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How Ambit Energy is using data analytics to deliver business value

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Introduction

Ambit Energy (Ambit) is a retail energy provider launched in 2006 that now serves more than one million customers. With 2013 revenues of $1.2 billion, the exponential growth rate Ambit has experienced since its inception is largely attributed to the company's multilevel marketing business model, which is discussed in the Q&A format throughout this paper. Ambit Energy was recently ranked #12 in Direct Selling News Global 100: The Top Direct Selling Companies in the World listing; an impressive improvement from #14 in 2013.

Particularly impressive is that Ambit Energy's growth has come within the retail energy market. The market is one in which competition is fierce, and is characterized by a significant level of customer churn. Therefore to sustain and grow its customer base, it has been imperative that Ambit find innovative ways to set its brand apart and deliver a unique customer experience. It's a strategy the company has advocated from its outset.

Today, data, and the effective use of technology, feature prominently in Ambit's business strategy and decision-making processes. In many respects, the effective use of data is one of the primary ways that Ambit has and will likely continue to distinguish itself from its competitors. The company treats data as a strategic asset: a data-driven approach touches every aspect of how Ambit manages its business operations and customer relationships. Data informs and is at the core of new product development and initiatives to transform business processes and enhance the customer experience.

Call the emphasis on data at Ambit Energy an expanding trend. Data analytics now permeate the entire utility industry value chain. According to survey results in the Utility Analytics Institute's 2014 Customer Analytics Report, 84% of utilities reported having a customer analytics initiative in place, and 79% expect to increase spending for customer analytics in the next one to two years. Even so, data's value is dependent on action. A recent Harvard Business Journal article stated:

> *"Better data-driven analyses aren't simply 'plugged-in' to existing processes and reviews, they're used to invest and encourage different kinds of conversations and interactions."*

Two members of Ambit Energy's leadership team talk about the company's effective use of data to deliver business value. Gene Luster is Ambit's Senior Customer Experience Technologist, and Will Huffman is Director of customer experience. Read what they have to say.

Q&A with Ambit Energy Leaders

Background

Q: *Tell me about yourself.*

Gene Luster: I've been in IT most of my career. I started my own business at 21 and grew that business from two employees to around 35. I joined Ambit Energy about four years ago as a consultant and led an initiative to select a new phone system and Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system. Ambit's CIO John Burke came to me and said, "Since you selected it, now you get to make it work." I became the subject matter expert on both systems and now lead Ambit's customer experience technical group. Prior to joining Ambit, I earned a master's degree in cultural anthropology and tend to look at the world through an anthropological lens.

Will Huffman: I lead Ambit's customer experience group and focus on discovering small incremental wins to improve the customer experience. I manage Ambit's voice of the customer (VOC) and voice of the employee (VOE) programs. Championing the customer across the organization is my team's mission. Prior to joining Ambit, I was at First Choice Power, where I was responsible for customer retention and renewals and ultimately assumed a more holistic customer experience role. Earlier in my career, I ran customer loyalty programs at Epsilon and BenefitMall.

Q: *Describe Ambit's business model.*

Luster: Ambit's business model is founded on multilevel marketing. A large independent salesforce (consultants) has enabled us to grow at a phenomenal rate. We offer consultants the opportunity to run their own company and sell Ambit's products. Customers are willing to make the switch from an incumbent utility company that up until recently has not focused intensely on customer service in general. Our consultants answer customer questions and act as their advocate if an issue does arise.

Consultants are incented to acquire new customers, and receive residual income as long as the customer is retained. Incentives promote the longevity of the customer's relationship.

Ambit is also unique in that core systems are homegrown. We custom tailor our systems for each market versus customizing off-the-shelf systems. Our business depends on the flexibility that we have built into our systems.

