

# **Buyer's Guide for Self-Service Bill Management & Reporting in Utilities**

*Essential Guide for Finance & Digital Management*

This buyer's guide provides Electric and Natural Gas Utilities a primer for serving data-driven Commercial and Industrial (C&I) customers and outlines important buying criteria to help you implement the best self-service solution.



# 1

## Business Primer: The Rise of the Data-Driven Customer

Today's customer wants to do more with less. They want to optimize their resources to get more from their money. They want to make fewer clicks to make better decisions. And they want more insights with less effort.

The driving force behind this efficiency movement is a heightened understanding of the value of data.

Businesses are investing heavily – both in time and resources – to further embed data analysis into processes and cultures. They want to move beyond auditing to a state of forecasting and decision-making. But this data-driven approach is dependent on the businesses' ability to acquire data in a way that easily integrates into their daily tasks.

Specific to utilities, businesses acknowledge usage and spend data as an area holding significant business value. While there are tools available today, the majority of bill management and reporting offerings fall short of expectations due to their inability to provide companies with the data they actually require to efficiently monitor and manage their usage and spend. And with more data being produced at unprecedented speeds, this gap for the data-driven customer is continuing to widen.

### The pitfalls of traditional bill reporting

Because of the rigidity and siloed nature of traditional bill reporting, today's billing portals assume that all customers have the same data needs and that those needs are static in nature. Of course, the utility knows their customers well enough to know this is not the case, however the available options for enhancing these tools have been limited and the cost to develop has been high.

While most utilities have successfully evolved to a digital state of reporting and data delivery, the functionality has not kept pace with business expectations. Compare, for example, a Residential

#### WHY TRADITIONAL BILL MANAGEMENT & REPORTING IS FALLING SHORT FOR TODAY'S DATA-DRIVEN CUSTOMER



##### LACK OF INTEGRATION

"I can't automatically connect my utility data to my internal invoicing processes."

##### NO PERSONALIZATION

"I have no way to organize my data at the source, making automated allocations impossible."



##### INFLEXIBLE REPORTING

"I have to pull multiple reports and then manually extract and consolidate the fields I need for usage and spend validation."

##### LIMITED MONITORING

"I can't monitor usage and spend as a whole, only at the individual account level."



##### LACK OF CONSOLIDATED VIEW



"The portal gives me access to a consolidated list of reports but I need a consolidated view of my usage and spend."

online billing and payment experience. Consumers can quickly see their monthly usage, view usage and spend dynamically, download all or a defined portion of the data, pay their bill and more.

Account and product complexities have stalled the availability of a similar experience for the C&I customer. Each company has a varying account structure to support a wide variety of business operating models. And each company is using multiple utility services and products. Consequently, it

