

Improving Customer Service with BPL

How enterprise-wide integrated networks enable a utility to seamlessly monitor, know and act with the utmost control.

Broad River Electric Cooperative, South Carolina





Speed. Service. Simplicity. Scalability.

Powerline LV delivers high-powered benefits.

Broad River Electric Cooperative thrives on opportunity. The South Carolina co-op was the first to have a bucket truck and to use power lines to get AMR readings back to substations. "We are not afraid of change," says their President, Richard Baines, which is why the company continually seeks innovative ways to improve service to 20,000 customers, many of them rural residents.

How Broad River and their transmission cooperative, New Horizon Electric, approached Broadband Over Powerline (BPL) is a lesson in listening to customers, taking the initiative and partnering together.

Critical issue

Increasingly, customers were inquiring about alternatives to dial-up. Doug Wilson, Broad River's Manager of Operations explains, "Many people are moving from urban to rural areas and they want to keep the same level services that they are accustomed to. They have electricity, but they don't have high-speed Internet. BPL gives us the opportunity to provide another positive service to our customer base."

Customer surveys conducted by New Horizon confirmed the need for speed and a strong interest in BPL. The co-op communicates with its customers regularly and receives very high marks for service and satisfaction. "Our customers tell us they want broadband service from a provider they like and trust," says New Horizon's Vice President, Michael Varner. "Improving service is our priority and BPL can help us do that. It is a vital area for growth."

"It all boils down to customer satisfaction, reliability and top-notch technology."

- DOUG WILSON, MANAGER OF OPERATIONS, BROAD RIVER ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

“The numbers were not adding up from the financial side with medium voltage.”

– W.B. COOK, MANAGER OF ADMINISTRATION, BROAD RIVER ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

The lowdown on wireless to low voltage

- Lower cost and lower initial investment
- Easy to install by a lineman
- Completely scalable – deploy as you grow subscribers
- Significantly improves your worker’s safety
- Reduces interference
- Decreases the possibility of electricity disruption to homes

Partnered solution

Initially New Horizon approached Broad River about testing a medium voltage product, but the experiment failed. Doug Wilson recalls, “The medium voltage project was unsuccessful. There were too many obstacles – including interference from existing powerline devices to the signal.” Besides compromising the grid and power reliability, medium voltage BPL can also require specialized personnel and significant costs to install.

Then, New Horizon learned about the Motorola Powerline LV Solution, the first wireless to low voltage BPL solution of its kind. Powerline LV is built on Motorola’s world-class Canopy™ Broadband Internet Platform, operating at over 15,000 sites worldwide. “When we heard it utilized Canopy as the point of injection, we felt extremely confident about the solution,” adds Wilson of Broad River.

From broadband to backhaul, Canopy offers impressive opportunities and reliable ROI for utilities. Richard Baines of Broad River points out that another co-op, Palmetto Electric, is using the wireless platform for SCADA and AMR with great success. “We are very excited about the Canopy system Palmetto has. Not only does it open the door to broadband, but gives us many other opportunities, such as replacing the frame relay for our substations which are T1 lines.”

Outcome

Enthusiasm for Powerline LV is high following its roll-out in May 2005.

“The ease-of-installation is one of the main benefits. So is improving customer service and future applications,” says Richard Baines.

While speed and service are most attractive, the company extols Powerline LV’s other advantages: easy installation at the pole by a lineman; plug-and-play simplicity for the consumer; true scalability, flexible migration and low capital investment for the utility.

Not only has Motorola Powerline LV generated a buzz with consumers, it’s being closely watched by colleagues. “We have 20 co-ops that are expecting to hear from us soon,” says Baines of the roll-out, “They are really excited about it, too.”

Both companies believe Motorola’s approach is instrumental to success. “Motorola is a great partner for utilities because they understand us and act in a very controlled and risk-free manner,” says Michael Varner. “It’s given us the confidence to move ahead with BPL. If the solution wasn’t coming from Motorola, we wouldn’t have pursued it.”

Historically the challenges of deploying a commercially viable system have proven to be significant.

“We trust them to do it right,” emphasizes W.B.Cook, Manager of Administration at Broad River. “Motorola really works to solve problems and we look at them as a true partner.”



Today’s utilities are looking for partners with the strategy and the resources to integrate systems, processes and people for improved safety, reliability, customer satisfaction and productivity. When seamless information flow is the issue, Motorola is the partner utilities turn to for helpful dialogue: We listen, we learn about application needs, then we help provide utilities with a strategy enabling them to monitor, know and act with the utmost control.

Providing leadership in Enterprise communications for more than 65 years

In today's world, you need a partner who understands the potential that interoperable communications systems can bring to your enterprise. Our experience along with our skills, people, partnerships and alliances, allow us to build innovative, fully integrated technologies that help organizations like yours share vital information with ease and confidence. We've been doing it for 65 years, and we'll be standing by our customers for years to come.

We are committed to bringing all our knowledge and technical expertise together so you can focus on what your organization does best.



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