

Horizon Telecom has been serving southern Ohio for more than 125 years, delivering internet, phone, TV, and security services to residential and business customers—including enterprise business services that include fiber, cloud, and ethernet services. With more than 5,500 route miles of fiber, Horizon offers the capacity to provide a backbone for the newest technology services, and the capability for nearly unlimited speed. Today, Horizon delivers high-quality connectivity solutions for residential, small and medium sized businesses, large enterprise, and wholesale carriers.



In a funding-rich environment designed to stimulate growth in the rural broadband sector, Horizon is branching out into new areas and needed a solution to help them with their expansion. They were looking for a solution that would allow them to gauge interest, define prospective leads, and create marketing campaigns. Hoping to keep staffing requirements limited, the solution would also need to allow customers to self-service.

## Making the most of a growth opportunity

In the last couple of years, the urgent need for high quality rural broadband has prompted an accelerated growth in broadband funding through such mechanisms as the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) auction and other state and federal funding sources. This creates a unique opportunity for telcos and other utility companies to obtain funding for the expansion of broadband capabilities to the communities that need those capabilities the most -- unserved and underserved markets.

In response to the increased demand and the new funding opportunities, Horizon made the decision to expand into new territories, starting with Circleville, Ohio, and stretching beyond the southeastern corridor of the state that has been their primary market for many decades. “Branching out with fiber-to-the-home to Circleville would mean passing almost 7,000 homes,” says Misty Tuttle, general manager of Business Operations at Horizon.

Historically, Horizon has relied on manual processes, such as web forms, to gauge customer interest, and then a CSR would need to reach out via email or phone to engage. Contacting and processing that many potential customers wouldn’t be feasible using their conventional methods. “We wanted to be able to reach new areas while maintaining current staffing levels, avoiding the need to prematurely increase headcount,” Tuttle said.

Tuttle realized that the only way to reach into new areas effectively without expanding headcount was with an automated process that could gauge interest, generate leads, promote a marketing campaign, and then allow customers to place orders and schedule installations online—so they could self-service without ever having to call in to a CSR. “In short,” she said, “We wanted to put the power into our customers’ hands.”

That’s when they turned to NISC and the iVUE Connect Marketing Solution.

## The iVUE Connect Marketing Solution

The iVUE Connect Marketing Solution from NISC is a fully-integrated marketing solution that allows users to leverage customer data to effectively create targeted campaigns and maximize ROI. Solidly built on the Salesforce CRM Platform, the iVUE Connect Marketing Solution interfaces with billing systems and leverages customer data to deliver feature-rich tools to aid new fiber network deployments, while offering the service tools needed to work with existing customers.

The iVUE Connect Marketing Solution features:

**SmartHub Crowdsourcing** that allows users to maximize the adoption of new services by better gauging interest and effectively communicating benefits.

**Lead Management** that effectively tracks interest and documents detailed lead data and interactions on the go.

**Campaign Management** that helps create campaigns with clear objectives to ensure message consistency across the organization.

**Sales Opportunities** that leverage customer data for upselling, and tailoring quotes based on service location and track sales and revenue easily.

**Market Segmentation** that means you can classify and target your campaigns by age, income, interest, and behavior to capitalize on your marketing dollars.

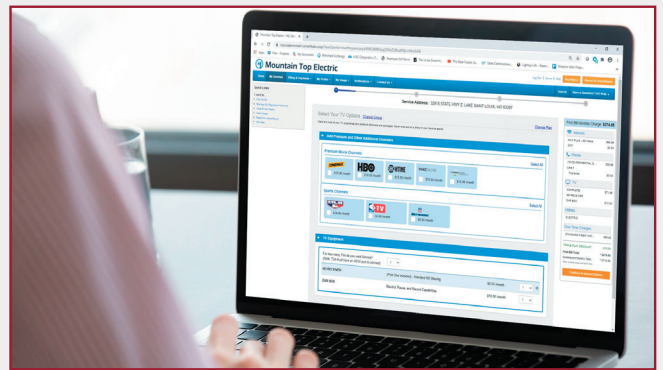
## Putting the solution to work

Horizon implemented the iVUE Connect Marketing Solution in April 2021 to begin work on their expansion into Circleville. Using this solution, they were able to create an email drip campaign that would keep customers informed throughout the expansion process from construction through installation.

