



On the heels of a transition to NISC solutions, an 87-year-old electric co-op with the mission of providing excellent service to its members received J.D. Power's highest honor in customer satisfaction among cooperatives less than a year after going live with NISC's enterprise solution in 2021.



J.D. Power awards are recognized as the voice of the consumer and are one of the few earned by receiving high survey scores from a random sample of customers representing over 101 million households.

Clay Electric Cooperative, headquartered in Keystone Heights, Florida, was rated in six areas, and according to its Chief Public Relations Officer Derick Thomas, the transition to NISC solutions impacted all six of them. As a result, the co-op ranked number one in the nation in four of the six categories: price, billing and payment, communication and customer care.

An Investment in the System

Just before its conversion to the NISC enterprise, Clay Electric completed an Automated Meter Infrastructure (AMI) project, transitioning its whole fleet of meters to smart meters, a huge investment by the co-op and its members. After the implementation of both projects, the co-op's members saw a major change in the way the co-op interacted with them.

"A whole laundry list of things changed in a short period of time, and it radically changed the member experience in a positive way," Thomas said. "Every software conversion is painful...But when our members rewarded us by being so pleased with the new service offerings, it makes all the pain worth it when there's something on the other end that's so positive."

A True Partnership

Chief Information Officer Brent Richardson attributes much of the project's success to the partnership developed between Clay Electric and NISC. "One of the great things about NISC is it's a solution that has co-op roots – they know the co-op business, so we didn't have to overcome the challenges that we've had with previous best-of-breed-type solutions that aren't attuned to the co-op business model," he said.

Richardson said that since NISC is a cooperative, they understand Clay Electric's business model and values. "They approach problems with the same mindset that we have – serving the member. They're here for us. It's not about the dollar, it's about the customer service experience and the satisfaction that we have in the product they deliver to us. It's a different relationship than you have with traditional software vendors. We were partnering together, not just purchasing a solution."

Thomas added that he has worked at Clay Electric for over 23 years, and this is the first software he has seen that's had a member focus. "Past software solutions have been focused on software only. With NISC, the Member experience is part of the product's design."

The Big Bang

NISC's solutions are designed to work together to allow for maximum efficiency, and Clay Electric decided to implement the entire enterprise at once, using what NISC calls the "big bang approach."

"They changed their payment interfaces, redesigned their bill, put out a new customer app, and took computers out of employees' hands and handed them iPads," said Leo Kalips, NISC Account Manager for Clay Electric. "Change is scary and that's a heavy lift, but leadership was willing to do whatever it took to get it done and employees stepped up to the task, learning the new software and figuring out how to continue serving their members in the best possible way. It was a true testament to their culture of collaboration and working together to solve a goal. And they were able to adjust and adapt their processes and provide a seamless experience for their members at the end of the line."

Before moving to the NISC enterprise, Clay Electric used several different "best-of-breed" software solutions but said trying to tie the different solutions together was riddled with challenges. "One of the goals of looking at NISC's enterprise was to try to separate from the best-of-breed environment into an ecosystem that's already integrated and functions together," Richardson said. "One of the things we learned through this process was even though we were moving from what we thought were the best-of-breed solutions, the NISC solution is tailored to the co-op electric utility space, so in its own way it is the best-in-breed solution for our organization."

Real Time = Real Benefits

Clay Electric is one of the largest electric cooperatives in the nation, serving approximately 190,000 meters in 14 counties, which leads to management challenges. The co-op was pleasantly surprised that NISC solutions can handle the challenges that come with trying to scale solutions to hit both its large district offices while meeting the needs of its smaller districts.

"We went into the project with the mindset that we were going to look at what the solution had to offer rather than trying to make it fit our current processes. We instead decided to align our processes with the software solution," Richardson said. "Going in with an open mind led to the success of the project. We weren't trying to fit that square peg into a round hole."

Going paperless as part of the transition created many benefits. "Prior to NISC it was all paper, so we weren't able to see where our employees were working," said Jason Parrish, District Line Supervisor for Clay Electric's Salt Springs District. "Having everything automated and in real-time adds an extra safety precaution. AVL (Automated Vehicle Location) lets us know where our service vehicles are, so we know where our guys are at all times. It provides an extra layer of safety."

Parrish said the employees in the field love NISC's solutions because of the time it saves them. "When they're on an outage call, NISC's Outage Management System tells them which accounts are out of power and when they come back on, which is huge," Parrish said. "Before, we could be thinking we had everything cleared up and they turned us back around because one transformer didn't come back on. Now when they're clearing outages, they can see that when they're there and they won't leave until they see that every meter is back on. That was a big plus in our eyes."



Moving to an automated system has also been beneficial to administrative employees, allowing them to solve many issues from the office that used to require an onsite visit, such as disconnections and reconnections. “This saves employees from having to go to someone’s location to disconnect them, which eliminates a negative interaction,” said Kim Dyal, Office Services Coordinator for Clay Electric’s Keystone Heights district office. “On the positive side, if the member pays immediately, their service is reconnected within just a few minutes. So instead of them waiting for someone to come back, it’s done within about five minutes, if that.”

My Clay Electric

As part of the implementation, NISC created a branded SmartHub mobile app for Clay Electric and its members called “My Clay Electric.” The app benefits both the member and the co-op by allowing members to view their daily usage, report or receive updates about outages, make payments and receive alerts about storms and other important developments.

“If a member calls us concerned about a high bill, we can tell them to pull up the app, and we can both look at the exact same thing, which helps us both work through the problem. Before, we would just send an employee out to their location, which we still sometimes do, but a lot of issues can now be resolved in a one-call conversation,” Dyal said.

“The SmartHub app was a resounding success with our membership,” Richardson said. “Overall, our customers are very appreciative of the app and compliment it frequently.”



Service

Clay Electric’s employees agree that the service they have received since implementing NISC’s solutions is one of the biggest benefits, saying it’s above and beyond what they could have imagined. For example, if NISC becomes aware of a hurricane coming the co-op’s direction, NISC proactively reaches out and they have conversations about what needs to be done to get the system ready if the storm hits. NISC and Clay Electric have also developed a process to help them scale for situations where the co-op is hit with an outage that affects 50- 75% of its member base at one time.

“NISC really steps up to make sure we’re not only in a good spot to handle storm situations, but also rides through the storm with us,” Richardson said. “We have daily communication with NISC about how the system is performing, making small adjustments and just checking in to see if we’re having any issues they can proactively address before they become major problems. It’s a lot like the co-op culture. We’re a family. We’re all here to do the same thing – to serve our members. NISC has that same culture but from a software support standpoint.”

Support doesn’t only come from NISC employees, but its other Members, as well. Thomas said the ability to learn from other NISC Members has been invaluable. “Before, we were kind of on an island to ourselves and now we can bounce things off hundreds of other co-ops when we have a problem or a challenge. That’s a huge value proposition for us that we didn’t have before.”

To learn more about how NISC can help you reach ultimate customer satisfaction with its enterprise solutions, please visit www.nisc.coop or email sales@nisc.coop.