

TOP 5

Winter Challenges That Technology Turns Into Opportunities

As the winter season approaches, technology can help convert new challenges into opportunities for propane retailers. From demand changes to weather complications, modern software solutions help businesses stay ahead of the curve, be as efficient and agile as possible, and communicate well with their clients, all while becoming more profitable. Automation, flexibility, and simplicity are key.



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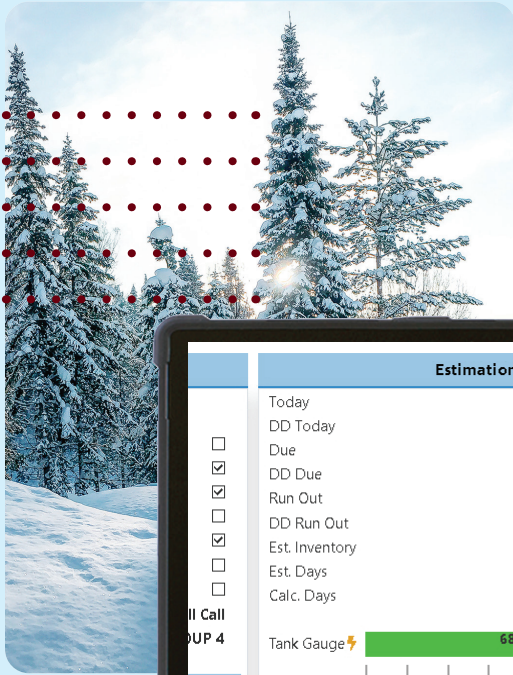




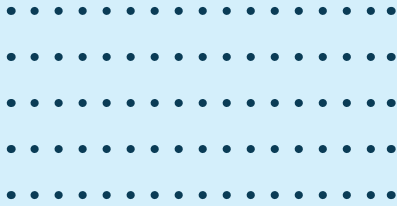
1. Software Helps Handle A Change In Demand

Of course, the change in temperature means a change in fuel usage. For most retailers, this means an increase due to heat usage. For some others in vacation towns, it may be a decrease as pools are closed, and rentals become vacant. Whatever the direction of the trend, software can help you prepare and successfully meet that demand with the ability to forecast needs both at the tank level with flexible scheduling and at the company level with powerful reporting.





Estimations		
	Today	09/12/2023
	DD Today	52541
	Due	11/14/2023
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	DD Due	54984
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Run Out	12/06/2023
<input type="checkbox"/>	DD Run Out	56264
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Est. Inventory	252
<input type="checkbox"/>	Est. Days	0
<input type="checkbox"/>	Calc. Days	0
Will Call		
GROUP 4	Tank Gauge	68% (5/8)
		0 2/8 4/8 6/8 11/14/2023



“With minimal effort, the software can predict when deliveries are needed, giving you a clear picture of your supply needs”

Flexible Delivery Scheduling

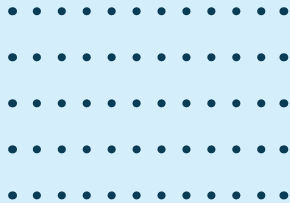
The most basic operational need for a fuel delivery business is the need to maintain optimal deliveries throughout any season. Flexible delivery scheduling software can handle demand changes with ease, offering multiple set-up options to meet the needs of each specific account throughout the year. From heat-related degree day forecasting to usage rates to day-of-the-week to tank monitors, modern software can meet each account’s needs. With minimal effort, the software can predict when deliveries are needed, giving you a clear picture of your supply needs. As client usage changes, the software can point out exceptions and even make adjustments to improve delivery efficiency.

While software can help you forecast deliveries for your most unpredictable accounts, tank monitors can add even more reliability. They can interface with your back office by sharing current tank readings so that an account can be automatically pulled for delivery when an ideal drop can be made. In addition, those tanks can be scheduled like a regular account so, should the tank monitor fail, the software can draw attention to it and avoid a runout.

Similarly, software can help you be more proactive when managing will call customers, some of your challenging accounts. Unpredictable usage can interfere with your fuel forecast, so it makes sense to take every opportunity to treat them like an automatic delivery account from a forecasting perspective. Rather than wait for those accounts to call for a delivery when they are about to run out and hope that they don’t call a competitor, they can be forecasted like a normal automatic delivery. Prior to pulling them for a route, easy software-enabled email or text communication can be made with them to suggest a delivery. This helps you secure those accounts and helps you have a more accurate handle on your true demand needs.



