Benefits of Electronic Bill Presentment and Payment (EBPP)

Overview

If your utility is thinking about implementing an electronic billing and payment system, you are not alone. More and more utilities are realizing just how beneficial this solution can be. The industry term for this process is called **Electronic Bill Presentment and Payment** (EBPP). This process is fast becoming a standard on how companies have streamlined and automated the mission-critical billing and payment processes. Not only does EBPP benefit your business, it also offers various benefits to your customers. Take a look at some of the benefits associated with implementing an EBPP system.

Cost Savings for Utility and Customers: Think about how much paper and postage you use each month to send out statements to your customers. Now, think of how much you could save if you could reduce or eliminate these costs. EBPP allows for you to electronically deliver statements, and then for your customers to make payments online. Your utility benefits by reduced paper handling and mailing costs. Customers no longer need to pay for postage, or manually handle payments.

Time Savings for Customers: Studies have shown that customers spend between five and ten minutes to process a paper bill. The customer has to find the bill, open it, write a check, address the envelope, find and attach a stamp, and remember to send the payment. All these steps can be time-consuming, especially in our fast paced world! With EBPP, all these actions can be performed electronically which saves a significant amount of time. Customers can sign up for auto-payment or go online to securely submit online payments.

Increased Customer Satisfaction: Customers appreciate self-service options, including electronic billing and payment methods. With an EBPP option, customers are empowered to view bills and make payments at their convenience, which contributes to their overall satisfaction with your utility. More and more consumers select and expect an electronic option for billing and payments. This is quickly becoming the standard for many billing processes from insurance, loan payments, phone services, and most recurring services.

Electronic statements look exactly like the printed statements: Statements stored in the system are PDF reproductions of the statement normally sent to the customer. This means there is no need for the customer to learn a new billing format. Most businesses have spent a significant amount of time and money insuring statements contain all required data and are easy for the customer to understand. An EBPP system should not force you to throw that investment away

Statements can be stored in an online archive: Statements generated by your bill printer can be uploaded and stored in a PCS database and are retained as long as you like. This insures that customers who want to get information about current or past statements can retrieve them from your system without needing the intervention of a customer service representative. Since the statement is a replica, your customer will have a minimal chance for confusion.

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The delivery of the notice of a statement and payment processes are totally separate: Some EBPP solutions require when the customer enrolls for electronic delivery, they are required to pay electronically. Not so with the PCS solution, some customers may want to be billed electronically, but still pay with traditional payment methods. Others may prefer to be billed electronically and manually pay online, whereas some customers might like to be billed electronically but sign up for a recurring automatic payment.

Customers can also elect to continue receiving their bills via mail but pay electronically using the methods stated above. Of course the customer can choose an all-electronic option. The customer is empowered to choose what works best for them.

How Does the PCS' EBPP Solution Work?
The PCS EBPP solution is not a separate product, but more so an integrated set of services within the *Connect* billing application. These services include:

- *Connect* Customer Service Module
- *Connect* Integrated Messaging (IM)
- *Connect* Database of Statements Module
- The *Online* Customer Web Portal
- The Utility Statement Processor
- Optional Mobile Customer Access (MCA)

The solution is generated by implementing a screen in *Connect* Customer Service where the customer service representative can sign up the customer for an electronic notice to be sent in lieu of a paper statement. As an option, this can be selected through the *Online* customer portal. As the statement file is generated, those customers requesting an electronic notice will have a special code added to their statement record. During this process, an email will also be generated to the customer notifying them a statement has been generated.

When the bill printer sees the special code, the statement will not print, however the bill printer will still generate an identical electronic version of the statement (in PDF format). The electronic copies of statements will be returned to the utility where the statement will be uploaded on the customer's account.

The customer can then view the statement anytime and is available for most browsers. In addition the customer can access payment, statement and usage information via the new PCS Mobile Customer Access (MCA) for smart phones and tablets. As noted above the customer has several methods of payment to select from including traditional walk-in, mail-in payment methods or electronic means such as recurring ACH, credit card, or demand e-check.

The PCS EBPP solution is a low-cost method versus higher cost stand-alone EBPP solutions.

Conclusion:
EBPP benefits both the utility and your customers. In today's tech-savvy age, it is important to keep pace with your customers' expectations for convenient, online billing and payment processes. If you don't have EBPP, it is definitely something you should look into. It's a technology that brings great benefits and potential cost savings to everyone involved.

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