Young Energy powers its customer experience with Omilia's Conversational AI

About Young Energy

Founded in 2005, Young Energy is a family-owned retail electric provider for Texans, by Texans. As a community-focused company, it prides itself on forging direct ties to the community and prioritizes the customer experience. It serves deregulated communities which means that they can choose their electricity provider. So, the need to provide electricity at the right price, with the right service, is critical to win customer loyalty.

paylesspower.com

youngenergytexas.com

Challenge

We had 24/7 availability but very limited self-service functionality or scope to act on customer data.

Young Energy is a technology and cloud-forward company. It is always looking for opportunities to modernize its IT. In 2024, this extended to its Interactive Voice Response (IVR) technology where it identified several areas that could be improved. It had 24/7 availability but very limited self-service functionality and very little scope to use customer data gathered from callers' utterances (what they say they need or want when calling in) or other systems to personalize interactions.

According to Bruce Gilbert, Chief Information and Technology Officer of Young Energy, this self-service functionality is crucial for companies in the utility sector as the business is very seasonal in terms of call volume and they need to respond to extreme weather conditions, and with it, extreme peaks in traffic: "When Texas experiences a blistering heat wave or cold spell, incoming calls spike. We need to service these calls in line with our company ethos and the rules and regulations of the Public Utility Commission" said Gilbert.

"For instance, over the Memorial weekend, temperatures reached the mid-upper 90s, with a Heat index 110. In that sort of Heat index, we're prohibited from disconnecting customers, even if they are overdue with their payments and owe us money. The same applies to freezing winters. So, we needed to find a way to protect customers and let them self-serve without incurring the additional cost of recruiting more call center agents."

Young Energy needed a solution that could enhance the customer experience, improve operational efficiency, reduce call waiting times and costs, as well as ensure their business could effectively scale.

> Like any business, we need to make operational efficiencies, but not at the expense of the customer. Their experience is sacrosanct territory.

Bruce Gilbert
Chief Information and Technology Officer
Young Energy

Solution

We sought interoperability, scalability and autonomy.

To capitalize on these opportunities, Young Energy partnered with Omilia to deploy a fully managed cloud software-as-a-service solution for Conversational Voice in US English and Spanish.

With the increasing adoption of Conversational AI in business and elevated customer expectations, Young Energy decided to commit to a solution that would greet callers with an open question and engage with them in a human-like conversation using Natural Language Understanding (NLU) and speech recognition technologies.

With Omilia, callers can speak freely, in their usual manner, and the AI Virtual Assistant accurately understands and responds as a human would. So, rather than wait in a queue for an agent or click through a frustrating menu, customers can simply say what they need and be routed and served accordingly.

"With so much focus on AI, it became clear that we needed to be an Adopter rather than a Laggard" Gilbert observed. "Today, we're more technologically advanced and poised to reap the benefits. We're primed to scale our customer service without adding headcount."

Young Energy initially deployed Natural Language Call Steering, choosing a use case that would deliver immediate results. Often, customers would press any button in the IVR to circumvent it. The intelligent call steering system now accurately routes customers to the right agent.

Young Energy also had a strong business case for deploying self-service functionality, so during the next phase of the project they implemented Caller Identification and Validation Self Service and conversational self-services for:

| Account Information Request | External Payment Capture | Payment Extension Request | Report Issues/ Provide Provider Information | Deferred Payment Plan Request |

When there are moratoriums or customers are overdue on payments, energy companies have an obligation to offer them payment plans and extensions. With Conversational AI, it can provide more AI-guided self-service capabilities, so these customers can defer or extend payment terms without needing to speak to anyone. This reduces the operational burden on the company and provides a better experience for the customer.

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When assessing solutions in the market, Young Energy had four main prerequisites:

Interoperability:
The company's contact center was hosted on Contact Center as a Service platform NICE CXone so it was mandatory that any IVR system needed to integrate seamlessly with NICE. Omilia's out-of-the-box direct integration with NICE was a key factor in their decision to select Omilia.

Industry-Specific Bots:
The vendor needed to understand the utility and energy industry and the specific service requests that customers have. Omilia provided pre-built industry specific task bots (miniApps®) out-of-the-box, that are hyper-tuned and powered by GenAI, which enable enterprises to create CAI applications in minutes with +96% intent understanding accuracy day one.

Scalability:
The system needs to flex to seasonal demand by managing sudden increases in caller traffic, without sacrificing its quality of customer service. Gilbert found that scalability in Omilia's technology: "Any call can be contained, but can it be fulfilled well, precisely in a customer's moment in need? That was our benchmark."

Autonomy:
Gilbert explained that in the past the company felt handcuffed by solutions that didn't work as they should and couldn't be troubleshooted. To mitigate risk, Young Energy sought a solution that's intuitive to use and can be fine-tuned in-house. Gilbert observed: "Omilia's platform and approach gives us that control. We can be self-sufficient."

Young Energy also evaluated Replicant and Amelia.ai. Gilbert recalls: "Amelia integrated with our NICE platform, but its solution wasn't built out to the same extent as Omilia's. Replicant is a new player and upon inspection, its solution didn't seem mature enough for our needs. Plus, it utilizes a lot of third-party providers. That's not necessarily a bad thing but we liked the fact that Omilia's technology is native and end-to-end. It's a straightforward and comprehensive solution with a straightforward deployment."

"Crucially, a key differentiator was Omilia's vertical expertise. Omilia has been around for 20 years and has worked with utility companies for much of that time. It has a vast catalog of pre-built utilities self-service task bots, meaning its technology is trained to understand and respond to utilities specific customer queries. The other vendors could not provide that."

Results

We're on track to provide a better customer experience, at a lower cost and expand our brand.

Soon after deploying Call Steering, Young Energy identified marked improvements. For instance, within a few weeks, the Sales team recorded a 30% reduction in calls being incorrectly routed to them. Which translates into more time to field genuine sales calls.

Gilbert is encouraged by the early results: "This is a massive time saver. Consider this – during a seasonal peak, when we open the phone lines at 9am, 200 people could be waiting. In the past, they'll press any button to speak to a live agent, whether it's the right person or not. With our current Call Steering solution this is no longer a headache, for us or our callers. After the first phase roll out of Omilia our containment rate is already 35-40%"

According to Gilbert, the goal is to resolve 75% of all calls with self-service: "That seems very doable now."

Young Energy has identified other strategic benefits along the way: "With Omilia's reporting functionality, we see the potential to gather a fuller understanding of customers' needs. This enhanced understanding will help us to modify services or create new ones."

With the solution already delivering early operational efficiencies, Gilbert can confidentially project into the future: "Agent attrition is an occurring issue for any company operating a call center. In time, with the technology's self-service functionality, we'll be able to automate more, and agent attrition will cease to be an issue. We'll run a slimmer, more profitable customer service function."

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Effectively, we're on track to provide a better customer experience, at a lower cost and expand our brand which will generate new revenue off the back of this technology. That's quite something.

Bruce Gilbert
Chief Information and Technology Officer
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"Our prepaid or pay-as-you-go customers, that pay daily based on use, call in about four times a month. They are less tech savvy, and more sensitive. Young Energy needs to provide them with a lot of information and assurance. With Omilia, we can reach population segments with an AI solution that can scale to their communication needs" said Gilbert.

Stepping back, Gilbert is quick to praise the Omilia team: "They've been a great partner. The implementation has gone well, and the product managers have been very helpful. It's early days but I predict a sizable impact on the business."

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