CUSTOMER SUCCESS | SOFTWARE

Customer portal

SENSUS
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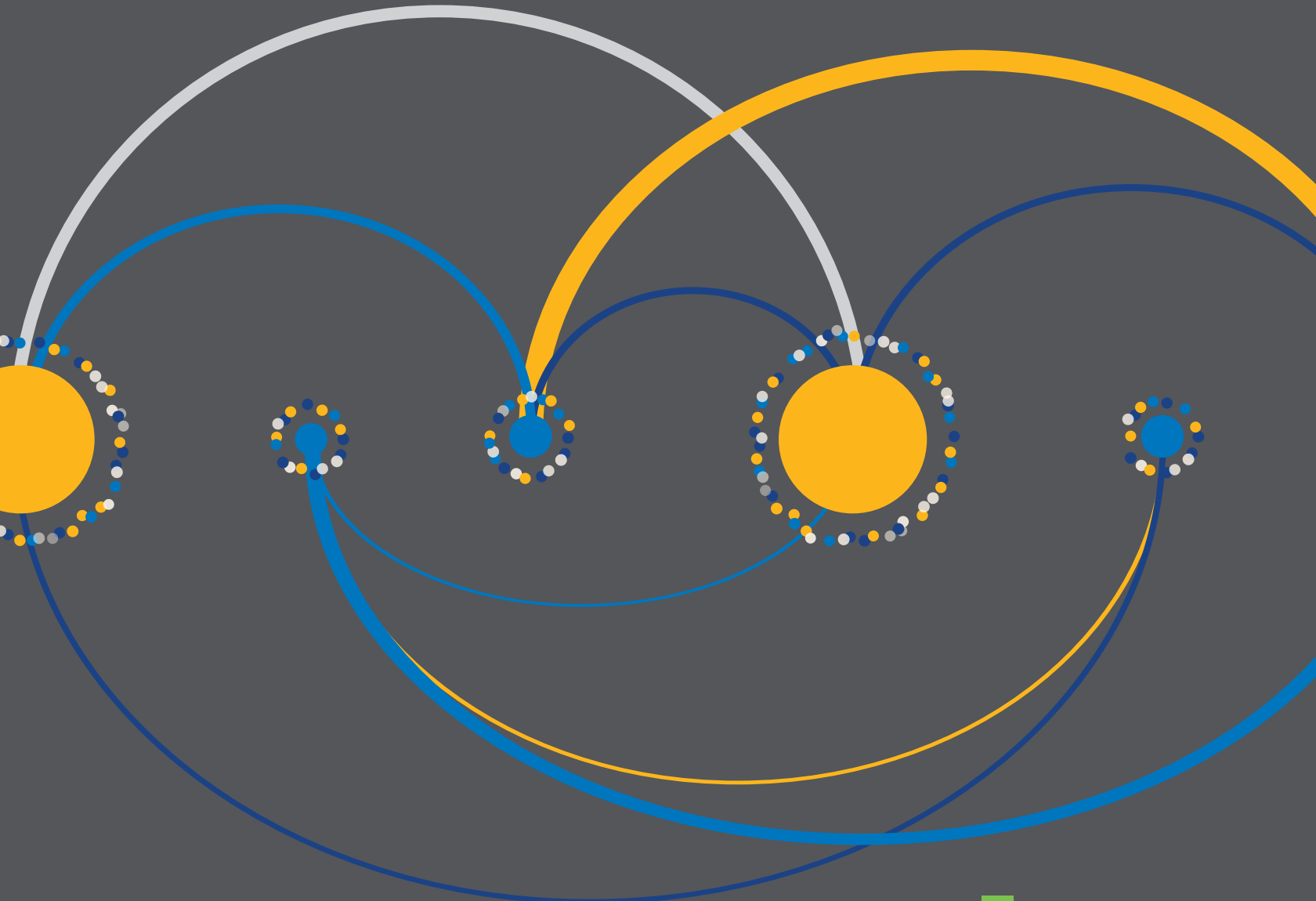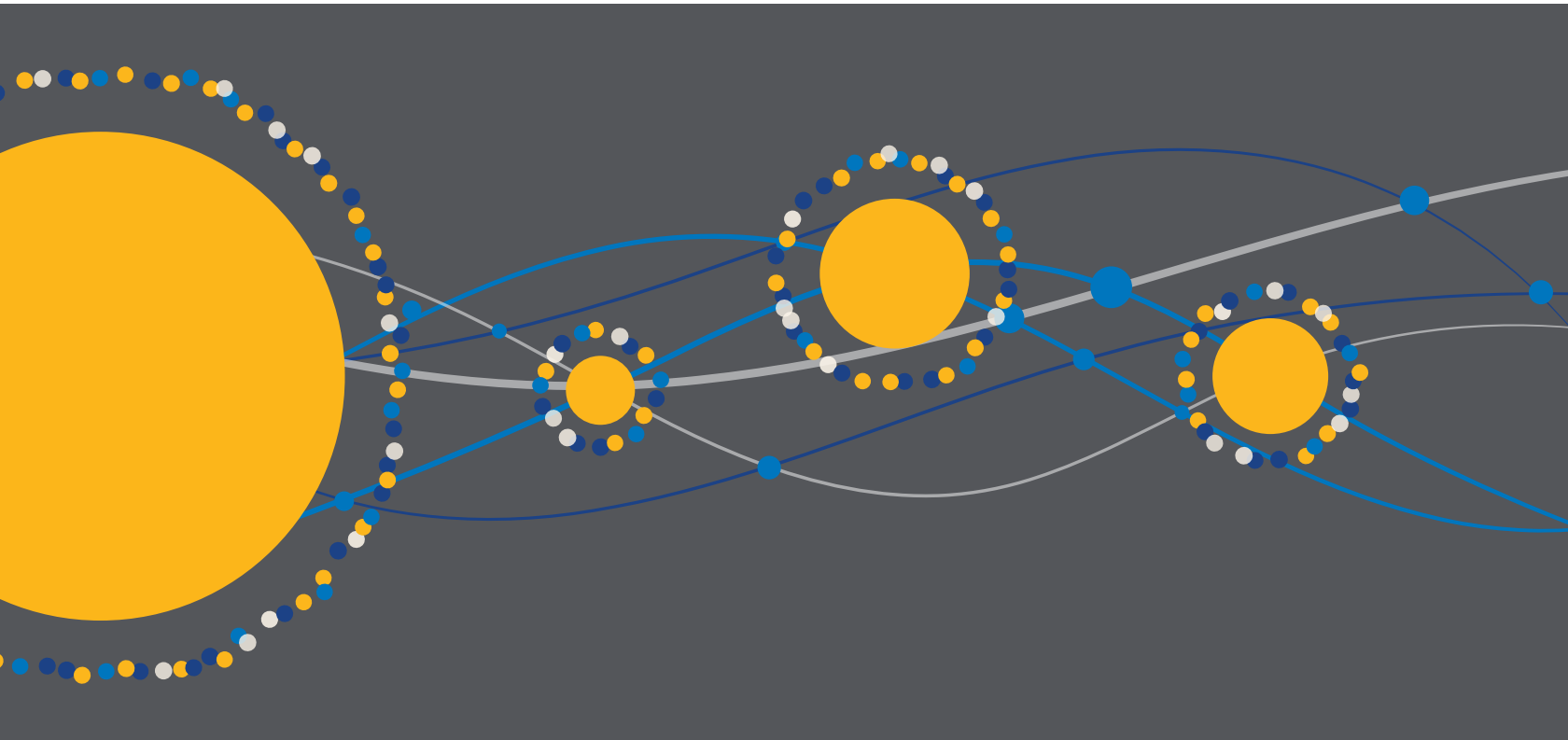
Twenty-first century consumers want control. They want easy,
digital access to product and service information. And they want
to be empowered to make immediate decisions that affect them without sitting on hold or
battling language barriers. In many cases,
"customer service" has become "customer self-service"—and that's
just the way we like it.

