

# customer care solutions from Nuance

---



white paper ::

## Proactive Notifications for the Utilities Industry

A Nuance Customer Care White Paper

---

### introduction

For today's utilities the old ways of doing business and delivering service no longer suffice. Industry priorities have shifted, placing new emphasis on balancing supply and demand, ensuring reliable service, and exercising environmental stewardship. This shift is driving utility companies to explore new technologies, introduce new usage models, and rethink the way they approach customer care. After all, the customer service experience plays a pivotal role in reducing complaints, increasing satisfaction, and complying with regulations.

What's behind this heightened focus on customer care? Deregulated utilities are competing with each other to win new business and retain existing customers. Regulated companies are under pressure to meet federal and state regulations and public utility commission standards. What's more, industry best practices demand focus on customer satisfaction survey scores, complaint volumes, average response time to incoming calls, field staff budgets, and more. Across all utilities, the ability to deliver an exceptional customer service experience has become essential for ensuring competitive success and minimizing compliance risk moving forward.



### proactive notifications: a key ingredient for exceptional customer care

Many utility companies are making a strategic investment in automated outbound care. This investment is intended to help them meet regulatory requirements in a cost-effective manner and to deliver the exceptional service experience today's consumers expect and demand. Automated outbound notifications go a step beyond the telemarketing or predictive dialer calls of the past to proactively deliver content that is relevant and useful to a specific customer. As a result, they enable utilities to enhance customer relationships, while reducing both the cost of customer outreach and

### Proactive Notifications: An Accepted Method of Customer Contact

Proactive notifications are becoming a widely accepted component of corporate customer care strategies. Need proof? Consider these research findings:\*

- Almost three quarters of respondents have experienced a proactive email communication in the past six months
- Respondents have received more automated customer care calls than live customer care calls
- Just over a third of respondents are receiving proactive messaging by SMS or text message

\* Source: Harris Interactive Consumer Research, 2008

the number of inbound calls to the contact center. What's more, because customers can opt in to receive proactive notifications how and when they want them, utilities avoid customer complaints about unwanted or insufficient communications.

Outbound campaigns proactively communicate and interact with customers — whether by SMS, email, or voice channels. They displace inbound call volume by anticipating the reasons a customer would call the contact center. They provide requested event-triggered information that boosts customer satisfaction. And they drive increased revenue by shortening collections cycles. For maximum return on their investment, utility companies are best served by outbound campaigns that know when and how to reach out to qualifying customers — all while navigating the complexities of regulatory requirements and customer care best practices.

Nuance Notification Hub from Nuance Communications is a complete solution for the design, development, launch, management, and analysis of multichannel outbound notification campaigns. The solution integrates with a utility's existing contact center infrastructure and CRM system to execute campaigns that reduce inbound call volumes, increase collections, and support compliance — automatically and cost effectively—making it a smart strategic investment.

## converging market dynamics: creating ideal opportunities for proactive notifications

In the utility industry, two key market dynamics are converging to create ideal opportunities for employing proactive notifications as part of customer care and regulatory compliance strategies:

### Heightened Focus on SmartGrid Technologies

In recent years, green initiatives and outdated infrastructure issues have led to increased focus on and investment in SmartGrid technologies. For utility companies, the SmartGrid opens up new opportunities for balancing supply and demand, supporting environmental initiatives, and delivering more reliable, cost-effective service. The SmartGrid enables consumers to proactively manage their utility costs by taking advantage of less expensive energy during non-peak hours, investing in intelligent, energy-saving end-use devices, or perhaps even selling energy back to the utility. However, the ability to capitalize on these opportunities — and truly reduce power consumption — requires two-way communication between the utility provider and the customer. Proactive notifications make this kind of interactive dialog possible. That's why, moving forward, it's important that utilities have outbound systems in place to handle communications ranging from scheduling meter installations to alerting customers of critical pricing events that affect peak-hour charges.

## Challenging Economic Environment

The recent economic downturn has increased consumer interest in reducing energy costs by taking advantage of SmartGrid-enabled programs like off-peak pricing. For maximum effectiveness, however, such initiatives require ongoing consumer education and awareness building. Proactive notifications provide a cost-effective way to inform customers of advanced meter capabilities, seasonal pricing events, or the cost advantages of using high-energy consumption devices during non-peak hours. Furthermore, since many households and businesses have fallen behind in their energy payments in recent years, utilities can use outbound campaigns to help increase collections. Proactive notifications can be used to send automated payment reminders, late payment alerts, and disconnect warnings. The results? Increased collections, reduced call volumes, and lower field service costs.



### Success Story :: Nuance Helps North American Utility Provider Increase Collections by Millions of Dollars

#### SOLUTION:

A North American utility company turned to Nuance for an automated collections solution. In response, Nuance delivered an outbound notifications system that continues to deliver impressive results. In 2008 alone, the system enabled the utility to achieve some impressive results.

