



# E Source announces top electric and gas company IVRs for 2016

## Utility IVRs have improved, but there's always room for better functionality

By Kym Wootton

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Utility interactive voice response systems (IVRs) continue to offer customers an improved experience over time, allowing them to find desired features more quickly and enabling them to perform a wide range of tasks. However, there's still room for improvement when it comes to offering a seamless customer experience.

Conducted since 2004, the biennial [E Source Review of North American Electric and Gas Company IVRs](#) measures how well utility IVRs engage residential customers and assesses system improvements related to customers' needs. According to the latest study, the top three utility IVRs belong to Portland General Electric, Consumers Energy, and Pacific Power and Rocky Mountain Power.

Based on utility feedback and industry trends in user experience, this year's study of 90 utility IVRs took a different approach by breaking the user experience into three key components: navigation, functionality, and delivery. IVR features were rated based on:

- *Navigation.* How easy is the feature to find?
- *Functionality.* How easy is the feature to use?
- *Delivery.* How are the voice, tone, and pacing of the feature?

Between January and March 2016, a group of residential customers accessed and used the top 10 informational and/or transactional features that had been identified through E Source market research, input

from industry thought leaders, and E Source expertise as the features residential customers most wanted to see on their utility's IVR.

Overall, E Source found a need for improvement in all areas, with an emphasis on functionality, which had the lowest average rating across the features reviewed in the study. Customers expect the IVR to understand their selections, to require thorough but not excessive account authentication, and to provide contextually relevant navigation options.

Top-rated utilities are responding to customer needs by providing systems with touch-tone capabilities, consistent voice and pacing, clear yet descriptive menu options, and self-service features for billing and payment. "It's important to provide an intuitive, consistent, comprehensive experience to contain callers in your IVR. Our research shows that the IVR is one of the least preferred contact channels among customers, but there are opportunities to change that dynamic by providing adequate self-service options and allowing callers to easily connect to an agent," says Sarah Hutson, senior market research analyst at E Source.

Interestingly, the top-rated IVRs all provide callers with a touch-tone option. "Touch-tone IVRs have been the standard in the contact center industry for a very long time, so many customers feel comfortable interacting with them. We expect that as natural language or conversational IVR technologies continue to improve, deployments of these systems will increase and utilities will become better at optimizing these systems, leading to a better experience for customers," says Jeffrey Daigle, senior customer experience analyst at E Source.

Regional rankings are as follows:

- **Canada:** Union Gas, Hydro One, BC Hydro
- **US, Midwest:** Consumers Energy, Wisconsin Public Service, Columbia Gas of Ohio
- **US, Northeast:** Consolidated Edison Company of New York Inc., Pepco Holdings Inc. (Atlantic City Electric), NYSEG
- **US, South:** South Carolina Electric & Gas, LG&E and KU, Alabama Power
- **US, West:** Portland General Electric, Pacific Power and Rocky Mountain Power, NorthWestern Energy

Rankings per utility type:

- **Electric:** Portland General Electric, Pacific Power, Alabama Power
- **Gas:** AGL Resources (Chattanooga Gas), Columbia Gas of Ohio, Union Gas
- **Combined gas and electric:** Consumers Energy, South Carolina Electric & Gas, NorthWestern Energy

For more information about this comprehensive study, please visit [www.esource.com/ivr-review](http://www.esource.com/ivr-review).

## Performance ranking of US and Canadian residential IVRs, 2016

Average usability scores across the three usability components (navigation, functionality, and delivery)

for each of the 90 companies included in this study and the percentage of features that were found on each company's IVR were combined with equal weighting to determine the overall performance index, which has a maximum possible value of 1,000. The IVRs were then ranked in descending order.

