

Gainesville Regional Utilities Helps Commercial Customers Manage Energy Usage

Progressive utilities are recognizing the opportunity to supply critical timely energy consumption data to their key commercial accounts. By providing this data directly to their end customers, the utility empowers them to better control their energy costs. A case in point is Gainesville Regional Utilities (GRU) of Gainesville, Fla.

ONE GRU CUSTOMER SAVES \$10,000 - \$15,000/MONTH

Naylor, LLC, a local publishing company

GRU uses Automated Energy's Load Profiler software to provide daily consumption information to its government and commercial customers. One GRU customer, Naylor, LLC, a local publishing company, has used the information to cut its electrical bill by between \$10,000 to \$15,000 per month.

GRU provides reports generated by the Load Profiler software to Naylor for a nominal monthly fee. Sample reports showing detailed power consumption for two recent months are shown in figures 1a and 1b. By relying on data from the load profiling service, which Naylor started using in August 2010, the company has reduced its overall electricity use by 39% and peak demand by 13%.

"Giving our customers information that shows energy consumption on a 15-minute basis allows for quick resolution of problems that otherwise would have taken to the end of the monthly billing cycle to recognize and deal with," said Dan Clark, key accounts representative of the GRU Energy and Business Services Department. "Customers can recoup the monthly cost very quickly through eliminating wasted energy consumption."

GRU selected the Automated Energy (AEI) reporting software because AEI's Load Profiler has been proven to be very useful by other utilities across the country. "We have the capability of producing consumption reports internally," said Dan Clark. "But, we're a relatively small utility, and with our IT department already stretched thin serving other needs it would not have made sense for us to develop our own reporting software."

Utility customer benefitted almost immediately

"We started benefitting from using the Load Profiler reporting almost immediately," said Lynn Hammond, Naylor Facilities Manager. "We look for spikes in our energy usage and try to identify changes that we can make to eliminate them. The main thing that we've done is establish a procedure whereby at a certain time during the day we'll shut down the HVAC system and not turn it on until the next morning."

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Figures 1a and 1b show the dramatic cuts that can be made. “Now, we also turn our air conditioning system off over the weekend,” said Lynn Hammond. “Though these things seem intuitive, the Load Profiler brought to our attention the huge energy usage we were having when no one was in our building, and it helped us see the benefits of smaller changes as well, such as going to more energy-efficient light bulbs.”

Reporting helps solve power problems

The reporting system can also provide data to help solve problems caused by isolated events. For example, soon after Naylor first got the service, there was some stormy weather. “When the power came back after a lightning-caused outage, it erased the pre-programmed settings in our building control systems, and the HVAC started running at night when it shouldn’t have,” said Lynn

Hammond. “In the past, we would have seen a higher electric bill at the end of the month, but we never knew if there was some setting that had changed or something had gone wrong with the system. In this case, we saw immediately from the load profile graph that the AC was running all night and fixed the problem, or so we thought. When subsequent data showed that the initial fix didn’t work, we were able to make the changes that fixed the problem permanently. Without the quarter-hourly load profiles, it could have taken us weeks to recognize and fix the problem.”

“We have a tenant in our building, too,” adds Lynn Hammond, “and though we don’t have a separate power meter on their usage, Load Profiler is helpful in identifying spikes that might be caused by them if everything is normal on our end.”

Reporting keeps budgets under control

“Naylor’s experience is typical of our Load Profiler users,” said GRU’s Dan Clark. “Some of our government accounts have used it to look at the after-hour energy consumption of their buildings. Since after-hour energy consumption is typically not budgeted-for by government entities, any overage caused by after hour usage can be a big problem. With the load profile reports, utility managers have documented proof of consumption to use in getting un-budgeted expenses under control.”

The Load Profiler system doesn’t require customers to log in and look at consumption levels every day in order to identify situations that require attention. The software supports alert systems that can email customers when there are events that they want to know about. “Typically, when the service is first installed, customers are on it every day,” said Dan Clark. “Then, after a few months of that, customers check the data only when there’s a reason. Load Profiler allows you to set the alert thresholds so as not to get too many alerts. You just get the data that you need and can use.”