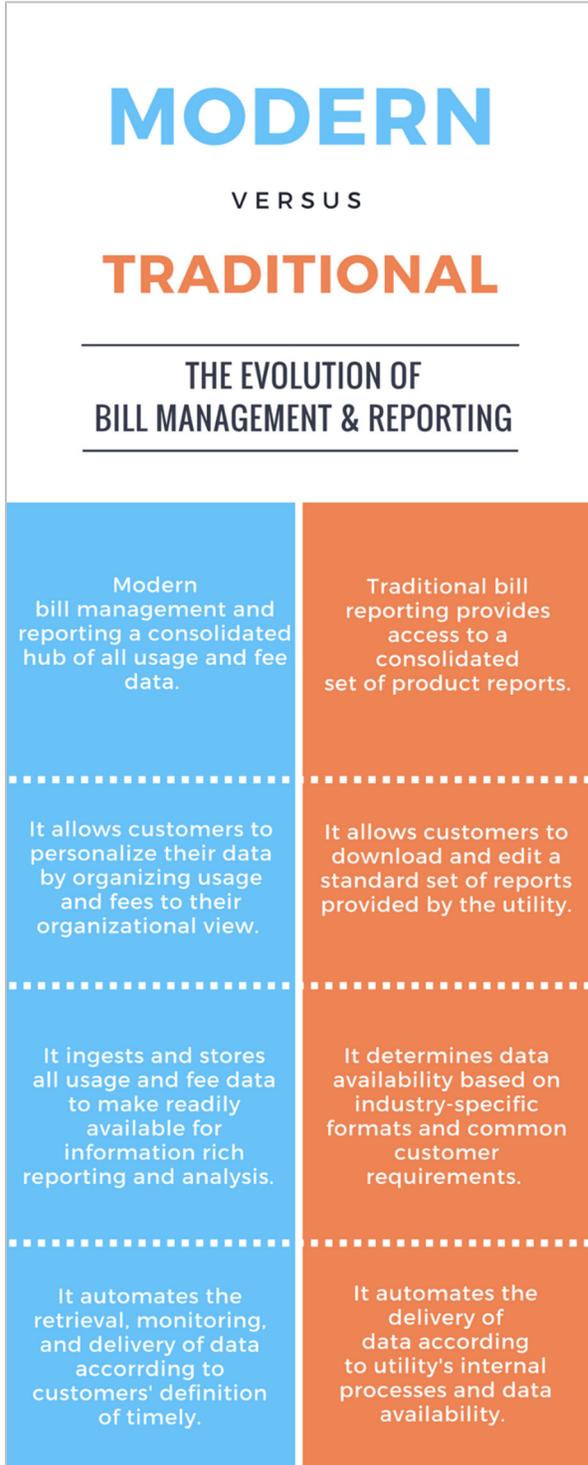
is more difficult for utility providers to identify and address the specific needs of business customers. This has resulted in a one-size fits all offering where customers are limited to selecting from a list of static reports, viewing fees and usage at a product versus consolidated level, and reporting according to the utility's product structure versus the company's organizational structure.

What is lacking in this traditional approach is the ability for businesses to define what data is needed, how they want to view it, when to receive it and how to process it internally. Although industry formats and standard reports are a necessity, so too are reports that are structured based on a company's unique business needs – both from an industry and a job function perspective. While one company may allocate charges at a location level, another may allocate at the corporate level. And while an Operations Manager may be focused on energy efficiency reporting, the Account Payables team needs access to all bills and associated detail data.

Understanding and addressing individual customer needs is an ever-evolving challenge given the dynamic nature of the C&I base. But as data expectations rise and new players emerge, maintaining the traditional approach to bill reporting will have a significant impact on the utility's ability to keep, grow, and win customers.

### Modern bill management and reporting in a data-driven world

Moving from a traditional approach is not as simple as adding new report and delivery options. The challenge is in how utilities have stored usage and fee data. Data is often siloed into disparate tables or databases limiting the utility's ability to deliver an adaptable customer-centric solution.



The shift to modern bill management and reporting means consolidating data and giving customers control. The four key traits to make this shift are as follows:



### **The Challenge**

While the billing portal typically serves as a host to a variety of product reports, data is separated by product. Utilities often struggle with data normalization and presentation due to the complexity and variations of data assets, e.g., legacy systems, acquired systems, digital upgrades, industry standards. Heavy investments in data warehouse initiatives have helped to streamline the utility's operations, yet this 'physical' consolidation of data has not addressed the logical linkages between the data and the customer needs.

### **The Impact**

This shortcoming places the onus on companies to manually extract, consolidate, and manipulate data to gain a holistic understanding of their usage and spend. This time-intensive process hinders the companies' ability to leverage their utility usage data to make smarter business decisions. Instead of analyzing and optimizing, companies are populating and validating spreadsheets.

### **The Need**

Utilities need a consolidation process that aligns the varying source data fields and values into a consistent and usable format. This begins with an advanced data mapping and validation exercise to discover commonalities and variations among the source data. Based on these findings, data is then mapped accordingly to normalized product, transaction, currency, and fee types. Data is then digitally presented and made available for reporting and analytics across all the products and accounts used by a customer.