As the leads came in, and as Horizon moved from the construction to the installation phase, Horizon's team was able to access a dropdown menu that enabled them to identify specific construction areas as they completed. The Horizon marketing team could then initiate a new campaign within the lead management portion of the iVUE Connect Marketing Solution where emails would be sent automatically to all of the customers in the completed area to inform them that service was available and encouraging them to sign up.

Prospective customers simply needed to follow a link in the email that delivered them to the SmartHub Order Management (SHOM) page, where they could sign up for service, select their service packages, and schedule their appointment without needing personal help from a CSR. From beginning to end, there was no impact on Horizon's CSR workforce in managing the customer's needs.

According to Tuttle, "The iVUE Connect Marketing Solution was perfect for our plans and worked seamlessly. We've always had a CRM for our enterprise and business customers, but we've never had the equivalent ability on the residential side. The tools that this system gives us and the way we can contact and communicate with the customer throughout the customer journey is really a game-changer for us. I'm happy that we now have a solution in place that will give us that level and quality of constant contact with our residential customers."



## The beginning of something bigger

Horizon's early efforts focused on using the iVUE Connect Marketing Solution exclusively for managing the demands of building out into new areas, but that experience has demonstrated additional benefits, as CSRs have adapted many of the new system's capabilities into their regular workflows. For instance, when customers call in to initiate or make changes to a service, CSRs have traditionally started the process within Horizon's billing system, which has always been a complicated multi-step effort.

Since the implementation of iVUE Connect, when working with new customers CSRs now regularly use the same portion of the SHOM web portal that self-service customers use—it's a streamlined process that's much faster and more intuitive than working through the legacy billing system. In fact, several of the CSRs at Horizon have compared SHOM's ease-of-use to the effortless process of shopping on Amazon, and emphasize how it makes their jobs both easier and more efficient.

The iVUE Connect Marketing Solution from NISC has offered Horizon an end-to-end solution, rather than a piecemeal labor-intensive approach. Tuttle is quick to affirm the benefits, “The impact it’s had on our expansion process has been pronounced; it’s saved us from needing to hire fresh staff during this key transition period by offering us a zero-touch approach to signing up new customers, which means our CSR team can focus on serving our existing customers without interruption.”

She continues, “I think one of the benefits we hadn’t anticipated is the degree to which it’s bolstered our image—when new customers sign up for new service in the SmartHub Order Management portal, the iVUE Connect Marketing Solution makes Horizon look and feel like a major player—a national company. And that gives the customer confidence when they’re dealing with us.”

## Trusting the process

From Horizon’s perspective, the smooth execution of this project has been extremely encouraging. Getting the iVUE Connect Marketing Solution up and running was a straightforward process for which Tuttle offers two simple pieces of advice, “Cleanup and simplify your backend by eliminating unnecessary and confusing codes; this kind of code maintenance will only prove helpful to customers on the front end. And listen to the folks at NISC—they’re experts who can take you through the process step-by-step.”

Having successfully transitioned through the initial stages of deployment, the experience of implementing the iVUE Connect Marketing Solution has had a profound effect on Horizon. “As we continue to upgrade and expand,” says Tuttle, “And as we’re able to offer new products and services, we’re happy to have discovered a great tool and a great way to communicate directly with customers.”

## About NISC

NISC has been providing technology solutions to the utility and broadband industries for more than 50 years. NISC is committed to research, development, and quality of the latest in technology to ensure its solutions cannot only solve today’s challenges, but are positioned to solve tomorrow’s as well.

Further information on how NISC’s Marketing suite of solutions can help you connect with your community on the NISC website at <https://www.nisc.coop/marketing>.