Huffman: Our consultants are customer advocates that market on our behalf because Ambit provides them an opportunity to achieve financial freedom. Many energy retailers spend a couple of hundred dollars to acquire a customer. That is not necessarily the case at Ambit. We pay out the cost-per-acquisition over the long term. We invest heavily in our consultant channel and desire to compensate consultants fairly for the revenues they generate. We continually search for better customer communications, tools, and services in order to enhance the customer experience, improve customer retention, and maximize residual income for our consultants.

Ambit's model creates multiple layers of engagement with the customer and the brand and a mutually beneficial relationship with consultants. It is fantastic because everyone is invested in the brand and customer satisfaction. ***It is the ultimate customer engagement model.***

Ambit prefers to build systems to our specifications versus permitting an off-the-shelf product to define our business processes. We don't want an off-the-shelf customer relationship management (CRM) tool to dictate our customer contact strategy, call center screens, or case management approach.

Data analytics: what it is, what's important, and capturing the value

Q: *What is your definition of data analytics?*

Luster: Data analytics is turning data into actionable business intelligence. It involves using both specific and aggregated data in a way that makes sense contextually for the business. Good data modeling considers the consumers of the data. For example, when it comes to third party verification:

- Customer Service wants to know the number of customers verified via the IVR versus a live person
- The Enrollment Group wants the raw number of people verified
- Developers want analytics related to paths the customer takes in the system
- Marketing wants to know our success rate

> Data analytics is turning data into actionable business intelligence. It involves using both specific and aggregated data in a way that makes sense contextually for the business.

Huffman: Data analytics is using data to:

- Ask questions
- Solve problems
- Develop products and services

Companies often use analytics teams in a reactive fashion. For example, they determine the risk associated with a billing or payment issue. I prefer to use analytics proactively to look into the future and determine how to solve X or Y. Good analytics resources are more than data aggregators and reporters. They can build insights into your business and develop hypotheses that can be validated with customers. Once you have a good analytics team, you never want to let them go. Individuals able to use analytics tools and make data relevant to the business are worth their weight in gold.

Over time, the value that an organization extracts from its analytics initiative increases as its analytics maturity level grows. And the data is cleaner and easier to use – there is a concurrent path toward the construct of good usable analytics data that does not get polluted at a later time – securing data continuity and consistency. Once clean, keep it clean.

Figure 1: The Analytics Value Curve

Today, many utilities moving along **foundational phase** of value curve

In the coming years, utilities will move aggressively into **advanced phase** of value curve

4 BI
Dashboards, dynamic data use, answers "what happened?" but more intuitive

2 Data fortress Data stored, secured and available

3 Basic reporting
Answer "what happened?" not intuitive, limited presentation

1 OMG!
Geez we have a lot of data!

6 Execution
Leveraging real and near real-time data

7 Business transformation
Business process change initiated by analytics-derived information

5 Predictive
Modeling and planning based on historic data

Value (y-axis) / Time (x-axis)

Source: Utility Analytics Institute

Q: *How do you know what information is most important?*

Luster: Ask, and don't assume. It's that simple. You always have to consider that the person you are asking may not know what they want or may not understand where the project will end up. I prefer an iterative design approach based on providing incremental features and improvements based on the users input. This approach allows for a   product that can be delivered much more quickly to the end user and avoids resources wasted on features or that the user didn't want or that don't operate as intended.

Huffman: Anytime the customer tells me anything, it's important. When it comes to our VOC program, I want to understand the customer sentiment. I want to identify specific data attributes of customers with less than a positive sentiment and determine their profile. Then, I want to identify attributes contributing to a highly positive sentiment customer and profile them. I look for a way to bridge the gap and turn a negative sentiment customer from a detractor into a promoter. That's what the customer experience is all about, and higher customer sentiment scores typically correlate to lower customer attrition.

