**PARTNER STORY**

Embracing Digital Messaging

The Indian Wells Valley Water District (IWVWD) is located in the Mojave Desert about 125 miles north of Los Angeles. Surrounded by mountain ranges on all four sides; the Sierra Nevada on the west, the Coso on the north, the Argus Range on the east, and the El Paso Mountains to the south. Indian Wells Valley Water District encompasses an area of approximately 37.7 square miles and serves approximately 12,000 customers.
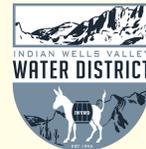
Indian Wells Valley Water District

LOCATION
Ridgecrest, CA

POPULATION
29,000

COMBINED OPEN RATE
86.5%

ACCOUNTS SERVED BY WATERSMART
12,000

Indian Wells Valley Water District

THE CHALLENGE

July 4th, 2019: It's a holiday morning. Just after 10:30 AM and a 6.4 magnitude earthquake rattles Southern California. The quake, along with the thousands of following aftershocks, shake through the Mojave Desert and into Indian Wells Valley. IWVWD staff are on high alert helping people throughout the community while still ensuring water systems continue to function properly. Then, just 36 hours later, a much bigger 7.1 magnitude quake hits the community.

As IWVWD continue to work round the clock supporting their community, staff become aware of a level sensor that has stopped functioning in one of the treatment facilities. The sensor error begins to cause discoloration and sediment build up in the drinking water. This prompts IWVWD to take the treatment plant and its wells out of production. With a now limited supply and the pressure of high demand from summer usage, staff realize the very real threat of over stressing the system. IWVWD need customers to be thoughtful with their water-use and must prepare to urgently spread the message to their community. Out of habit, staff plan to rely on door hangers as their primary mode of communication, but Jason Lillion, Operations Manager at IWVWD, has a much more effective approach in mind.

A TARGETED SOLUTION

The Group Messenger module within the WaterSmart Utility Analytics Dashboard empowers utilities to easily send targeted and personalized messages to groups of customers via e-mail, text, and automated voice. Staff can quickly select recipients from preloaded lists, draw a target region on a map, upload a GIS shape file, search customers by account or meter number, and/or upload accounts from the Customer Information System or Meter Management platform. Utilities turn to this solution to target highest users, to encourage greater participation in community events, to alert users of water quality reports, to notify households of planned service outages, and much more.

AN URGENT MESSAGE

"The wells we were having to take out of production primarily serve Zone A, so we needed this portion of our service area to take immediate action and be conscious of their water use," remarks Jason. By drawing a polygon around the affected area, Jason quickly generated a List of the more than 7,500 accounts needing immediate notice. From there, Jason composed messages with personalized variables for each customer, and sent it all within minutes.

Group Messenger makes it easy to reach thousands of customers—or just a select few—by email, text, and automated voice.
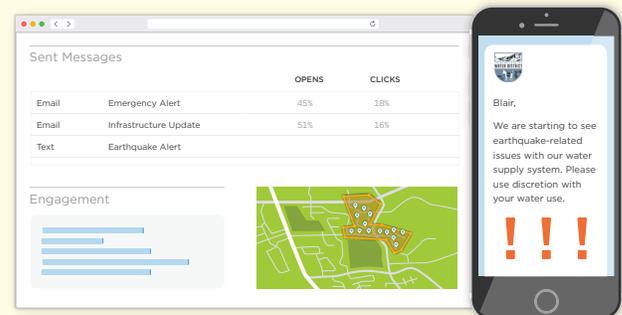
Given the severity of the situation, IWVWD need to capture their customers' attention quickly. Staff want to make sure their message cut through the clutter of everything else. Therefore, Jason and his team resolve to communicate via multiple channels (email, automated voice call, and SMS text message) in order to feel confident that each affected account is adequately notified.

Previously, IWVWD virtually could not proactively interact with their customers. Staff either waited for customers to call in to the District to be able to share important messages or head out into the field. Now with Group Messenger, Jason says "Instead of spending hours distributing door hangers, we are able to draw a polygon and immediately send out a mass communication to affected customers. This improved strategy saves us a lot of time and helps Indian Valley Water avoid angry customers."

IWVWD with Group Messenger also gain visibility on the success of their communication efforts. With this, staff keep their eyes on the delivery success rate, open rate, and click rate of the three messages they sent. Ultimately, IWVWD see a combined average open rate of 86.5%, a significantly higher rate than the industry's average of 41%. These metrics validate the team's confidence on the power and effectiveness of this new approach to targeted customer notifications.

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> JASON LILLION, OPERATIONS MANAGER

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EMBRACING A DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION FOR COMMUNICATION

Not only do digital communications increase the timeliness of customer outreach, which is especially important in times of emergency, they also provide dynamic message customization based on customer characteristics, such as location. Group Messenger also provides important engagement metrics such as open and click through rates which were previously inaccessible to water professionals.

The emergency notifications sent following the earthquakes were a huge success. As such, now every time a service repair occurs or service is interrupted to any specific region within the District, Jason's team turns to the polygon tool to quickly identify the appropriate audience to receive the voice messages and texts. With Group Messenger, IWVWD is preventing community frustration and improving operational efficiency. Jason describes the process as a huge improvement "It's saving time on the front end with message composition and on the back-end by decreasing the number of phone calls we have to handle from people yelling about not having water or why it's off."

"I am so proud of my entire team for how they responded to the earthquake and helped to support the water district!"

JASON LILLION, OPERATIONS MANAGER

PICTURED LEFT TO RIGHT: KALEB GRIFFIN, SAM MOLINA, JASON LILLION, KEN SILLIMAN, JOHN SVIKA, JOHN THATCHER, ARTURO MAGALLANES, JOHNATHAN CHAPIN, KURT KRAMER, JOHN PEARL, GABRIEL SMITH, CHRIS CHARLON, ROBERT CUNNINGHAM

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