THIS PROJECT WAS MADE SUCCESSFUL FROM THE COLLABORATION OF THE FOLLOWING TEAMS

DTE Energy
Know Your Own Power®

Alliance for Deaf Services

Energy Services, L.L.C.

Franklin Energy
Alliance for Deaf Services (ADS) approached DTE Energy to discuss and explain gaps with traditional program offerings including DTE’s Energy Efficiency (EE) offering.

THINGS WE DID NOT KNOW

- Not directly engaging the Deaf community was resulting in little to no participation with DTE’s EE programs.
- American Sign Language (ASL) is a different language than English.
- Inability to communicate with a service professional has the potential to make the Deaf customer uncomfortable in their own home.
- The technology solution of Video Remote Interpretation (VRI) can create a direct relationship with our customer rather than an intermediary.
• Michigan has roughly 100,000 people who communicate exclusively using American Sign Language (ASL).
• DTE had no specific method of field capable outreach to the Deaf Community beyond using community interpreters.
• Some videos do have subtitles but it does not fully address the language gap between ASL and English.
• DTE’s was experiencing low to no engagement or participation from the Deaf community in its EE programs.
The Pre-Pilot program state needed changing to better serve our customers. DTE became the first utility in the country to use Video Remote Interpretation to bridge the gap in communication with our Deaf customers.

Every situation, customer and market segment may be different, but design thinking can help ensure successful program implementation.

Empathize -> Define -> Ideate -> Prototype -> Test
DEVELOPING THE OFFERING

1. Cost, Scoping & Approvals
2. Design of Marketing Material
3. Cultural Liaison
4. Brought in best field crews
5. Maximizing Program Offerings
6. Three Stage Approach
HOME ENERGY CONSULTATION PROGRAM (HEC)

- The HEC program is DTE’s flagship residential energy efficiency program.
- 267,000 Homes served throughout Michigan since 2009.
- Single family direct installation program.
- Program includes free basic energy savings measures (LED, pipe wrap, water flow limiters, nightlights, programmable & WiFi thermostats,)
ENERGY EXPERTS

- Four Energy experts initially selected to participate in ADS/DTE pilot
- All received basic training in elements of American Sign Language (ASL) and Video Remote Interpretation (VRI) software prior to pilot launch
- Each performed in-home walk-throughs of an HEC using VRI tablets in a deaf customer’s home
- HEC process was streamlined to better address to the needs of the deaf community
SUCCESSFUL FIELD TEST

To determine where process breaks would occur, a HEC for a Deaf customer was tested from sign up to completion.

LEARNINGS

• Dedicated tablets with mobile wireless connectivity should be used to mitigate against service interruption.

• Direct communication is paramount whether or not someone else offers to or can interpret within a customer’s home.

• Backup videos needed to be developed for use in extremely rural areas or areas where WiFi and data are unavailable.

• The customer voice is of paramount importance when designing a product, program or outreach event.
LEARNINGS

• Most effective lead generation was through direct outreach at Deaf clubs and events
• To verify appointments texting permission needed to be granted during signup
• News flashes needed to be provided to existing call centers in order to route potential signups
• Appointment windows needed to be reduced from 4 hour blocks to no more than 2 hours
• A video phone was needed at the point of scheduling in order for the call in numbers to work
• Weekly meeting with learnings, best practices & new ideas for improvement

STAGE 2: SMALL SCALE TESTING FOR GAPS

WORD OF MOUTH MARKETING

• Small scale marketing targeted 50 households prior to full commercialization in order to further improve the offering and mitigate against any customer dissatisfaction that may have been overlooked
STAGE 2: SUCCESSES

SOFT INDICATIONS OF SUCCESS

• Increased Deaf community awareness & surrounding energy efficiency programs
• A feeling of being an equally valued customers
• High levels of customer satisfaction & increases in programs participation
• DTE has empowered the Deaf community to request, develop, and engage in similar programs in the general market place
• Increased fire safety for Deaf households through installation of shaker type smoke alarms

ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IDENTIFIED

• Launched a Hard of Hearing “Speech to Text” Service as a result of the Hard of Hearing Community’s request to include individuals who have been deafened later in life but may not communicate through ASL
STAGE 2: RESULTS

219 LEADS
5 OUTREACH EVENTS
19.5% CONVERSION RATE
43 COMPLETED HECs
5 JOBS CREATED

Home Energy Consultation

Need to Lower Your Energy Bill?
We’re Here to Help.
Schedule a FREE Home Energy Consultation today.

A DTE Energy specialist will visit your home and conduct a Free Home Energy Consultation to find out where your home uses the most energy and identify things you can do in every room to save energy.

Get My Free Consultation >

Deaf and Hard of Hearing
DTE Energy and Alliance for Deaf Services (ADS) is collaborating to provide the Home Energy Consultation Program to the deaf community by utilizing ASL Video Remote Interpretation and Speech to Text.

To schedule an appointment, call 313.202.4433 (video phone) or email vnhec@michiganenergy.com.
STAGE 3: COMPLETE COMMERCIALIZATION

HEC COMMERCIALIZATION

- Focused on 1,000 homes
- Continuation of feedback loop
- Larger scale program learnings
FACEBOOK LIVE OUTREACH

TUNE IN
AUGUST 22
AT 9 A.M.
as DTE broadcasts live in
American Sign Language!

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STAGE 3: CONTINUING SUCCESS

1,000+ LEADS

75+ OUTREACH EVENTS

38% CONVERSION RATE

375+ COMPLETED HECs

3 PROGRAM EXPANSION
INSIGHTS

MARKETING & OUTREACH

• Even with the same program incentives & information, communications need to be customized because not one size fits all for program marketing.

LEARNINGS

• Live streaming social media on well-respected and popular forums

• MOU’s were developed to incentivize lead generation with Deaf clubs and Community partners

• Text responses & notifications were used with customer permission

• New outreach videos were created to show what programs were offering
INSIGHTS

PROCESS

• While delivering the same service need, processes behind program implementation must stay flexible to accommodate all possible customers.

LEARNINGS

• Dedicated email signup accounts were created for housing programmatic requests
• Specific channel flags were used during signup to determine customer needs
• Energy Specialists were assigned to Deaf customer homes first in time blocks
• Call center notifications needed to be sent out to ensure correct routing of signups
CUSTOMER VOICE

• Early involvement of the customer voice will help mitigate against potential project blind spots and ensure that the initial launch will be well received.

LEARNINGS

• Don’t do anything for us without us

• Program showed areas were DTE Energy could accommodate rather than comply

• Allowed for meetings with state agencies to better accommodate safety notifications, outage updates & collaborative communication with Deaf Customers
DESIGN THINKING

• Every situation may be different, but utilizing Design Thinking can help ensure successful programs.

CUSTOMER FOCUSED

• Programs need to be continually looked at with customer centric lenses in order to see if they are as effective as possible.

• BUT… what is MOST important is remembering that DTE Serves Everyone. So complete service to every market segment is critically important.
FINAL THOUGHTS

CUSTOMER SERVICE REQUIREMENTS

- Systematic barriers do not diminish our pursuit of the “American Dream.”
- Access to effective communication is vital to high quality customer service.
- The ability to converse freely is enlightening and empowering.
- Positive customer experience will open participation pathways to other programs and services.

SERVICE PROVIDER TAKEAWAY

- Our responsibility as a utility is to engage all customers with the best possible communication resources
- VRI enables people without experience the ability to interact with customers who are Deaf.
- Building a successful model with our Deaf customers opens the door to explore the other language offering of this technology

“Now I don’t have to accommodate the crew, the crew accommodates me. That is the main difference” *

*Quote provided by Todd Morrison: President of the Michigan Deaf Association
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Questions?