ABOUT:
Cedar Falls Utilities serves roughly 19,000 customers in northeast Iowa. Known as an industry leader, aside from the standard electric, water and gas, the utility also provides a number of innovative services including fiber-to-premise phone, internet and television options and rural wireless broadband.

CHALLENGES:
Prior to partnering with dataVoice, Cedar Falls had no real means to collect and manage accurate outage data. In fact, the organization only supported an interactive voice response system. However, as their connectivity model neared completion, and new service offering became available, leadership decided the time was right to search for a more robust technology that would be beneficial for the Utility as a whole. The key would be finding the right product.

Crucially, the utility was interested in leveraging their fiber to the premises system by using the in home device’s loss-of-power alarms as a proxy for meter status. Ideally, these devices would function much like AMI meters and integrate with an outage management solution so that technicians could view areas on the map that might be in outage even without AMI meters.

Leadership tasked Krysten Reid, the distribution system engineer at Cedar Falls, with sourcing and implementing these tools. Early into her search, Reid reconnected with a dataVoice sales representative she had encountered years earlier and saw potential that dataVoice could meet her utility’s technological and budgetary needs.

“We were looking for flexibility and people who would think outside of the box. What we wanted to do had never been done anywhere else that we could find,” Reid explained. “Plus, we’re a smaller utility, so solutions that made sense for bigger utilities, didn’t make sense for us from a cost perspective.”

The implementation began in 2015. Along with developing an innovative new solution to track on-premises fiber connections, dataVoice engineers had to grapple with several complicated integrations. Cedar Falls used an advanced iteration of GIS publisher and leveraged AutoCAD to design its service infrastructure, both of which presented unique challenges for implementation staff.

Despite this, Reid and the folks at Cedar Falls trusted dataVoice to get the job done.

“dataVoice was open from the very beginning and that gave us a lot of confidence,” she said. “They said, “Yeah, we will look and see what this will take.”
OUTCOMES:

Cedar Falls debuted the custom OMS solution and rolled out the PowerPal mobile application in Fall of 2015. The final integration was completed in January 2016. Cedar Falls implemented some new systems on their side that at times slowed progress, but the utility is beginning to see results, and has been very happy with dataVoice’s responsiveness and flexibility in dealing with these challenges.

“In general we’re pleased and excited. We can see a lot of positives both anticipated ones, and some we did not even realize at the time” Reid said. “A lot of what we hoped to achieve, we’re starting to see now.”

Over the coming months, Reid expects to continue working with dataVoice to fine-tune the system, a process she has come to appreciate, as the software provider prides itself on keeping lines of communication open with clients. The Utility is also ready to focus more on customer outreach and education on the new tools available to them including the app.

“We’re very satisfied,” she summarized. “They are very responsive, and have been a good company to work with.”