

## CRC's Customer Care, Overflow Contact Center Services Offer Utilities Call Handling Solutions

Cooperative Response Center, Inc. (CRC) is known as an industry leader with regard to assisting electric utilities across the nation with their consumer call handling needs. For some utilities, CRC is a one-stop-shop with its energy dispatch services, meaning CRC not only handles incoming consumer calls but also dispatches outages to line crews. For other utilities, CRC is used to assist with the utility's needs with either customer care or overflow services – helping when needed but leaving the dispatching of line crews to the utility's own dispatchers.

### Customer Care and Overflow Services Defined

Nearly 20 percent of CRC's contact center membership utilizes CRC for services other than energy dispatch, subscribing to either customer care or overflow services as explained below.

#### Customer Care

CRC assists with consumer calls ranging from general messages, assistance with bill payments, to reports of electrical outages. With regard to outage calls, CRC immediately sends all outage reports to the utility's dispatchers who then coordinate the restoration of the outage.

#### Overflow

CRC's overflow services are utilized by those utilities that have in-house 24/7 member services and/or an interactive voice response (IVR) unit and dispatch their own line crews. CRC is then utilized in times of need when call volume is too great for a utility to handle internally.

Prospective members work with a CRC regional business manager to determine which of CRC's services best meet their utilities' needs. Below are case studies from CRC members who utilize CRC for either customer care or overflow call handling services.

### Customer Care Services Case Study: First Electric Cooperative Corporation

Based in Jacksonville, Arkansas, First Electric Cooperative Corporation joined CRC's membership in 2006 subscribing to customer care services. The electric cooperative, which serves over 94,000 meters, decided to join CRC to offer callers support in times of need.

“The relationship with CRC and First Electric Cooperative was a good fit for our members,” explained Ashley Garringer, vice president of administration at First Electric Cooperative. “We saw the need for additional resources during our busy call times. The partnership not only offered the support we needed during those times, but also the convenience for our members to get assistance outside of business hours.”

### Enhancing the Call Handling Process

Prior to joining CRC, First Electric Cooperative members may have experienced long hold times or even busy signals during the day. After-hours calls that were urgent would be answered by dispatchers and non-emergency after-hour calls were directed to call back during business hours.

Since joining CRC, the common protocol for CRC to handle the utility’s calls is as follows:

- Calls received after business hours are answered by CRC.
- CRC is able to assist members with most requests. Those requests that cannot be completed are noted and sent to the utility’s member service department and the caller is contacted the next business day.
- CRC has a direct line to the utility’s 24-hour dispatch in case of emergency situations.
- In addition to after-hours assistance, CRC accepts calls from First Electric Cooperative members when their call volume is extremely high and in the event down time is experienced with their phone provider. If the phone lines are unavailable, all calls are automatically routed to CRC.

### CRC Helps Utilities to Focus on What They Do Best

Like CRC, First Electric Cooperative prides itself on providing service excellence to its consumer base. With CRC, its utility members can rest assured their calls are being handled quickly and efficiently so they can focus on normal business operations.

“Our mission at First Electric is improving quality of life and CRC helps us do just that,” Garringer said. The customer care service allows us to quickly assist our members 24/7. Our contact center has the support from CRC when they need it most and our dispatchers are able to focus on dispatching and do not have to juggle member calls.”

### Overflow Services Case Study: Coweta-Fayette EMC

Coweta-Fayette EMC, an 80,000-meter distribution cooperative headquartered in Palmetto, Georgia, has utilized CRC’s contact center overflow services since 2008. Prior to joining CRC, Coweta-Fayette EMC would occasionally experience longer hold times in its call center, usually the first of the month or during bad weather.

Rick Owens, manager, member services, at Coweta-Fayette EMC, explained long hold times were frustrating to callers as well as to the utility because they wanted to provide the best service possible to its membership.

“Member calls would queue up in our call center creating long hold times and eventually all trunk busy situations would develop where members would receive a fast-busy condition when calling,” he said. “We began reviewing options to provide better service to our members and customers as well as provide a better direction to manage growth.”

### Partnering with CRC

According to Owens, there were several factors that helped Coweta-Fayette EMC decide to

partner with CRC for call handling services.

“The first certainly was the experience in our industry that CRC had – both with the security industry and with electric cooperatives,” he said. “In our review we learned CRC could also post payments for our members as well as outage tickets.”

Coweta-Fayette EMC began its business relationship with CRC by subscribing to its overflow services and added certain customer service features depending on how calls are communicated with the utility.

- If someone wants to report a power outage and they attempt to enter an outage with Coweta-Fayette EMC’s dispatch, the call will be routed to CRC for processing after a defined wait time.
- After-hours and weekend callers who use Coweta-Fayette EMC’s IVR unit for payments or outage issues and need assistance are routed to CRC for processing.
- During normal business hours, Coweta-Fayette EMC’s customer service scripts allow callers who have their account numbers and wish to make a payment to select an option that will route them to CRC.
- When Coweta-Fayette EMC’s private branch exchange (PBX) becomes full due to peak events or weather issues, their network provider routes calls to CRC.

“Communications with CRC is critical during those periods so CRC agents can respond to our customers with current information,” Owens explained. “Using CRC in this fashion has helped us better support our members, have more professional response during crisis situations, and with the inclusion of payment processing, our call center agents are free to help with more complex calls. CRC combined with Coweta-Fayette EMC’s email submission, web-based customer portal, and smart phone application helped develop a contact process that meets the various preferred methods our members and customers want.”

### Less Juggling, Better Service

According to Owens, one of the biggest changes the utility experienced since joining CRC’s services is offering more availability to their consumers, especially with regard to bill payment and outage reporting as well as offering a live-call handling solution.

“After hour and weekend support for these types of calls allows our dispatch to focus on restoration of power and not juggling payment questions or outage tickets,” he said. “We have automated systems that most cooperatives do now, however there are members who prefer speaking with a ‘live’ person and CRC has helped us on that respect.”

### Contact CRC

For more information about services provided by CRC, please contact one of our regional business managers below.



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