Really big data: Helping large data centers meet their energy-efficiency goals

By Luke Currin

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Utilities have been concerned about low customer load growth for years, but that concern doesn't apply to data centers. According to a June 2016 article on the Data Center Knowledge website, these energy-hogging facilities consume a whopping 3 percent of electricity globally—a number that will rise in the years ahead.

It takes a lot of electricity to power and cool the machines that process and store the data generated by many millions of individuals, businesses, and other institutions. Consider just one data center demand stream: processing and storing smartphone-generated data. Amazingly, 2013 research by Digital Power Group CEO Mark Mills cited in a *Time* magazine article suggested that a single iPhone with heavy data usage could potentially have a bigger energy footprint than a medium-sized Energy Star–qualified refrigerator when wireless connections, data use, and charging were all accounted for. The overall energy footprint of an iPhone has hopefully decreased since then, but it's no wonder data centers are constantly adding storage capacity and consuming more electricity to fuel their operations.

Source: iStock
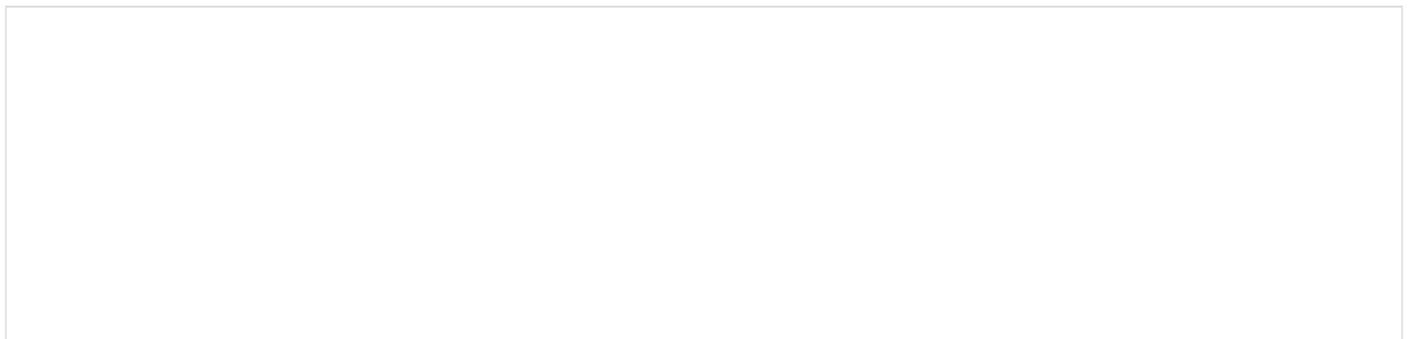
In this age of low load growth, utilities have to treat data centers like the critical customers they are. They take energy costs very seriously, more so than any other business sector, according to data from the E Source Business Customer Insights Center. As such, energy efficiency is a high priority. Our new report for members of the *E Source Business Marketing Service*, Marketing Energy-Efficiency Programs to Large Data Center Customers, provides a glimpse into these customers' energy-efficiency priorities as well as the attributes of their energy management decision-makers. For instance, our research indicates that large data center customers are more interested in IT infrastructure efficiency programs than cooling programs.

As North American consumers generate more and more data, the energy needs of the data center sector will also continue to grow. So utilities will need to stay engaged with these customers in order to help them meet their energy-efficiency, technology, and sustainability goals. How are you reaching these important customers? Leave a comment and let me know.