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UTILITIES SOLUTIONS

Case Study

*The City of Newark, DE,
Saves Time With NorthStar's
Automation Platform*

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The City of Newark's High-Priority To-Do List Is Always Full

Located in New Castle County, Delaware, the City of Newark serves a population of 34,000 and is home to the University of Delaware Blue Hens. They offer electric, water, sewer, and stormwater services to 13,000 accounts. The City's mission is to provide well-maintained and cost-effective services to its customers, emphasizing quality, value, and responsibility.

In keeping with their mission, the Newark team wanted a way to automate repetitive daily, monthly, and yearly tasks to provide value to their community. They also wanted to streamline operations responsibly but not sacrifice the quality of services they provide. Because their high-priority task list was always full, and there never seemed to be enough hours in the day, the team wondered if automating processes was the answer to their question. How could they squeeze every task into a work week, increase efficiency, and improve employee morale without sacrificing the quality of service?

Tasks Need Doing, But There's Not Enough Time in the Day

The City of Newark's office staff is busy handling numerous governmental services and utility services. Each day the team set out to complete all the utility tasks required, like running daily credit control batches, but by the end of the day, many jobs had to wait until the next business day. Although all of these tasks were high priority, there wasn't enough time to finish them all in the day.

Daily tasks took up much of the team's time each day. They have five different credit control batches to run daily. To run them, one team member had to focus on that job and could not work on other high-priority tasks. Running these reports also used much of the computing resources available, slowing

> *Our credit control batches are now set up to run through the Automation Platform beginning at 4 AM and finishing by 8 AM daily. Having these processes run through the Automation Platform saves so much time and system resources. We estimated this process takes a little over 8 hours a week to run, a full day of the work week. By scheduling them off hours, the batches are ready to be reviewed and posted when our CSRs arrive in the morning.*
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> Daina Montgomery, IT Applications Manager, The City of Newark, DE

everyone down. If they could not complete this process by the end of the day, Customer Service Representatives (CSRs) did not have the information they needed to contact customers about past-due payments or intentions to disconnect until the batches were run the following day.

Late payment processes also had to be run daily to ensure that the day's payments were posted before assessing penalties. Additionally, two team members had to coordinate when the Late Payments Process and the Web Payment Transfer reports were run, and these reports were essential in calculating the billing journals. And even lockbox maintenance and reversing payments and charges also became problematic if the team could not complete these tasks by the day's end.

On top of all these daily tasks, the Newark team had monthly reports to complete as well. Newark is a college town, and students regularly move out of campus housing. Team members had to run a monthly finalized payment report to provide not only these students with their refunds but also regular customers with finalized payment refunds. But again, someone had to be responsible for running these reports and take action after the time-consuming process of running this report.

Why The City of Newark Chose to Automate Processes with NorthStar's Automation Platform

After reviewing its business processes, The City of Newark identified what repetitive tasks could be automated. By setting up these automations and scheduling them to run at night, the team had every daily report they needed in their inboxes each morning. The team no longer had to worry about whether a report could be run during the day. Instead, the reports would be waiting for them as soon as the process was complete. Through automation, the team found that consistent reporting resulted in greater account information accuracy, leading to better customer experiences.

The City of Newark wanted a way to organize its day to serve its customers efficiently and effectively. The team has freed up key personnel and computing power for other high-priority tasks by scheduling processes to run after hours. Automation has improved the team's day-to-day operations and reduced frustrations at not completing their to-do list. And the City's staff now has accurate, up-to-date information they need to serve their customers.

We are a college town, so we have a lot of accounts that get finalled that have refunds. We have the Automation Platform setup so that it will create two separate batches each month around the 10th of the month. With the process only run once a month, it could easily get missed. Automating the process prevents us from skipping it and ensures that it is run in enough time for our Accounts Payable clerk to cut the checks and ensure our GL balances at month end.
LaTrice Nichols, Application Support Administrator, The City of Newark, DE

With accurate data, the team can notify customers promptly that a payment is late, and they can quickly process refunds, if required. With more time in the day and precise information, the team can achieve its goal of providing exceptional customer service.

How The City of Newark Uses NorthStar's Automation Platform

The City of Newark uses NorthStar's Automation Platform (AP) to streamline operations and maximize the use of each hour daily. The first efficiency they found was having the five credit control batches waiting for them in the morning. Because these reports are available to CSRs when they walk into the office, they can begin notifying customers of late payments and potential disconnections. Although the team cannot draw a direct correlation between this automation and increased receivables (because of COVID relief), they can see a decrease in the number of accounts loading into the credit control batches. This process takes 8 hours to run each week, and because it is automated and runs after hours, key personnel and computer resources can be used on other high-priority tasks.

The city's team can also run the late payment process each weekday at 4 PM, creating the batch and loading the accounts based on their criteria. Once the report is complete, the team receives an email verification. This process has helped the team ensure that payments are made timely and that revenue remains consistent.

Each month around the 10th, the Accounts Payable team runs two batches for finalized bills, one for the college and one for regular accounts. Once this report is complete, the team gets a verification email. Because this report was only run once a month, it was in danger of being skipped when the team was busy. Now the report is run automatically, keeping customer refunds processed on time.

The final yearly report used to be a challenge as well. Each year on December 31st, the team runs four separate utility batches to determine what accounts need to be written off. Before using NorthStar's Automation Platform, to run this report, the team had to close the Payments and Billing Division early, which inconvenienced customers, or they had to stay late, which reduced employee morale.

With the automation in place, they can run this process after business hours, and the system notifies the team and prints and posts the journal. And this automation allows the team to serve customers throughout the entire last day of the year, and employees can leave on time.

With NorthStar's Automation Platform, The City of Newark has been able to maximize efficiency and use every hour of the work day effectively, all the while providing exceptional customer service.

Put NorthStar's Automation Platform to Work for You

With NorthStar's Automation Platform, you can

- save time and money
- schedule time-consuming reports
- increase system accuracy
- improve account reliability
- improve customer experiences

Are you looking for ways to automate processes to get more out of your work week and improve customer experiences? Contact your Sales Account Manager to learn how the NorthStar Automation Platform can work for you.

The Complete
Customer Experience Solution

We're focused on helping modern utilities leverage technology to automate operations and deliver consistent customer experiences across every touchpoint. For utilities who invest in today for tomorrow, NorthStar offers affordable and modular solutions that scale as your organization's needs evolve.

NorthStar CIS may be optionally enhanced with value-add modules for mobile workforce management, consumer engagement, business intelligence, and more. Each of which integrates seamlessly with NorthStar CIS to deliver exceptional customer service experiences.

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