

# How to Improve Your Utility Website

Excerpted Findings from the 2017  
E Source Website Benchmark Study

Heather Hilgenkamp, PhD

Senior Analyst, Market Research Services



**E Source**

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# Study Details

Conducted biennially since 2002, the Review of North American Electric and Gas Company Residential Websites measures how well utility websites engage residential customers and assesses website improvements as they relate to customer needs. Based on industry trends in user experience and utility feedback, this year's study of 114 utility websites separates the user experience (also referred to as usability) into four key components—navigation, functionality, appearance, and relevance—which will appear throughout this report. We gave scoring of computer and mobile features equal weight because customers expect the experience to be consistent across multiple devices.



**Navigation:** How easy is the feature to find?



**Functionality:** How easy is the feature to use or accomplish?



**Appearance:** How is the look and feel of the feature?



**Relevance:** How pertinent is the content to the feature?

# Feature Scenarios

We reviewed 10 features on a computer as well as a variety of mobile devices. We chose these features based on what customers expect to be able to do or find on their utility website (data from the 2016 [E Source Residential Utility Customer Survey](#)); industry thought leaders' feedback; E Source expertise and experience; and, lastly, learnings from past website review studies.

**Account Preferences.** You would like to control what, when, and how your utility company communicates with you, and ensure that your personal information is up to date.

**Contact Us.** You need to contact the utility and want to find the various ways to do so.

**Home Page.** You want to visit the utility website and start your navigation on the main page of the site.

**Make a Payment.** You want to pay your current bill.

**My Account.** You want to know what you can accomplish through the secured portion of a utility website.

**My Energy Use.** You want to better understand how you're using energy (either electricity or gas) and want to know whether your utility provides information and tools to help you manage your energy usage.

**Online Bill Viewing.** You want to view your most recent bill online.

**Outages or Emergencies.** You're experiencing a power outage or gas leak and you want to contact your utility to report the situation. You also need to find out when to expect your power to be turned back on or your gas service restored once you report the outage.

**Payment and Billing Options.** You've been paying and receiving your bills the same way for years. Now you want to know what other options are available for receiving and paying your bill.

**Pricing Options.** You want to know what your current utility rate (price per unit of energy) is and you want to find out whether there are other pricing options or rates available.

The background image shows three construction workers on a roof installing solar panels. One worker on the left is leaning over a panel, another in the center is standing and looking towards the camera, and a third on the right is leaning over a panel. They are all wearing hard hats and safety harnesses. The solar panels are dark and arranged in rows. The sky is blue with white clouds. An orange semi-transparent rectangle is overlaid on the middle of the image, containing the word 'Recommendations' in white serif font.

# Recommendations

# Recommendations

Customers want to accomplish their tasks on a utility website as quickly and easily as possible. Utilities can facilitate this by following our recommendations, which are based on trends from reviewer comments and ratings across all features assessed in this study. More recommendations by feature are available in the Design Guides on our Utility Website Design Center. The Design Guides also explain what information is most important to customers.



## Navigation:

- Make it easy to find key tasks from Google site links, the home page, and the main menu.



## Functionality:

- Use expandable or collapsible headers and tables to organize information and reduce scrolling.
- Put all related information on one page so customers don't have to visit multiple pages.
- Organize information with the customer's priority in mind. Put the most important details toward the top and supporting information farther down in a logical progression.
- Make the website easy to use on any device.



## Appearance:

- Use icons, images, and bullet points to make information easier to digest.



## Relevance:

- Never use technical or industry jargon.
- Keep the customer top-of-mind when deciding what to present; include the information customers need and expect and cut anything that's extraneous.



