WOODRUFF ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE CASE STUDY

ABOUT:

Woodruff Electric Cooperative manages approximately 4,500 miles of electrical distribution line in northeast Arkansas. Founded in 1937, the utility now serves more than 17,000 households in Cross, Lee, Monroe, Phillips, Prairie, St. Francis and Woodruff counties.

CHALLENGES:

Prior to collaborating with dataVoice International, Woodruff Electric Cooperative relied on its knowledgeable linemen to resolve outages. In most cases, dispatchers simply handed off handwritten call notes to field crews who then surveyed lines to look for deficiencies.

"We had a very rudimentary system," Mark Young, an information systems analyst at Woodruff, explained. *"The most advanced technology we used were paper maps, pens and pieces of paper."*

As a result, dealing with outages proved especially difficult. Additionally, the utility found it hard to collect accurate data to comply with reporting protocols established by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and other local regulatory bodies.

"We would have to pore over mountains of paper and guess as to what parts of the system went out during an outage and calculate the impact," Matt Kelley, manager of information systems for the utility, said.

In 2000, Woodruff started researching interactive voice response and outage management systems to address these issues.

SOLUTION:

After screening a number of vendors, Kelley, Young and their colleagues scheduled a demo with dataVoice. A sales representative traveled to Woodruff headquarters in December, showcased the dataVoice IVR and OMS solutions and left town just before a massive winter storm hit the area.

"We encouraged her to hurry up and go through her presentation quickly, unless she wanted to stay in Arkansas for another week or two, and nobody wants to do that," Young recalled.

The presentation - along with the serendipitous winter weather event - prompted Woodruff to act. The utility decided to implement both systems.

OUTCOMES:

After implementation, Woodruff saw immediate results. With the IVR in place, a single dispatcher could easily handle day-to-day operations and even oversee small to medium-sized outages. Additionally, office personnel could leverage the OMS to view detailed outage data, which took the pressure off service crews and made their jobs easier. Years later, as new technologies became available, Woodruff Electric decided to implement the dataVoice

Lineman App. Management was excited about the new solution, however, some lineman were at first reluctant to adopt the new technology. "The comments we were getting initially were: 'If that thing can't help me hang a transformer, I don't need it'," Kelley said. "But when they saw the results, they started believing in the system."

One day in December 2015 - with the ice storm still working its way through the area and the dataVoice agreement freshly signed - Woodruff downloaded the lineman app onto a pair of tablets and handed them to two service teams in its eastern division.

"We pointed to the area where the outages were and said, 'Have at it'," Kelley recalled.

The linemen were able to learn the software en route to pre-identified outages and ultimately restored power to the members in their service area faster than their colleagues in the western division.

Soon after, the utility outfitted all of its crew with tablets equipped with the dataVoice Lineman app.

Woodruff also appreciated that the dataVoice OMS provided the outage data it needed to stay compliant. And, the IVR facilitated a considerable reduction in negative member feedback.

"They hang up happy because they know we understand what's going on," Young said.

Today, Woodruff continues to work with dataVoice to empower its linemen and improve overall operational efficiency. Currently, the utility is in the process of implementing the dataVoice workforce management solution.

"We have other vendors still doing things the way they did in the 1980s. And, as we all know, it's not about if technology changes, it's a matter of when," Kelley explained. "What has impressed me most about dataVoice, is their ability to evolve and adapt to changing technology."