Q: *What's necessary to insure that data is actionable, learnable, changeable (based upon lessons learned), sustainable and impactful?*

Luster: It requires the ability to look back and formalize the learning process. To me, the iterative development approach is the way to accomplish that. Reflection and reassessment must be built into the program for all projects. If we deliver a solution that does not work, we need to fix it rather than move onto the next project which is typically what happens in most organizations. That's why Ambit switched from a waterfall methodology where the user was asked to come up with a fairly complete list of requirements that would often change during the development process and lead to very long delivery times, to a current Agile methodology where features and improvements are delivered quickly, allowing the users to make changes that are much less disruptive to the process This results in iterative releases which result in a much better job of leveraging our data assets and team resources.

> If you don't use customer feedback data to drive change, you are doing yourself and your company a disservice.

Huffman: My biggest professional pet peeve is surveying for the sake of surveying. If you don't use customer feedback data to drive change, you are doing yourself and your company a disservice. When we get data from our customers or when we get sentiment or quantitative or qualitative responses, we digest the data and use it to prioritize projects, fixes, or enhancements. If you are the receiver of customer feedback and you don't scream it as loud as possible to the entire organization, something is wrong. When I give presentations about how to create actionable VOC programs, I always tell colleagues to use a LOUD voice!

Data, a strategic asset

Q: *Please describe why Ambit considers data to be a strategic asset.*

Luster: Although Ambit is a retail energy provider, it has always considered itself a data processing company. Data is what we know about our customers and the markets we serve. We must know who to bill, how to bill — and do so accurately — and then handle customer inquiries effectively. Data is central to maintaining strong customer relationships.

From a service standpoint, we strive to make data accessible to end users internally. Data must be accurate and representative of reality because it guides decisions throughout the company. We are working hard to ensure that: 1) we consume the data properly, 2) our systems refer back to a single source of trusted data for balances, payments, and similar details so that customers receive consistent information across channels, 3) we use the right algorithms to present the data contextually, and 4) we trigger the appropriate response.

We have an initiative underway to combine transactional data from our Interactive Intelligence phone system with our CRM data that's customer-centric. Combining this data will enable us to answer questions like "How many times did a customer from a specific segment call last year?" The ability to take the native data from the Interactive Intelligence

platform and understand how a transaction or phone call was resolved perhaps by market, by product, or by customer will be invaluable.

Ultimately, the secret to business success is to do what you say you are going to do in the timeframe and for the price that you promise. Your data is what will enable you to fulfill that promise.

Huffman: Ambit operates in more than 55 markets, manages relationships with a million plus customers, interacts with multiple utilities, and pushes and receives data through multiple electronic data interchange channels. Data is a strategically important asset, and the premise of "let's get it right" is echoed throughout the organization. Given the potential for negative impacts on customers, consultants, service channels, and business operations, our data must be spot on, and our data processes must work correctly. Therefore, we pay a lot of attention to our data and have some phenomenal architects that insure data integrity.

At the corporate level, we're implementing a new platform that will provide better visualization of key metrics. Users will be able to filter the data on predefined, organizationally approved criteria that will tell a consistent story. I used this platform previously, and it was powerful. When compared to traditional reporting, and depending on someone else to produce an ad hoc report, the ability for business users to slice and dice the data makes data much more prominent in decision-making. Users will realize benefits much faster.

It is important to understand what data is available, the strategic value of that data asset to you and most importantly to your customer, and to leverage that data to build customer loyalty and engagement.

## Technology questions for Gene Luster

Q: *Ambit has made significant investments in data and technology. Describe one of these initiatives.*

The implementation of the Interactive Intelligence communications platform was huge for us. Prior to that, Ambit relied on a proprietary phone system and had little visibility into what was happening outside of canned reports. There was no integration whatsoever between our phone system and CRM system. We selected Interactive Intelligence because their platform is developed on open standards and runs on non-proprietary hardware. Access to the platform's standard SQL databases permits us to do a high level of customization. We did not want to be dependent on outside consultants to build out the capabilities we envisioned. We wanted to do our own customization, and Interactive met our requirements.

The result has been improved visibility and efficiency, and substantial customer experience benefits. If customers encounter long hold times or if a problem arises in the call experience for the customer, we are able to quickly identify the customers impacted and take appropriate action.