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Strong Reporting

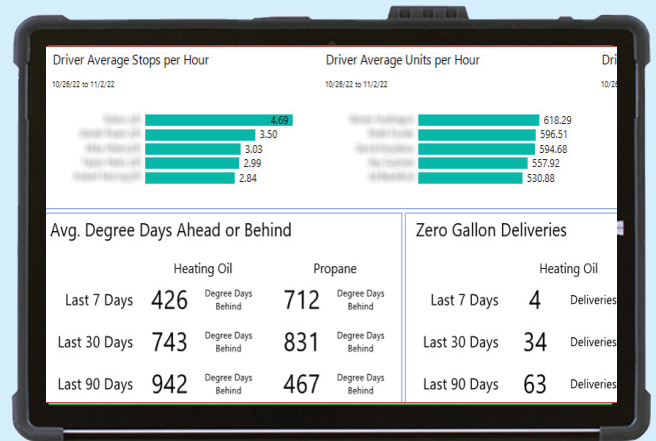
With demand changes, strong reporting is essential to understanding operational needs in a seasonal business. BI (business intelligence) reporting can do that effortlessly. Modern BI reporting offers much more flexibility with reports than you might be used to. For those retailers who have been manipulating data in Excel spreadsheets to get to the information and presentation they require, reporting software can save a tremendous amount of time. The reports can be run and delivered on a preset schedule. Direct reporting with no manual interaction means data integrity, time savings, and faster, informed decisions. Reporting enables businesses to manage less by 'feel' and more by the actual current business numbers.



High-Level KPIs Right Down to the Detail

True visibility into your business starts with an informative, quickly digestible dashboard with your KPIs (key performance indicators). Every company is unique, so having a dashboard that is completely customizable helps retailers keep a close eye on the things that matter most.

Reports and KPIs are useful as a quick picture of your whole company, but their usefulness increases 10-fold if those high-level figures can be drilled down on. If a number is unexpected, a drill-down on that figure will provide the "why" and help the team develop the next steps to pull it in line. You don't have to waste time investigating numbers, and there's no delay in response time.



“...reporting software can save a tremendous amount of time”



Concentrate on the Exceptions

Another important reporting feature is exception reporting. This style of reporting focuses on data that is outside the normal expected range. The report focuses on only the things that need your attention. No need to spend time paging through long reports. Instead, you can spend your time on the problems that are hurting your profitability and possibly your reputation.

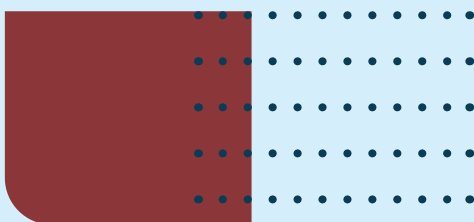
Add Automation – Add Efficiency

Better yet, current technology can proactively and automatically alert you to exceptions. You can set acceptable ranges for some of your important measures, and your software can send you an email notification whenever something happens outside that acceptable range. With alerts, the software can find your problems before you even start combing through your data. This timely, automatic notification means that things don't slip through the cracks.

To help you deal specifically with demand changes, BI lets you report on expected deliveries and constantly have gallon KPIs at your fingertips. Stay on top of gallon and dollar projections with analysis of budget to actuals throughout the season. The reporting capabilities are endless, customizable, and give you a true picture of your business.



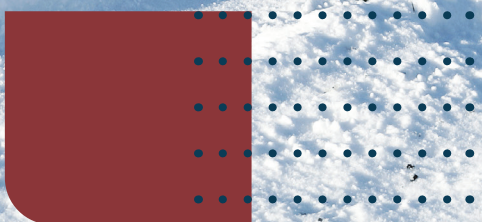
	Ideal	Zone	WC	Total Days	Total Del.	Total Gallons	Average Gal / Del.	A
OU (9 Locations)					28	2647		
1	1000	ADC1	N	108	5	135		
1	1000	ADC1	N	218	4	120		
1	1000	ADC1	N	105	3	200		
1	401	ADC1	Y	34	2	110		
275	190	BK30A1	N	27	3	75		
1000	728	ADC1	N	288	2	700		
275	200	BK12E4	N	281	5	711		
125	75	32D3	N	0	2	96		
2500	1500	ADDN1	N	0	2	500		





2. Software Helps Mitigate Pricing & Supply Risk

Price fluctuations can happen throughout the year, but winter typically brings higher prices and more variability. Successful navigation and a protected margin require attention to detail. As you lock in your supplier contracts, your back office software can focus on the demand side of the equation. Customer budget programs and pricing features that are in lockstep with your contract gallons and dollars can ease the risk.