### **The Challenge**

Traditional bill reporting requires manual manipulation of data to fill the gap between what the utility provides and what the company needs in order to support operational decision-making. Although the shift to digital has made it easier to access the data provided, it has not resolved the issue of presenting data in a way that is easily consumable by the company, its departments, and their supporting corporate systems.

### **The Impact**

Given the limitations of traditional bill reporting, companies are leveraging the utility's solutions to simply feed data into spreadsheet and systems residing on their side. As account-specific data is made available, it is extracted and manually imported into spreadsheets according to the companies' account assignments.

This would be a seemingly simple task if the data was minimal and consistent, but customers have to take transactions from multiple products and services to create a comprehensive and actionable view. The high volumes and fluctuation in products, services, fees, accounts, and owner

assignments makes this data organization process one that is daunting and error-prone. Companies expect to have data automatically aggregated and reported according to their specifications. And as their specifications change, they want a dynamic view that reflects that change.

### **The Need**

Integrating customer-defined hierarchies directly into the utility's reporting is one critical element. It is important to note that these are not customer profile hierarchies of how the utility 'thinks' the company is structured. This is a tool that allows the company to build a hierarchy – or multiple co-existing hierarchies – to reflect how they define their business, i.e. location or corporate structure. Once the hierarchies are defined, companies assign accounts and all consumption and fee data aligns accordingly.

Another data organization capability is the grouping or tagging of data. Customers define a series of tags (owner, location, high cost, etc.) that can then be applied to accounts or individual data records. As opposed to searching and assigning, the tags are automatically applied based on customer-defined rules.

By empowering the company to self-organize at the front of the process, utilities enable a level of personalization and therefore, efficiency, which is lacking in today's bill reporting. As opposed to gathering the data and then manipulating offline, companies have immediate access to usable and consumable data. This saves companies an extensive amount of time in their reporting and reconciliation process and improves the utility's data position as mission-critical versus important.



### **The Challenge**

The challenge for utilities is providing access to both a summarized view and the supporting detailed consumption – in a way that customers can easily select what and how they would like to view the data. The onus is on utilities to produce, organize, and store data in a way that can easily be delivered as varying formats and digested through varying processes. But this 'open' model poses issues of scalability and flexibility when serving thousands of high usage customers.

### **The Impact**

Although new industry formats have evolved in attempts of bringing consistency, companies are hesitant to adopt another format that seemingly still presents limitations. Without the ability to easily obtain the information required, many companies site 'pulling fields from multiple reports' as standard practice to adequately feed their corporate systems and processes.

Some utilities have established 'direct to data' models, which allow companies to extract raw data files for automatic ingestion into their corporate systems. Although this solution provides information rich data, it can be costly and often requires a specialized skillset on the customer side to integrate and manage – making it viable for only large corporate customers.

### **The Need**

What is required is a flexible data hub and richer data formats to make data more adaptable to changing company needs. By capturing and transcribing data from multiple systems into a flexible data hub, utilities enable companies to extract data formatted to meet their business process requirements. This approach increases the data types and level of detail made readily available to companies, while streamlining the data into a standards-based, interoperable format.

The access to information-rich data and its resulting outputs enable companies to communicate information needs across multiple utility partners in a much more efficient manner than traditional bill reporting. This allows companies to bring both resource and cost efficiencies to specific financial business processes by minimizing the need for manual consolidation and manipulation.

In order to adopt this information-rich data approach, utilities must ensure their data hub is flexible enough to ingest, analyze, store, and output high volumes and varieties of data.



### **The Challenge**

The challenge for utilities is being able to automatically trigger the delivery of data based on varying customer needs. Although some standard formats have moved to an automated delivery state, many utilities lack the ability to dynamically translate customer requirements into an output that is automatically delivered as directed by the customer.

Customers are also limited in their ability to proactively monitor information, based on what they define as important or high risk. Although some utilities offer alerting capabilities within their usage reporting, the alerts are typically pre-defined or only allow for a single parameter to be applied.

### **The Impact**

This dependence on pulling information has a significant impact on the way customers perceive and engage with their utility partners. After spending hours each day to gather and manipulate data into a useable format, minimal thought or time is allocated to optimizing their utility products, services and relationships.