Using the software development kit provided by Interactive Intelligence, we were able to develop a custom application that we call the BNClient that presents all of the applications an agent uses as well as call control into a single user interface. Prior to using BNClient, our agents managed 15 to 20 different windows, making it difficult to stay focused on the relevant CRM and call detail information for the customer on the phone. The need for an interface that would pull these applications together on a single screen was abundantly clear. Now, all the different applications appear as tabs across the bottom of the agent's screen and agents switch between them easily while they're on a customer call. Also using computer telephony integration (CTI), the screen pops to the customer's account when the agent answers the customer's call. The phone control client, previously a separate application, is shown at the top of the agent's screen.

Figure 2: Improving efficiency, agent performance and a customer's experience with the Ambit Energy BlueNet client
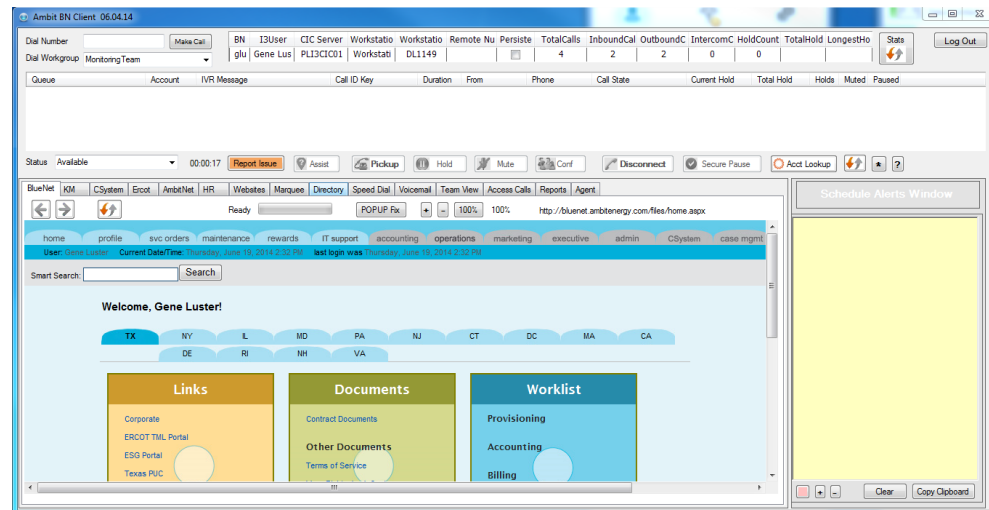
Q: *Are there other examples you could share?*

Yes, there are. We are in the process of implementing our plan to launch some other significant solutions aimed at improving a customer's service experience. For instance:

- A customer preference center that will capture and make accessible the primary and secondary channel preferences of each customer by communication type.
- New customer channels for social media, chat, and email, all integrated via the Interactive Intelligence platform's native multichannel capabilities.
- A marketing automation system that will act as the gateway for customer communications across channels, and enable Ambit's marketing teams to set up campaigns and automate customer communications throughout the customer life cycle.

Q: *Describe your technology development approach.*

When I design systems and software, I typically take a small group of agents or end users, and they feed me the features they'd like to see based on their experience. Using that input, I then develop a small prototype and solicit feedback, at which point end users test the functionality and inform the design. The turnaround is often the same day.

Within this approach, I engage a beta tester who understands the risks and how to manage them, enabling us to avoid some formal quality assurance processes. Using a "report issue button" that we developed, the beta tester triggers an email containing screen shots, stack traces and other technical details I need to effectively troubleshoot issues.

BNClient is the result of me working closely with agents and supervisors for about a year, observing and asking lots of questions. Agents would ask, "It would be great if we could have this feature and present it this way". We would prototype their idea and allow them to quickly see the results. Often they would say "This is great, but can you also do this" or "Oh, this is not what I want" and the resulting feedback would go right back into development. It was truly an iterative experience for all stakeholders involved.