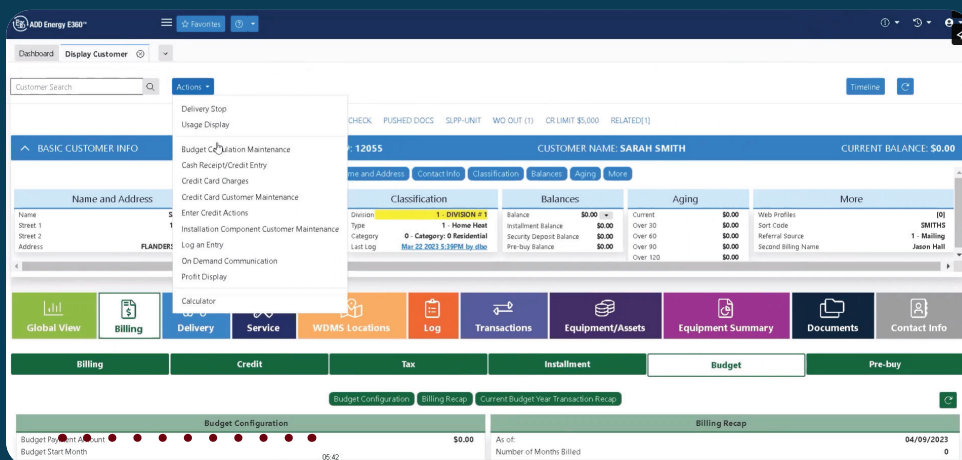
Customer Pricing Plans Help

With pricing, software can offer a large selection of options, from simple to stepped to volume, but when trying to match supply, perhaps one of the best options is pricing plans. Customers can sign up for a plan with a specific price per gallon for a certain number of total gallons or dollars, and that price can be set in accordance with your supply contract price to guarantee a comfortable margin. These plans can include even more advantageous features like pre-buy, in which a customer pays for a lump sum of fuel at the beginning of the season. Now you have a guaranteed price and the money in hand before the season begins, effectively locking in your margin and mitigating the supply risk.

Budget Programs Solidify Customer Base

In the same way that these price plans help, a strong customer budget program can help balance supply pricing risk as well. Essentially, rather than bill a customer for each delivery, projected usage for the year is added up and divided equally over a number of months. Not only are these payments more manageable for the customer, but they can help with supply risk mitigation. The propane retailer has the ability to set the price per gallon based on their contract pricing, helping to guarantee a healthy margin. These contracts also help to lock in customers and lessen the likelihood that they will jump to a competitor mid-season.

Budget programs are not a new concept. In fact, most retailers have some form of budget program, but it can be involved and time-consuming. Software can help move your budget plan to the next level. You can have the flexibility to run your plan for a specific period for all accounts or start and end at multiple times throughout the year. Software can also help predict usage and solicit sign-ups. What used to be a laborious task can be simplified so that you can increase your number of budget customers and ensure the pricing and gallons match up nicely with your supply contracts.



“...effectively locking in your margin and mitigating the supply risk”



3.

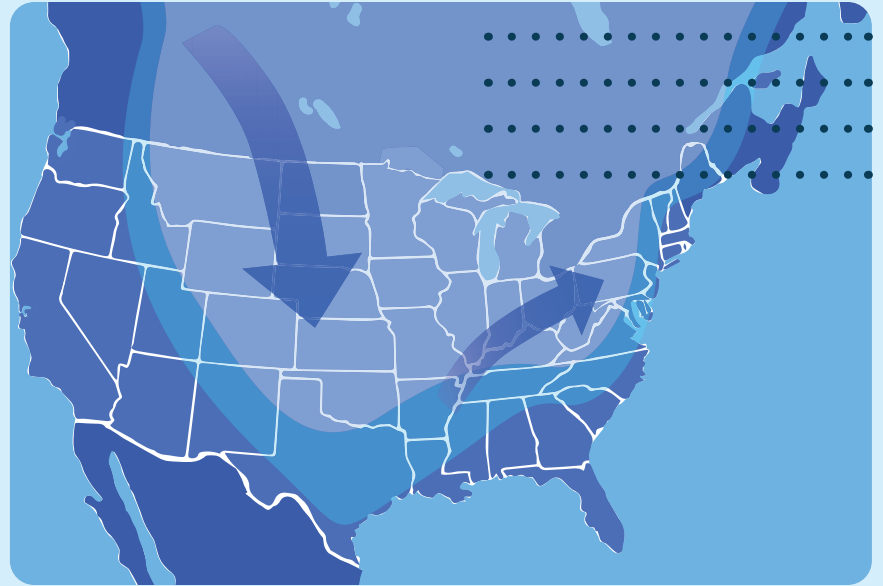
Technology Helps Handle Weather Challenges

