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Ulysses Learning VP Discusses Role of Smart Grid and Voice of the Customer

By Juliana Kenny, TMCnet Web Editor

The smart grid is one of the most prominent hot topics these days, so much so that the Smart Grid Summit EXPO East 2011 is sure to demonstrate some pretty ingenious developments for the coming year. The growth of the smart grid has expanded the role of utilities, especially where the customer is concerned.

Dina Vance, senior vice president of Ulysses Learning, recently discussed the role of utilities in terms of the smart grid and customer service in an interview with Rich Tehrani, CEO of TMC. As an organization that helps companies in the energy, telecom, insurance, manufacturing, hospitality and financial services industries improve their customer interactions and relationships, Ulysses Learning provides service mentoring, coaching, and performance leadership skills. Vance noted that the advance of the smart grid is allowing customers to make more informed decisions. Don't miss Vance's session "Voice of the Customer: Are Utilities Listening?" See the full exchange with Tehrani here:

RT: What impact will the continuing trend of rising energy costs have on smart grid in 2011?

DV: *Because of the smart grid, savvy customers have access to more information and are more tuned into energy costs. As such, they have more questions for utilities – and utilities need to be prepared and able to competently, confidently respond to customers, as well as be able to justify the increased cost of services.*

RT: What impact will communications technologies have on smart grid in 2011, and what specific ones will we hear the most about?

DV: *Savvy utility companies will be restructuring their customer service groups to move from customer service generalists to teams that are able to meet the needs and demands of specific groups of customers. These dedicated energy advisors will be able to educate customers as well as answer their questions and ultimately improve the overall customer experience.*

RT: Where are the hot areas where utilities will be investing the most this year?

DV: *Over the past several years, utilities have spent their money on technology and improving their products. Now, it's time for utilities to invest in their people, though customer service training, leadership performance improvement training and coaching to reinforce this training. By investing in their employees and customer service, utilities will be able to meet the needs of their increasingly informed and demanding customers who want the right answers quickly.*

RT: How can a smart grid change the world for the better?

DV: *Smart grids are giving customers more information about the energy they consume and are enabling them to easily make better, more informed decisions, both in terms of consumption and their ability to hold utilities accountable to high standards of service.*

RT: Where do you see the best opportunities for smart grid vendors to partner with vendors from the telecom/IT world?

DV: *As the telecom industry experienced in the 1990s, the utility industry is becoming less reactive and more proactive. Utilities need partners who can help them give their employees the training and skills they need to successfully interact with their customers.*

RT: Why is your session a must-attend at the Smart Grid Summit?

DV: *At this session, attendees will learn about:*

- *The importance of changing the way your customer service agents interact with your customers*
- *How good conversation strategy can improve the customer experience and drive opportunities*
- *The necessity of transforming management from mere supervisors into coaches and true leaders*
- *The changing profile of today's customer, what's driving those changes, how to meet their needs and how to increase customer satisfaction scores*
- *What's worked, what hasn't and why for other utility companies throughout the country*

RT: What new and exciting products/solutions can we expect to see from your company in 2011?

DV: *Ulysses Learning is continuing to offer online, role-playing simulations to improve service, sales and coaching performance. Our contact center-specific training, coaching and leadership performance development continues to help utility companies increase their customers' satisfaction, adoption of Smart Grid technology and overall enhanced experience.*

RT: Please make one surprising smart grid prediction for 2011.

DV: *Because of the changes driven by the smart grid, utilities are become more customer-service driven and will begin making the necessary internal improvements to enable their front line to meet the change voice of the customer.*

Edited by **Juliana Kenny**

*Juliana Kenny graduated from the University of Connecticut with a double degree in English and French. After managing a small company for two years, she joined TMC (**News - Alert**) as a Web Editor for TMCnet. Juliana currently focuses on the call center and CRM industries, but she also writes about cloud telephony and network gear including softswitches.*