When a user population is accustomed to having no one listen to them, it's amazing what happens when they're given the opportunity to provide input into a process — and then see their recommended changes implemented in a rapid fashion.

Business Process questions for Gene Luster

Q: *You've described process improvements resulting from Ambit's data and technology investments. Are there other examples?*

Yes, more than a few come to mind.

- We recently made a change to our CRM that knocked one minute off of every call! Previously, our CRM attempted to load all the data that agents need simultaneously. We now first load the data that the agents need first. This asynchronous approach enables the agent to immediately verify certain information while the other data continues to load. If you've ever been on a call and had an agent say "my computer is slow," you'll understand.
- Agents can now run a call report and immediately view statistics about their performance — number of inbound calls, outbound calls, hold statics for the day, hold times by customer, on average, or in aggregate. Agents are graded on these metrics. Agents in many call centers receive these metrics in an after report. Our goal is to empower our agents.
- Supervisors can view their team's overall performance and agent-specific performance in real time. They can pull historical information and dig deeper. If an agent has a call on hold for over two minutes, the call turns red on the supervisor's screen. Visual indicators enable supervisors to listen in on calls and coach on the spot, not the next day. If there is a new training group, supervisors unearth problems and take immediate action. One agent handling 80 or 90 calls a day can do a lot of damage if they are not coached and corrected in a timely fashion.

- Complex customer service questions often require research or the involvement of our Care Action Group. It's possible for an agent to forget that a customer is on hold. Based on agent input, we added 1 and 2 minute thresholds to BNClient. After one minute, the entire screen turns yellow (as shown here), and at two minutes it turns red and starts flashing. This not only helped the agent be aware of the customer's experience, but allowed an easy way for supervisors walking the floor to identify long hold times visually.

- With the Interactive Intelligence platform, we can attach any custom attribute that we want to a call. Supervisors can look at an inbound call queue, add a column for account, and based on the customer's phone number, our IVR can identify the customer's account number in real time. If a particular customer has been on hold twice, supervisors can go directly to the customer's CRM page. They can listen to a live call while simultaneously reviewing the account, intervene in the call, or walk over and talk to the agent.

- A "report issue button" makes it easier for agents to provide us with the feedback we need when there is a problem. They note the issue, and an email including a screen shot is automatically generated to the supervisor.

- Web based dashboard views show live data from the Interactive Intelligence system for every queue in customer care — average handle time, calls handled, wait times, service levels. While granular data is great, a holistic view provides actionable information that executives and call center managers use to optimize our call center operations.

- Supervisors and managers are now able to look for anomalies or patterns in the data versus looking at random calls. They can determine if long hold times are related to multiple calls or a few problem calls in particular.

Q: *What future business process transformation opportunities do you envision?*

Luster: The next generation will involve integrating other customer channels and anticipating the reason for the customer's call, and dropping the agent on the appropriate screen (for example, the payment screen) using data analytics. We want to "get predictive" about our customer interactions. My goal is to maximize the potential of my customers — our agents, other employees, and our sales force — by removing roadblocks related to bad data or system issues, and making it easier for them to do their jobs by putting the data they need at their fingertips.

> The ability to put data in the consumer's hands can be extremely powerful.

