How E Source research and advisory services enable water utilities to optimize customer service and communications

Aleana Reeves, VP, Sales Support and Engagement

Dale Pennington, President, Technology Planning and Implementation Consulting Division

E Source

POWERING WHAT'S **NEXT**

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Who you're speaking with today

Aleana Reeves

Vice President, Sales Support and Engagement

860-830-1680

aleana_reeves@esource.com

Dale Pennington

President, Technology Planning and Implementation Consulting Division

631-807-4063

dale_pennington@esource.com

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Agenda

- Who is E Source, and who do we serve?

- How does E Source help water utilities?

- Research and advice you can access

- Member benefits

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Who is E Source?

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POWERING WHAT'S NEXT

Who we are

A research, consulting, and data science firm focused exclusively on the intersection of utilities and their customers

Clients

We work with over 600 utilities, cities, and their partners

Founded

Founded in 1986, we've been in the industry for nearly 35 years

Who we serve

Electric

Water

Gas

Cities

Water utilities we serve

Why E Source

	E Source	American Water Works Association	Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies
Research on demand	✓		
Industry best practices	✓	✓	✓
Unbiased market research	✓		✓
Databases & tools	✓		
Educational events & networking	✓	✓	✓
Customer experience maturity assessments	✓		

How E Source helps

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Challenges water utilities face

Top concerns

- Communicating about:
  - Aging infrastructure
  - Financing capital improvements
  - Long-term water supply
  - Value of water
  - Emergency preparedness and crisis communications
- Managing multichannel customer service

- Credit and collections during COVID-19

- Enhancing customer engagement

- Aging workforce

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How we help utilities …

Develop effective business cases for new initiatives with best-practice research

Unbiased guidance on vendor selection

Robust networking and peer connections

Access to cutting-edge market research

E Source

How we can help you …

Prioritize, operationalize, and guide your **customer engagement** efforts

Evaluate technology and enhance the success of your existing and new **customer service and credit & collections efforts**

Improve the functionality and usability of your **web and mobile platforms**, and evaluate new digital channels

More-effective **communications** to increase customer awareness and adoption

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How E Source delivers value

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Industry best-practice reports

How to manage high call volume through your IVR during COVID-19
Tips for updating or upgrading your IVR to improve containment
Chris Peters

APRIL 24, 2020 | 15 MIN READ

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Key takeaways
- Interactive voice response (IVR)–only calls cost the utility about 15% of what live-agent calls do.
- You don't have to spend a lot of money to improve your IVR containment rate. Restructuring and simplifying your current system can do the trick.
- There are various technological upgrades you can make to your IVR to improve containment, including speech recognition and visual IVRs.
- Implementing virtual-hold technology can help manage call volume when contact centers are busier than normal or short-staffed.

Contents
How should you restructure your IVR to improve containment?
How can you upgrade your IVR to improve containment and the customer experience?
What features do IVR vendors offer?
Additional IVR resources

An IVR is a dependable resource for handling high call volume—which utilities have been experiencing due to the COVID-19 crisis. Additionally, with work-from-home orders, your customer service reps (CSRs) are more likely to call in sick or need time off for family reasons. So it's vital that your IVR can successfully guide customers through a transaction. And with advancements in IVR technology, the likelihood of first-contact resolution (FCR) via IVR is higher than ever.

How should you restructure your IVR to improve containment?

IVR containment—when customers resolve their issue within the IVR and aren't transferred to a live agent—can save your utility money. According to analytics and software development firm

RELATED CONTENT

Using FCR to create a great experience and save money

Omnichannel Survey

Creating Human Connections in the Call Center

What are recommendations for surveying customers after contact center interactions?
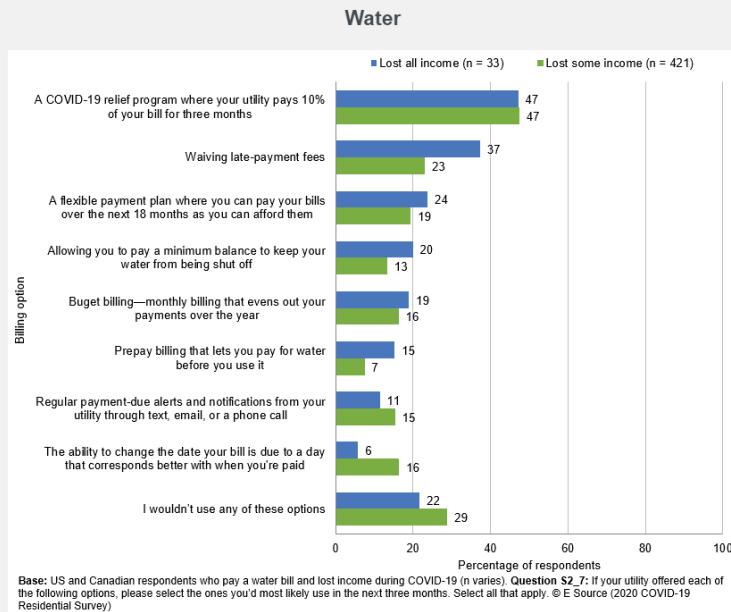
Contact Center Performance 2016

ASK E SOURCE

Through our Ask E Source service, you can ask our experts questions related to any of the subject areas your organization has access to.