Although in theory the integrated portal should offer considerable time savings, the reality is the siloed data that sits within the integrated interface still requires a customer to spend several hours each month pulling the required spend and usage data.

### **The Need**

Utilities must shift from pull to push, automatically delivering data and information based on a customers' individual parameters and preferences. This goes beyond scheduling a standard report to be emailed or transferred via SFTP to allowing the customer to define what they want, how and when they want it.

This automated schema is only feasible with a highly flexible, highly configurable data and delivery model. It leverages all of the aforementioned data traits – consolidation, personalization, and information-rich – and applies a notion of timeliness that is lacking in traditional bill reporting.

This timeliness must also be applied to data alerts, allowing customers to monitor data in near-real time based on a wide variety of cross-applied parameters, i.e. product, transaction type, cost, volume, or account.

## **The business value of modern bill management and reporting**

Empowering customers with modern bill management and reporting enables utilities to move beyond service provider status to that of a partner critical for business efficiency. Data reporting,

analysis and monitoring is transferred from a manual, offline state to the core of the utility's billing and reporting – keeping the utility's data at the center of the customer experience. This enhanced offering can assist the utility in improving how they keep, grow, and win new customers.

### ***Keep Customers***

This modern approach creates a customer stickiness that is uncommon in the previous generation of bill management and reporting. Customers will invest in personalizing their data views, outputs, and transfers – making them dependent on the solution and ultimately, the utility.

### ***Grow Customers***

The automation of processes and data alignment are directly tied to improved efficiencies and accelerated decision-making, which are recognized among C&I customers for offering significant value. This advancement in reporting and analytics technology enables utilities to redefine the expected experience, as well as what customers are willing to pay for it.

### ***Win Customers***

Businesses are looking for utility partners who are capable of providing the products and services, as well as the technology required for the improvement of their business. Innovation around data and analysis continue to rank high in importance among C&I customers, yet the billing experience continues to receive low satisfaction ratings – a prime opportunity for those who are willing to advance forward.

# 2

## Evaluation Guidelines:

### Selecting the Right Self-Service Bill Management & Reporting For Your Commercial and Industrial (C&I) Customers

#### **Business justification and ROI**

Developing a business justification and return on investment (ROI) model for an bill management and reporting solution is the normal course once the main business drivers have been identified. The Globys ROI Analysis methodology provides one way to assess the ROI of modern information reporting. Measurable benefits include:

- Decreased operational costs
- Improved customer retention
- Improved Days Sales Outstanding (DSO)
- Improved customer satisfaction of billing experience
- Incremental revenue growth
- New revenue stream

#### **Build versus buy**

Building a bill management and reporting solution versus buying one has significant implications on ROI.

First, building your own solution requires specific knowledge that is often scattered throughout the organization. While developers may possess adequate data expertise, the knowledge of customers' reporting needs often lies within product or account management, and integration and maintenance sits within IT. The gathering and application of requirements across these varying groups can be time intensive and often defaults to what is easily obtainable versus what is best for the customer.

Ongoing enhancements and maintenance of the solution are also a factor to consider. As priorities shift, often the responsibility of ensuring the solution is continuing to meet the needs of today's customer is deprioritized as well.

Building is typically more expensive than buying because of the need to develop requirements, create designs, procure infrastructure, administer the solution, and maintain the code. Given the increased cost, you have to guarantee unique payback over a purchased solution.

As opposed to traditional bill management and reporting solutions, modern cloud solutions allow utilities to plug and play best-of-breed components without having to re-invent or re-build any existing back-end investments. Utilities can easily adapt to evolving products and services, ensuring consistent and long-term alignment with the utility's vision and customers' needs.

Contrast the opportunity and direct costs of building a solution with the cost of buying. A purchased solution lowers direct costs and accelerates time to payback because it can be deployed in a fragment of the time to build. The net is an increased ROI.