# Navigation Recommendations: Google Site Links

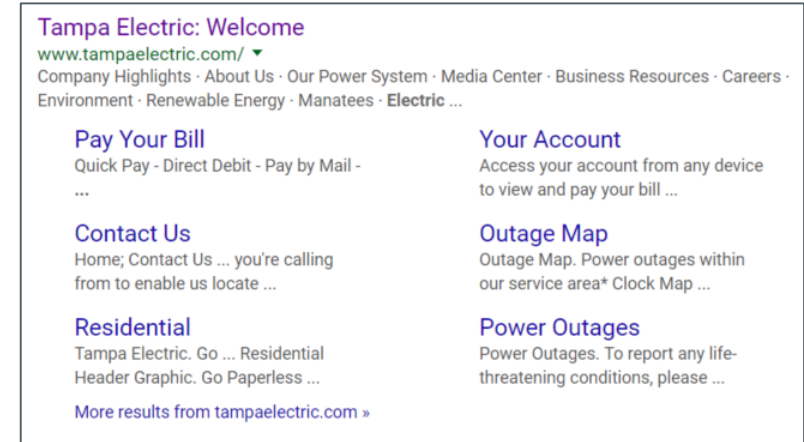
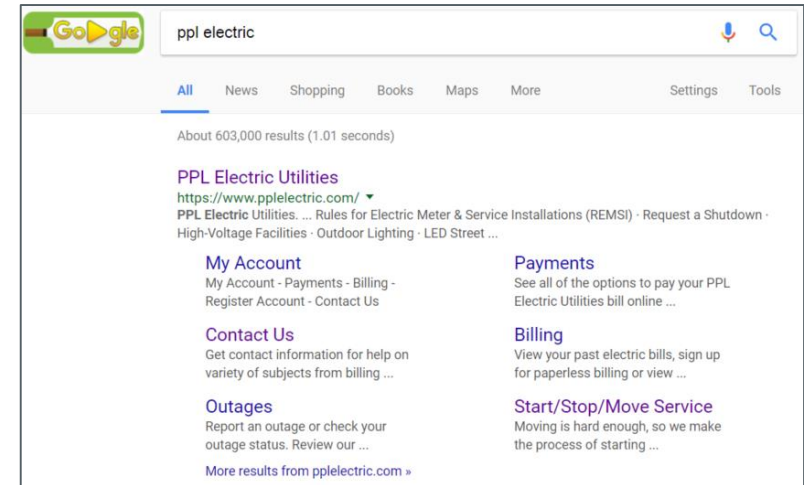
Your Google site links should include the following options because they are some of the main reasons customers visit a utility website:

- Outages
- Contact Us
- My Account
- Make a Payment



“ I was glad that I could navigate directly to the power outages page from the Google site links. From the home page, it was fast and easy to either go directly to the outage map (right on the home page) or the power outages page (in the residential drop-down menu).