Submit an inquiry

Get more COVID-19 content

15

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Cutting-edge market research

Figure 2: Customer interest in bill-relief options

Across the board, customers were most interested in a COVID-19 relief program where their utility would pay 10% of their bill for three months. Currently, interest in prepay is low. Use your marketing dollars on bill-relief programs customers show real interest in.

Water

Legend: ■ Lost all income (n = 33) ■ Lost some income (n = 421)

Billing option	Lost all income	Lost some income
A COVID-19 relief program where your utility pays 10% of your bill for three months	47	47
Waiving late-payment fees	37	23
A flexible payment plan where you can pay your bills over the next 18 months as you can afford them	24	19
Allowing you to pay a minimum balance to keep your water from being shut off	20	13
Buget billing—monthly billing that evens out your payments over the year	19	16
Prepay billing that lets you pay for water before you use it	15	7
Regular payment-due alerts and notifications from your utility through text, email, or a phone call	11	15
The ability to change the date your bill is due to a day that corresponds better with when you're paid	6	16
I wouldn't use any of these options	22	29

Percentage of respondents

Base: US and Canadian respondents who pay a water bill and lost income during COVID-19 (n varies). **Question S2_7:** If your utility offered each of the following options, please select the ones you'd most likely use in the next three months. Select all that apply. © E Source (2020 COVID-19 Residential Survey)

Gain useful data and insights through databases and tools

Events & networking

On-demand research questions

How are utilities encouraging water conservation awareness?

An Ask E Source answer

Jessica Bailis

SEPTEMBER 4, 2019

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Q: How are utilities encouraging customers to conserve water?

A: Utilities are engaging with residential customers to improve awareness around water conservation via their website, social media, and primarily print, radio, and direct mail advertising and marketing campaigns.

RELATED CONTENT

E Source Utility Ad

Research & advice you can access

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Optimize customer service

Credit and collections

Expert advice on collection, disconnection, and security-deposit practices

Billing and payment

Best practices for improving the bill-pay experience and information about innovative payment arrangements and assistance

Customer service operations

Best practices for customer service metrics, staffing, turnover, training, deploying at-home agents, and quality assurance

Interactive voice response system (IVR)

Best practices and recommendations for improvements

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Develop a business case for bill-relief programs

Problem

Utility in the Pacific Northwest wanted to explore bill-relief programs during COVID-19

E Source support

Leveraged E Source research to identify bill-relief options that other utilities were exploring.
Put forth their business case leveraging E Source research in front of their executive board.

Success

Utility created a sound business case for bill relief that executives approved and customers quickly adopted

What the CDC's eviction moratorium means for utilities and their customers

Lisa Schulte

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With the US on the precip...
moratorium on evictions ...
relief that doesn't addres...

Evictions are dela...

Early COVID-19 relief me...
$1,200 stimulus payment...

The COVID-19 billing programs customers are interested in

Findings from the 2020 E Source COVID-19 Residential Survey

Lisa Schulte

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Key takeaways

- About one-third of utility cust...

How customers prioritize their bills

Findings from the 2020 E Source COVID-19 Residential Survey

Sarah Baker

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Key takeaways

- Residential utility customers rank their electric bills as the mo...
  internet, and mobile phone.

What to expect for your credit and collections operations during a recession

Takeaways from how utilities reacted during the Great Recession

Lisa Schulte

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Key takeaways

- Almost one-third of utility customers have lost some or all of their income since March 2020. Your prerecession customer segments don't reflect all your current customers at risk of missing payments.
- Of customers who have lost all of their income, 26% anticipate making late payments or missing upcoming

RELATED CONTENT

What the CDC's eviction moratorium means for utilities and their customers

How are utilities adjusting

Streamline digital efforts

Digital customer experience

Advice on building a business case to update your website's self-service features

Digital channels

Best-practice insights on digital metrics and performance

Information on how to evaluate and improve your use of social media, smart speakers, online chat, and mobile apps to better serve customers

