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HOMETOWN CONNECTIONS

# Outage Management and IVR Communications Systems Improve Employee Effectiveness and Customer Service

By Susan Ryba

In his previous position as director of the electric department for the City of Hamilton, Ohio, Tony Pochard contended with energy analysis software and a geographic information system that were difficult to upgrade and had limited capabilities. In 2014, Pochard oversaw the city's transition to the mapping and analysis software from Milsoft Utility Solutions. Today, in his position as Electric Utility Director for Anderson Municipal Light & Power in Indiana, Pochard manages the utility's full-scale deployment of Milsoft's engineering & operations suite, including outage management and IVR communications.

Milsoft provides software and support to the electric utility industry, with more than 1,000 client organizations in the U.S. and abroad. Its E&O system combines engineering analysis, outage management, geographic information, field engineering and IVR communications with operations data management. The easy-to-use Milsoft software integrates with a utility's other applications and data, increasing employee productivity, service reliability, and operational efficiency.

"The professional staff at Hamilton was very pleased with the capabilities of the Milsoft software," Pochard said. "The engineering team and substation operations management group valued the improved ability to map and analyze sources of trouble on the system."

When Pochard arrived at Anderson Municipal Light & Power, the utility had already deployed on site the field engineering and analysis, GIS, OMS and IVR software packages from Milsoft. Pochard noted, "Here at Anderson, I've had my first exposure to Milsoft OMS/IVR, and I find it to be a very well designed and thought-out product." If during an outage the Anderson phone lines become overloaded, the system automatically switches the overflow to a server hosted off site by Milsoft and customers never receive a busy signal when trying to report an outage or request information on service restoration.

In addition, staff can access the OMS via a web browser on a tablet. Pochard explained, "Wherever we are, we can call up the OMS data to see instantly where the problem is. Also, because the OMS information is linked to GPS information on our utility vehicles, we can see where our crews are in relation to the outage zone. With the outage information linked to the city's website, customers can call up outage information wherever they have Internet access. And with the OMS linked to our AMI system, we can pinpoint trouble to individual houses or transformers."

Along with IVR systems that are installed on-site and maintained by utility personnel, Misoft offers a cloud-based solution hosted off site and maintained by Milsoft. There is no hardware and software for

the utility staff to maintain. For the small City of Napoleon, Ohio, the hosted IVR solution from Milsoft is proving to be a very effective customer service tool.

During a wide-spread, weather related outage in July of 2014, the high volume of calls reporting outages overwhelmed the city's administration, police dispatch and electric department. Internal communications were nearly impossible as all phone lines were being used to answer customer calls. Tracking outages using the internal messaging and job board method was quickly found to be inadequate. The staff decided that an IVR system would be the best way to proceed in the future. Todd Wachtman, Substation Specialist for the City of Napoleon Light & Power, said, "Milsoft is a well-established vendor in their market and a Hometown Connections partner. The hosted setup allowed Napoleon to provide very little upfront capital in exchange for a fully-functional system. The option to own a system is always there, but the value of hosted solution makes it possible to put that decision off further into the future."

As described by Wachtman, the cloud-based element frees the dispatch from one physical location and allows a dispersed approach. While normally handled by Police Dispatch, an outage that grows too large can have additional dispatchers added instantly by simply having them log into the system. To assist in large-scale events, the complete dispatch operation can be seamlessly transferred to the county Emergency Operations Center. All that is required for a dispatch center is a solid internet connection. Wachtman noted, "We chose the Milsoft hosted solution for being flexible, scalable, and fault tolerant." The system now handles all of the outage call traffic for Napoleon Light & Power.

"The most important beneficiaries have been our customers, who now have the instant ability to report a problem with their electric service," Wachtman said. "By simply calling in to the system, they are guaranteed the best level of service from our crews in restoring their power. The electric department staff is now able to focus on managing an outage instead of being inundated with calls. We also have a reliable means to track crew progress on each ticket."

Wachtman added, "The team at Milsoft was absolutely essential to the successful rollout of the system for Napoleon. From the first kickoff phone call, we were assigned a team of individuals to guide us through every aspect of the system setup until our goals were addressed."

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[sidebar options]

Milsoft Hosted IVR Features include:

- No hardware, software, or T1 lines
- Outage call handling
- Customer notification
- Delinquent account notification and collection
- Load shedding and energy saving notification
- Planned outage notification
- Emergency notification
- Surveys

- Automated attendant
- Automated connect, reconnect, disconnect
- Credit card and e-check payments
- Appointment scheduling
- Crew call out and assembly
- Versatile CIS interfaces

OMS BENEFITS

- Detect Outages Sooner
- Analyze Outages Better
- Respond to Outages More Effectively
- Restore Power Sooner
- Improve Customer Communications & Service
- Maintain Valuable Reliability Data