## **Vendor Selection Criteria**

For a bill management and reporting solution, the selection criteria can be dependent on many requirements across a number of dimensions. It is important to outline the critical business needs to determine the key dimensions and assign appropriate weighting for the scoring model.

### **Deciding What Is Important**

Globys recommends ranking 5 – 10 critical success factors for your organization and mapping these to the selection criteria to develop your vendor comparison matrix. Determining the critical success factors will help prioritize the important aspects of a vendor evaluation, such as ease of integration, scalability across varying market segments, user management, core functionality, patented technology and continued innovation.

### **Developing a Vendor Comparison Matrix**

A sample vendor comparison matrix is included in the Appendix A. This matrix is not intended to be exhaustive, but it includes the frequent selection requirements and dimensions used by many utilities. If the scores are close for 2 or 3 vendors, reviewing qualitative feedback and revisiting the critical success factors can be useful to making the final selection.

# 3

## Evaluating Globys:

### Leverage Our Expertise to Your Advantage

#### Next Steps

Globys is helping some of the world's largest service providers improve their bill management and reporting experience, leading to decreased costs and improved customer satisfaction.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss your business needs and demonstrate our unique approach to bill management and reporting. Specifically, we would be happy to provide:

1. A business requirements discussion with our Solutions team
2. Solution demos tailored to your requirements
3. A comprehensive response to your RFI or RFP
4. Customer references on request

Get the help you need for choosing the best Bill Management & Reporting Solution for you and your customers

Please contact us at [info@globys.com](mailto:info@globys.com)

OR

Learn more at

<https://www.globys.com/solutions/utilities>

Evaluation Dimension	Description	Score	Notes
<b>USER EXPERIENCE</b>			
<b>Access</b>			
SSO through existing portal	Allow for direct access through customer portal, inheriting existing user permissions		
Configurable per customer segment	Allow for tailored experience with features and functionality aligned to segment specific needs		
<b>Dashboard</b>			
Message center	Provide a configurable channel to communicate system notifications and customer communications		
Customer summary	Provide user with overview of recent transactions		
Account changes	Provide user with notifications of recent changes		
End user configurable dashboard	Allow user to define trended dashboard layout		
<b>Bills</b>			
At least 13 months of bills	Allow user to view current or previous bills		
Consolidated bill viewing	Allow user to combine bills from varying products and systems into a single view		
User-defined budgets	Allow user to define and view budget variances per account		
Month-over-month comparison	Allow user to run 12 month trended fee analysis		
Bill to detail drilldown	Allow user to click directly from bill line item to associated detail data		
Searchable bills	Allow user to find bills and fees according to user-defined criteria		
User configurable account descriptions	Allow user to add user-defined descriptions to accounts		
User configurable account grouping	Allow user to group accounts and bills by source, bill date, descriptions		
Additional documentation storage	Host additional customer documents which can be viewed and downloaded on demand		
Paperless billing preference	Allow user to set any or all accounts to paperless		
Export options	Allow user to download bills in variety of formats		
<b>Reporting</b>			
At least 3 months of usage and fee data	Provide access to current and historical data		
Usage reporting	Allow user to monitor near real-time usage activity		
Default summary reports	Allow user to view a set of standard summary reports		
Default detail reports	Allow user to view a set of standard detail reports		
Editable default reports	Allow user to edit and save the parameters of default reports		
User configurable summary reports	Allow user to create an unlimited number of summary reports		
User configurable detail reports	Allow user to create an unlimited number of detail reports		
Drill down from summary to detail	Allow user to click directly from line item in summary report to associated detail data		
Tabular reporting	Allow user to view and create tabular reports		
Graphical reporting	Allow user to view and create graph reports		
Trended reporting	Allow user to run multi-month reports		
In-app report sharing	Allow user to share created reports with other users		
Automated report creation	Allow user to setup a recurring schedule for report creation		
Automated report delivery	Allow user to setup a recurring schedule for report delivery		