Huffman: I envision new products and services built around advanced data. For example, Texas customers may have a smart meter product that will provide visibility into their usage, proactive usage threshold alerts, and perhaps prognosticate their next bill based upon past usage patterns. The ability to put data in the consumer's hands can be extremely powerful. If done correctly, data will be a key differentiator for us going forward and can create brand loyalty.
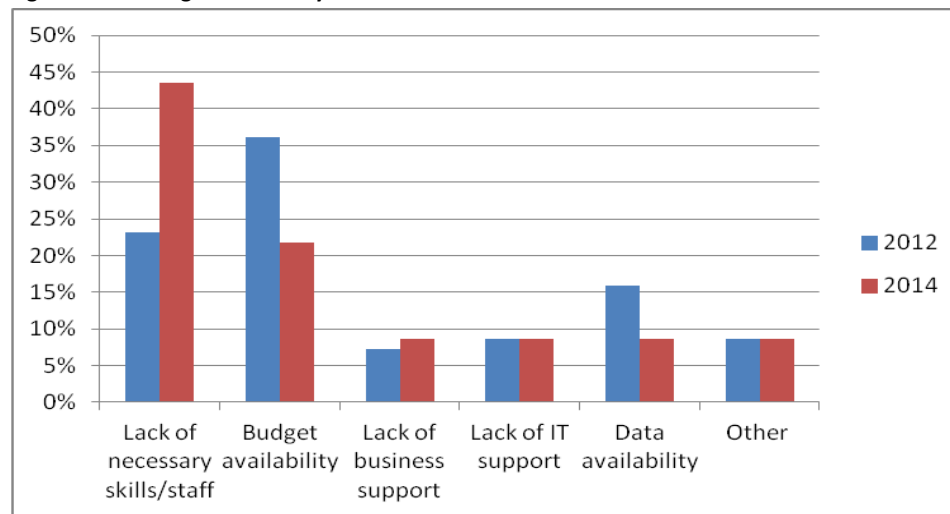
People

Q: *Describe the role that people play in analytics success.*

Luster: People need to feel empowered and that someone is listening. They want to be involved in the process, rather than be directed to an already created process. The latter practice makes people more resistant to change. It's important, then, to give people the chance to shape something new. Users who are engaged in the design upfront will take ownership of the project and, when a skeptic comes along, you don't have to sell it. They will sell it for you.

> *Research conducted by the Utility Analytics Institute shows that the people side of analytics is quickly becoming the primary challenge, and potential impediment, to analytics success.*

Figure 5: Challenges with Analytics Initiatives

Source: 2014 Grid Analytics Report, Utility Analytics Institute.

When BNClient was being rolled out, I found that people sitting in nearby cubicles started saying things like "I want that"; "How do I get that?" It became a kind of whisper campaign. "Oh, you can't have it because we are in a control group." Everyone wanted the shiny new toy. There was no need for me to "sell" the new functionality, as demand for the new functionality was evident.

> Data can be intimidating. It is important to show employees how the data will be used.

Huffman: Ongoing and continuous employee education about what the data means and how to access the data is essential. People tend to be somewhat skittish when it comes to investigating and looking at data unless they have been trained. Data can be intimidating. It is important to show employees how the data will be used. Data is the foundation of new concepts, ideas, policies, and decisions. If employees don't know how to properly access and use the data, or at least how to seek out the resources to get the data for them, then they will not be very effective supporting a position or proposing a new idea. There is power in the data, and decisions are based on it. Ambit Energy is a quick and nimble organization, and it is essential for our employees to be able to use data effectively.

Business Value

Q: *What benefits has Ambit realized from its investments in data and enabling technologies?*
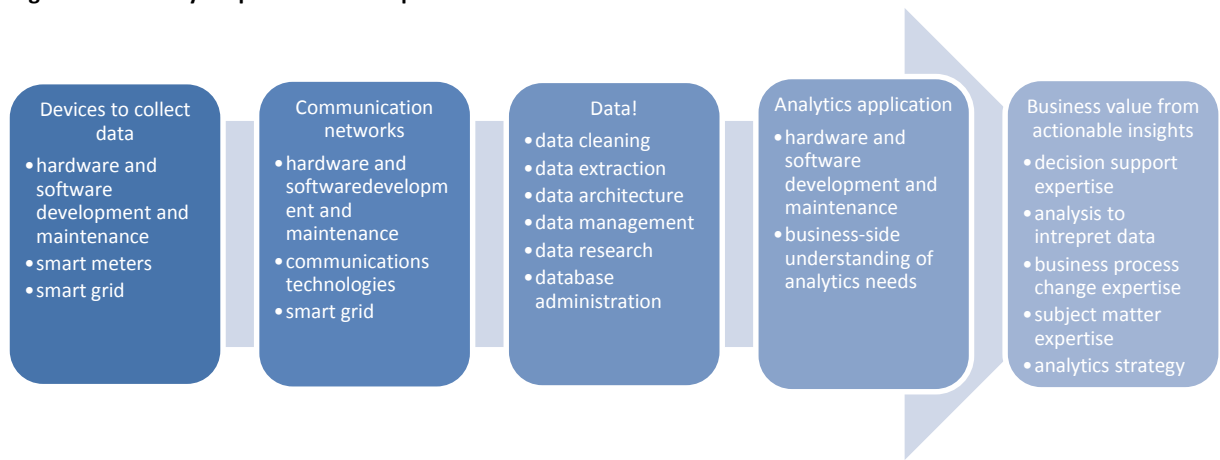
Luster: Our investments in data have produced profound impacts and tremendous value. For example:

- We have better visibility and improved efficiency.
- We are delivering an enhanced customer experience.
- BNClient has made training immensely easier, workstations are pre-configured, and browsers and favorites no longer need to be populated.
- The "report Issue button" has taken iterative design to a whole new level. Today, we have 5 to 10 beta agents and implement bug fixes and new features 3 to 4 times per month.
- As we pointed out earlier, we've validated via our Interactive Intelligence platform that a recent process change to our CRM knocked one minute off of every call!
- Supervisors view their team's performance and agent-specific performance in real time. They are no longer just monitoring accounts, they now understand the context.
- Agents have immediate access to statistics about their own performance.
- More data granularity has improved agent performance evaluations. Easy access to the data is level setting agent and supervisor expectations.
- Also as we pointed out earlier, dashboards show live data from the Interactive Intelligence system for every customer care queue. This comprehensive view provides the actionable information our executives and call center managers need.

Huffman: By building and customizing the BlueNet client together with the ingenuity that Gene applied in order to leverage data from our existing platforms, Ambit has derived a host of benefits:

- Agents have access to the data they need much faster, from training support materials to the websites needed to service customers.
- Average handle time has decreased dramatically.
- Call volumes and hold times have declined substantially.
- Customer issues are being resolved much faster.
- Operational efficiency has improved.
- The system has simplified the process of how agents service customers.
- Reporting and root-cause analysis capabilities are exceptional.
- Most importantly, Ambit is providing consistent and accurate information to our customers and a better overall customer experience.

Figure 6: The analytics process and the path to business value

Devices to collect data	Communication networks	Data!	Analytics application	Business value from actionable insights
• hardware and software development and maintenance • smart meters • smart grid	• hardware and softwaredevelopment and maintenance • communications technologies • smart grid	• data cleaning • data extraction • data architecture • data management • data research • database administration	• hardware and software development and maintenance • business-side understanding of analytics needs	• decision support expertise • analysis to intrepret data • business process change expertise • subject matter expertise • analytics strategy

Source: Utility Analytics Institute

Best practices advice

Q: What advice would you offer to those seeking to extract value from their data?

Luster

- Adopt an iterative design and development process
- Start with a small audience
- Don't roll out new functionality to 100% of the user audience; there will be bugs and if you do that too much, people will lose confidence in the process
- Use prototypes and minimize your risk
- Understand that you will not get it right the first time, and the design may need to be tweaked or changed
- Allow yourself to fail – failure is often the best way to learn
- If an update goes horribly wrong, don't beat yourself up; fix it, and adopt a new approach.
- Make sure you learn from your mistakes
- Involve the end user in the design process
- Shape the product based on user input

While there will be many challenges, people will help you overcome the hurdles if you involve end users and produce a good product.