Because temperature fluctuations and potential storms can cause unexpected changes to delivery schedules, logistics, and the overall consistency of your operations, propane retailers need the right technology to help successfully deal with these challenges as they occur. Software gives retailers the tools to plan ahead, react quickly, and communicate well with clients, all vitally important to operational success.



Get Ahead of the Storm

With technology-enabled delivery scheduling, not only can your accounts be set up with reliable scheduling methods, but dispatching can have the flexibility to easily pull tickets in advance to get ahead of an impending storm and get on top of accounts that may run out. Software lets you focus on specific difficult-to-reach locations to help keep your customers safe and warm, capture signatures, optionally print out and leave an invoice or email it. There can even be automatic communication with the customer so the delivery is expected and a path can be cleared to the fill location.



Weather Surprises Call for Agile Dispatching

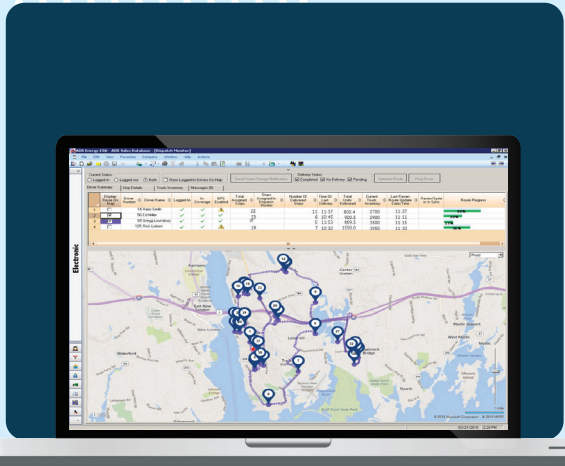
Even last-minute challenges, like closed roads due to ice or snow, can be handled efficiently with dispatching flexibility. Dispatchers can get all the information they need to make the best decisions, including efficient dispatching of last-minute orders from worried customers. Back office delivery software can help facilitate your whole process, regardless of the conditions, and the whole office staff can stay well-informed to give excellent customer service.

Mobile Delivery Tools Empower Drivers

With the addition of technology in the driver's hands, flexibility and efficiency greatly increase. Back office and mobile tools work together to give a real-time picture of truck locations for better dispatching and efficient communication between the field and the office. As unexpected phone orders come in, your dispatcher can see them on a map with all the drivers' locations. The call can be quickly included in a current route and sent automatically to the driver for completion that day. The driver's route can even be re-optimized on-the-fly to make sure to minimize the miles driven.



Drivers will be at ease with turn-by-turn directions, easy communication with dispatch, GPS locations of both the customer and the tank(s), and important information about the customer's account. Drivers no longer have to worry about carrying physical tickets around and having them potentially get damaged.



Flexible Service Scheduling and Dispatching for Increased Urgency

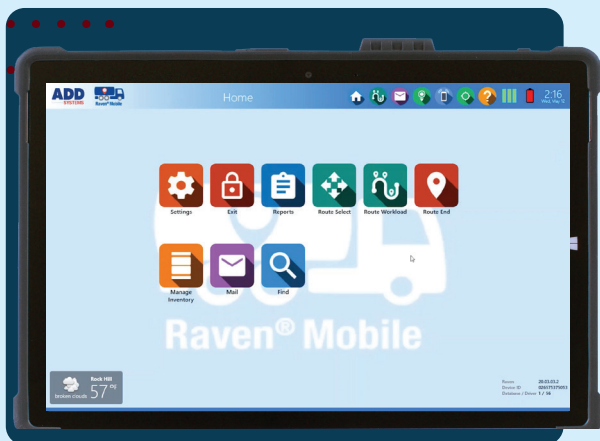
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Mobile Service Tools to Support Techs