In the e-commerce space, Amazon is a household name because customers can shop, order,
track and return online with no hassles. And although "hassle-free" doesn't exactly describe most
cellphone carriers, users can still go online to monitor device usage and even cut off data when a
family member has been monopolizing it (think teenager). Within medical practices and hospital
groups, patient portals are becoming the norm, allowing healthcare consumers to access records,
pay bills and communicate with their doctors. Across the board today, industry leaders have risen
to the top because they know the key to success: **Customer experience matters**.

> *"A customer portal provides virtually everything a customer needs to correct current issues and make more informed decisions about future usage."*

RYAN ROBERTS
Software product manager
Sensus

Engaging the utility customer

Natural resources are among the few remaining products that customers pay for after consumption. Couple that with a regulated environment, and some may say the utilities industry doesn't need to be as concerned about customer experience. But this is not the case. Regardless of industry, customer satisfaction is king and impacts the reputation—and ultimate success—of any company. Even when a utility is the only game in town, the relationship they create with customers is reflected in the way the entire community is perceived by commercial businesses, residents and visitors.

According to Ryan Roberts, software product manager at Sensus, "Implementing a customer engagement strategy is now a major goal of many utility CEOs. Whether it's for reducing churn in competitive markets, increasing customer satisfaction in regulated markets or meeting new conservation regulations, utilities need to enable customers to make informed decisions."

The key is to put account management at the fingertips of the utility's customers—the end users. This requires having sorted, actionable data. And the key to actionable data is analytics software.

"Once the raw data is collected via a robust and reliable smart communications network, it has to be organized for the respective utility departments," Roberts says. "And when that data is further sorted for use by the end user (the consumers), they no longer feel like they're being held hostage by the utility. They feel in control of their accounts."

## A portal to customer satisfaction

So how can utilities empower consumers with the service they want? "A customer portal provides virtually everything a customer needs to correct current issues and make more informed decisions about future usage," Roberts explains. "This interactive web-based application creates easy-to-read usage charts, graphs, usage alerts, tips and more to put relevant data at customers' fingertips."

