



Case study

How Grid Wide is bringing value to Ashley-Chicot Electric Cooperative

verizon^v

Customer

In a list of seven principles that guide how it operates, Ashley-Chicot Electric Cooperative includes one in particular that says a lot about its culture concern for community .

Ashley-Chicot Electric Cooperative works hard for the communities it serves, the firm says. That's because those employed by the organization live and work within those communities. In other words, Ashley-Chicot knows the level of customer service its members want – and deserve.

With fewer than 20 full-time employees, Ashley-Chicot Electric Cooperative is an electrical utility that operates as a nonprofit organization. Many of its approximately 5,700 accounts are residential, and it serves approximately 1,100 irrigation pumps.

Challenge

When Ashley-Chicot sends technicians out to read meters, they're often entering rural areas, which means good network coverage is critical.

According to Rodney Chapman, Ashley-Chicot's general manager, there are also a host of other unknowns that might make for a less than ideal customer experience. This includes the risk of surprising a homeowner, setting off an alarm or upsetting a homeowner's dog. Additionally, heavy trucks might damage the property leaving deep ruts that need to be fixed.

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Rodney Chapman
General Manager



“As a utility company, there are always liability concerns,” he said. “Usually technicians are in a bit of a hurry because they have a lot of meters to read in a short time. There are all kinds of logistical-type situations, and they can really interrupt your day.”

These challenges can also lead to costly mistakes, given that meter reading has traditionally been a manual process and that technicians are paid based upon mileage, Chapman said.

“One error can take half a day to fix. You've got to roll a truck again, and you've got to communicate with a customer whose bill is clearly wrong,” he said. Human errors can also lead to inaccuracies, which in turn creates more customer service issues. “Not only can you have a disgruntled customer, it's very time-consuming and not a very good use of resources to have to deal with bad meter readings.”

To manage the many moving pieces of their work and improve their customer service, Ashley-Chicot needed an end-to-end solution that didn't require major infrastructure changes.



Solution

Ashley-Chicot decided to adopt Verizon Grid Wide: Intelligent Energy. This includes a comprehensive suite of smart energy meter solutions with remote meter provisioning, configuration, monitoring, control and management.

To start, Verizon set up trial meters in rural locations to enable connection with Ashley-Chicot. From there, they expanded to all of the cooperative's main locations, establishing a plug-and-play solution that connected seamlessly with their systems. "We have places so rural that we can't talk on the phone, but with Grid Wide, we can read the meter," Chapman said.

What's more, Verizon partnered with Ashley-Chicot to not only deploy Grid Wide but also to integrate it with its billing system. With this end-to-end solution, the cooperative could gain efficiencies and cost savings by boosting the speed and accuracy of readings. Prior to partnering with Verizon, for example, Ashley-Chicot was responsible for managing peak demand periods by manually monitoring power usage by irrigation pumps during these times. By

integrating Grid Wide into their systems, however, Ashley-Chicot had near real-time access to the data directly from the irrigation pump. Now they have the ability to respond to peak demand event by remotely turning the power on/off.

For Ashley-Chicot, this meant they could provide reliable, affordable electricity to customers, while relying on Verizon to establish and maintain the fully managed infrastructure that enabled that service. For technicians, this meant their work would also be less disruptive to members' physical environments.

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Results

“I think that maybe one thing that some people don’t realize is that Grid Wide is very advanced,” Chapman says. “Grid Wide can do everything that everyone’s technologies can do – maybe more. That was a big thing. We didn’t have to take less to go with Grid Wide. We got everything we would have anyway, maybe more.”

To Chapman, a key benefit has been the reduced risk of mistakes, thanks to the automation Grid Wide smart energy meter solutions provide.

“The integration part of it has really been wonderful, because when you’re entering thousands and thousands of numbers once a month ... there’s no way to be perfect at that without technology,” he said.

This has been good news for technicians and other members of the Ashley-Chicot team, who can now spend more time focusing on what they do best for the cooperative’s members.

“Our construction folks are getting to do more construction because they were having to pitch in and read the meters once a month,” Chapman said. “That’s really a plus – that we don’t have to stop what we’re doing and lose a week of construction.”

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“I like the simplicity and the plug-and-play without infrastructure to maintain. Grid Wide meant we did not have to create or maintain the infrastructure. Grid Wide is very advanced, and it works everywhere.”

Rodney Chapman
General Manager

Overall, Verizon provided a cost-effective solution that didn’t mean more work for Chapman and his team. In the future, Ashley-Chicot plans to adopt even more features of Grid Wide that are poised to benefit the cooperative, including:

Remote disconnect capabilities, which enable technicians to disconnect services from the office without having to send a truck to the location. This saves the cooperative money by not having to pay for gas mileage, and it allows the technicians to spend more time on other tasks.

Text-based outage notifications, which allow technicians to send text messages to customers communicating possible outages, thereby enhancing the customer experience by giving members plenty of notice instead of reactively waiting for them to call in.

Pre-paid services, which improve the customer experience by allowing members to pre-pay what they’re able to afford for metering.

With similar technologies, Chapman explained, there’s often a demand to set up equipment, maintain it and replace parts on an ongoing basis.

Learn more about Verizon Grid Wide intelligent energy solutions here >