Huffman:

- Don't be afraid to reaffirm or validate long-standing processes using your data
- If you have done something the same way for a long time based on a hypothesis (Product A works and creates brand loyalty), go back and cross-analyze and challenge the assumption with real data
- Feel free to second guess intuition, and your data will help you do that
- Don't be afraid to ask questions; people often look at data attributes and infer certain meanings; serious consequences can result if you do not look at the data in the right way
- Seek validation and truth with your data
- Spend time with your data, and not only when you need to answer a reactive question or a question about a potential future service

I recommend that you become your data's best friend – take your data to dinner – arrange a "date night" with your data. Constantly recheck and reexamine your data – I cannot stress that strongly enough.

Ambit Energy provides electricity and natural gas services in deregulated markets across the United States, primarily marketed through a direct sales channel of more than 250,000 Independent Consultants.

Based in Dallas, Texas, our company is focused on being the finest and most-respected retail energy provider in America, offering cost-effective choices for today's energy consumer.

In 2010, Ambit was named #1 Fastest-Growing Private Company in America by Inc. magazine, and we continue to pick up steam as the fastest-growing company in the retail energy sector today.
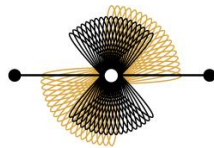
Interactive Intelligence offers utility companies a smarter way to communicate with customers and improve the service experience. To engage customers more fully, we provide a standards-based multichannel platform and integrated applications for the contact center, unified communications, and business process automation. To enhance and ensure customer service levels, our all-in-one platform extends a consolidated view of all customer interactions company-wide. Deployed via the cloud or on-premises, the Interactive Intelligence solution also requires less hardware, less maintenance, and no multi-vendor sourcing. Within the utilities industry, our customer footprint spans the U.S., Canada, Europe, the Middle East, South America, and Asia Pacific.

The Authors

Gene Luster is Customer Experience Senior Technology Consultant for Ambit Energy and has a Master's degree in Applied Anthropology with a focus on business and organizations. Gene's primary role at Ambit Energy is application design and development of customer facing systems by leveraging out of the box problem solving and qualitative research methods. Gene ensures that Ambit Energy focuses on iterative design ensures constant innovation and improvements that keep up with the fast changing landscape of customer centered technology. Prior to working with Ambit Energy, Gene was an independent consultant and CEO and founder of a networking services company.

Will Huffman is the Director of Customer Experience for Ambit Energy, one of the country's largest Retail Energy providers providing service to over 1 million customers across 52 markets. In his role, Will ensures that all customers receive superior customer experiences across all of Ambit's many touch points through the use of Voice of the Customer programs, independent consumer insight research, and various customer engagement and loyalty platforms. Prior to Ambit Energy, Will led customer experience teams with two other retail energy providers, with both yielding significant improvements in independent customer satisfaction studies and customer loyalty. Will graduated from Texas Christian University.

Kim Gaddy is Senior Analyst and Consultant supporting several Utility Analytics Institute and Energy Central initiatives. Kim has more than 20 years of experience in the utilities and telecommunications sectors. She co-leads the Institute's utility industry working groups, develops content for conferences and events, conducts market research, and has authored numerous research reports, case studies, white papers, and online articles. Kim also provides product strategy guidance and advice, supports business development, and is a frequent conference and webinar speaker and moderator. Previously, Kim held the position of senior director, client solutions, at Vertex Business Services where her responsibilities ranged from product strategy to formation and management of strategic partnerships to business development. Earlier in her career, Kim held leadership positions at AT&T in the product management, regulatory affairs, and sales organizations. She holds a BBA from Texas Tech University and an MBA from St. Edward's University.

Mechele Herres is focused on government and utilities vertical markets as a Marketing Solutions manager at Interactive Intelligence, working with customers in those industries to assess Interactive's cloud solutions for the contact center, unified communications, and business process automation. Prior to Interactive Intelligence, Mechele held positions at Columbia Gas, Time Warner Cable Business Class, IBM, and Cardinal Health. Her career has spanned roles in marketing, sales, sales training, and product development and management.