—Reviewer's comment about the navigation to Tampa Electric's Outages feature

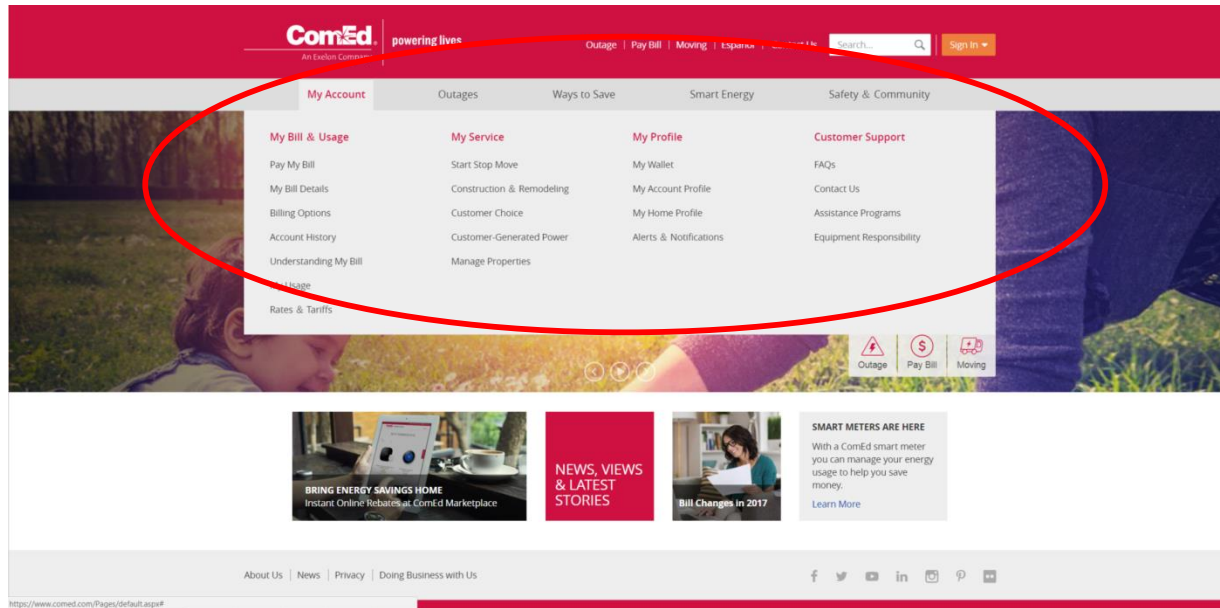


# Navigation Recommendations: Home Page and Menus

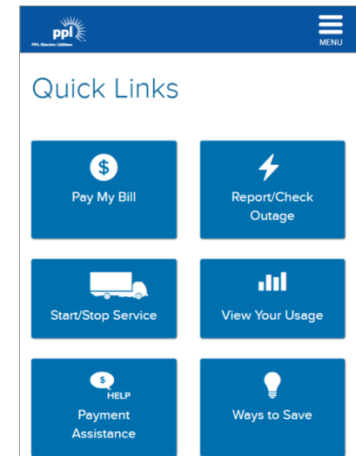
Make it easy to find key tasks from Google site links, your home page, and the main menu.



On ComEd's website, key navigation options are prominent in the main menu.



PPL Electric put the most important features in its Quick Links section.



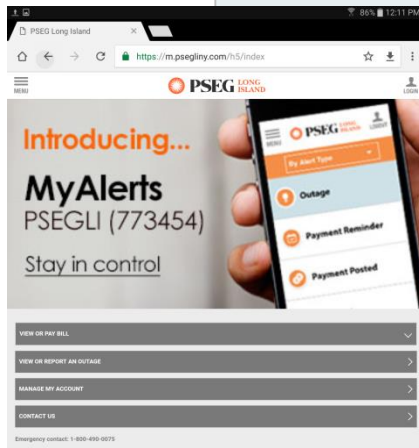


# Functionality Recommendations: Organization

- Use expandable or collapsible headers and tables to organize information and reduce scrolling.
- Put all related information on one page so customers don't have to visit multiple pages.
- Organize information with the customer's priority in mind. Put the most important details toward the top and supporting information farther down in a logical progression.



An email form is available at the top, so customers can contact the company online without leaving the page.



