

Development of a comprehensive Consumer Communications Program for the Victorian Smart Meter Deployment

the challenge

In 2006, the Victorian Government endorsed the deployment of Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI)¹ to all Victorian electricity customers consuming less than 160MWh per annum.

Deployment of AMI meters to approximately 2.6 million customers commenced in September 2009 and will be completed over a four year period. Customers need to be informed of the brief interruption to their power supply, and of the new services that will be enabled by these meters, including more detailed information about their individual energy consumption.

Whilst historically distribution businesses and retailers would independently manage meter-related communications on a customer-by-customer basis, the mass rollout of AMI meters demanded a coordinated cross-industry approach, so as to ensure that the right message is delivered from the right communicator, to the right stakeholder, through the right channel, at the right time.

what Marchment Hill did

Marchment Hill Consulting, in our role as the Victorian AMI Program Office, established and facilitated the Consumer Communications Working Group, comprising communications experts from the distribution businesses, retailers, government, and consumer representative groups. Local and national regulatory authorities were also involved in these discussions.

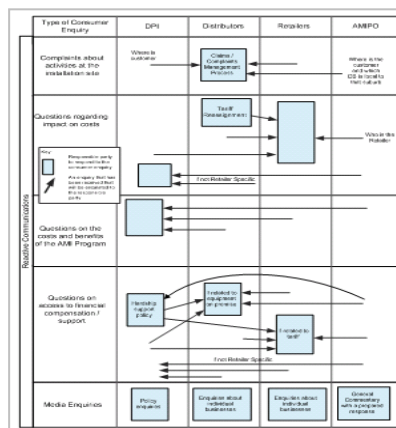


Figure 1: High Level Communications Processes
This diagram shows the pro-active and passive communications of the AMI program.

¹ AMI is the Victorian government's term for Smart Metering. AMI includes meters that satisfy the Minimum AMI (Victoria) Functionality Specification and related communications technology required to fully enable the AMI Services defined in the Minimum AMI (Victoria) Service Level Specification.

Over a six month period the Working Group developed a cross-industry Communications Strategy and Plan covering the end-to-end pro-active, reactive and passive communications activities involved in the AMI Program.

The Plan also detailed the key messages to be delivered; the roles and responsibilities; and the timing, mechanisms and tools required.

Marchment Hill continues to facilitate the Working Group's activities including development of the AMI Communication Materials (e.g. FAQs and consumer notifications) and manage stakeholder communications through industry forums.

the benefit

The Communications Plan was used as the baseline from which individual businesses and stakeholders developed their own communication strategies and materials.

The cross-industry communications approach ensured:

- consistency in the messages that each Program stakeholder communicated to their audience;
- clarity regarding the allocation of communications accountability amongst the Program stakeholders;
- confidence amongst the Program stakeholders that, if required, all parties had appropriate reactive communications prepared; and
- appropriate levels of consumer awareness of the AMI Program, particularly with regard to the Programs relevance to the customer at any point in time.

Marchment Hill's approach to consumer communications has also assisted industry stakeholders' management of the costs for responding to consumer enquiries regarding the AMI Program.

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