

# MUTUAL ASSISTANCE FOR CALL CENTERS



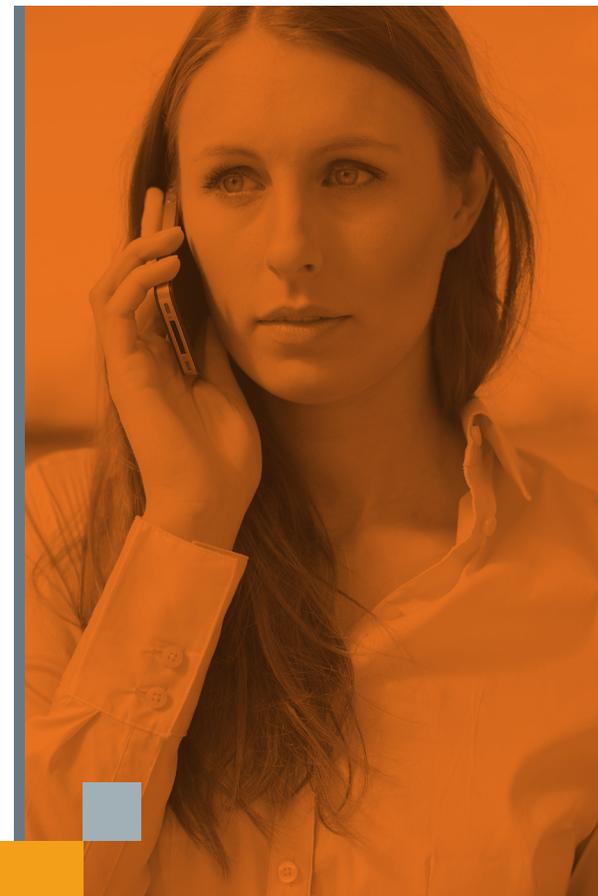
west<sup>®</sup>

DATA SHEET

Mutual assistance is a cornerstone of the utility industry. Until now, it has been used by operations for line crews, equipment and other resources related to actual restoration efforts. TFCC's Mutual Assistance Routing System (MARS) makes it possible for utilities to use the same principles for customer service. They can:

- Assist each other with agent-answered calls during large or extended outages
- Transfer outage calls to actual utility CSRs with industry knowledge and experience in outage situations
- Answer calls for other utilities regardless of the telecommunications carrier in place
- Meet demands through a simple, web-based interface
- Be ready to assist in 30 minutes through online training

Changing weather patterns have dramatically increased both the incidence and severity of weather events across the United States in the last several years. Through MARS, the sharing of agents in a virtual environment has become a critical element in many utilities' storm response plans. In addition, the MARS concept fits seamlessly within a utility's internal systems through a simple, easy-to-use interface that moves smoothly across multiple telecommunications carriers.



## WHAT *MARS* USERS ARE SAYING...

"I'm very familiar with mutual assistance programs with utility companies, so the idea and the concept of MARS made total sense to me. It's the same concept as regular mutual assistance programs, but because it's Twenty First Century you don't have to move bodies or equipment. That's a huge benefit."

"We've never had any problem getting volunteers. There's just a general excitement, really, whenever we ask our agents to help. It's pretty exciting. With the ability to help a utility that's so far away and talk to customers that are not our own, it's just a very good experience for our agents and it's an easy thing to train."

— *Karen Lewis, Director of Customer Service, Tampa Electric (TECO)*

"You can also really help yourself with PR if your customer satisfaction is there...as well as avoiding regulatory bodies being upset with your response when you have good customer service. So, even from a cost perspective, in the long run it might be better over. Our plan has always been to use MARS after the first couple of days, when people really want to talk to a human being. And that was one of the biggest reasons we decided to use it because if we can't handle those incoming calls with our own people, we do want them to talk to a human being. That is something that goes a long way with your regulators that people aren't complaining to them that 'I could only talk to a machine!'"

— *Harry Ruschetta, Call Center Manager, NSTAR*

"From a Southern Company perspective, we're a major utility and we like to be a part of a lot of different, emerging technologies, especially if they're going to benefit us in any way. We like to be available to other utilities, sister and fellow companies, as far as mutual assistance is concerned. We've been doing it for many, many years with power distribution and line crews so we thought the call center effort would be a good fit."

— *Wesley Higgins, Technology Analyst, Alabama Power (Southern Company)*

"It allows us to meet increased customer demands sometimes on a planned basis, sometimes on an unplanned basis, with customer service professionals who are used to this business. The comfort is the fact that these are customer service professionals who are used to handling this type of call. They're familiar with the terminology so this isn't something that's new to them. That's really the comfort."

— *Maria Mercado, Applications Business Analyst, Pepco*