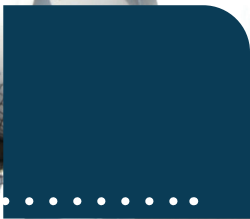
Just like mobile delivery tools, mobile service tools can increase the efficiency of technicians and the back office immensely. Communication is streamlined, and the need for any radio contact is all but eliminated. The dispatcher has a real-time view of the techs and can hand them a list of calls in the morning and/or feed them calls as they come in. Completed calls can be billed in time & materials or flat rate right on site or sent wirelessly back to the office for billing. Handwriting interpretation is eliminated, and accuracy is greatly improved.

Techs have everything they need to be successful – turn-by-turn directions, easy communication with the office, as well as customer information and history, including pictures of equipment. The parts usage can even interface with a parts supplier to have inventory automatically replenished each night.



Mobile Means Maximum Efficiency

All of the functionality of mobile devices for drivers and techs means a measurable uptick in efficiency during a period when time is of the essence. The complete interface between the mobile device and the back office means great communication, no duplication of work, better accuracy, and faster billing.



4. Technology Helps Keep Equipment Safe

As a propane retailer, your investment in equipment is substantial. Keeping track of your tanks and their condition is important and time-consuming, but every effort to keep your tanks and customers safe is paramount. Software can tie all these responsibilities together and make them as streamlined as possible.





Efficiently Manage Tank Inventory

With the right software, you can track where your tanks are at all times, and store their movement history. Maintenance on your tanks is important too, so software can help keep track of critical data. Things like maintenance dates are stored and easily reportable. You can stay on top of your investment and keep all your tanks in good shape. Even better, this functionality can be easily wrapped into service techs' workloads and handled on-site on their mobile devices. Equipment information can then be automatically updated in the back office. This leaves little chance for error or lost paperwork. With these details in the system, they are also reportable. When a component has a manufacturer's recall, it is easy to find the affected accounts and make the necessary repairs.

Focus on Safety with Gas Check

The right software will also help your company with the NPGA Gas Check program. Safety is extremely important, so it is imperative to perform all the necessary tests on equipment to stay safe and in compliance. Technology can help with full Gas Check information stored on the customer account, and, just like the equipment maintenance, the service tech's device in the field can gather the Gas Check information while on site and then automatically transfer it back to the home office. No chance of losing paperwork and no rekeying data in the office.

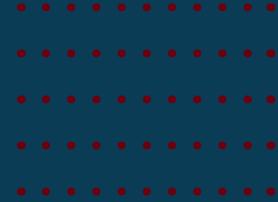
Software was created with the intent to make your business' everyday tasks easier, faster, and less costly. When it comes to your equipment, technology can help you stay on top of your investment and prioritize safety without compromising efficiency.



5. Software Facilitates Communication

As we approach the winter season, delivery challenges are expected, but, when they happen, they disrupt the normal flow. It makes consistent and reliable communication very important, and software can help to streamline your customer communication as well as automate as much as possible. Great customer communication can be a game changer, and software can help you give your customers the information and attention they need with minimal employee time.





