2002

2002

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The Chartwell

CIS Report

4th Edition

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Section II:

Case Studies

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Company profile:
Duquesne Light Co. provides electricity to customers in Allegheny and Beaver counties over an 817-square-mile service area in Pennsylvania. Its customer base consists of 530,000 residential, 50,000 commercial and 2,000 industrial customers. The utility is a subsidiary of DQE, which also owns AquaSource, DQE Financial, DQE Systems and DQE Energy Services. Duquesne Light is making the transition from a vertically integrated utility into a smaller transmission and distribution services company. Pennsylvania has a deregulated electricity market.

CIS vendors and consultants:
Duquesne Light's CIS is the inhouse-branded DISCuS, a PricewaterhouseCoopers-built system. The utility is using MITEM of Menlo Park, Calif. The vendor's MitemView product creates composite applications from legacy system assets.

After initial design and building of CIS, no consultants were used except for contract IT personnel on a periodic basis.

Outsourcing:
On occasion, outside contractors handle some programming work. Bill printing and payment processing are done in house, but mailing is outsourced to Pittsburgh Mailing.

System components:
• DISCuS — Custom-built PricewaterhouseCoopers system installed in the early 1990s.
• MitemView — Installed in January 2001.
• Genesys Telecommunications Laboratories — computer telephony integration (CTI).
• InterVoice Brite — interactive voice response (IVR).

Implementation and integration:
In addition to installing MitemView, Duquesne Light leaders discussed upgrading the call center with the Genesys CTI system and the InterVoice Brite IVR. "We saw the capability for using the IVR to get this important [outage] information to our customers," Larkin explains. MitemView "took information from two or three existing outage screens and consolidated it onto one easy-to-use screen. The CSRs and the IVR both

use that information. You can pick out bits of information from all of your legacy applications and put it on one screen. The magic word here is 'user-friendly.'"

MITEM committed to a 30-day implementation for installation and going live. "The company met its deadline with little problem," says Larkin. Two MitemView developers were sent to work with Larkin and a part-time Duquesne team; the 30-day implementation — including determining the functional requirements, building the screens and making sure the system worked — was accomplished the equivalent of three full-time people.

Objectives/strategies:
In 1993, Duquesne Light went live with DISCuS, a custom, green-screen system modified from a base PricewaterhouseCoopers CIS. The utility still uses DISCuS, but significant modifications were made to the system in the late 1990s.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania began deregulating its retail electricity market with customer choice pilots in 1999 and fully opened its market in January 2000. "We had to add a lot of new functionality to handle customer choice," explains Tom Larkin, customer service administrator.

In-house IT staff made extensive changes to the CIS, and Larkin estimates "thousands of hours" were invested in development work to adapt DISCuS for customer choice. "At the same time, generation assets were sold in 2000, because the company decided it could not compete in the open generation market with such a small, compact service area," he adds. A proposed merger was terminated during that time as well.

Because Duquesne had set a goal to "be the best small wires company in the U.S.," company leaders wanted the utility to improve customer service, particularly as it pertained to outage restoration and information. In fact, providing customers with more reliable outage information was the driving force behind installation of the MitemView solution. "Not only do most customers want their service restored as soon as possible, they also want reliable information as to the expected length of the outage. We felt that focusing on these two areas would help improve our customer satisfaction numbers," said Larkin.

Decision process:
Going to MitemView was a strategic decision to improve the accuracy of outage restoration times as well as estimated restoration times given to the customers. MitemView was chosen for its potential compatibility with Duquesne's CIS. At a convention, MITEM reps showed Larkin a PC that had a green screen "very similar to what we used in DISCuS." After seeing a demonstration of MitemView, "I felt comfortable MITEM could do things with DISCuS that it had done for someone else," he explains.

Another factor that contributed to Duquesne's decision to go with MitemView was the promise of a quick implementation. "You could easily spend six months looking for a vendor you're comfortable with. They provided me with a client list that included

Bayer and Central Maine Power, which has the same Pricewaterhouse CIS that we have. I contacted both clients before a final decision was made."

Project timeline:
The MitemView system was installed and up in 30 days. "That was one of their selling points. I couldn't see this [kind of installation] taking a month, but quite honestly, it worked," Larkin says.

System performance:
The system is operating with no major problems. "We had a few minor bumps, but it has performed as designed," Larkin asserts. With the system in place, customers can call in for a recorded message explaining the outage situation. If they are calling from their home phone, or the number recorded at the utility, they are automatically linked with information pertinent to their area. Customers confirm their address in the IVR and are given the cause of the outage and the estimated time of restoration.

Has it made a difference in Duquesne Light's customer service? Customer surveys were conducted in early 2001 indicating that only 20% of customers felt they received reliable or satisfactory outage information. When customers were surveyed in August/September 2001, 90% stated that they received reliable outage information. "MITEM was very much a part of that [result]," Larkin says.

System capabilities:
• Automatic retrieval via caller ID: Yes
• Payment record: Yes
• Record of past customer inquiries: Yes
• Latest consumption stats to last billing: Yes
• Current real-time consumption reports: Yes (daily)
• Variable rate information: Yes
• Real-time rate information: Yes
• Automated maps/geographical information: Yes (but CSRs don't use)
• Real-time outage notification: Yes
• Work order requests on file: Yes
• Work order status reports: Yes
• Summary billing for multiple sites: Yes
• Demographic information on customers: Some
• Products and services purchased by customer: N/A

System costs/economics:
The total cost for MitemView was approximately $280,000, which included equipment, software and all consultants' time, according to Larkin. Duquesne did not purchase a maintenance contract because of other strategic decisions that were made in early 2001, Larkin says, adding that decision had nothing to do with MITEM's performance.

Lessons learned and advice:
"Strictly looking at the MitemView product, I have no horror story to tell. If anything,

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I'd continue with further development," Larkin says. "What I found is that the two consultants who handled the installation were extremely capable and very accommodating, very customer friendly."

Larkin suggests carefully evaluating processes and outlining specific goals. "I would ask myself if I am making things harder or easier for a customer service rep, and if I am making them more efficient or less efficient."