

Why Utilities Need a Modern Communication Intelligence Layer

How delivering timely, personalized communication at scale
enables utilities to strengthen trust and lower costs



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For mid-size utilities and investor-owned utilities (IOUs), communication hasn't meaningfully changed in years.

Many teams still rely on multiple, siloed systems to send messages to customers, from billing notices and outage alerts to payment reminders and service updates.

But these systems provide neither the context nor the unified visibility needed to understand the full customer journey, leaving utilities unable to determine next-best actions and send timely, personalized communications at scale. Moreover, as affordability pressure intensifies and evolving regulatory expectations raise the stakes for customer communication, utilities can no longer rely on a hodge-podge network of disparate systems.

It's time for mid-size utilities to invest in a modern communication solution that enables them to connect siloed systems, support live journeys, and deliver timely, personalized communications at scale.



3 biggest communication problems **and how to fix them**

A lack of coordination among systems and no insight into the customer journey leaves utilities unable to reach customers with right-time, right-match communications.

PROBLEM 1

No coordinated communication across systems

Utility communications are often disjointed across departments, systems, and workflows. With no single interface to manage all customer communications, many utilities still rely on the communication capabilities embedded in existing systems of record, such as billing systems or outage management systems.

While these systems may work for individual, function-specific communications (like billing reminders or outage alerts) they weren't designed to work together to give utilities a unified view of customer engagement. That means billing, customer service, and operations departments are often communicating with each customer individually, with no insight into what other departments have communicated, when, or how the customer responded.

Internally, system fragmentation creates challenges, too. For example, if teams want to coordinate outreach across systems, they have to manually search for and reconcile information.

"Say you want to send communications from your CIS [client information system], but it's separate [from] your billing," says Ellis Friedman, Product Marketing Manager, Convey. "Then you have to do a manual data pull, which can be time-consuming. It could also lead to errors, or maybe the data you pulled is out of date."





PROBLEM 2

No complete view of the customer journey

Because many utilities lack a unified strategy, they often struggle to understand what communication looks like from the customer's perspective. For example, the billing department may know they sent a notice, but they lack larger insight into what else that customer received, how they responded, and what they're currently experiencing.

Ultimately, this lack of visibility degrades the customer experience. If a utility can't understand a customer's recent interactions, then it can't understand what that customer needs next.

"These processes are fire-and-forget. They don't take into account the whole picture of what's going on with each customer," says Paul Watkins, Director, Production Management & Strategy, Convey, describing common utility communication workflows. "Without an intentional customer engagement operating system, these system-specific communications are incapable of knowing what's happening outside their purpose."



PROBLEM 3

No ability to deliver real-time, personalized next-best actions

To determine what to communicate to each customer — and encourage the right action at the right time — utilities need a way to understand what's happening to each customer in real time.

But without a single intelligence layer to unite siloed systems and customer data, utilities are left largely in the dark about how to address each customer's unique needs. As a result, they often default to sending generic, one-size-fits-most communications to all customers, irrespective of their specific situations.

Worse, Watkins says, those visibility gaps mean utilities risk missing opportunities to send any communication, leaving customers without clear guidance on what's happening and what they should do next:

“One of the biggest gaps is that each communication is an opportunity to collect more information and learn more about the customer,” says Watkins.



The fix: an intelligence layer that enables live customer journeys

To solve these challenges, utilities need a single intelligence layer that can unify cross-department communications in a single source of truth while pulling in real-time information about where each customer is in their journey.

With this context, utilities can shift from reactive, generic messages to proactive, personalized communications that match each customer's current situation.

That personalization starts with context, including information like each customer's current enrollment, status, eligibility requirements, payment history, etc. Then, it uses that information to determine what to communicate, to whom, when, through which channel.

For example, suppose a customer receives a disconnect notice shortly before a widespread outage. Without timely, personalized communication, they may not know whether they were disconnected early, whether the outage caused the disruption, or whether they still need to act on a notice. A live journey can help prevent that confusion by using real-time context to pause or suppress the disconnect message during the outage.

"That's one of the benefits of having a live journey," adds Watkins. "It takes into context what's happening in real time to that customer so the journey doesn't interfere with higher priorities."

Live journeys also help utilities determine next-best actions based on real-time customer, account, and event data.

For example, suppose a customer is three days late on a bill. With insight into the customer's full payment and action history, the utility can see that the customer has requested short due-date extensions several times in the past year. Rather than waiting for the customer to call and ask for help again, the utility can proactively offer a payment extension through a live journey.

"You can create very intentional journeys that allow customers to have a longer-term engagement plan with the utility."

Paul Watkins
Director, Production Management & Strategy, Convey

How communication intelligence reduces confusion and costs

Clear, proactive communication helps build trust between utilities and their customers while preventing costly inbound calls.

