



E Source Announces Top Electric and Gas Company IVRs for 2011

By Wendy Bloechle

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Consumers are enjoying a better experience when calling their electric and gas companies' interactive voice response systems (IVRs) compared to previous years, according to the "E Source Review of North American Electric and Gas Company IVRs: 2011." E Source found that 65 percent of the electric and gas companies reviewed improved the usability of their IVRs. In addition, none of the utility IVRs reviewed in 2011 are considered to be "very poor," unlike some of the IVRs reviewed in 2009.

The top-rated electric and gas company IVRs belong to Duke Energy, Portland General Electric, Florida Power & Light Co., NorthWestern Energy, Arizona Public Service, and Cleco. The top-rated Canadian utility IVR belongs to Union Gas Limited.

"The top-rated utilities have done a great job designing their IVRs with their customers in mind," says Rich Goodwin, manager of the *E Source Utility Customer Care Service*. "It's obvious that they are focused on making it easy for callers to complete their transactions."

E Source's comprehensive benchmark study, which has been conducted biennially since 2004, measures the performance of North American electric and gas company IVRs in meeting the needs of residential consumers. This year, 96 U.S. and Canadian IVRs were reviewed from the residential consumer's perspective, with a focus on how well they functioned for the key tasks that consumers expect to find on electric and gas company IVRs. The reviewers judged how usable they are—or how user-friendly it was to accomplish the tasks.

Florence Connally, associate research director at E Source, says, "Providing a better experience with the IVR will lead to a better interaction with the customer service representative as well as encourage customers to take the next step and make use of self-service options available on the IVR."

For the first time, reviews were also conducted using mobile phones. Two tasks, Make a Payment and Report an Outage or Emergency, were reviewed solely from mobile phones. “As more consumers rely on their mobile phones or live in mobile-only households, the experience of navigating a company’s IVR from a mobile phone cannot be ignored,” says Sarah Fiebiger, senior research associate at E Source.

Northeastern U.S. Allegheny Power, Duquesne Light, and Baltimore Gas and Electric had the top-performing IVRs in this region.

Midwestern U.S. The top three IVRs in this region belong to DTE Energy, KCP&L, and OG&E.

Southern U.S. Duke Energy, Florida Power & Light Co., and Cleco were named as the top utility IVRs in the southern region.

West U.S. Portland General Electric, NorthWestern Energy, and Arizona Public Service have the top three IVRs in this region.

Canada. The top-performing IVRs in Canada belong to Union Gas Limited, Toronto Hydro Electric System, and Hydro One.

The “E Source Review of North American Electric and Gas Company IVRs: 2011” is based on the reviews of more than 1,200 calls to utility IVRs. These reviews were conducted between December 2010 and March 2011 by four typical residential energy customers who called 96 U.S. and Canadian utilities to see if 13 key residential customer service tasks could be found using their IVRs (**Table 1**). The 13 tasks fell into three categories: general customer service, payment, and credit. The number of tasks found determined the functionality score of each IVR, and E Source used that score, coupled with the usability rating for each IVR, to rank each utility on a 1,000-point scale.

TABLE 1: Performance Ranking of U.S. and Canadian IVRs, 2011

Functionality and average usability ratings for each of the 96 IVRs reviewed were equally weighted and combined to determine each IVR’s overall performance index number, with a maximum possible value of 1,000. The IVRs were then ranked in descending order by performance index number. First-quartile utilities have both above-average usability and more than 50 percent of the 13 tasks we looked for in this study.

Rank	Company name	Score	Rank	Company name	Score
Top quartile			Third quartile		
1	Duke Energy	809	49	Consumers Energy	564
2	Portland General Electric	772	50	SRP (Salt River Project)	560
3	Florida Power & Light Co.	763	51	CPS Energy	558
3	NorthWestern Energy	763	51	Jersey Central Power & Light	558
5	Arizona Public Service	721	51	Public Service Electric & Gas	558
5	Cleco	721	51	South Carolina Electric & Gas (SCANA)	558
7	Union Gas Limited	710	51	Southern California Edison	558
8	PacifiCorp	707	51	Washington Gas	558
9	DTE Energy	693	57	NSTAR	555
10	Allegheny Power	685	58	Pepco	554
11	Sacramento Municipal Utility District	679	58	Southwest Gas Corp.	555
12	Duquesne Light	667	60	Manitoba Hydro	543
12	KCP&L	667	60	Nova Scotia Power	543
14	NIPSCO	644	60	Southern California Gas Co.	543
15	Baltimore Gas and Electric	638	63	TECO Peoples Gas	537
16	Long Island Power Authority	636	64	Hawaiian Electric Co.	529
16	OG&E	636	64	Piedmont Natural Gas	529
16	Wisconsin Public Service	636	66	Memphis Light, Gas & Water Division	527
19	Pacific Gas and Electric Co.	626	67	Hydro Ottawa	522
19	Philadelphia Gas Works	626	68	Tacoma Public Utilities	519
19	Georgia Power	626	69	Westar Energy	517
22	Alliant Energy	620	70	ComEd	502
22	NW Natural	620	70	Enbridge Gas	502
22	PNM	620	72	Dominion	501
22	Vectren Corp.	620	72	Entergy Corp.	501

Second quartile			72	NB Power	501
26	Columbia Gas of Ohio	617	72	PPL Electric Utilities	501
27	Laclede Gas	610	72	Silicon Valley Power	501
27	Peoples Gas	610	Fourth quartile		
29	Dayton Power & Light	609	77	Consolidated Edison Co. of New York	481
29	We Energies	609	78	Black Hills Energy	467
29	Xcel Energy	609	78	Tucson Electric Power	467
32	Omaha Public Power District	606	80	Atmos Energy	466
32	Puget Sound Energy	606	80	San Diego Gas & Electric	466
32	Toronto Hydro-Electric System	606	82	BC Hydro	466
35	CenterPoint Energy	605	83	Nicor Gas	449
35	Progress Energy Inc.	605	83	Questar Gas	449
37	MidAmerican Energy	596	85	Missouri Gas Energy	448
38	Ameren	591	86	EPCOR	439
39	Connecticut Light & Power	589	87	Reliant Energy	435
40	Hydro One	585	88	Los Angeles Department of Water and Power	417
41	NV Energy	582	89	New York State Electric & Gas	407
41	PECO	582	90	Santee Cooper	392
43	American Electric Power	573	90	TXU Energy	392
44	Austin Energy	573	92	FortisBC (reviewed as Terasen Gas)	373
44	Louisville Gas and Electric Co.	573	93	Hydro-Québec	365
44	National Grid	573	94	ENMAX	342
44	Oklahoma Natural Gas	573	95	Avista Utilities	324
48	Idaho Power Co.	567	96	Direct Energy	282

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