

■ Access

With increased competition, companies are looking to improve customer service levels by making transaction and statement data more accessible electronically, as part of best practice customer relationship management.

■ AXSPoint Solutions

Enhancing work processes

Utility companies are under constant pressure to deliver power to the community without interruption and to offer the highest levels of customer service. This can require the storage and deployment of vast amounts of information, both long-term and short-term in nature. With this task in mind, at the end of 1995, Portland General Electric (PGE) embarked on an ambitious project to revolutionise its customer services environment by investing in enterprise report management (ERM) technology from AXSPoint Solutions.

Accelerating data processes

The initial catalyst for this change was that, as for many other utility companies, preparing, printing and distributing high volumes of paper-based statements and reports across the enterprise was proving highly expensive and a significant material- and labour-intensive process. Added to which, the cost of storing and microfilming reports on a daily basis, to meet regulatory requirements, was also high.

However, instead of restricting its use of ERM technology to archival and retrieval only, PGE decided to take it much further. Working with its customer services department, the work processes were re-evaluated and streamlined by creating an electronic distribution solution using the ERM software. Three months after its selection, PGE implemented AXSPoint Central software (the flagship product of AXSPoint Solutions) at its Portland headquarters.

The goal of increasing overall productivity and efficiency was achieved beyond all expectations, and PGE now captures a staggering 90,000 pages into AXSPoint Central every day, 70,000 of which are customer statements or bills. Now that the electricity industry is poised for deregulation, this decision has the potential to deliver an important competitive advantage.

Customer service efficiency

By creating a new electronic distribution system, PGE has been able to dramatically reduce call times because customer statements are available to customer service representatives online. This enables immediate review and query resolution. In the past, obtaining a duplicate statement to answer the same query could have taken two days. Similarly, if a customer has lost their bill, a replacement can be faxed to them instead of

waiting two days for a new copy.

Customer service representatives no longer have to wait for printed reports to arrive at their location before work can begin. Reports are processed overnight and made available at the beginning of their working day. Another advantage to having reports available electronically is the ability to assign work to available resources regardless of their physical location. With the demand of billing error resolution within a 24-hour window, this has eliminated the need for overtime in the customer service billing area. The new electronic distribution process has also increased the management's auditing capability, enabling managers to carry out quality checks on employees to ensure that work is processed correctly.

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Competitive advantage

In the current highly competitive, deregulatory climate of the electricity utility industry, providing the end-customer with a high level of service is an important competitive advantage. PGE is able to differentiate itself from the newly emerging market competitors by ensuring customer information is only a few keystrokes away for those who access this information daily. In addition, the framework has been built for enabling future customers' direct access to desired account information via the Web.

Further development

Plans for the future include remote access to the repository, which was proven recently in a pilot concept, intended to facilitate telecommuting and remote administration. Use of AXSPoint Central by the finance department is also expected to increase. PGE is also preparing for the impact of deregulation in the utility market in 2001 and is investigating the potential of web-based, self-service bill presentment for its external customers.

COMPANY PROFILE

AXSPoint Solutions enables its customers to gain and maintain competitive advantage through providing the foundation for sharing information with their trading partners. With a customer base of over 120 worldwide clients, AXSPoint Solutions has proven expertise in the financial services and utilities industries.