

Twenty First Century Communications Supports Dominion with automated Field Crew Management and Real-time Reporting

THE OPPORTUNITY

In an environment of increasingly longer and more devastating storm seasons, customer service demands placed on utility companies have grown exponentially. Dominion is one of the nation's largest producers of energy, serving 2.4 million customers in nine states. One of their greatest challenges was retrieving critical information from the field in a timely manner in order to provide progress reports during a storm, update their customers, validate today's work, and plan tomorrow's work.

Work crews responding to outages and downed lines needed to be able to call in without receiving a busy signal from the Dispatch Center. Members of mutual aid crews, regardless of equipment type, needed to be able to connect with Dominion to report job status and receive assignments. And demands on call center staff needed to be alleviated.

Immediate data collection and real time reporting were also necessities so the utility did not have to wait until an end of shift -- or even after an event -- to analyze performance and update customer service.

For typical day-to-day work management, Dominion also needed a simple, non-hardware solution to progress work from one status to the next; so that once a job was complete the next team could be dispatched to perform follow-up work.

THE APPROACH

After evaluating its options, Dominion decided to go with Field Connect, by Twenty First Century Communications (TFCC). TFCC has provided Dominion with exemplary automated outage reporting management services since 1997. Field Connect is a fully hosted, automated job tracking system that uses the latest in advanced speech technology and direct real-time interface to allow field personnel to report job status quickly, easily and in real-time by simply speaking into their phones.

Dominion presented TFCC with a rather specific and demanding set of functionality needs. Through successful collaboration with TFCC's technical team, a long list of requirements was pared down into a series of questions with reasonable responses to get the data needed from the work crews. Says Tim Kesler, Dominion Technical Advisor, "we were very pleased we had a good partner with whom to effectively work through that process."

Dominion went live in late April on the heels of a company-wide work management system deployment. TFCC built Dominion's customized system on the fly to interact with this program. Field Connect is used to complete normal work every day and restoration work during storms.

Field personnel simply identify themselves, speak what work order they want to close, and the system takes it from there. Field Connect asks the questions to be answered for the type of work reported, prompting proper responses when appropriate and passively confirming responses as the conversation moves along. Key for Dominion is that they are able to use Field Connect over multiple systems within the company. Outage management and day-to-day work management exist on different platforms. The tool is transparently talking to multiple systems (Validation,

Scheduled and Emergency work), and multiple jobs of multiple types can be reported within the same call.

THE RESULT

Field Connect allows both Dominion's teams and mutual aid crews to communicate via cell phone, so incompatible radio systems or mobile data terminals are no longer an issue. Advanced Speech Recognition eliminates the communication bottlenecks that occurred while field crews were waiting to reach a human CSR. The system takes the burden off both dispatch and customer service staff.

Progress reporting through the day is a critical barometer during storms -- both for validating today's plan and for projections beyond today. Analysis without a thorough picture of events doesn't tell the whole story. Field Connect's real time interface provides immediate reporting and allows for improved in-day and post-storm analysis, actually filling in data gaps through automation. Utilities need the resources to continue to meet their customer commitments during a storm. Utilities can't just 'wait and hope,' -- they have to 'know now and adjust.' Real-time reporting through this tool provides a mechanism for that.

"Field Connect is another tool in our toolbox for providing customers with information that lets them plan their lives. We are positioned now to turn busy signals and field frustration into valuable information for ourselves and our customers."

-- Tim Kesler, Technical Advisor, Dominion

For more information please visit www.tfcci.com or call 1.800.382.8356.

