

# CenterPoint Energy Powers Up with Outsourcing



In Minnesota, CenterPoint Energy is the state's largest natural gas distribution company serving more than 760,000 residential, commercial and industrial customers in over 240 communities. Home Service Plus®, the company's non-regulated business in Minnesota, offers products and services in the categories of heating, ventilation and air conditioning, HVAC appliance repair and sales. As part of its business, the

company operates a call center for handling appliance repair and emergency service calls. In the fall of 2000, Minnesota Gas, a business unit of CenterPoint Energy, recognized a need for assistance handling its peak time periods during extreme weather and high call volume times. Seeking a cost-efficient alternative to hiring and training temporary agents to manage seasonal rises in call volume, Minnesota Gas partnered with Virtual-Agent Services (VAS).

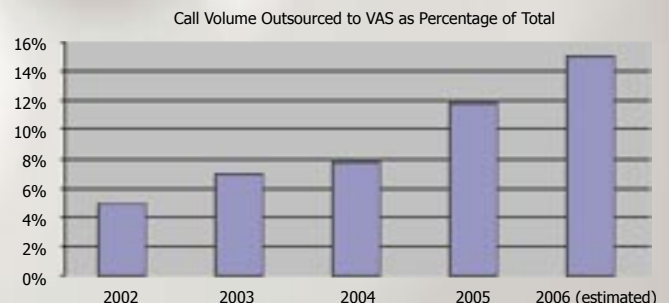
VAS began answering calls in November 2000 and services residential customers who are in need of appliance repairs. The agent offers services under Home Service Plus® Repair Plan and also parts & labor charges. In addition to service calls, agents also handle move orders and overdue account calls by setting up payment arrangements and answering basic billing inquiries.



OBJECTIVES	APPROACH	RESULTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cost effective peak call volume handling</li> <li>Maintain a core agent group matched to a leveled call volume projection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offset seasonal call peaking, long and short term staffing shortages due to attrition, FMLA, training, meetings, projects, etc. through outsourcing to VAS</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Approximately 12-14% of Minnesota Gas call volumes currently outsourced to VAS</li> <li>No increase to Minnesota Gas' core agent complement in the past 3 years</li> <li>Elimination of over-hire and sunk costs invested in training for short-term temporary staffing</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Convert legacy billing systems to SAP/CCS platform</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>VAS commitment to agent training and client assimilation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seamless transition for Minnesota Gas customers</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase sales of appliance service contracts, preventive maintenance programs, appliance leads, and utility account programs such as budget billing, bank pay options etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Up-to-date client information available at all times through a shared database</li> <li>Customized sales specific training provided to VAS agents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Confirmed sales figures for VAS agents are consistent with those of internal agents</li> <li>Sales performance of VAS agents was equal to that of internal agents after providing services for only 3 weeks</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase customer satisfaction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain high response service levels</li> <li>Quality agent/customer interaction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitored scores remain in the "very-good to excellent" range for overall satisfaction and "good to very good" range for feeling valued</li> </ul>

*"The CenterPoint Energy/VAS partnership has been an extremely positive experience for both companies. Our peak workload strategy, using VAS as a service provider, has offered us operating flexibility, cost-effective call load management and sustained quality customer service support in times of business growth and change."*

Brad Holland  
 Director, Customer Services  
 CenterPoint Energy/Minnesota Gas



## For More Information

Virtual-Agent Services • 1920 N. Thoreau Dr., Suite 116, Schaumburg, IL 60173  
 888.827.7253 • sales@vagent.com • www.vagent.com