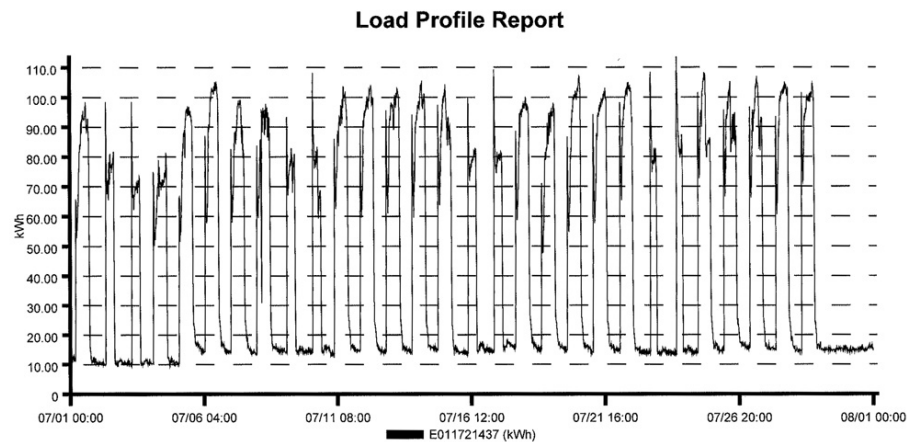


Figure 1a. Real-time power consumption data for Naylor for July, 2011

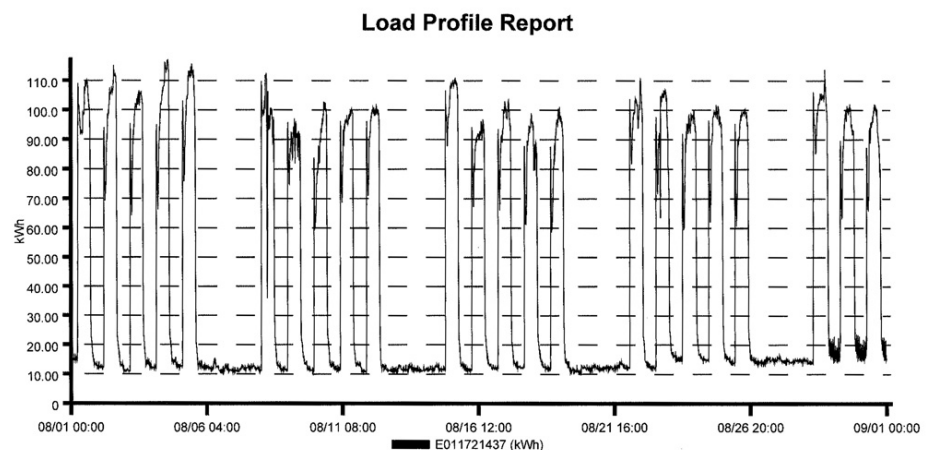


Figure 1b. Real-time power consumption data for Naylor for August, 2011.

As Figure 1a shows, Naylor was already saving power by turning its building’s air conditioning and office systems off during the evenings in July, but the company was able to produce additional power savings in August when the systems were turned off on weekends as well.

Reporting helps with power planning

The Load Profiler software can help utilities with their power planning as well. “The software provides the capability for us to overlay the weather on the graphs,” said Dan. “You can see how the power consumption reacts to a certain temperature and use that to predict loads assuming the weather forecast. And we can use the information to advise our commercial customers to pre-cool their buildings, for example, when the forecast is for hot weather.”

“The Load Profiler system gives me a sense of confidence day-to-day that things are operating correctly,” concludes Lynn. “It’s nice having the historical data so that we can compare our current usage with previous time frames so that we can prove the value of incremental energy-saving decisions that we make.”

Automated Energy, Inc.

TEL 405.601.7500

TOLL-FREE 866.421.1234

FAX 405.601.7503

www.automatedenergy.com
support@automatedenergy.com

4100 Perimeter Center Drive
Suite 202
Oklahoma City, OK 73112

