Utility2utility

+ Iberdrola USA/Central Maine Power

IBERDROLA USA, A SUBSIDIARY OF SPANISH UTILITY powerhouse Iberdrola, delivers natural gas and electricity to nearly 3 million customers in Maine and New York through Central Main Power Company, New York State Gas & Electric Corporation and Rochester Gas and Electric Corporation. The company has also expanded beyond the utility corridor into peaking generation, retail energy marketing, telecommunications and a natural gas distribution business.

Back inside the company's utility endeavors, we spoke with Laney Brown, director of smart grid planning and programs at Iberdrola USA, about AMI, tropical storms and how it all impacts their American family, specifically Central Maine Power.

INTELLIGENT UTILITY: You've embarked on a successful $200 million AMI project. What was the impetus behind it, and how is the project going so far?

BROWN: As one of the leading utilities in the nation, our goal at CMP is to deliver energy to our customers affordably, reliably and safely. With those goals in mind, we embarked on our AMI project a few years ago. It is a $200 million technology upgrade, including the installation of more than 600,000 new smart meters, a wireless communication network, and a meter data management system. As the Maine Public Utility Commission (MPUC) called it "… it is an important technology that will ultimately

> "[Our AMI project] is a $200 million technology upgrade, including the installation of more than 600,000 new smart meters, a wireless communication network, and a meter data management system."

reduce utility operational costs, improve customer service and provide customers with necessary tools to use electricity more efficiently and lower their electricity bills."

We are happy to share that the project has been successful thus far. It was completed on time, on budget and has in fact, been named one of the AMI project showcases by the Department of Energy (DOE). We are also looking to leverage the AMI system as the foundation for the deployment of additional smart grid applications such as distribution automation to improve operational efficiencies and reliability. Additionally, we will be continuing to improve customer service and looking into potential demand-side management applications and the smart integration of distributed energy resources such as solar panels and electric vehicles in the future. Last but not least, the success of our AMI project provides a template for our sister companies in the global Iberdrola Group, to ensure the success of their AMI and smart grid planning and deployments.

There are many lessons we have learned from this project, but the three main lessons are:

1. Engage your customers early and often.
2. Build the right project team.
3. Choose the right smart grid platform.

INTELLIGENT UTILITY: What major lessons have you learned from that project?

BROWN: There are many lessons we have learned from this project, but the three main lessons are the importance of engaging your customers early and often, the elements to building the right project team, and the importance of choosing the right smart grid platform that can serve not only the smart metering needs today but also additional smart grid applications in the future.

In terms of customer engagement, we undertook an extensive community outreach and education program, by hosting community presentations throughout our service area to discuss the installation process and the benefits of an AMI network directly with customers. During these community forums, we invited customers and community leaders to participate in discussions about how information from smart meters empowers users to better understand their energy usage. We are also happy to share that J.D. Power & Associates has ranked us high in customer satisfaction for the last seven years, recognizing our tireless dedication to understanding and effectively communicating with our customers. In fact, we ranked No. 1 in business customer satisfaction among midsize electric utilities in the eastern states in its 2013 Electric Utility Business Customer Satisfaction Study. This year is also our seventh No. 1 ranking for business or residential customer satisfaction.

To ensure the success of the initiative from a project management perspective, we created a tight project governance plan where all the key stakeholders were aligned and shared a common interest to ensure project success. Our governance plan identified mitigating measures for various risk areas such as technology performance, supply chain, IT integration, field exception, records exception, dynamic pricing acceptance, regulatory, and financial. From the outset, flexibility and speed were critical to the team's success. The cross-functional teams met weekly to review status, anticipate potential issues, and resolve them quickly. Through bold leadership and true partnership within CMP and with our partners, we were able to successfully complete the AMI project on time and on budget, despite the challenges posed by our diverse, large terrain and very tight time schedules.

From a technology perspective, we at CMP had always understood the importance of choosing a standards-based smart grid platform that could serve not only our needs today, but also future smart grid needs tomorrow. These factors led us to develop a bold and aggressive strategy for the smart grid deployment, seeking the implementation of an intelligent communications backbone to serve as the central nervous system. For this project, we chose the Trilliant Communications Platform.

INTELLIGENT UTILITY: And speaking of lessons learned, you were on the front lines with several natural disaster events, from Tropical Storm Irene, Hurricane Sandy to Winter Storm Nemo, recently. Did recovering from these events teach you anything new about storm restoration?

BROWN: Post-storm debriefing is a key to improving our emergency response. What we learn from each major event is fed back into our system planning, operations and maintenance plans, and emergency response planning. It is also important to respond to customers quickly and provide them with clear communications on what to expect and how to stay safe during

an outage. Being able to respond quickly and restore outages safely is a high priority for us. We are humbled to have been recognized twice in the past two years by the Edison Electric Institute for our response to major storms, including Hurricane Sandy and Topical Storm Irene, where our customer communications capabilities were put to the test.

INTELLIGENT UTILITY: How do your specific CMP smart grid plans fit into a bigger focus for Iberdrola overall? How will those plans evolve over the next decade, for both CMP and Iberdrola?

BROWN: Iberdrola has become a benchmark for innovation, after being acknowledged as the most innovative Spanish and the fifth most innovative utility in Europe, according to the ranking drawn up by the European Commission. The company invested €145 million in the field of research, development and innovation in 2012, allocated mostly to the development of projects involving smart grids, clean generation, renewable energies and electric vehicles. Our smart grid initiatives in Maine will help other Iberdrola Group companies with their smart grid deployments. We are happy to share our best practices and lessons learned with other utilities to ensure the success of their smart grid planning and deployments.

In the next decade and beyond, we will continue to look at how to leverage this system as a foundational system that can support many more smart grid applications that will deliver benefits to our customers. Some of these may include distribution and substation automation throughout our territories, demand-side management programs, integration of distributed solar and wind, and intelligent electric vehicle charging to avoid additional strain on the grid.

Customer lessons from the Mona Lisa

+ And Oncor's Mike Guyton

By Kathleen Wolf Davis

MY FRIEND TOOK HIS 80-YEAR-OLD GRANDMOTHER TO PARIS a few weeks ago. When she finally saw the Mona Lisa—the woman with the mysterious smile—up close and in person at the Louvre, his grandmother said, "That girl's up to no good."

For the Mona Lisa, that mysterious smile has made her famous. It's made her the most iconic painting on Earth and a pop culture icon. And, it's quite possible that grin is the reason why.