Raising the Stakes: iVUE Connect - Staking Efficiencies save Ozarks Over 2,000 Hours

Ozarks Electric Cooperative, headquartered in Fayetteville, Arkansas, serves a quickly growing area covering several counties in northwest Arkansas and northeast Oklahoma. With the cooperative experiencing around 4% growth in their territory each year, Ozarks' need to efficiently stake new utility lines was becoming a major priority for its team of 13 staking professionals.

Adapting to Territory Growth

Ozarks had been using NISC's Mapping and Staking product since it implemented the NISC Enterprise suite of solutions in 2015. However, to keep up with the rapid growth of its territory, and the new poles and lines that needed to be staked quickly, Ozarks knew that even small efficiencies would go a long way toward success in its territory.

Ozarks found some of those efficiencies during a demonstration of iVUE Connect - Staking, NISC's web-based staking tool, at the 2022 NISC Member Information Conference (MIC).

"Watching a demo of iVUE Connect - Staking, I immediately saw how user-friendly it was, and I knew that our stakers would like to have the software in their hands," said Adam Moore, system staking tech at Ozarks Electric Cooperative. "So when we heard that NISC was looking for beta testers for iVUE Connect - Staking, I immediately went to my boss and said we need to jump on that."

The Early Adopters

Ozarks has beta-tested several NISC solutions.

"We've really taken every opportunity that we can to beta test new products," said Teresa Lackey, director of Ozarks' Project Management Office. "Ozarks has always been cutting-edge and early adopters of new technology, and NISC always seems to have new tools and new features for us to implement. As beta testers, we really find that we have more of a voice and more of an influence on those features and can also help make the product suite better for other members as well."

For the beta test, Moore selected five of his 13 staking techs to begin using iVUE Connect - Staking. They started the process in November 2022, but by April of 2023 all 13 stakers had moved to iVUE Connect - Staking.

"The first two weeks, it was a little bumpy," Moore said. "But it didn't take a lot of them that long at all. Once they got comfortable with the software, they picked it up and ran with it and haven't looked back."

Creating Cloud Efficiency

While NISC's Mapping and Staking product allowed Ozarks to utilize the advantages of NISC's Enterprise, iVUE Connect - Staking showcased several efficiencies for Moore and his team of stakers that made a huge difference in keeping up with their territory's growth.

Before implementing iVUE Connect - Staking, stakers began their day by accessing Mapping and Staking to check out work orders they would have to complete that day. The stakers downloaded their work list, completed the tasks throughout the day and checked the work orders back in when they were finished. The process took between 10-15 minutes in the morning for check out and another 10-15 minutes in the evening to check the updated work back into the system.

"They couldn't start on their work until all of that happened, and everything had to happen just perfectly," Lackey said. "If that failed, they would sit around for hours in the morning, you know, waiting for everything to sync up. All of that has gone away. And it sounds like a lot of the extra clicks that were involved in just doing small tasks are down, too, so it's just a lot more efficient all around."

One of the biggest benefits of NISC's iVUE Connect solution, including iVUE Connect - Staking, is that it is cloud-based. The software doesn't require any local servers to be maintained by Ozarks' IT department, and it can be accessed anywhere, anytime using only a web browser. The near real-time access of data through the cloud eliminated the necessity for a check in/check out process, saving Moore and his team of stakers hours every day. Moore said syncing data in iVUE Connect - Staking takes only a few seconds.

"We did have a couple of scenarios where you could duplicate some work on a work order," Moore said. "With iVUE Connect - Staking being more live, that risk of duplicate work was basically eliminated."

Another area where Moore and his team have seen added efficiency is through the staking sheet report. Moore's team runs staking sheet reports at the end of their projects as a way of closing the work orders. Before, the stakers had to pause their other work while the report was running and couldn't finish additional tasks. With iVUE Connect - Staking, Moore's team can run the staking sheet report in a separate browser window and continue working on other work orders while the report is running.

"This has really helped us multitask," Moore said. "Most of the time, when you run a staking sheet report, you're basically done with that work order. So having that report open in a separate window has really helped our process."

Along with the check in/check out process and the staking sheet report, the significant improvements in the user interface have reduced the amount of time it takes Ozarks to stake each job, as well as reduced the time it takes for staking reviews by Ozarks' management team.

Time Savings Across the Enterprise

The efficiencies gained from iVUE Connect - Staking have been seen beyond Moore's department, reducing the time Ozarks' work order processing clerks and accounting departments spend making data corrections. Ozarks' IT department has also seen time savings from reduced software installations and maintenance thanks to the cloud-based nature of iVUE Connect.
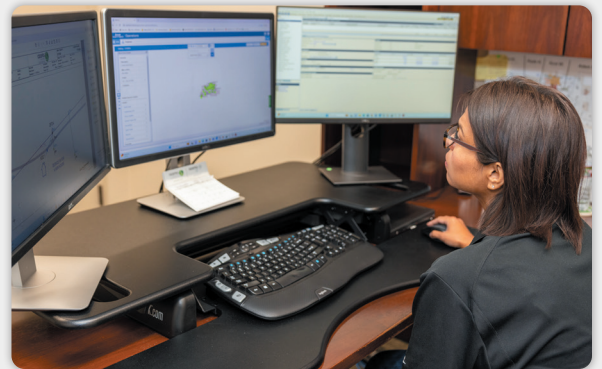
Ozarks' Project Management Office measures time spent on a project both before and after to determine time savings. Lackey and her colleagues in the Project Management Office determined that the conversion to NISC's iVUE Connect - Staking saved the cooperative 2,181 hours, or roughly one full-time equivalent. Ozarks is hopeful that the move to iVUE Connect - Staking will help Moore and his team continue to stay ahead of growth while keeping the same number of employees for the foreseeable future.

"When we knew this project was coming, we really wanted it to go well," Lackey said. "We were really kind of hoping for a unicorn project, and that's what we got. That's what NISC delivered, and it really could not have gone better."