



Building Connections with a Better Broadband Signup Process

Cumberland EMC is an electric provider but has begun offering broadband services as a way to ensure their community has access to high-speed internet. The Clarksville, Tenn., cooperative discovered they had large pockets of members that are underserved or unserved by an internet service provider.

“When we started this project, we were advised to of course, expand our network first to the areas where we knew we were going to make money,” said Kaitlyn Bonds, creative director for Cumberland EMC. “But being a co-op, we wanted to go where people were in the most need. In many of the areas where we first made services available, many members did not have access to any internet options in their homes.”

While the broadband project has been well-received by the community, it hasn’t been without challenges. One of those challenges included limitations on how members could sign up for service. Cumberland has been offering their broadband service in zones throughout their membership, ensuring they started in areas with the biggest need. When a zone was opened, interested members had to either call or come into the office to sign up for service, creating a heavy workload for customer service representatives and long wait times for customers.

“Our customer contact center knew when they came in on a zone opening day, the phones were going to be ringing off the hook and it was going to be a long day for them,” said Beau Baggett, manager of member experience at Cumberland EMC. “Not that they aren’t excited about getting members signed up for this service, but when you’re faced with a large queue of calls, and you know the member you get may have been waiting 30 minutes, you’re starting what should be a great interaction at a disadvantage.”

Cumberland recently started offering online broadband signups through their website, powered by NISC’s SmartHub Order Management. This software provides customers a self-service shopping cart experience through SmartHub on their web browser through a computer or mobile device where they can select the services they want and check out on their own.

Since implementing SmartHub Order Management, online signups have been the most popular way for members to sign up for broadband service through Cumberland. Recently opening a zone, Cumberland saw 60% of signups happen online, freeing up their customer service staff to focus on other issues.

“SmartHub is now our most utilized option to sign up for our broadband service since we’ve implemented it,” said Bruce Anderson, information systems specialist at Cumberland EMC. “I think at one point we had people waiting on the phone for over an hour, and SmartHub Order



Management has cleared that up. Saving people time, making it easier for them and giving them a better customer experience, I don't think you can put a price on that."

The customer experience was essential for Cumberland, especially when it came to making it easy to sign up for service. They discovered very quickly that SmartHub Order Management was easy for customers to use.

"Before we even announced it, before we were even able to test it, a member had already signed up for service using it," Anderson said. "She beat us to the punch in testing, signed up for video and internet, and we hadn't even let her know about it. It just happened 20 minutes after we set it up."

The customer experience doesn't end with an easy-to-use solution. The process for signing up for service can give a customer an idea of what to expect from that service. Ensuring the process was not only simple, but really felt world-class was important to Cumberland.

"I feel one of our biggest advantages is the relationship we already have with our potential subscribers as their local electric cooperative. Building on that relationship and strengthening it will help us provide the best service, support, and experience to our subscribers," Bonds said. "The addition of our online signup process, along with the options of signing up in our local offices and over the phone, speaks to the member experience that we've designed and further adds to the support that subscribers can expect after their installation is completed.

A world-class customer experience also allows Cumberland to not only be competitive but stand out among other service providers that may be competing for customers in certain zones in their community.

"I take pride in the fact that we are being compared to major ISPs," Anderson said. "They have an online setup service, well so do we. Members go in, choose their package and go on about their day. SmartHub Order Management enabled us to be a part of that competition."

SmartHub Order Management is available as part of NISC's iVUE Connect suite of solutions. From crowdsourcing and signup to keeping your customers informed, iVUE Connect has your communication covered. For more information, visit NISC.coop/ivueconnect.