

NorthStar

Hosted Utility Billing and Customer Information Software Service



WPPI Energy members developed the Hosted Utility Billing and Customer Information Software (CIS) service to help aid in local utility operations. Through the service, WPPI jointly purchases, maintains and provides support for members using the NorthStar billing and CIS software.

Purpose

The service provides value to members using the software and the WPPI membership as a whole.

For members, the service offers a higher quality, more functional product; lowers the total cost of ownership; provides easier access to high-quality support, a strong user network for additional support, and greater access to customer information and data.

For WPPI as a system, the service allows for access to critical customer data imperative to optimize the power supply portfolio and effectively offer other support services like innovative rate designs and other customer information services. Toward that end, WPPI relies on the ability to access customer information across the membership with a reasonable amount of flexibility. Using the NorthStar system is a critical component for members implementing advanced metering and maximizing the joint purchasing benefits of AMI infrastructure, meter data management and customer information services.

Overview

NorthStar is available on a pay-for-service basis to all members. Participating members access NorthStar through WPPI's wide-area network. Members connect directly to the software from their local workstations. While the server is located in Sun Prairie, users have the flexibility to perform tasks like printing to local printers and transferring files for hand-held meter reading, and taking payments just as if the hardware and software were local.

WPPI provides first-line support to participating members for software and billing-related support issues. WPPI employs a group of full-time staff to provide this support. WPPI coordinates maintenance and upgrades to the software so member staff can focus on their customers.

WPPI also offers a variety of training opportunities through onsite sessions, webinars and larger group workshops.

Annual user group meetings provide networking opportunities for members to share ideas, discuss issues and pass along helpful hints. A committee of NorthStar users plan these meetings.

Standard Features

- » Billing – all services including electric, water, sewer, gas, storm water, refuse, Internet, commitment to community, cable, Round Up and Project Share programs
- » Customer Information System and service orders
- » Complex rates
- » Cashiering
- » Hand-held interface
- » Pre-authorized payment
- » Transformer analysis
- » Statement billing
- » Report writer
- » Activity calendar
- » Integration with WPPI Meter Data Management (MDM) software
- » Meter management including AMR and AMI meters
- » Web-based electronic bill presentation and customer portal
- » Web-based electronic staff portal
- » Electronic billing (eBilling) and online bill payment data services
- » Mobile field service orders (mCare)
- » Online bill presentation and secure payment options email billing
- » Online customer information and communication
 - » View electric and water usage (interval data for customers with AMI, monthly data for non-AMI customers)
 - » Customizable notifications and alerts
 - » User goal setting and usage management
 - » Customer property profile
- » Customer engagement portal with options to implement behavioral energy efficiency initiatives, rate comparisons, demand response communication, and other personalized customer experience programs (my Meter)
- » As requested by members, WPPI can perform a Utilization Review to ensure business practices align with the software.

Member Role

- » Use WPPI Helpdesk system for first-line support
- » Comply with Member Policy 211 “Use of Information Systems”
- » Participate in user group meetings
- » Pay annual support and maintenance fees
- » Pay for authorized customizations specific to the member
- » For new participants, pay the current license and implementation fees

WPPI Role

- » Act as liaison between NorthStar staff and members for escalated support and customizations.
- » Provide implementation, data conversion and training support for new NorthStar members.
- » Provide first-line support to troubleshoot and resolve software, hardware and connection issues.
- » Manage hardware, licenses, application and data, including maintenance, upgrades, backup and disaster recovery services.
- » Conduct workshops and training sessions.
- » Create and share custom reports.
- » Support new modules, services and features, such as complex rates.
- » Develop and manage custom interfaces for WPPI staff and members.

Ask about complementary services...

Outsource Retail Billing Service

One of the most cost-effective ways for electric utilities to communicate with retail customers is through the monthly bill. WPPI offers the Outsourced Retail Bill Service to help members improve their communication with customers and has negotiated joint pricing for the service and manages the business relationship with InfoSend, the outsourcing partner. Professionally formatted, color billing statements with key usage and comparison information provides value to customers.

Retail Billing and Tariff Compliance Service

To best serve customers, utilities are implementing innovative rate structures and new technologies making the billing process increasingly complex. The Retail Billing and Tariff Compliance Service is designed to help participating member utilities ensure billing accuracy. The service offers a variety of levels to help validate meter data and perform retail billing functions such as performing critical billing best practices and preparing retail bills.

Participation & Costs

Members first implementing NorthStar are billed a onetime fee that covers joint licensing, data conversion, implementation services, training, and go-live parallel support. Customizations specific to a member are billed on a passthrough basis. Member out-of-pocket costs associated with a NorthStar implementation are eligible for the Member Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Loan Program. Contact us for additional information on pricing.

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