **LG&E and KU** – Best practices for promoting self-service adoption.

Auto-enrollment for Outage Alerts

Henderson gave a general overview of auto-enrollment for messaging (text, voice, email). From the 2022 Chartwell consumer survey results, 93% of respondents expressed that they would be OK with, or indifferent to, being automatically enrolled for outage alerts. Many attendees said their utilities had already auto-enrolled or were in the process of auto-enrolling customers for outage notifications. For utilities who have auto-enrolled their customers, they have seen increased customer satisfaction and had a very minimal percentage opt-out. Some participants who auto-enroll customers for outage alerts said that ongoing challenges are to keep the distribution system connectivity model accurate and to customer data accurate so that the correct information is going to the correct customer. Another major challenge is to properly load-test processes and systems to make sure they are capable of handling the increased volume of messages that comes with auto-enrollment. Several utilities have experienced “bottlenecks” when attempting to deliver the messages in a timely manner. Council members asked Chartwell to search for any recent cases studies or court rulings related to TCPA that could enhance interpretation.

Surveys and Metrics

Henderson shared that Chartwell’s benchmarking surveys show that most utilities have some type of feedback mechanism regarding the utility’s performance with outage communication. Post-event surveys are now the most common method. According to Chartwell’s 2022 Consumer Survey, a single outage can decrease the customer’s overall utility satisfaction by a full 8%. In contrast, good outage communication experience can significantly lift overall customer satisfaction. **Consumers Energy** surveys by channel and **Georgia Power** includes a link in the restoration message with one question: How satisfied were you with your outage experience? **Alabama Power** discussed that timeliness of results are important so changes, if needed, can be made more quickly.

The trend is to create more dashboards that combine operations data and voice-of-customer data to provide a holistic picture of the outage experience. However, as a lesson learned, one precaution was discussed about creating and using metrics or KPIs correctly. A couple council utilities have seen their internal metrics impact the customer negatively because it rewarded behaviors for only achieving the metrics target and subsequently not incentivizing the behaviors to provide a good outage customer experience.

Upcoming Leadership Council Events

- Next call: Tuesday, Nov. 15 at 2 p.m. Eastern – Consumer Trends in Outage Communications

Meeting Attendees

- Wayne Boone, Alabama Power
- Kimberly Williams, Alabama Power
- Marcella Flasha, ATCO Electric
- Andrew Barrington, Avista Corporation
- Nataly Hart, Cobb Electric Membership Corporation
- Jennifer Peinado, Cobb Electric Membership Corporation
- Stefanie Pritchard, Consumers Energy
- Anthony Mecke, CPS Energy
- Melissa Gutierrez, CPS Energy
- Patricia Villa, CPS Energy
- Joyce LePage, DTE Energy
- Jackie Robinson, DTE Energy
- Rami Younes, DTE Energy
- Susan Adam, Entergy
- Sandra Tilley, EPB Chattanooga
- John Zumbado, Georgia Power Company
- Robert Globocki, Hydro One
- Jennifer Withrow, Hydro Ottawa Ltd.
- Andita Weathers, LG&E and KU
- Nicole Luna, Omaha Public Power District
- Rodney Walker, PECO
- Melinda Snyder, Salt River Project
- Kassidy Warren, Snohomish County PUD
- Lee Banghart, Snohomish County PUD
- Pam Haldi, Snohomish County PUD
- Michael Williams, Southern California Edison
- David Rodriguez, Southern California Edison
- Robin McCord, Southern Company

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