Scheduled reporting for colleagues	Allow user to setup a recurring schedule for report delivery to a user-defined distribution list		
Default filters	Allow user to apply a set of standard filters to default of user-created reports		
User configurable filters	Allow user to create filters leveraging all available data fields		
Export options	Allow user to download all reports in a variety of formats		
<b>Hierarchies &amp; Cost Allocation</b>			
User configurable hierarchy	Allow user to build a hierarchy within the application		
User assignment of accounts to hierarchy	Allow user to add accounts to hierarchy		
Splitting of charges across hierarchy	Allow user to specify the percentage of charges to be applied to specified accounts		
Multiple hierarchies	Allow user to build and apply two or more hierarchies		
Private/public chart of accounts	Allow user to select sharing/no sharing with other users		
Cost allocation reporting	Allow user to run a cost allocation report across selected hierarchy		
Export options	Allow user to export reports and hierarchies in a variety of formats		
<b>Payments</b>			
Single or multi-payments	Allow user to make payment for a single or consolidated bill		
Multiple payment methods	Allow user to select credit card or bank payment		
Digital wallet	Allow user to store payment sources for future payments		
Auto-payments	Allow user to set-up recurring payments across any or all accounts		
Payment transaction confirmation	Provide user with detailed transaction receipt		
Payment history	Provide user with detailed view of previous payments		
Offline remittance slip	Allow user to print remittance slip for single or consolidated bill		
Integration with payment gateways	API to existing payment gateways		
Integration with utility Accounts Receivable	Automated transfer of captured remittance data		
<b>Notifications</b>			
Delivery options (Email, SFTP)	Allow user to define how reports are received		
One-time bill delivery	Allow user to schedule delivery of bills via preferred channel		
Recurring bill delivery	Allow user to schedule daily/weekly/monthly delivery of bills via preferred channel		
One-time report delivery	Allow user to schedule delivery of reports via preferred channel		
Recurring report delivery	Allow user to schedule daily/weekly/monthly delivery of reports via preferred channel		
One-time allocation report delivery	Allow user to schedule delivery of allocation report via preferred channel		
Recurring allocation report delivery	Allow user to schedule daily/weekly/monthly delivery of allocation report via preferred channel		
User configurable alerts	Allow user to define multi-parameter fee and transaction alerts		

Automated email alert monitoring and delivery	Provide continual alert tracking and delivery based on user specifications		
<b>User Management</b>			
Multi-user environment	Allow multiple users from organization to access application		
Per-account access controls	Allow admin user to define account visibility per user		
Admin user permissions control	Allow admin user to define permissions per user		
User configuration system notifications	Allow user to select preferences for system notifications		
<b>User Preferences</b>			
Language preference	Allow user to select from applicable languages		
Request for linking additional accounts	Allow user to submit request for combining additional existing accounts into organizational view		
<b>DATA INTEGRATION</b>			
13 months historical bills and data from billing system(s)	Consolidate transaction and fee data from billing system(s)		
ETL process	Support extraction, transformation, and loading of data from multiple systems and run schedules		
<b>TECHNOLOGY</b>			
Open architecture & APIs	Support the ingestion of multiple data sources		
Cloud-based storage	Support thousands of users across multiple years of data		
System alerts	Integrated process and performance monitoring and alerting		
<b>SECURITY</b>			
Authentication and Access	Governed by Utility's overall security policy – conforms to current privacy and security standards		
Secure communication and data delivery	Data is presented and secured for customers using encryption and secure transport technologies (SFTP)		
<b>RELIABILITY</b>			
Up-time	Specified SLAs for uptime along with documented statistics for last 24 months		
Disaster recovery	Provide documented Disaster Recovery Plan		
Redundancy	Configured redundancy for data centers and networks		
Storage	Off-site storage of backups		
<b>BRANDING</b>			
Configurable to utility look and feel	Apply corporate design elements to application		
Configurable to utility messaging/terminology	Align application terminology to utility terminology		
<b>PROFESSIONAL SERVICES</b>			
New system/product integrations	Integrate additional data feeds into existing instance		
Additional system integrations (case management, disputes)	Integrate with existing/future applications and work flows		