Answering Customer Questions - That's Easy

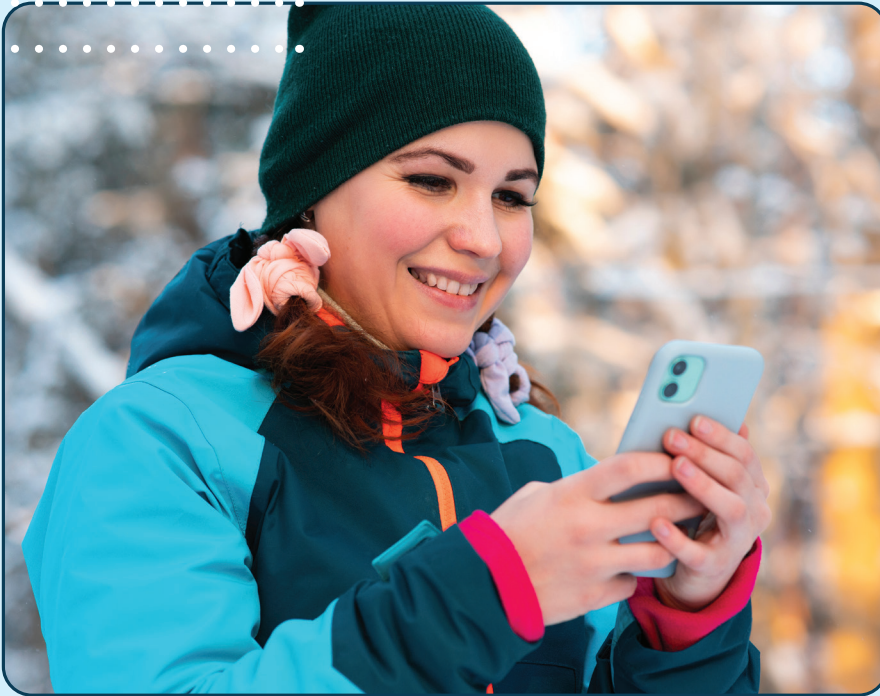
One of the challenges associated with storms and other disruptive weather is managing the increased number of customer phone calls. Phone calls can be effective but also time-consuming. Modern software makes them as easy and efficient as possible by putting all the important information at a CSR's fingertips. An incoming phone call can, via an interface with the phone system, allow the customer account to pop up for the CSR. No searching for the account. All the answers to those customers' questions are visible with even more details easily available by roll-over pop-up messages. The integration available with the drivers' and techs' devices in the field means real-time updates and accurate answers for the caller, not to mention easy functionality to open a service call or phone order. Designed for ease-of-use, the user interface with back office software can be exceedingly efficient and friendly.

Easy On-Demand Communication

While expedited phone calls are possible, your call center can still be overwhelmed by the disruption a winter storm can cause. Deliveries can slow down or even be temporarily halted, and that means you need to get ahead with proactive communication. Your software should let you easily reach out to a group of customers with any email or text message. For example, in advance of an impending storm, a company could easily email or text a group of customers due for delivery soon to ask them to make sure there is a clear path to their fill location. Another touch might be after a storm has hit to let customers know that you are making deliveries, but that there might be a delay in returning phone calls. Keeping your customers informed both before and after weather events puts them at ease and keeps customer satisfaction high.

“Great customer communication can be a game changer...”





Automated Communication – It's Effortless

On-demand communication is great for some situations, but automated text and emails are perfect for consistent communication with no manual intervention needed. Informative notifications can be sent to a customer automatically, like when a driver or service tech is dispatched, arrives, or completes a delivery or service job. A headshot and bio of the technician or driver can also be included to not only inform your customer, but help put them at ease.

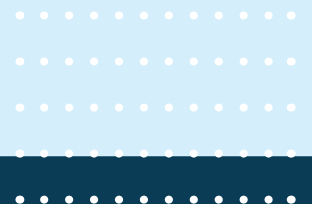
Simple actions taken by the driver on a mobile device can prompt a customer communication to be sent. If a driver attempts to deliver fuel to a home and the tank is inaccessible due to a locked gate, the driver can click a button to indicate the issue, and that can prompt an automatic text or

email to the customer. Without mobile technology, the driver might have to call the dispatcher, and the dispatcher or CSR would in turn have to call the customer. The automated notification saves all that effort and time. This easy communication also can lead to a quick remedy, allowing the delivery to be made while the driver is still in the area. This eliminates the need for a special, costly trip to the same location the next day.

ADD Customer Self-Service

Weather can make customers nervous, so consistent easy access to information can calm their concerns. A customer web portal, connected to back office software, can be invaluable during a period of heightened activity or uncertainty, allowing customers to check for themselves rather than calling the office. A customer can see updated information, review their account, request a delivery or service call, pay their bill, and have their questions answered quickly with no need to call the office.

Customer communication is paramount to a customer's overall experience with your company, and software can make it faster and easier. Quickly accessible information and proactive text and email communication means fewer phone calls and more time for CSRs to handle other important tasks. During a busy time with challenging weather, great communication gives a personal touch, keeping your customers informed, happy, and loyal.



Technology

Lets You Do More

As winter nears, propane companies need to be ready to handle more activity and effectively deal with challenges. Modern technology can help by streamlining and automating processes and adding flexible functionality to mitigate risk. Information can be made easily accessible and easily shared to help provide a great customer experience.

Technology lets you do more.

To learn more about how you can use technology to improve your operation, contact ADD Systems at 800-922-0972 or addsys.com.



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