

How Transparency, Contests and Cutting-Edge Tools All Help Customers Make Smarter Energy Decisions

From the beginning of 2009 through the scaling up of Smart Meter-enabled applications in 2012, the Stakeholder Education Group at San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E) responsible for the customer experience has been focused primarily on one goal: transparency with customers.



The Foundation for SDG&E's Success: A 90-60-30-day Implementation Protocol

Along with general media outreach, this plan built awareness about planned Smart Meter installations at each of three 30-day intervals leading up to installation. "We tested every step in this process with the customer and the end-result in mind," said Farrell Cox, SDG&E's Smart Meter Deployment Manager. To ensure a smooth deployment, the entire project management team worked within 100 feet of each other.

90 DAYS AHEAD: Stakeholder Education Group members connected with community leaders wherever possible in face-to-face meetings.

60 DAYS AHEAD: Group members organized and spoke to community gatherings about how Smart Meters could help them better understand the cost of the energy they use.

30 DAYS AHEAD: Customers received a letter with a timeframe they could expect a Smart Meter to be installed at their residence.



A few days before, two outbound dialing teams — one at SDG&E, the other at contractor Grid One — notified customers of the 'window' during which the installer would be on site. Customers had the option of specifying their own 'window.' This way, they could be sure, for example, their computers were backed up and turned off and any life-support systems could continue to run smoothly.

Roles for Stakeholder Education and Infield Liaison Teams

Inherent in the focus on transparency was the belief that quick, nimble and responsive customer communications could get in front of and deal credibly with any customer complaints. And it paid off. Out of 2.3 million meter installations, SDG&E received complaints from only about 1,200, or 0.16%, of them. "If something went wrong, we fessed up and fixed it as quickly as we could," said Shannon Ray, who managed customer communications for the Stakeholder Education Group.

To ensure they were plugged into the customers' adoption of Smart Meters and what it could do for them, SDG&E deployed an "Infield Liaison Team" comprised of three recent retirees to canvass about 50,000 customers in a representative sample of neighborhoods about two weeks after the installation.

Customers in Control and Earning Bill Credits on “Reduce Your Use” Days

For the summer peak cooling season, SDG&E created “Reduce Your Use” day rewards enabling customers to earn a bill credit for using less electricity on specific days between 11 a.m. and 6 p.m. Participants set up email or text alerts on SDG&E’s website to be notified the day before a Reduce Your Use day occurs.

In the first year alone, approximately 50,000 SDG&E customers signed up to receive text and email alerts, more than 40 percent of eligible customers received a credit on each of the event days, and customers who reduced received almost \$20 in bill credits in 2012.

Motivating Customers with Contests That Engage

As with two other Smart Grid-enabled utilities, SDG&E achieved success with a Biggest Energy Saver contest. Not only did it boost awareness, but the contest got customers thinking about how they can save a significant amount of energy and money.

What follows are highlights from SDG&E customers Erica and Collin of Lakeside, California, on how they became SDG&E’s first Biggest Energy Saver in 2011. They won a laptop computer after reducing their usage by 1,350 kilowatt hours, or 46% from the same Sept. 1–Nov. 30 period a year earlier. Watch the entire testimonial here, courtesy of contractor Simple Energy. <http://vimeo.com/49777225>



Collin: “I looked it over, read the rules and looked at the prizes. I told myself, we could really win this thing.”

Erica: “I think it would be really neat to let family members compete on Facebook with energy consumption. The contest is what really got us motivated.”

Collin: “I did a lot of research on the types of TVs and types of appliances we had. I found out how energy efficient they were. I found out our older plasma TV set really wasn’t that energy efficient.”

Erica: “You can see not only how much you’re using but how much it’s costing you. That’s a big incentive. We’re still saving money four months after the contest because we developed (good) habits on energy consumption ... We literally went to Disneyland on our savings.”



Video of testimonials are available in our resource library at smartgridcc.org:

<http://smartgridcc.org/category/resource-library/smart-grid-benefits-resource-library/success-stories>

SDG&E built on its success with Biggest Energy Saver and launched the San Diego Energy Challenge¹ in July 2012. The San Diego Energy Challenge invited customers living within the boundary of the San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD) to “compete” on behalf of their local SDUSD middle school.

Customers who joined the San Diego Energy Challenge had the chance to earn individual prizes and help their local SDUSD middle school compete for a chance to win a cash grant based on how much energy they saved on Reduce Your Use days. A total of \$26,500 was awarded to eight SDUSD middle schools. At the time of this report’s publishing savings evaluations were still underway.



Home-Area-Network Devices Provide Real-Time Controls

Since early 2013, customers have been able to purchase and install one of three home area network (HAN) devices that were validated by SDG&E. Each of the HAN devices is integrated with customers’ Smart Meters to help them make energy consumption decisions and reduce their overall usage and costs.

Customers also can determine approximately how much energy various appliances in their home are using, such as that new energy-efficient TV or outdoor patio light, by watching the kilowatts and estimated cost per hour go up or down on a small digital display as the appliances are turned on or off.



Building on Green Button Data with PowerTools

SDG&E is not just participating in the industry-led “Green Button” program, inspired by a 2011 call-to-action from the White House to offer electricity customers easy access to their energy usage data, it is enabling customers to get more out of their personalized energy use information and find new ways to save energy with the first advance tool for interpreting Green Button data.

The first of these tools, aptly named “PowerTools,” enabled by SDG&E and created by Candi Controls, was the first suite of secure cloud-based applications designed to help consumers identify ways to make smarter choices in their energy use habits and decisions, improve efficiency, and lower costs. PowerTools is available on iPhone and iPad via the iTunes Store, and in Google Play for select Android mobile phone and tablet devices.

With PowerTools, customers can:

- Analyze their historical electricity usage
- See an overview of actual use and savings relative to their history
- Learn about the environmental impact of their energy usage
- Choose and track energy saving goals
- See how the current and past local weather affects their energy usage



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