Clear communication strengthens customer trust

Understanding utility bills, usage patterns, and other account changes is a common headache for customers. According to EY, 56% say they wish their electric bills were easier to understand, and 59% agree that parts of their bills “seem like another language.”

Friedman points to time-of-use (TOU) plans as a particular source of confusion: “People may not know they’re on [a TOU], especially when it’s an opt-out, not an opt-in,” she says. “When their bill changes but their behavior hasn’t, they’re going to say, ‘What happened to my bill?’”

Siloed, opaque communication systems exacerbate the confusion. Without insight into each customer’s journey, utilities can’t know what information a customer needs or when they need it. Worse, when utilities rely on siloed systems for outreach, they risk sending irrelevant, poorly timed, or even conflicting messages, further causing confusion and soiling trust.

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An intelligence layer gives utilities the unified visibility and context they need to communicate more clearly and proactively.

For example:

- Notify a customer that their rate plan is changing and provide resources to help them understand the impact
- Send a warning that current usage is trending higher than last month to help avoid surprise
- Remind customers on TOUs plans when electricity costs are highest

By giving customers transparent explanations and education about bills, usage, and service changes, utilities can build trust and reduce confusion before it escalates.

That trust is especially important when it's time to communicate high-stakes updates, like load shed events or rate increases. JD Power found that “when utilities have strong brand appeal perceptions, 37% of their customers trust them to set fair rates”; when brand appeal is weak, just 10% do.



Proactive communication lowers operational costs

Many utilities make call centers a key part of their communication strategy, but they are the most expensive way to interact with customers. McKinsey estimates that utilities with 2 million customers receive two to three million calls per year, costing between \$20 and \$40 million.

According to Watkins, two call types tend to consume the most time and cost: customers surprised by a bill change and “supercallers,” i.e., frequent callers. In both cases, he says a communication intelligence layer can help utilities preemptively identify customers and take steps to solve their problems before they turn into costly inbound calls.

For example, with insight into a customer’s journey, utilities can send targeted messages to:

- Send payment reminders or assistance program information before delinquency
- Provide alerts to help customers understand usage spikes
- Guide customers to relevant self-service options

“Think of the CX operating system as an extension of your Tier-1 support capability and an effective self-service and call deflection strategy,” he explains.

In this way, modern, proactive communication helps utilities lower costs by giving customers more timely, personalized support to deflect avoidable inbound calls.

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Why modern communication is an urgent priority

With affordability pressures mounting and regulatory scrutiny creating higher stakes for the customer experience, communication modernization should be an urgent priority for all mid-size utilities.

Affordability pressures are increasing

Electricity and energy costs are surging, making affordability a bigger challenge for more customers. Per JD Power, average monthly residential electric utility costs have jumped 34% since 2020 for a record high in 2025. There doesn't seem to be much respite ahead; ICF predicts US electricity to grow 25% by 2030 and 78% by 2025 from 2023 levels.

"More and more customers are finding themselves struggling to pay their utility bill month after month, and more customers are needing assistance and other programs that they're not familiar with," says Friedman. "A utility needs to be able to engage a customer early and guide [them]."

By using insights from each customer's live journey to send personalized, timely messages, utilities can help customers shoulder this affordability burden by providing educational resources on different payment options, assistance programs, usage patterns, and other ways to reduce costs.

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increase in electric bills
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Source: JD Power

25%

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Source: ICF

Regulatory expectations are evolving

Utilities also face growing regulatory pressure around customer satisfaction and responsiveness, making it urgent to modernize communication outreach.

Much of this pressure comes from new TOU rate mandates. For instance, [California's Public Utilities Commission](#) issued a declaration directing major IOUs towards default residential TOU rates. With other states increasingly following suit, Friedman advises utilities to act now:

"This is coming, especially as there is more demand for energy with less supply. Utilities, therefore, need better ways to communicate because these rate plans usually create confusion and more calls."

Beyond TOU transitions, other regulators are introducing and/or increasing requirements for utility customer satisfaction, communication timing, responsiveness, and related service measures. If utilities don't meet updated expectations, they may face fines or complications in rate cases. In New York alone, the [Department of Public Service](#) reports penalties or NRAs amounted to approximately \$28.9 million for customer service performance failures in 2024.

To smooth transitions to new rate structures and avoid both penalties and customer confusion, utilities can modernize communication with an intelligence layer that supports live journeys and timely, personalized communication.





CONCLUSION:

Utilities need communication capabilities that can keep up

Amidst the intensifying affordability crisis and new regulatory pressures, utilities can't keep relying on fragmented communication strategies that make customer outreach opaque, generic, and reactive.

But by adding a modern communication intelligence layer on top, utilities can unify siloed systems and bring real-time customer context to live journeys for timely, personalized communications that control costs, strengthen customer trust, and continue deepening the utility-customer relationship.



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