



GUIDE

Empowering utility providers:

A guide to customer-led innovation in 2024



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In 2024, the power and utilities sector is going through big changes due to economic shifts and technological advances.

Utility providers can survive and thrive in this dynamic landscape by embracing innovation and putting the customer at the center of their strategies.

In this guide, we'll explore how utility companies can navigate policy changes, enhance customer support, and move towards a cleaner, more efficient future.



The economic landscape

Although fuel costs are decreasing and wholesale electricity prices are declining, the average price of electricity for homes could increase by almost 5% as utility providers recover from the impact of milder winters on profits, grapple with higher interest rates, and invest in enhancing the power grid's environmental friendliness.

As a result, customers will likely see higher bills, and utility companies will see an increase in customer support inquiries.

To effectively meet demand and deliver a consistently acceptable average speed to answer (ASA), utility companies will need to scale their customer service operations to effectively communicate the changes and adjustments happening in response to the evolving energy landscape on a massive scale.

Customer focused innovators are exploring the use of AI to streamline contact center operations. Leaders in the space have already launched voice assistants that adapt to varying call volumes by ensuring consistent support during peak times without hiring additional staff.

Navigating the grid

Climate change has introduced challenges to the energy grid, and the demand for electrification is expected to triple by 2050.

Managing this surge requires strategic planning and a focus on customer needs. Utility companies must predict and respond to increased questions about grid stability and potential disruptions.

An increase in calls about planned and unplanned outages is already pushing up call volumes for many utility providers.

Leveraging new voice AI technologies, utility companies can offer personalized automation, updating callers on known outages in their area.

As contact centers are pressed to squeeze more value from smaller budgets, voice AI will ensure consistent customer experience, even in peak times.

When utility companies can access real-time data, it's possible to react faster to unforeseen events. Decisions become data-driven and issues are resolved faster, creating trust and confidence with each customer.



Modernizing customer intelligence

As the utility landscape undergoes massive transformation, the breadth of knowledge customers expect from the call center will expand.

Utility innovators are leveraging voice AI to capture insights into why customers are calling, and using this intelligence to develop more robust processes for support.

Using voice assistants to capture these insights while handling simple customer service queries will also free up service teams for better, more in depth training on rapidly changing processes.

To create a competitive customer experience, utility companies will invest further in automated solutions for operational and customer support intelligence.





Navigating policy changes with AI-driven support

The sector's commitment to initiatives like building codes and clean vehicle standards is crucial for providing reliable, affordable, and clean electricity. As policies evolve, energy providers must transparently communicate these changes to customers.

Service teams will be stretched to provide additional education and context for customers, on top of typical customer service transactions.

Customer service leaders are turning to automation to handle common inquiries and upskilling staff to provide bespoke support and advice to those who need it the most.



The call flows you can automate with call center voice AI

For utilities companies, a new generation of voice assistants is now available to answer customer phone calls, promising higher conversion rates, better customer experiences, and a higher degree of control than ever before.

By automating some of the most common call flows in utilities, a customer-led voice assistant gives time back to contact center agents to focus on customers with more complex requirements that require their expertise to resolve.





Here are some utilities call flows a voice assistant can handle:



1. Appointment scheduling

Callers can interact with a voice assistant to schedule, edit, and cancel services, negotiate dates and time slots, and ask questions to help them select the best options.

Instead of navigating through the options of traditional automated systems, customers can quickly and efficiently manage their appointments through natural conversation.



2. FAQs

Your agent's time is best spent helping customers with complex queries or emergencies.

By automating the responses to FAQs, customers can get immediate answers to common queries without waiting in a queue or navigating through complex menus. You'll also save time for both customers and agents, allowing agents to focus on customers with more complex or urgent issues.



3. After-hours inquiries

Customer queries don't always fall into regular office hours, and when it comes to issues with heating or electricity, immediate support is a necessity.

A voice assistant can answer calls 24/7, allowing customers to directly access immediate support for urgent issues outside normal business hours, such as power outages or heating failures.

If issues persist, a voice assistant can collect customer and service-related information to assist agents with callback when they are available.



4. Outbound

Customers expect the basics of clear communication. A voice assistant can proactively reach out to customers to provide service reminders and technician arrival times or remind customers about scheduled follow-up services.

Keeping customers informed is crucial for a positive experience. It helps customers plan their day, avoids frustration, and shows a commitment to transparent and efficient service.



5. Call prioritization and routing

Every customer call is important, but some calls require more immediate attention.

A voice assistant can understand customer intent and recognize priority situations (e.g., loss of heating in winter or cooling in summer) to efficiently route calls to the correct agent at the right time to ensure that critical issues receive immediate attention while optimizing resource allocation.





6. Billing and payment

A voice assistant can assist customers in checking and paying bills, providing information on outstanding balances, and processing payments securely.

Customers benefit from real-time information on outstanding balances and due dates, streamlined processes for inquiries and payments, and the assurance of secure transactions.



7. Authentication

Agents can spend anywhere between 20 seconds to one minute authenticating callers.

Automating the customer identification, verification, and data collection portion of a call can save your agents precious time and allow them to spend more time helping the customers that need them most.

Trust is a fundamental component of customer loyalty, and customers are more likely to engage with a company they believe prioritizes their security.



8. Account management

Even when digital self-service options are available, many customers still prefer the familiarity and ease of using the phone.

For routine calls, like account management, a voice assistant can update customer account details, including address, property details, payment information, and more.



9. Multilingual support

Implementing multilingual support positions your company as accommodating and accessible.

A multilingual voice assistant allows you to create a personalized experience for customers regardless of language and contribute to the growth of your business.



10. Call routing

Many contact centers continue to use touch-tone Interactive Voice Response (IVR) systems that often misunderstand customers, resulting in misrouted calls, increased wait times, and frustrating customer experiences.

A voice assistant can accurately route calls without relying on keywords by letting customers speak freely and understanding what callers need, even from long and complex queries.





Conclusion

With significant changes on the horizon for the power and utilities sector in 2024, including economic challenges, grid complexities, operational efficiency, and policy shifts, innovative solutions are more critical than ever.

From appointment scheduling to multilingual support, embracing AI-driven voice assistants is a crucial strategy for organizations to improve customer support, adapt to industry changes, and guide utilities providers toward a successful, customer-led future.

PolyAI is the inventor of customer-led voice assistants.

To find out more about how PolyAI can help you put your customers in the driver's seat, improve loyalty and reduce cost-to-serve, [schedule a demo with our team.](#)