#### RESULTS:

- Over 17,000 late payments —representing almost \$19 million — have been collected through automated calls
- Over 12,000 customers who received personalized answering machine messages responded and self-served through the IVR for collections of almost \$15 million
- The automated outbound collections calls delivered additional savings through reduced mailing costs and live agent call deflection

## outbound application examples for the utility industry

Utility companies can head off complaints and reduce inbound call volumes by using outbound notifications to engage their business and consumer customers in a two-way dialog. By anticipating questions and issues and proactively sending relevant information and alerts via the customer’s preferred communication channel — landline, mobile phone, email, or SMS — utilities can dramatically reduce costs. The following are examples of outbound applications that are well suited to the utility industry:

<b>Account Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notify customers in changes to variable rates as part of the Smart Grid rollout</li> <li>• Offer recommendations on ways to reduce bills by using appliances more efficiently or by shifting energy consumption to non-peak hours</li> </ul>
<b>Collections Courtesy Calls</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remind customers of late payment</li> <li>• Provide interactive options to pay to avoid late fees or disconnection of service</li> </ul>
<b>Disconnect/Reconnect Notifications</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Warn customers of impending service disconnection if payment is not received</li> <li>• Allow customers to make overdue payments to avoid loss of service</li> <li>• Leverage reconnect notifications to increase field service efficiencies</li> </ul>
<b>Outage Alerts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alert customers of an outage to avoid a spike in inbound customer complaint calls</li> <li>• Notify customers when power has been restored</li> </ul>
<b>Appointment Reminders</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help optimize field service productivity by increasing the likelihood of household access</li> <li>• For more sophisticated notifications, integrate the campaign with the utility's truck GPS system to notify the customer when the technician is close to the service destination</li> </ul>
<b>Grid Capacity Management Alerts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Request voluntary air conditioning turn down or alert customers of a system shut down</li> </ul>
<b>Welcome Greetings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcome new customers, thank them for their business, and make them aware of programs like auto payment</li> <li>• Acclimate customers to outbound notifications and reinforce the utility's brand and its commitment to service.</li> </ul>
<b>Staff/Crew Communications</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alert staff of emergency situations or pandemic protocols to ensure safety and responsiveness</li> <li>• Notify field crews of schedule updates to optimize productivity and customer service</li> <li>• Inform key IT staff of incidences, such as outages and viruses, to ensure business continuity</li> </ul>

## nuance notification hub: a complete solution for multichannel outbound notification campaigns

Leading utilities recognize that outbound interactions are an increasingly critical part of an effective customer care strategy. Nuance draws upon our extensive contact center system design and integration expertise to deliver a seamless and customized inbound and outbound service experience that aligns with a utility's overall customer care vision and strategy.

This expertise is reflected in Nuance Notification Hub (NNH), our complete solution for multichannel outbound notification campaigns. NNH enables utilities to proactively communicate relevant, timely and actionable notifications to customers based on their personal profiles, account usage, and contact preferences. Unlike other outbound solutions, NNH supports more sophisticated proactive notifications that utilize speech technologies, integrate with customer databases in real time, and offer interactivity to connect end users to inbound self-service applications. NNH enables fully automated, personalized notifications over SMS, email or voice that can:

- Increase customer satisfaction by delivering meaningful, account-specific information and other relevant content
- Reduce inbound call volumes by proactively contacting customers about matters that might otherwise prompt a call to the contact center
- Free live agents to focus on more complex customer issues and interactions
- Generate additional revenue through payment reminders and collections

With NNH, utility contact centers can successfully design, develop, launch, manage, and analyze multichannel outbound notification campaigns. The flexible NNH solution may be deployed on premise, as a managed service, or in a SaaS model. Because NNH hosted and on-premise solutions are built on the same technology platform, system management and reporting are seamless and transportable. As utilities grow and evolve, they have the option to switch deployment platforms without having to invest more money in development and intellectual capital. What's more, NNH can be easily extended to integrate within an organization's existing contact center infrastructure, receiving real-time data or batch files from the customer relationship management (CRM) system or other enterprise applications.

With add-on modules such as Nuance Subscription Manager, utilities can empower customers to choose what notifications they receive and how they receive them. Subscription Manager enables customers to set personal preferences, including notification type (payment reminders, appointment reminders, rate changes, and more), communication channel (landline, mobile, SMS, or email), timing (quiet periods), and even alternative contacts. When necessary, these automated proactive notifications may be easily and intelligently transferred to the inbound IVR or to agents to provide a more complete and satisfying customer care experience.



## about Nuance Communications, Inc.

Nuance is in the business of helping companies better support, communicate with and understand their customers while maintaining operational efficiency goals. Nuance currently supports over 8 billion care interactions around the world. No other company has as much experience as Nuance in understanding how customers interface with a care operation. Our vision is to make every customer interaction a winning experience. For more information about our customer interaction solutions, business consulting and professional services, please visit [www.nuance.com/care](http://www.nuance.com/care).

© 2009 Nuance. All Rights Reserved. Nuance is a registered trademark of Nuance. All other trademarks mentioned here are the property of their respective holders. WP 022510 NUCC696