Improve features

Help with identifying and improving the key features on your website for customers to self-serve
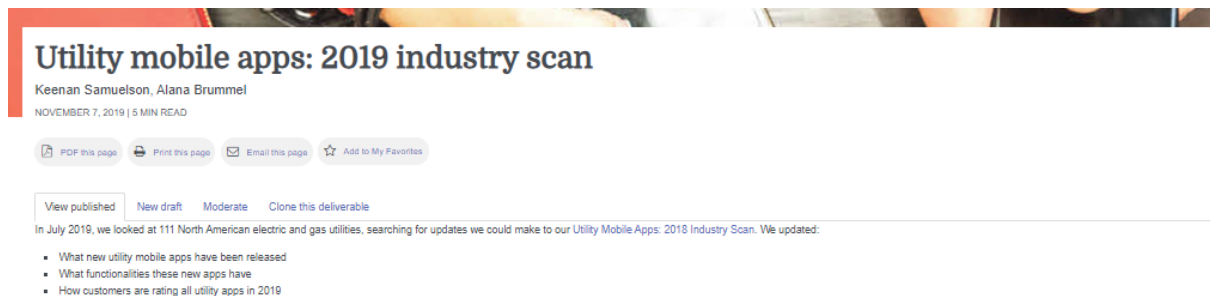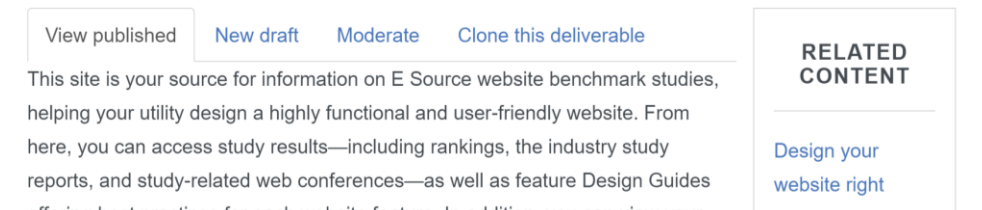
Improve your website & mobile strategy

Recent research:

- How to make your online payment feature more customer friendly

- How to improve the mobile web user experience

- Get information to your customers faster with more-readable content

- Website design best practices:
    - Home Page
    - Contact Us
    - Payment and Billing Options
    - Account Preferences
    - My Account
    - Online Bill Viewing

UTILITY WEBSITE DESIGN CENTER | Design Center Home | Results | Design Guides | My Assessments

Utility Website Design Center

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This site is your source for information on E Source website benchmark studies, helping your utility design a highly functional and user-friendly website. From here, you can access study results—including rankings, the industry study reports, and study-related web conferences—as well as feature Design Guides offering best practices for each website feature. In addition, you can view your

RELATED CONTENT

Design your website right

Utility mobile apps: 2019 industry scan

Keenan Samuelson, Alana Brummel

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In July 2019, we looked at 111 North American electric and gas utilities, searching for updates we could make to our Utility Mobile Apps: 2018 Industry Scan. We updated:

- What new utility mobile apps have been released
- What functionalities these new apps have
- How customers are rating all utility apps in 2019

Enhance customer engagement portals

- A member utility saved $60,000 on their customer engagement platform by leveraging E Source's research in their decision-making process

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Enhance your communications

External communications

Rate increases

- Recommendations on turning disruptive changes for residential and business customers into trust-building opportunities

COVID-19

- Examples of how top utilities are communicating about COVID-19, including sample messages and engagement metrics

Water quality

- Best practices for improving satisfaction among customers concerned about water quality

Internal communications

Employee communication channels

- Best practices for effectively communicating with your employees across internal and in-person channels

Employee communication tactics

- Tactics for increasing employee awareness of key corporate messages

Enhance your social media efforts

Since 2010, E Source has been conducting an online survey of utilities' social media efforts to help inform the industry on social media strategy, design, and implementation, as well as to determine social media trends and common practices. This survey polls leaders in utility social media on a variety of topics, including:

- ✔ Channels and audience
- ✔ Uses and goals
- ✔ Policies and other documentation
- ✔ Digital strategy
- ✔ Staffing and budgets
- ✔ Metrics and reporting
- ✔ State of the industry
- ✔ Lessons learned

E Source asked social media managers what they'd change if they had a magic wand. Here's what they said:

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1:15

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Member benefits

E Source member benefits

Strategic and tactical advice related to customer service, digital efforts, and communications

Unbiased industry and best-practice research

Cutting-edge customer market research

Facilitated networking opportunities, virtual events, and conferences

Access to our research staff for on-demand research questions (option to add more)

E Source

How to become an E Source member

Contact Aleana Reeves

Aleana Reeves

Vice President, Sales Support and Engagement

860-830-1680

aleana_reeves@esource.com

Q & A

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