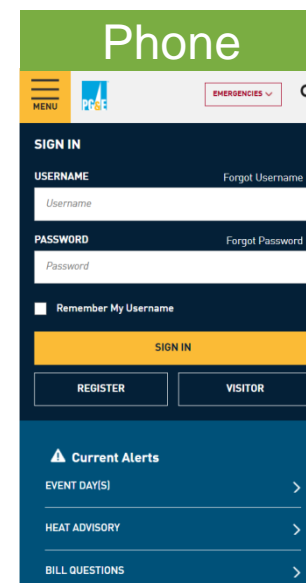
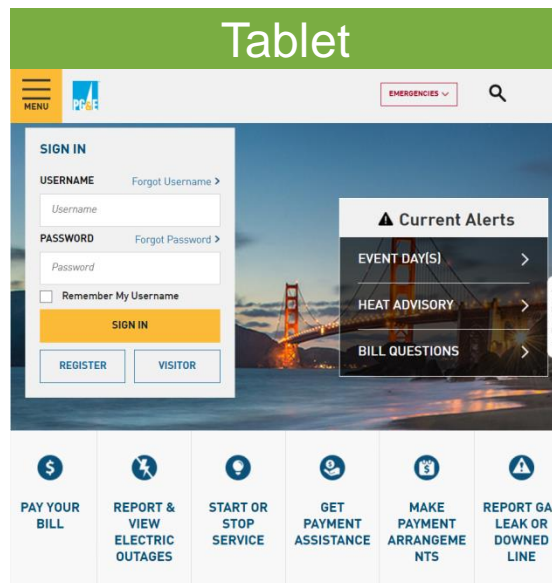
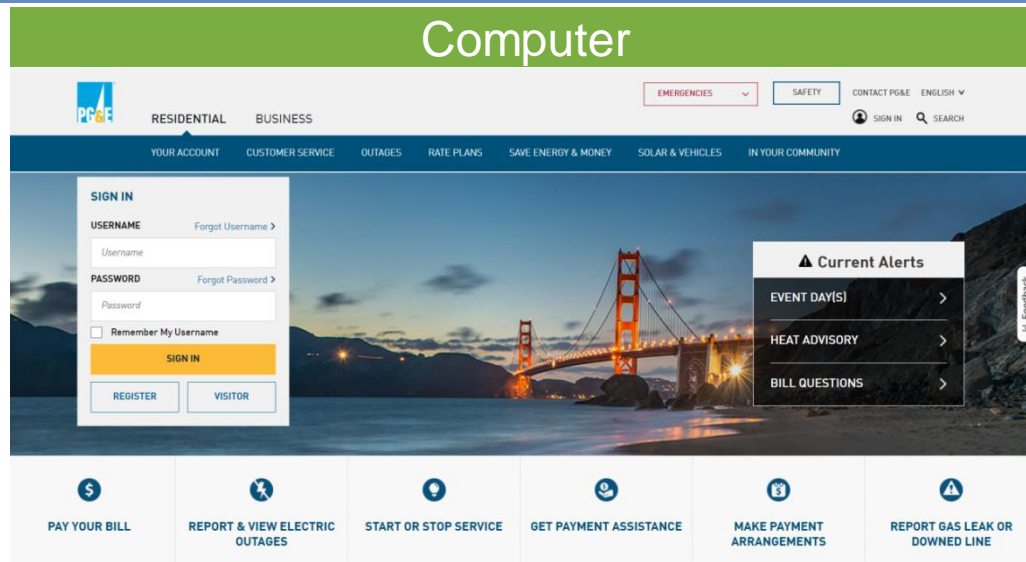
Online chat and emergency phone numbers are placed toward the top of the page because customers prefer these channels or need them in an emergency.

Mail is the least used channel, so the address is located toward the bottom of the page.

Group contact methods or use expandable headers like PSEG did to maximize space and minimize scrolling.

# Functionality Recommendations: Mobile-Friendliness

Use responsive design to make your website easy to use on any device.



The information stays the same no matter the screen size; only the format changes.

# Appearance Recommendations: Icons and Images

Use icons, images, and bullet points to make information easier to digest.



The professional, appealing image on SaskPower's website lets customers know that by clicking it, they can learn more about the utility's app.



Icons accompany written options to help customers quickly find what they're looking for.

# Appearance Recommendations: Bullet Points



KCP&L's icons and bulleted lists make the information easy to skim, allowing customers to find what they're looking for.

