

Lake County Illinois

Leveraging Itron AMI and Analytics to Save \$250,000 Annually While Enhancing Customer Service & Water Conservation

OVERVIEW

Until recently, the Lake County Public Works Department was manually reading meters every 60 days and had little insight into its leaks and water usage patterns across its distribution system. The company had started a project to install an automated meter reading system, but knew that it needed a solution that would allow customers to be billed on a regular schedule without the need to manually visit each customer premise.

In addition to automating billing, due to its service territory spanning a large geographic region, the utility suspected that significant savings could be realized by automating meter reading activities, allowing meter readers to drastically reduce drive-time and miles driven.

The utility issued an RFP and comprehensive interview process to evaluate technology options, and determined that leveraging an Itron Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) system would not only allow the utility to streamline its billing process, but also unlock opportunities for enhanced customer service, operational savings and conservation.

SOLUTION

In addition to providing the AMI network, which included communication modules capturing hourly consumption data, the utility has leveraged Itron hosting and analytics to derive even more value from the system.

Since completing installation in 2015, the utility has improved the time it takes to gather reads and bill customers for water service from up to six days down to one. Additionally, having true usage data gathered on an hourly basis has allowed the customer service department to have more valuable interactions with customers. Customers can also view their personal usage data through an online portal, allowing them to adjust their usage to fit their personal spending and conservation goals.



CUSTOMER

Lake County, Illinois

SERVICE TERRITORY

The Lake County Illinois Public Works Department owns and operates two public water supply distribution systems across a large service territory.

TECHNOLOGY

Hosted Itron AMI solution equipped with analytics



SOLUTION *(continued)*

“Prior to having analytics we could tell that ongoing consumption meant the customer likely had a leak, but we did not have the data to back it up so some customers would simply not believe us,” said Kathleen Dalessandro, chief account specialist at Lake County Public Works. “We are now proactively reaching out to alert our customers to possible leaks so they can take action, saving them money and conserving water.”

Compared to the way the utility operated 10 years ago, with three meter technicians and a supervisor, this transition has allowed them to adjust staffing, through retirements and natural attrition, to one meter technician and a supervisor. The utility had also been hiring a contractor to help do a lot of driving and walking to collect meter readings for billing, a cost they are now able to eliminate. The utility now has a reliable, predictable way to collect usage information automatically without having to send out meter technicians.

The same is true in the billing department. The utility has become more resourceful and proactive, moving from four fulltime billing specialists and a supervisor to a single supervisor, one fulltime billing specialist and part-time billing specialist. In addition to spending the utility’s dollars more wisely, the work of department staff is more rewarding due to the fact that they now have more positive interactions with customers, and help them save money and conserve.

“Installing this system was a win for us as well as our customers,” added Dalessandro. “This is a project that our County Board supported and they highlight this project as a sustainability initiative.”

WHAT’S NEXT

Since beginning to use analytics for leak detection and customer service, utility personnel continue to realize new ways to leverage system data to improve operations and service. Utility customers are now able to leverage the Customer Portal to view personal usage data and take action without needing to contact the utility. The utility has begun customer outreach campaigns to inform customers about ways to conserve, and they are seeing more and more customers interested in conservation every day.

“We are hearing more and more customers looking for ways to conserve and with new towns working to get water allocations, we all need to make sure we are using our water wisely,” added Dalessandro. “It is refreshing to have this abundance of data available to make more informed decisions and improve our service to customers.”



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