For this customer engagement approach to be successful, the utility must be able to customize the portal to highlight useful information, and customers need 24/7 access. When this is done right, utilities can reduce call volumes and provide greater customer control over water and energy use. Roberts adds, "When people gain awareness and control, they not only reduce usage and lower expenses, they become happier customers."

> *"The most important factor is the timeliness of data. Customers want data access hourly. They don't want yesterday's data today."*

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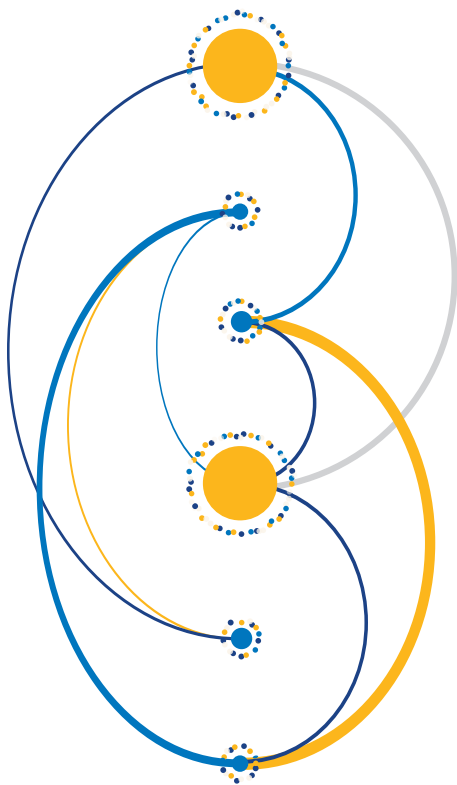
A customer portal provides value to the utility and the consumer while unifying the two through improved communication.

FOR THE UTILITY
- Provides a huge asset for the customer service department.
- Improves billing and usage relationships.
- Decreases customer calls and high bill complaints.
- Enables utility to be proactive, initiating alerts and calls to consumers about unusual use.
- Allows customization and manageability without a web developer needed.

FOR CONSUMERS
- Provides alarms and problem notifications to prevent or minimize a disaster.
- Decreases the need to call customer service.
- Allows for usage assessment and control.
- Helps keep bills low through usage alert settings and targets—preventing billing surprises.
- Allows for remote monitoring of rental and vacation properties.
- Provides peer comparisons to better gauge normal usage.

Choosing the best portal

The potential benefits made possible by a customer portal depend on the actual product—and there are many options in the marketplace today. "The most important factor," Roberts says, "is the timeliness of data. It must be available quickly and frequently. Customers want data access hourly. They don't want yesterday's data today."

Another aspect to success is data resolution, or accuracy. The actionable information is only as good as the data being delivered to the consumer. Moreover, the data dashboard must be customizable to meet the specific needs and purposes of the utility customer.

"Immediate and direct alarm notifications not only prevent would-be crises, but they go a long way to building trust between the utility and consumers," Roberts says. "And when there are issues that impact a particular area within the utility coverage, the portal allows for zone notifications to create segmented and targeted communication."

Rolling out the customer red carpet

When a utility chooses to activate a customer portal, it's vital to effectively communicate to consumers the what, why and how factors in order to maximize usage. According to Roberts, there are definitely "best practices" for implementing a customer portal. "Just as the tool (portal) itself establishes a means for efficient communication, a utility must create a definitive plan to inform customers about the portal, when it's being launched and how it can be optimized."

In today's technology-driven, self-serve world, it's actually pretty easy to get people excited about another cool "customer self-service" gadget— especially one with money-saving potential. And when that mindset is coupled with the cultural focus on environmental sustainability, a customer portal becomes even more attractive.

"A customer portal is a great way to take the action-ready data provided to the utility by way of analytics and make it consumer-friendly and actionable on their level as well," Roberts says. "It's a win-win situation for everyone."

Create a portal roll-out plan.

MEMORABLE URL	BILL INSERT/ MAILER	SIGN-UPS AT COMMUNITY EVENTS	MEDIA COVERAGE

SOCIAL MEDIA	DOOR HANGERS	EMAIL CAMPAIGN	VIDEO

About Sensus

Sensus, a Xylem brand, helps a wide range of public service providers—from utilities to cities to industrial complexes and campuses—do more with their infrastructure to improve quality of life in their communities. We enable our customers to reach farther through the application of technology and data-driven insights that deliver efficiency and responsiveness. We partner with them to anticipate and respond to evolving business needs with innovation in sensing and communications technologies, data analytics and services. Learn more at sensus.com and follow us on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter through @sensusglobal.

Sensus by the numbers

175+ Years Serving Utilities

14K Customers

3,200 Colleagues

45M SmartPoints
795M Messages/Day

88M Meters

986 SaaS Customers

Meters
4% Lighting
36% Water
10% Gas
50% Electric

654 Patents Granted

290 Patents Pending

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