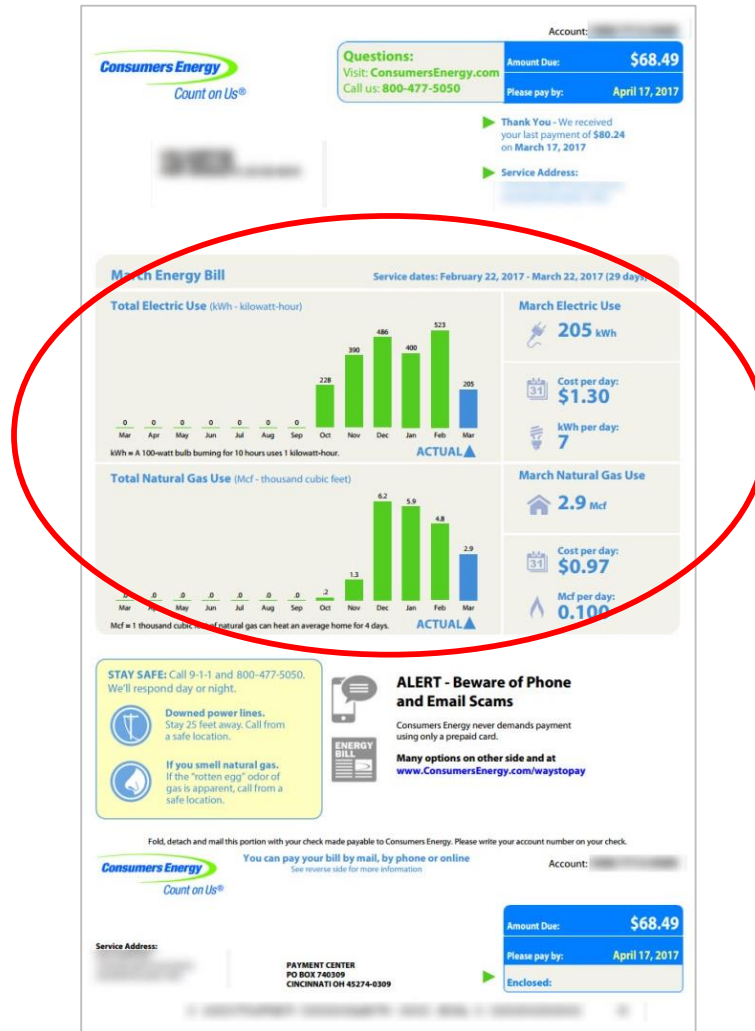
“I really liked the use of colorful, but also helpful, icons above each payment method, as they added visual interest to the page. I thought the top header and sidebar menu were also well designed with nice touches of color and readable text.”

—Reviewer's comment about the appearance of KCP&L's Payment and Billing Options feature



# Relevance Recommendations: Customer-Centric Info

- Never use technical or industry jargon.
- Keep the customer top-of-mind when deciding what to present; include the information customers need and expect and cut anything that's extraneous.



Consumers Energy provides energy usage and billing details in customer-friendly language and an easy-to-understand format.

# Relevance Recommendations: Organization of Info



**TORONTO HYDRO**

Residential Login Business Login

FOR HOME FOR BUSINESS ELECTRICITY CONSERVATION POWER OUTAGES GRID INVESTMENT CONTACT

Home For Home Rates

Customer Care  
Billing  
**Rates**  
Are you moving?  
Metering  
Electrical Safety  
Service Connections

**November 1, 2016** — Time-of-Use winter pricing starts

**RESIDENTIAL ELECTRICITY RATES**

**Electricity Rates**

Please select the type of electricity rates that is applicable to you.

Time-of-Use Holiday Schedule

Time-of-Use Rates Tiered Rates Retailer Rates

**Time-of-Use Rates**

The Ontario Energy Board has announced new electricity prices effective November 1, 2016.

Time-of-Use (TOU) rates work together with your smart meter. With TOU rates, you pay according to the time of day you use electricity. It's important to know how much electricity you use and when you use it.

Winter rates, effective November 1, 2016 to April 30, 2017:

Rate Type	Rate	Weekdays
On-Peak	18.0¢ per kWh	7 a.m. – 11 a.m.   5 p.m. – 7 p.m.
Mid-Peak	13.2¢ per kWh	11 a.m. – 5 p.m.
Off-Peak	8.7¢ per kWh	7 p.m. – 7 a.m.

Weekends and statutory holidays are off-peak all day.

The rates quoted above cover the cost of electricity provided on your behalf. Toronto Hydro passes this cost through to you, without mark-up, and pays it directly to our suppliers.

**Delivery**

**Regulatory**

“

This utility gets it. They understand that normal people don't want to read a PDF just to know how much their energy costs, so they made it super simple to understand.

—Reviewer's comment about the relevance of Toronto Hydro's Pricing Options feature

Toronto Hydro put the most relevant information for customers at the top of the page in user-friendly language.

Information that the utility needs to provide, but isn't as important to customers, is at the bottom of the page with expandable headers.