

CASE STUDY



# Empowering Co-Op Members

Coast Electric faced significant challenges but received crucial support from Brillion in providing reliable information to members.

## CHALLENGE:

In 2005, just after Hurricane Katrina, Coast Electric experienced one of the most challenging times the co-op has ever faced. “Brillion stepped up for us, ensuring that our members had a reliable, trusted source of information,” recalled April Lollar, Coast Electric’s Director of Communications.

The evolution of home energy efficiency has become increasingly complex over the last 19 years. “We don’t know how many electrical items people have in their homes nowadays because there’s a lot more people could have that we didn’t take into account 20 years ago,” explained Mark Wallace, Director of Energy Management at Coast Electric. Clay Sweet, Director of Member Services, added, “When we get someone on the phone and try to chase all the different elements someone could have in their home, without the right tools, it’s either a frustrating conversation for us and the member, or it’s a long conversation, and neither one are good from a call center standpoint.”



<b>Profile:</b>	<b>Coast Electric</b>
Total Members:	89,000
Location:	Mississippi
Primary objective:	Enhance communication and efficiency in providing members with accurate home energy management information

### BEFORE

- New energy efficiency technology
- Difficult to provide detailed information
- Limited education resources

### AFTER

**+3,000%**  
increase in usage

**Personalized education**

**High satisfaction**  
Resulting in reduced calls

(Continued)

Educating members about their specific energy use has also been a challenge. Wallace's team used to spend time proactively reviewing accounts to look at differences in use. With 89,000 meters in their service territory, it was hard to catch every change and communicate with members before they received a high bill.

On the programs side, Wallace said that the challenge is advertising the programs because there's so many areas to get news now. "It's hard to be everywhere," he said. Sweet added from an energy efficiency standpoint, members who most need what Coast Electric is trying to provide might not be able to make all the recommended upgrades and changes for a variety of reasons.

## SOLUTION:

**Coast Electric has embraced innovative solutions to enhance member engagement and understanding of their energy usage. Lollar emphasized the standout feature of Brillion products: their customization, which allows members to access detailed information about their bills and make informed decisions about their energy consumption.**



▲ *Personalized video bill explanations for households*



The most impressive thing about Brillion products is the customization."

**APRIL LOLLAR,  
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS**

"The most impressive thing about Brillion products is the customization," Lollar explained. "Our bills are bundled, so when members receive a paper bill, they don't get a full break down of all the compartments of their bill. On our website, members can see all of the parts that make up their bill. These interactive calculators were originally created by Brillion," said Lollar.

Coast Electric have since added more Brillion Educate and Engage products such as mid-cycle alerts, video bill explanations, and home energy advisor. Lollar explained that the mid-cycle alerts are a great proactive tool to help their members before they receive a high bill. "It gives us the piece that was more difficult to get before. It helps us talk to members about their use before it's too late. Having something proactive that gives people a nudge letting them know what their bill is on track to be helps reiterate existing messaging and give them more tools to make a change," she said.

Lollar has also noticed more and more people seeking out energy efficiency education over the last few years. "They're really craving that, especially those individualized pieces that we can offer them now that are about their own home," she shared.



## Education Boosts Satisfaction

Coast Electric takes pride in utilizing programs that reinforce co-op principles like member education. It's very important to them to educate their members on understanding their bills and use, what they have control over, and what they can do about it. "The more we educate our members about their energy use, the more empowered they become," said Lollar. She said that the people who realize they're not just customers but also members and owners consistently show higher levels of satisfaction. She continued, "Anytime we poll our members, the more they know about energy efficiency, the more information we can give them, the more empowered they feel and the happier they are. It helps when they know more about their bill and what they can do to control their costs." Sweet shared that their American Customer Satisfaction scores have stayed at 88 despite starting a new broadband subsidiary and member service reps taking on new responsibilities for not only co-op members but high-speed internet subscribers.



## Personalized Communication Builds Trust

"People really like the fact that they can look at a mid-cycle alert and know that is information about their home. That has made a really big difference," said Lollar. They pride themselves on the trust they've built with their community. "Educating members on their energy use with their specific data and not general explanations helps create trust," said Wallace. He added, "People trust us because we put a human touch that goes beyond just paying bills." Providing actionable solutions with personalized communication builds trust because their members feel heard. Since implementing Brillion Educate and Engage, Coast Electric has seen a monthly usage increase on the DIY home energy audit by almost 3000%. "The Brillion emails have really good open rates, read rates, and click through rates, especially if we're able to target," said Lollar. "As far as Brillion emails go, I really think people like seeing the personalized data."



## More Participation, Less Complaints

"There's no doubt that high participation in programs leads to less member complaints," said Sweet. "Brillion Educate and Engage have reduced the number of calls going to our call center. Providing information on our website, so members don't have to call or wait for a home visit, make our operations more efficient," Wallace added. The mid-cycle alerts and video bill explanations further decrease the need for calls because important information is sent directly to members. Brillion's video bill survey results show that 95% of Coast Electric members say they don't feel the need to call the call center.



#### ABOUT COAST ELECTRIC

Coast Electric, headquartered in Kiln, Mississippi, provides reliable, affordable electric service to three counties in Mississippi. Formed in 1937 by members of the community, they are a not-forprofit that provides power to more than 89,000 homes and businesses.

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