



Smart Electric
Power Alliance

Case Study ———

Understanding Fleets in Your Service Area

A Case Study with DTE Electric

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Authors

Drake Moran Analyst, Research & Industry Strategy
Smart Electric Power Alliance

Garrett Fitzgerald Senior Director, Transportation
Electrification
Smart Electric Power Alliance

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Case Study: Understanding Fleets in Your Service Area

The Challenge	The Solution
<p>Utilities face challenges establishing contact with fleet managers and building relationships that facilitate smoother electrification processes.</p> <p>Enhancing the understanding of a utility's service territory's fleets is crucial for fostering effective communication and nurturing strong relationships between utilities and fleet managers. By bridging the knowledge gaps such as lack of transparency into fleet data, unfamiliarity with new technology, and using electricity as a fuel source, utilities can develop programs that holistically address the unique needs of fleets within their service territory, thereby facilitating a harmonious transition to electrification. This proactive approach helps foster clear communication, minimize delays, and optimize costs, ultimately paving the way for successful electrification initiatives. Recognizing the shared challenge of comprehending fleet dynamics, utilities and fleet customers can work together to overcome misunderstandings, streamline processes, and unlock the benefits of electrification, including improved efficiency, reduced emissions, and enhanced sustainability.</p>	<p>DTE Electric (DTE), a Michigan energy company, developed a first-of-its-kind, comprehensive seven-step advisory services process and staffed an in-house expert consulting team. This team is dedications to initiating dierct outreach to customers by utilizing automotive fleet data, helps DTE learn learn about fleets in its service territory, and establishes better relationships with fleet managers.</p> <p>To build stronger relationships with fleet managers and facilitate a smoother electrification process, utilities must develop a better understanding of the fleets within their service territory. Approaches to achieving this goal include purchasing and analyzing fleet data, establishing direct contact with fleet managers, providing advisory services, building or providing resources to an eFleets Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) tool, and extending outreach efforts. By employing these strategies, utilities can identify fleets most likely to electrify and provide valuable support and resources to accelerate the transition to electric transportation systems.</p>

Approaches to Understanding Fleets in Your Service Area

DTE took the following steps to better understand fleets in their service territory:

1. Purchase and Analyze Fleet Data: DTE purchased a data list from IHS, a provider of automotive fleet information. The data included fleet sizes and contact information for relevant commercial and industrial accounts with company vehicles. DTE used this information to identify about 1,500 potential candidates for fleet electrification, focusing on larger fleets (more than five vehicles) and early adopters such as villages, cities, hospitals, and colleges. They then refined this list, targeting fleets that were most likely to electrify first such as fleet size, industry type, vehicle age, and EV market availability DTE approached targeted customers using various outreach methods, including LinkedIn, cold calls, email, and other mass marketing techniques.

2. Establish Direct Contact with Fleet Managers: DTE's consulting team contacted fleet managers through LinkedIn, cold calls, and mass marketing. By proactively initiating conversations, they were able to build relationships and better understand electrification needs.

3. Provide Advisory Services: DTE guided interested customers through a customized expert consultation, helping them identify the feasibility of electrifying their fleets, develop personalized electrification plans, including suitable available EVs and chargers, and navigate their utility make-ready rebate application process. They also offered financial analysis services such as Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) assessments to help customers evaluate the cost-effectiveness of transitioning from ICE vehicles to EVs.

4. Develop an eFleets Self-servicing TCO Tool: The eFleets TCO tool is a comprehensive self-service platform provided by DTE. It is designed for fleet customers who wish to analyze the costs associated with their fleets independently. By accessing the tool at <https://efleets.dteenergy.com/>, fleet customers can input specific details about their fleet, such as vehicle types, usage patterns, charging windows, and replacement year. The tool then calculates the TCO by considering various factors such as fuel prices, vehicle efficiency, and maintenance costs. This allows fleet customers to assess the financial implications of transitioning to EVs compared to traditional fossil fuel vehicles. With the TCO results provided by the tool, fleet customers can make informed decisions about adopting EVs and

better understand the potential savings and benefits associated with electrifying their fleets.

5. **Extend Outreach Efforts:** DTE participated in ride-and-drive events and expos, and partnered with

third-party organizations such as local Chambers of Commerce, and Trade Associations to engage with fleet operators beyond their initial list of 1,500 potential candidates. This approach allowed them to reach more fleets within their service territory.

Utility Benefits	Customer Benefits
Improved customer relationships: Proactively reaching out to fleet operators and offering advisory services helped DTE build trust and improve customer satisfaction.	Improved communication: Proactive outreach including surveying customers on their experience and ongoing support from DTE ensured that customers felt heard and understood throughout the electrification process.
Opportunities for growth: By continuously expanding its outreach efforts, DTE was able to connect with more fleet operators and grow its fleet electrification program.	Shorter timelines: DTE's guidance and support helped fleet operators navigate the electrification process more quickly and efficiently.
Improved system planning: Information DTE discovers on fleets within their service territory is immediately passed to distribution planning teams, allowing the utility to better prepare for future fleet electrification.	Better understanding of financial benefits: DTE's advisory services helped customers evaluate the cost-effectiveness of transitioning to EVs, making the decision to electrify easier.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

“Through our advisory services and deep utility knowledge, we empower fleet managers to embrace the transformation to EVs. By leveraging our expertise and insights, businesses can unlock the full potential of electrifying their fleets, realizing substantial cost savings, reducing emissions, and driving towards a more sustainable future.”

– Milena Marku, Manager of Customer Marketing, DTE's EV Strategy and Programs.

As DTE worked to understand fleets in its service territory, one significant challenge was addressing the uncertainties of the early stages of fleet electrification. Many fleet operators are still in the initial phases of this transition and have yet to form clear strategies. DTE's goal wasn't to convince these operators to electrify, but rather, to equip them with the necessary information and tools to make informed decisions about electrification in the future.

Evolving how to conduct quality engagement with fleet operators was also key. It was clear that some fleets would require multiple interactions over time before pursuing electrification. In these conversations, the goal was to create an open dialogue about electrification and educate fleets about the benefits of electrification. Even when fleets initially decided against electrification, open dialog, and ongoing engagement increased the likelihood they would keep abreast of electrification trends and reach out to their utility early, should they eventually choose to electrify.

The experience also underscored the importance of flexibility and adaptability. DTE learned to meet customers where they are, tailoring their approach to accommodate each customer's unique needs and circumstances. This adaptable, customer-centric strategy was essential in strengthening relationships with fleet operators and offering support for a potential transition to electrification.

By leveraging automotive fleet data and proactively engaging with fleet operators, DTE could better understand the fleets within their service territory, build stronger relationships with fleet managers, and facilitate smoother electrification processes. Their approach demonstrates the value of targeted outreach, advisory services, and ongoing support in driving the adoption of EVs. Utilities looking to replicate DTE's success should consider investing in fleet data analysis, establishing direct contact with fleet managers, and prioritizing flexibility and adaptability around customers' needs.



**Smart Electric
Power Alliance**

1800 M STREET, NW FRONT 1

#33159

WASHINGTON, DC 20036

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