



Case Study: Puget Sound Energy

Communication is Key to Success for Hopkins Ridge Wind Farm Project

To accelerate completion of a major new wind farm project in Washington State, Puget Sound Energy focused on communicating more effectively with stakeholders. PSE used the PIER System as the control center for this initiative to facilitate open, responsive communication with local residents, landowners, and other important stakeholders. The result was a highly successful project that generated early community support and ongoing enthusiasm.



Overview

Customer Profile

Puget Sound Energy is the largest and oldest energy utility in Washington state, primarily serving customers in the vibrant Puget Sound area.

Business Situation

During the construction of a major wind farm project, PSE needed a way to quickly communicate all aspects of the project with local residents and other key stakeholders.

Solution

PSE turned to PIER Systems, Inc. for their PIER System – a web-based control center that allowed PSE to communicate information about the project and coordinate traffic disruptions caused by equipment shipments.

Key Benefits

- Easily accessible website
- Broad communications regarding schedules and impact
- Quick posting of current, vital information
- Timely responses to stakeholder questions
- Successful community relations

Customer Profile

Puget Sound Energy (PSE) is a company committed to a clean, sustainable energy supply. By 2013, their goal is to meet 10% of their customers' energy needs with renewable sources. With this in mind, PSE has added green solutions including wind farms to produce electricity that are both cost-effective and environmentally friendly.

The first of these wind farms, Hopkins Ridge, was built in a remote corner of southeast Washington, near the town of Dayton. With 83 wind turbines producing a total power output of 150MW, this project produces enough electricity to serve over 50,000 homes.

While the wind farm was being constructed on a relatively small number of land parcels, it was still a large-scale project that could potentially have significant impact on the lives of local residents. Projects of this size often create public concern, which can result in time-consuming delays that add expense and potentially threaten of the entire project.

Business Situation

To help ensure project success, Grant Ringel, Director of Communications for PSE, decided on a strategy of proactive stakeholder communication. Instead of trying to maintain a low profile in hopes of avoiding controversy, PSE moved ahead with a plan that some might see as over-communication: an aggressive plan to keep everyone informed with always-current information for every step of the project. "With the Hopkins Ridge Project," noted Grant, "it was our policy to always provide more information than was asked for."

Ringel knew that in order to move ahead with this strategy, he would need to streamline his current communications system and procedures. For a rapidly moving project like Hopkins Ridge, time



was of the essence. He needed a way to quickly create, vet, approve and communicate information that was constantly changing. Some stakeholders would get their information from the website, but others would need to be notified directly of time-sensitive events.

To complicate matters, Ringel and some of the other PSE team members were located in Seattle, while the rest of the team was located hundreds of miles away at the project site. The ability to collaborate in real time was going to be essential, which meant team members would need a way to easily communicate among themselves.

Ringel identified his challenges as the following:

- First, PSE needed a way to directly communicate time-sensitive information to critical stakeholders – the construction schedule, the impact of road closures on local travel and farm machinery, the blasting of explosives, and temporary hunting closures.
- Second, they wanted to post points of general interest as they were occurring: photos, video, news releases, fact sheets, and maps of the project site. This information was of high interest not only to the local community, but also to employees and officials in Seattle and other areas.
- Third, and perhaps most important, they needed a way to immediately respond to questions and concerns from the surrounding community and other interested parties. Since multiple people would be answering these questions, it was critical that each person have full visibility into every previous question and answer.
- Finally, all of these concerns needed to be addressed from a collaborative perspective, allowing all team members to access the system and participate from anywhere. And, as the timeline for this project was fast-approaching, PSE needed a proven solution that could be put into service quickly.

The Communications System

With these challenges in mind, Ringel turned to PIER Systems, Inc. for the PIER System, an integrated control center for managing the entire communications process.

The PIER (Public Information and Emergency Response) System integrates several major elements into an organized and secure web-based system. From anywhere at anytime, PSE communicators are able to draft documents, upload other media, collaborate on key messages, and approve distribution. Information can be posted to the web site with the click of a mouse, and also distributed to select stakeholder groups via email, fax, or even telephone. Inquiries are managed on the system as well, with full visibility into what was asked before, who answered, what they said, and exactly when it happened.



Puget Sound Energy was able to utilize this functionality to communicate the construction of the Hopkins Ridge wind farm with the local farmers, residents, PSE project staff, and government relations departments. Contact management was easy with the PIER System, and PSE could pre-determine which types of contacts received certain types of information. Farmers and local residents received information regarding road and hunting closures. PSE leadership received information regarding the status of the project, from beginning shipments to the completion of important milestones. And finally, government officials could access information when they needed it most.

The PIER System also allowed for quick posting of news releases, maps of the site and surrounding roads, and photos and videos of all aspects of the construction process. On a routine basis there was new, easy-to-access content online, providing local residents with a positive understanding of the Hopkins Ridge project and building PSE's reputation as a good neighbor.

When it came to the critical area of answering questions and concerns from residents and other stakeholders, PIER provided an organized system that allowed PSE to quickly address every inquiry. Each question was logged, time-stamped and most importantly answered within minutes. All of this information could then be used at a later time to create relevant, updated posting that would address the most frequently asked questions.

Within days of the decision to use PIER, PSE's communication control center was ready for use, addressing their need for quick turnaround. Working with PIER Systems, Inc., the PSE public affairs team established a dedicated information portal for the project, www.psehopkinsridge.com. The site was immediately popular and well-received, with over 120,000 visits in the first two months.

Says Ringel, "Without the PIER System we would not have been able to communicate the wide variety of information necessary for the project, nor would we have efficiently and accurately handled the volume of inquiries we received."

Key Benefits

The PIER System was just one part of a comprehensive communications program that included one-on-one meetings with local officials, community forums, and on-site representatives. Throughout the project, the emphasis was on open, timely communication. PIER played a significant role in meeting this objective.

With the help of the PIER System, Puget Sound Energy successfully completed the Hopkins Ridge wind farm project, minimizing potential confusion and public objection while maintaining an aggressive schedule. Perhaps most notably, the commitment to "over communicate" has created lasting community support and goodwill among the residents of Dayton, Washington.

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Additional Information

For more information about Puget Sound Energy and their commitment to renewable sources of energy, visit:

www.pugetsoundenergy.com or www.psehopkinsridge.com