| Ranking<br>(top<br>quartile)    | Company name                                 | Performance<br>score | Ranking<br>(third<br>quartile)  | Company name                                              | Performance<br>score |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1                               | Portland General Electric                    | 853                  | 47                              | Georgia Power <sup>a</sup>                                | 533                  |
| 2                               | Consumers Energy                             | 847                  | 47                              | Nova Scotia Power <sup>a</sup>                            | 533                  |
| 3                               | Pacific Power and Rocky Mountain Power       | 840                  | 47                              | Seattle City Light                                        | 533                  |
| 4                               | NorthWestern Energy                          | 813                  | 50                              | DTE Energy <sup>a</sup>                                   | 513                  |
| 4                               | South Carolina Electric & Gas                | 813                  | 50                              | Westar Energy <sup>a</sup>                                | 513                  |
| 6                               | LG&E and KU                                  | 807                  | 52                              | Hydro-Québec                                              | 507                  |
| 7                               | Alabama Power                                | 800                  | 52                              | Laclede Gas Co. <sup>a</sup>                              | 507                  |
| 8                               | Pacific Gas and Electric Co.                 | 773                  | 52                              | MidAmerican Energy Co. <sup>a</sup>                       | 507                  |
| 9                               | APS                                          | 767                  | 52                              | Tampa Electric (TECO) <sup>a</sup>                        | 507                  |
| 9                               | AGL Resources (Chattanooga Gas)              | 767                  | 56                              | San Diego Gas & Electric <sup>a</sup>                     | 493                  |
| 11                              | Wisconsin Public Service                     | 747                  | 57                              | Southwest Gas <sup>a</sup>                                | 487                  |
| 12                              | Columbia Gas of Ohio                         | 727                  | 58                              | SaskPower <sup>a</sup>                                    | 460                  |
| 13                              | Cleco Power LLC                              | 713                  | 59                              | Morristown Utility Systems                                | 447                  |
| 13                              | Vectren                                      | 713                  | 59                              | Silicon Valley Power                                      | 447                  |
| 15                              | Union Gas                                    | 693                  | 61                              | Enbridge Gas Distribution                                 | 440                  |
| 16                              | Consolidated Edison Company of New York Inc. | 687                  | 61                              | Peoples Natural Gas <sup>a</sup>                          | 440                  |
| 16                              | Hydro One <sup>a</sup>                       | 687                  | 63                              | PNM <sup>a</sup>                                          | 427                  |
| 18                              | Ameren Illinois                              | 673                  | 64                              | Ameren Missouri <sup>a</sup>                              | 420                  |
| 18                              | Peoples Gas Light                            | 673                  | 64                              | Manitoba Hydro                                            | 420                  |
| 18                              | We Energies                                  | 673                  | 64                              | Philadelphia Gas Works <sup>a</sup>                       | 420                  |
| 21                              | ComEd                                        | 660                  | 67                              | Central Maine Power                                       | 413                  |
| 21                              | NV Energy                                    | 660                  | 68                              | Idaho Power Co. <sup>a</sup>                              | 400                  |
| 23                              | BC Hydro                                     | 653                  |                                 |                                                           |                      |
| Ranking<br>(second<br>quartile) | Company name                                 | Performance<br>score | Ranking<br>(fourth<br>quartile) | Company name                                              | Performance<br>score |
| 24                              | Pepco Holdings Inc. (PEPCO)                  | 640                  | 69                              | Oklahoma Gas & Electric <sup>a</sup>                      | 393                  |
| 25                              | Dayton Power & Light                         | 633                  | 69                              | Southern California Edison <sup>a</sup>                   | 393                  |
| 25                              | Southern California Gas Co. <sup>a</sup>     | 633                  | 71                              | Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD) <sup>a</sup> | 387                  |
| 27                              | AEP Ohio                                     | 627                  | 72                              | EPCOR <sup>a</sup>                                        | 380                  |
| 28                              | Pepco Holdings Inc. (Atlantic City Electric) | 620                  | 72                              | Jersey Central Power & Light <sup>a</sup>                 | 380                  |
| 28                              | Florida Power & Light                        | 620                  | 72                              | TXU Energy <sup>a</sup>                                   | 380                  |
| 28                              | NYSEG                                        | 620                  | 75                              | Memphis Light Gas and Water <sup>a</sup>                  | 360                  |
| 28                              | Toronto Hydro <sup>a</sup>                   | 620                  | 76                              | Reliant <sup>a</sup>                                      | 347                  |
| 32                              | FortisBC                                     | 607                  | 77                              | Los Angeles Department of Water & Power                   | 327                  |
| 32                              | Xcel Energy                                  | 607                  | 77                              | New Mexico Gas Co. Inc. <sup>a</sup>                      | 327                  |
| 34                              | Avista Utilities                             | 600                  | 79                              | Ambit Energy <sup>a</sup>                                 | 313                  |
| 34                              | National Grid                                | 600                  | 79                              | Questar Gas <sup>a</sup>                                  | 313                  |
| 36                              | Alliant Energy                               | 593                  | 81                              | KCP&L <sup>a</sup>                                        | 300                  |
| 36                              | Black Hills Energy <sup>a</sup>              | 593                  | 82                              | CPS Energy <sup>a</sup>                                   | 287                  |
| 36                              | Oklahoma Natural Gas <sup>a</sup>            | 593                  | 82                              | ENMAX                                                     | 287                  |
| 39                              | Hawaiian Electric Co. (HECO)                 | 580                  | 84                              | Duke Energy <sup>a</sup>                                  | 273                  |
| 40                              | Énergie NB Power                             | 567                  | 84                              | Piedmont Natural Gas Co. Inc. <sup>a</sup>                | 273                  |
| 40                              | Nashville Electric Service                   | 567                  | 86                              | Salt River Project <sup>a</sup>                           | 260                  |
| 42                              | Public Service Electric & Gas (New Jersey)   | 560                  | 87                              | Entergy (Louisiana) <sup>a</sup>                          | 227                  |
| 43                              | Puget Sound Energy <sup>a</sup>              | 553                  | 88                              | Duquesne Light <sup>a</sup>                               | 200                  |
| 44                              | UGI Utilities <sup>a</sup>                   | 547                  | 89                              | Eversource Energy <sup>a</sup>                            | 180                  |
| 45                              | Nicor Gas <sup>a</sup>                       | 540                  | 90                              | Dominion (Virginia Power) <sup>a</sup>                    | 140                  |
| 45                              | Northwest Natural Gas Co. <sup>a</sup>       | 540                  |                                 |                                                           |                      |

Notes: a. Utility did not provide account access. As part of the study methodology, the utility could not earn a rating higher than 3 of 5 for any of the three usability components if the feature was found but account verification was required to move forward in the system for that particular feature.

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E Source labels the quartile with the highest-ranking utilities "top quartile," followed in descending rank order by the second, third, and fourth quartiles. Several utilities—including Atmos Energy, Baltimore Gas & Electric, CenterPoint Energy, PECO, PPL, and Washington Gas Light Co.—were originally included in the benchmark sample but did not provide account access, without which E Source was unable to evaluate their IVRs. As such, they were not scored in the review.

## About E Source

For 30 years, E Source has been providing research, consulting, and market research to more than 300 utilities and their partners. This guidance helps our customers advance their efficiency programs, enhance customer relationships, and use energy more efficiently.

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