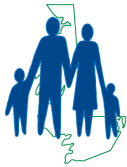


Delivering Reliability through GPS-Enabled Fleet Dispatching: The Choptank Electric Story



**Choptank Electric
Cooperative**
A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

Company Name:
Choptank Electric Cooperative
Location:
Denton, MD
Industry:
Electric/Utilities
Customer Since:
2004

The Problem

Popular phrases such as “the customer is the boss” convey an important truth for service-based businesses and utilities. But for electric cooperatives (“co-ops”) – private, independent, democratically-governed electricity providers owned by the local members they serve – the statement is literally true.

Choptank Electric is a successful co-op serving the nine counties that comprise the Eastern Shore of Maryland, and for this 68-year-old company, customer service is always priority one. When it comes to an everyday staple like electrical power, there will inevitably be many questions, and providers must be prepared to answer them. Yet with 189 employees and 173 vehicles on the road, the challenge of staying on top of daily activities in order to keep customers accurately informed had, in recent years, become a major headache for Choptank.

For electric industry veteran Robert Behlke, Vice President of Consumer Affairs for Choptank Electric, the link between more efficient customer service and better information concerning the real-time activities and locations of field staff was an intuitive one. “Reliability is something we strive for. In the electric industry, typically when you say reliability you think of clean, safe power, and that’s right. But the other aspect of being reliable is being responsive, being there when members need us. We’re a co-op, so our customers essentially are owners. But we can’t respond well without accurate information about our own vehicles.”

Behlke felt strongly that for Choptank to continue to offer their customers the level of service and responsiveness they had come to expect, he needed to know more about the everyday activity of his field workers. “It seemed to be that we should know more about what our vehicles are doing during the work day... that we didn’t know enough about what was going on outside of our ‘visual scope,’” he said.

Behlke also understood the benefits this information would provide in terms of making sure Choptank was not incurring unnecessary overtime costs. “If an employee has a certain amount of work to do, and if it incurs overtime, I can only guess that they did it correctly, that they plotted their routes in an expeditious manner... and that was one of the things I wanted to know for sure.”

The Solution

Senior management at Choptank stay in touch with industry trends and had been aware of the existence of GPS-based fleet management for some time, but when it came time to start seriously looking into a system for themselves, they wanted to go with a supplier they felt they could trust. Behlke considered using a cell phone-based tracking solution, but could not find one that was user-friendly enough, or that offered additional tracking benefits such as the ability to notify when a bucket truck has the boom in the air. “I knew that if I was having trouble using it, my employees would too,” he said.

In the end, Choptank decided to go with Navtrak because they knew several other businesses that were using the system successfully, and preferred to use a provider with local connections (Navtrak’s national headquarters is in Salisbury, MD).

“If somebody calls in with a problem, it’s easy for us to look at the Navtrak system and find out where our closest service vehicle to the customer is, rather than making a guess... we know where they are, who the closest one is, and we can dispatch them easily from there.”

- Robert Behlke
V.P. of Consumer Affairs
Choptank Electric Cooperative



Driving Business Success

Success Story

As an electric service company, Choptank has a wide variety of vehicles on the road, from simple vans and service trucks to construction equipment – not all of which they deemed equally important to track. Therefore, they decided to install Navtrak on those vehicles being used for job functions directly related to members, such as service restoration, routine connects and disconnects, and collections. At first, according to Behlke, it took them a little time to understand the significance of all the vehicle information Navtrak was giving them, “but we soon learned how to put it into certain categories and really use it.”

The Results

The most obvious positive effect Navtrak had on the efficiency of Choptank’s operations was in the area of dispatching. Behlke values the way that Navtrak enables them to respond to customer questions and complaints quickly. “If somebody calls in with a problem, it’s easy for us to look at the Navtrak system and find out where our closest service vehicle to the customer is, rather than making a guess, or calling someone on the radio and asking them where they are.... we know where they are, who the closest one is, and we can dispatch them easily from there.”

Customer service is especially important for an electric service company in an outage situation, and Behlke observed that during a power outage, they simply don’t have time to waste trying to locate drivers or figure out what they’re up to when there are hundreds of homes without power. “Navtrak allows us to find our servicemen right away, and we know where the next closest job is, so we minimize windshield time and outage time.”

Choptank realized that they can use Navtrak in numerous ways, depending on what is required.

One employee working out of their central office uses it for company-wide dispatching, and in each of their six other offices, an operations manager and a customer service manager uses the system to manage their own teams -- servicemen on the operations side, bill collectors or regional account representatives on the member service side. The more Choptank used the system, the more they recognized its impact on a company-wide scale, not just in one particular area.

The sum of it all, for Behlke, is the knowledge that Navtrak affords their organization in terms of what is happening in the field, as well as the improvement in the efficiency of his mobile employees. “Even if the system can save me one hour of time a month per employee, I know it’s paying for itself,” he said. “Most of the time, our guys are using their heads out there. But it’s important to me that we know.”

Navtrak: The Proven Remedy for Mobile Workforce Headaches

All organizations with mobile workforces contend with “headaches” that limit productivity and reduce profits. If any of the following pain points is an issue for your business, be sure to read the corresponding case study (available at www.navtrak.net) to learn how Navtrak provides the cure!

- Excessive overtime costs:
The Bug Doctor story
- Insufficient knowledge of vehicle location/activity:
The Sunshine Paving story
- Inaccurate dispatching:
The Dove Pointe story
- Security and liability concerns:
The J.H. Peterson story
- Inaccurate tracking of vehicles:
The Boucher Real Estate story
- Inefficient delivery practices:
The Somerset Food Service story

For more information on how Navtrak can “heal” your mobile workforce headaches, contact your local Navtrak salesperson today, or email us at sales@navtrak.net.

GPS-Based Management Tools for Businesses with Mobile Workforces

