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The Integration of Everything Improves Utility Performance

New Braunfels Utilities Thinks Out of the Box

When Deploying Milsoft GIS/OMS/IVR

After about six years as a manager in the water and wastewater division for [New Braunfels Utilities](#) (NBU) in Texas, Trino Pedraza took the position of Systems Control Manager and brought his enthusiasm for thinking creatively about technology to his new Division. At the time of Pedraza's transfer in 2015, NBU had in place a preliminary technology roadmap for the future and a goal to converge the IT and OT functions. Pedraza garnered the financial and personnel resources to expand this technology vision and integrate all of the utility information systems to improve operations and customer services.

NBU delivers electric, water, and wastewater services to about 35,000 customers. The NBU leadership empowered Pedraza to improve the operations of the dispatch system and invest in advanced metering infrastructure, meter data management, outage management, interactive voice response, and a geographic information system covering all utility services. To begin this effort, he traveled to other utilities to investigate the ways in which they are using new technologies. Pedraza was particularly impressed by the Milsoft OMS/IVR deployment at Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative.

"NBU had purchased the Milsoft system back in 2006 but was not using all of its features and benefits," Pedraza said. "At Bluebonnet, I saw the Milsoft system in action and returned determined to unlock its efficiencies and improvements for NBU staff and customers."

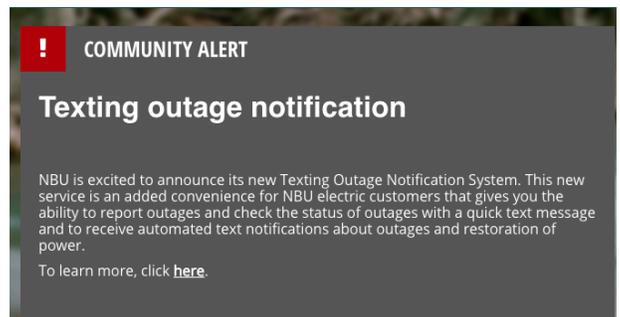
In partnership with [Hometown Connections](#), the utility services subsidiary of the [American Public Power Association](#), [Milsoft Utility Solutions](#) provides public power utilities with powerful engineering, operations, and customer service software. Milsoft's OMS/GIS/IVR and engineering analysis products maximize the utility's ability to give employees and customers fast and accurate information.

Milsoft has long been renowned for the superior performance of its maintenance and technical support team.

Prior to the deployment of the Milsoft system, line crews at NBU spent a lot of time trying to find the specific location of a service call or outage.

“The lack of good GIS information was the root of the problem,” Pedraza said. “As soon as we fired up the Milsoft system, we achieved what I call an early victory. Our crews got excited about the location improvements. They volunteered to sit with our team in the Control Center to fill in data about our service territory on the Milsoft mapping solution.”

As part of its Milsoft deployment, NBU is using the IVR platform for a [Texting Outage Notification System](#). This new service is an added convenience for NBU electric customers to help make reporting outages and receiving notifications or updates about outages much easier. All customers with valid cell phone numbers in the utility database are automatically entered into the text notification system, with the ability to opt out upon request.



Customers enrolled in the program can text NBU and receive automated text notifications from NBU regarding outages.

Reporting an Outage

- In the event of an outage, NBU electric customers enrolled in the Texting Outage Notification program are able to report an outage by text.



Checking the Status of an Outage

- Once an outage is occurring at the customer's location, they are able to text [#Status](#) to check on the status of an outage, and NBU's notification system will then respond with the current status of the outage at the customer's location.

NBU Notifies Customers of Outages

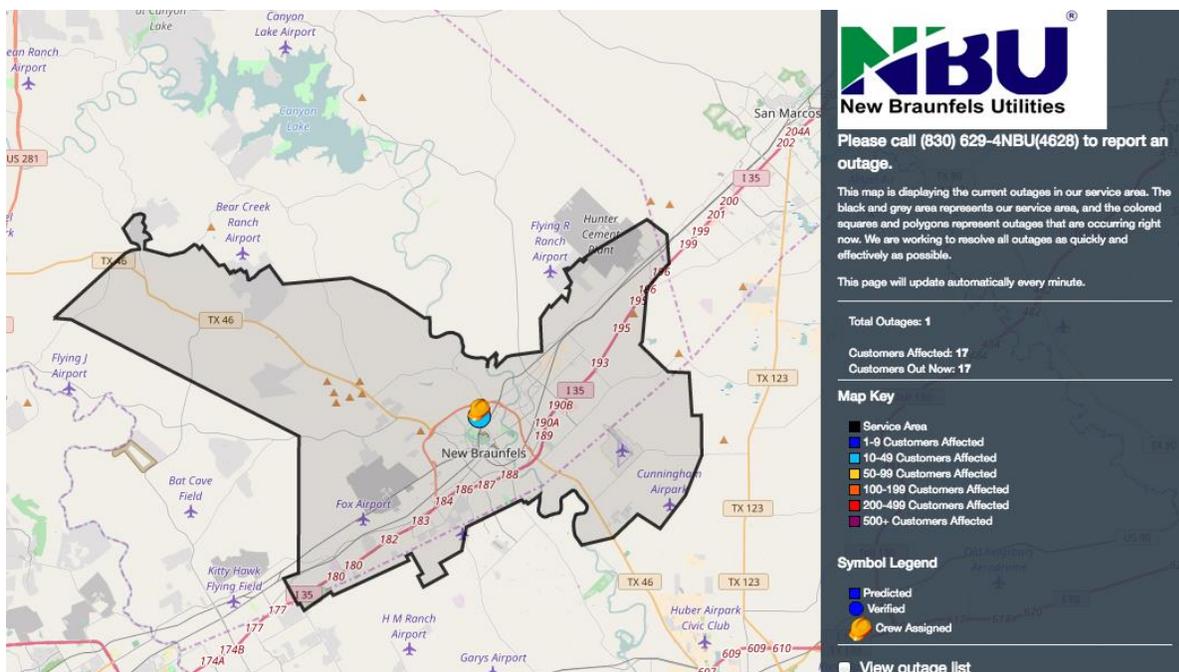
- NBU is able to notify the customer that there is an existing outage at their location if it has been reported by another customer. In the event of an outage detected at a location, NBU will text the customer to notify them.

Notification of Restored Services

- Whether the customer reported the outage or received notification of the outage from NBU, the customer will receive a final text when the outage has been restored.

In addition, NBU uses the Milsoft IVR system to send text messages or calls to customers with delinquent payment/service disconnect notices. According to Trino Pedraza, very few NBU customers have opted out of the notification system.

Customers may go online to see the [Electric Outage Viewer](#), which displays the NBU system map with outage information.



Recently, NBU switched from the Milsoft IVR system that is installed on-site at the utility to [Milsoft's Hosted IVR solution](#). By moving to this cloud-based IVR system, NBU is no longer limited by the number of phone lines in the system. Because the hosted IVR allocates phone capacity on demand as needed, busy signals are a problem of the past.

“Everyone today is talking about the ‘Internet of Things,’ Pedraza noted. “But I prefer to talk about the ‘Integration of Everything.’ Our integrated information systems enable my team to think outside of the box, finding creative ways to serve our customers. For example, our MDM collects information on water usage as well as electricity. If the system detects higher than normal water usage, we can send a text message to a customer to warn them of a possible water leak.”

Pedraza added, “Our staff wakes up each day excited to go to work, enjoying the freedom to find new ways to use the Milsoft software. The Milsoft staff has been attentive to our needs and readily available for tech support. They share our enthusiasm for developing new applications and finding new ways to better serve our community.”

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