



Texas Water Provider Improves Customer Communication with Sensus

CEDAR PARK UTILITY OFFERS INSIGHT ON USAGE AND BILLING TO 23,000 CUSTOMERS



CHALLENGE

Improve customer understanding of water usage and billing

SOLUTION

Deploy Sensus Analytics and Customer Portal

REACH FARTHER

Use data to plan long-term for citywide conservation and loss estimation

The City of Cedar Park, located near Austin, Texas, is changing the way it communicates with its water customers. Instead of putting an invoice in the mail and taking questions over the phone, the city has upgraded its system with technology that puts customers in the driver's seat.

"We saw very clearly that we needed to be able to communicate better with our customers about how much water they were using and the impact on their monthly bill," said Cedar Park Utility Programs Manager Nanette McCartan. "Our upgrade to advanced metering infrastructure and analytics empowers our customers to better manage their water consumption.

Prior to upgrading, the City of Cedar Park used automated drive-by meter reading (AMR), so their water consumption data was limited to two monthly reports. Without robust analytics, it was challenging to explain to customers why their bill may fluctuate month-to-month.



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NANETTE MCCARTAN, *Utility Programs Manager, City of Cedar Park*

Selecting a solution

The City of Cedar Park did extensive research, contacting 50 other municipal water districts to learn about the challenges and benefits of implementing smart water technology. The customer engagement aspect of Sensus' [Customer Portal](#) greatly appealed to the city. In 2017, the City of Cedar Park deployed Sensus' [Advanced Metering Infrastructure](#) (AMI) solution to 23,000 municipal water customers. The solution included Sensus smart meters and the [FlexNet® communication network](#), a two-way system that allows city staff to remotely monitor water usage and increase billing accuracy.

The utility also implemented the [Sensus Analytics](#) solution and opted into the Customer Portal to streamline customer communication and water usage data. An easy-to-use and informative web-based customer portal was necessary for Cedar Park to enhance service and help customers understand and manage their water use to keep monthly bills down.

"We found that the Sensus customer portal was the perfect option for us," said McCartan. "It is very user friendly and you can access it from any mobile device, a laptop or a desk top. Customers can log in themselves."

Delivering immediate value to customers

Through the customer portal, McCartan said Cedar Park customers can gain a better understanding of their water usage—even in one hour increments—before receiving their bill. They can also see factors that cause variation in monthly usage and even create customizable alerts for any sort of unusual water activity. For example, if the homeowners are out of town, they can check on their irrigation system through their water consumption alert threshold.

By incorporating billing system parameters such as usage tiers, Sensus Analytics also alerts customers about usage increases that could bump them to a more expensive price tier.

"Many of our residents are very conservation-minded, so they appreciate the alerts," said McCartan. She noted that the City of Cedar Park is in the watershed of the Highland Lakes chain of reservoirs in Texas. "At times, we've had low lake levels that required rather drastic mandatory conservation measures. That prominent visual of a lake drying up was a big motivator for local water conservation on an everyday basis."

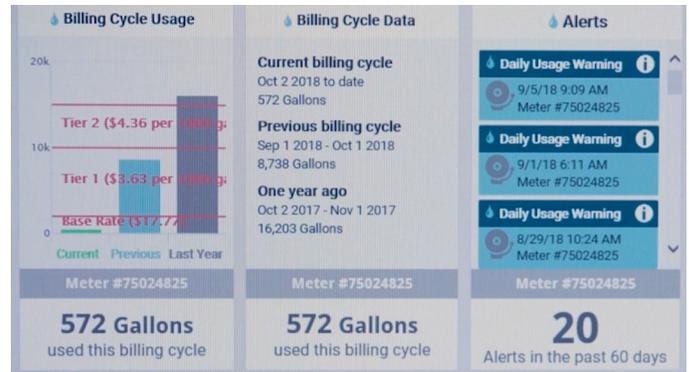


Just three months after deployment, more than 6 percent of Cedar Park’s water customers had registered to use the portal.

“When we talked to other utilities, we were told that 10 percent adoption was excellent, so we feel really good about getting 6 percent adoption basically right off the bat,” said McCartan. “All of our marketing and education on this is paying off.”

Customer response to the easy to read analytics continues to grow. Now one year into the portal, Cedar Park is up to 9 percent active users. Cedar Park utility representatives have contacted more than 300 customers about potential water leaks.

“The system allows our team to detect continuous flow very quickly, sometimes within a few hours,” said McCartan. “This helps us catch leaks early, before damage occurs or bills increase significantly. A few times, customers didn’t believe they had a problem – but later they called us back to thank us.”



The Sensus Customer Portal offers easy to read water usage and billing information. From a laptop or mobile device, customers can select alerts to flag potential issues in near-real time.

Planning for future growth

The City of Cedar Park continues to connect with customers to increase conservation efforts. Their next goal is to increase portal usage to 15 percent.

To estimate daily losses, the team at Cedar Park will soon use the solution to compare citywide meter reads to the production of their water treatment plant. It’s just one example of how Cedar Park can leverage Sensus Analytics for long-term system planning and upgrades.

“Analytics is an invaluable customer service tool. Every day we’re learning something new, and that’s going to impact every aspect of our business,” said McCartan.