

Utility department boosts collections using voice technology

Tele-Works' interactive voice response delivers customer self-service payment options and automated customer notifications by telephone.

Situation

Union County N.C. was the 6th fastest growing county in the nation, and the Public Works Department had to keep up with a significant increase in water utility accounts.

A burgeoning customer base meant there were a host of new challenges for the Department —

- o Customers wanted easier ways to pay and more self-service options
- o Past due accounts were rising
- o It had become increasingly difficult to get timely information to customers
- o Costs for collecting and processing payments were rising

The Department was looking for ways to deliver improved customer service and become more efficient in its collections processes without adding to its overall costs. A solution with a quick payback was essential.

Solution

Union County selected interactive voice response (IVR) technology by Tele-Works to upgrade the customer's total experience, improve collections, and cut costs.

Customers can now hear their account balances and make payments by phone without having to call during normal office hours or wait to speak to a customer service representative. Customers can serve themselves at a time that is convenient for them.

And because the IVR system interacts with the Department's utility database in real-time, customers and staff are always working from the same information. There is no added work for staff.

Tele-Works has integrated with more local government utility databases than any other IVR vendor — a 21-year history of providing proven, low-risk solutions.

The IVR system also makes courtesy calls to customers whose accounts are delinquent to remind them of their overdue balance.

Customers can opt to speak to a customer service representative, make an automated payment by credit card or eCheck, or hang-up and pay later. Either way the customer is informed.

2007 Statistics

Population: 163,000

Utility customers: 36,000

- ✓ 10 month return-on-investment
- ✓ Collected \$1.7 million in payments by phone
- ✓ Reduced unnecessary shutoffs by 40% with automated calls to 27,000 past due accounts
- ✓ Improved staff productivity — IVR handled 94,000 inbound/outbound calls without staff intervention
- ✓ Called thousands of customers to notify them of urgent water usage regulations

Benefits

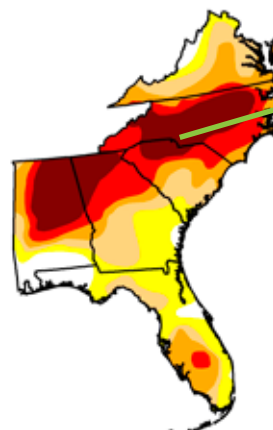
Automation with IVR technology has been widely successful for the Public Works Department. In 2007, the IVR handled 94,000 inbound and outbound calls, and collected more than \$1.7 million in payments.

The system placed more than 27,000 calls to overdue accounts — a process that has been beneficial to the Department and its customers alike, since many customers have been able to avoid the costly and frustrating experience of being unknowingly shut-off.

"It's easier for us to make a courtesy call than to disconnect service. To save even one trip is saving money."

Jolene Keziah
Customer Service Supervisor
Union County Public Works

Drought!



Innovative IVR

Hard-hit with severe drought, Union County needed to quickly notify customers about new and changing water regulations.

Voice technology from Tele-Works automatically calls thousands, helping to conserve water, notify violators, and warn users of excessive consumption.