CASE STUDY

In Perfect Alignment with Alden ONE: CORE

170,000
Customers

5,000
Square Miles of Territory

1,200
Attachment Violations Corrected

THE SITUATION

CORE is a Colorado-based rural electric association with about 170,000 customers over 5,000 square miles of diverse territory, from cities to mountain towns to ranches. The utility has 230 employees, but that's tight staffing for the job they have to do. The joint use department mainly consists of Vertical Asset Coordinator Michael Surran, a 39-year employee.

For years, CORE used paper logs in binders to keep track of its assets as well as other companies' communications attachments to those assets. The staff used emails for most communications with the attaching companies. "People were printing them out and putting them in a three-ring binder, so tons of paperwork," Surran recalls. As the number of attachments on the assets steadily increased, the system became more difficult to manage. Joint use interactions could be a long, drawn-out process that frustrated both the utility and the attaching companies. The condition the data was in made billing difficult. "We didn't know what we didn't know," Surran says.

CORE
ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

Overview

A Western REA finds an ideal match, gets a handle on joint use, and positions itself for the future with intuitive asset management software.

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— Michael Surran

THE CHALLENGE

Some utility employees wish joint use would just go away, but Surran knew that was not going to happen. In fact, just the opposite. As communications networks get more and more dense, companies increasingly are relying on small cell equipment attached to utility poles to meet service demands that large cell towers alone can't handle. That means more attachment requests – a lot more. Even before the push to 5G wireless began, Surran saw that CORE had too many assets and too many attachments for the management system it was using. Sometimes, for example, the utility became aware of an attachment and had to spend a large amount of time researching records to determine whether it had been permitted. Surran began looking at potential solutions to organize asset data, to streamline and speed up the joint use process, to make life easier – and that brought him to Alden.

HOW CORE FOUND A PARTNERSHIP THAT CHECKED ALL THE BOXES

One of the large communications companies attaching to CORE's assets suggested the utility look at Alden's Notify system, the predecessor to the current Alden ONE joint use management platform. The more Surran saw of Alden, the more he liked it. Once CORE implemented the software, he says, the benefits were even greater than he expected.

Organization.
Alden made an immediate difference in the accessibility and management of CORE's asset and attachment data, Surran says. Questions could now be addressed quickly, efficiently, and accurately that used to take days to answer, and had sometimes been impossible to answer with complete confidence. Alden ONE also helps CORE meet timelines in the rules and regulations regarding attachments.

Sophisticated simplicity.
"I hate complicated things," Surran says. "There's so much for us to do and remember and try, if you can make something simple and intuitive, that's perfect. And I do think that's where Alden delivers." I really appreciated Alden taking their slightly outdated Notify System and moving it forward to updated technology. Most companies will not spend the time and money to make advancements in technology for their customers, Alden did.

Productivity Goals

Organized Asset Data

Facilitated Billing

Faster Processing

Mutual benefits.
One of the biggest pluses of using Alden ONE is that Alden understands both the needs of utilities and the needs of attaching companies, Surran says, so the platform is designed to help mediate the issues that typically arise from the joint use process. Alden's data-sharing capabilities and automated workflows keep everything moving along. Communications and billing are simplified, and every interaction produces an electronic record.

Internal information flow.
Alden ONE did more than smooth CORE's relationships with attaching companies. It greatly improved internal communications about joint use, says Surran, who has become known as "the joint use guy." People in departments such as engineering, operations, GIS, and consumer services use the system to share information. "It's been successful for everybody because they're less frustrated," Surran says.

Solid support.
One of CORE's departments initially was resistant to adopting the new system, Surran recalls. Alden sent a team, including CEO John Sciarabba, to Colorado to meet with the employees, address their concerns, and show them how the system would help them. "Ever since then, they love Alden," Surran says. The support continues. When Surran has a question or problem, he usually gets a response from Alden the same day, he says. "They work, they get it done, and always act like it wasn't a big deal."

Plant security.
About the same time CORE implemented Alden's software, it hired Alden to perform a joint use audit on its assets. The audit identified about 1,200 attachment violations, such as attachments that were too low on a pole or too close to the electrical lines. Notices of violation were sent through Notify, and most of the problems have been corrected, Surran says.

Nationwide reach.
Alden ONE is the go-to software for many large companies and for companies in most states, making it a logical choice for a utility with ever-expanding joint use relationships, Surran says.

THE ROAD AHEAD

Surran sees big challenges ahead for CORE and the whole joint use community. The worldwide race for bigger and better broadband is underway, most recently in the rush to deploy 5G networks. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased that pressure, with many people telecommuting and students doing distance learning. "They want massive amounts of data," Surran says, and that means increased sharing of utility assets for the foreseeable future. He predicts an important role for Alden in that future and often tells people at other companies about Alden ONE.

"I get pretty passionate about Alden ONE and pretty excited letting other utilities know how miserable joint use was, and how greatly it's improved since using Alden ONE," he says.

Results

Better Workflow

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