

From Resource Acquisition to Relationships: How Energy Efficiency Initiatives Can Work Effectively with Large Commercial & Industrial Customers

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ABSTRACT

As state- and utility-managed efficiency programs seek dramatically higher savings, Program Administrators are searching for new program strategies. In most jurisdictions, existing buildings represent the largest reservoir of untapped potential. Furthermore, large customers typically use a disproportionate share of electricity: facilities over 100,000 square feet represent just 2 percent of all commercial buildings but consume 40 percent of the electricity. Therefore, existing facilities of large customers represent a substantial portion of available efficiency potential. This paper describes an “account management” approach to capturing this potential.

With an account management approach, vendors dedicate sales personnel to one or more customers with whom they develop a comprehensive working relationship. This approach is common in many industries, including utilities, but has rarely been attempted with a focus solely on efficiency. Dedicating program staff to thinking about the efficiency needs of specific customers on a continual basis results in two important outcomes. First, much of the potential in existing facilities is in early retirement (i.e., “retrofit”) projects. An account manager is in a position to “sell” efficiency to the customer to capture this large efficiency resource. Second, the relationship increases the chances that program staff are “at the table” to influence important decisions such as annual capital spending planning or replacement of failed equipment on short notice.

Successful implementation of efficiency account management for large customers requires new efficiency program strategies. This paper describes one example of an account management model and presents preliminary quantitative results from its implementation.

Introduction

As state- and utility-managed efficiency programs seek dramatically higher savings, Program Administrators (PAs) are searching for new program strategies. Efficiency savings targets of up to 15 percent over the next 6 to 10 years have been issued by legislators and regulators (NYPSC 2007; Efficiency Vermont 2007; Illinois General Assembly 2007). Achieving this level of savings in building energy consumption means reducing energy use in *every* building by that amount, on average. Even very aggressive efficiency programs only reach between 60 and 80 percent of all customers. Average savings in participating buildings will therefore need to be closer to 20 or even 25 percent, rates not typically achieved by programs dominated by savings from lighting measures.¹

¹ Most efficiency programs achieve the vast majority of their savings from lighting measures. Lighting represents approximately 40 percent of the electric use in a typical commercial building (CEE 2007). Very aggressive lighting efforts that include both advanced technologies and operational strategies (e.g., daylighting, occupancy sensors,

In most jurisdictions, existing buildings represent a far greater efficiency potential than new construction. Even in areas with high rates of growth, total commercial building square footage increases at only about 5 percent per year (EIA 2003). Clearly, savings from existing buildings must represent the majority of all savings if aggressive savings targets are to be met. In the near-term, this can only be accomplished through early retirement of inefficient equipment; waiting for inefficient equipment to fail or live out its typical useful life will simply take too long.

Fortunately, a small number of large facilities consume a very large share of electricity. According to the U.S. DOE Commercial Buildings Energy Consumption Survey (CBECS), facilities larger than 100,000 square feet represent just 2 percent of all commercial buildings nationwide but account for 40 percent of total commercial building electricity consumption (EIA 2003).

The combination of all of these factors means that the existing facilities of large customers represent a substantial portion of the efficiency potential available to PAs (although a relatively small number of entities) and PAs must capture substantial savings from a range of lost opportunity and retrofit projects across multiple end-uses at these facilities to reach their savings goals. Unfortunately, these can be some of the more difficult opportunities for PAs to capture. These customers present a number of unique barriers to efficiency investment, including:

- Hierarchical and/or centralized decision making
- Disconnect between building operations and capital improvements personnel
- Diversity of technical needs, both intra-firm and inter-firm
- Internal competition for limited capital improvement funds, making early retirement projects difficult to implement
- Pressure on profits resulting in a decrease in the number of trained staff available to consider energy efficiency in decision-making
- Time constraints for the replacement of failed equipment leads to “replace with same” mentality

Account management offers PAs a potential solution to these challenges. The next section introduces the key components of account management and its application to energy efficiency programs. Following that, we present a case study of account management as applied to efficiency and some preliminary quantitative results from its implementation.

The Account Management Model

According to the Strategic Account Management Association, account management evolved in the 1960s out of the need for sellers to devote significant corporate resources to large, complex accounts having special requirements. Historically, accounts that qualified for special treatment were characterized by several common traits: centralized coordinated purchasing with influence over multiple corporate locations, a complex buying process, large purchases (in terms

dimming) might save 50 percent, but more realistic overall targets are between 20 and 30 percent. Therefore, lighting savings might reduce building energy use by 12 percent ($0.3 \times 0.4 = 0.12$), far below the levels necessary to achieve overall savings of 25 percent. As baseline lighting standards rise, lighting savings will most likely be reduced further.

of dollars and/or product volume), and a need for customer-specific products or services (SAMA 2008).

In the Account Management framework, vendors dedicate sales personnel to one or more customers with whom they develop a comprehensive working relationship. These Account Managers (AMs) become the key link between a company and its clients. The AM is responsible for helping clients get the most value from the company's products and services. In the end, a successful AM must convince his or her clients to buy these products and services. They work closely with clients to determine the clients' needs. If necessary, they make sure their company develops products or services to meet those needs. In short, the key components of Account Management are understanding the customer's needs, communicating one's products and services to the customer, and using the products and services to address the customer's needs comprehensively.

Account management is common in most industries, including utilities. Despite the fact that the large C&I sector would seem to benefit from account management, utilities have rarely attempted to provide it with a focus solely on efficiency. Below, we describe the basis for pursuing account management within energy efficiency programs.

Account Management for Efficiency Program Administrators

Most utilities have account managers (e.g., "Account Executives") for their large customers. When the utility is also the efficiency PA, the temptation may be to rely on these existing relationships to support efficiency efforts. Unfortunately, there are several reasons why this is a sub-optimal solution. First, existing utility account managers are usually tasked with several responsibilities. It is not uncommon for Account Executives to work with customers on high bill complaints, power factor problems, demand response, load building (e.g., exterior security lighting, economic development incentives for enlarging facilities), paperwork of all sorts, and explanations of new or existing tariffs structures (e.g., rate classes, rate increases, and demand charges). Account Executives also serve as front line emergency responders. When outages occur or are expected, staff may be diverted from all other responsibilities to make sure customers have timely information on the projected length of the outage in order to make business decisions. Representatives from combined gas and electric utilities may have to fulfill all of above roles on the gas side, too. Multiply these responsibilities by 40 or 50 customers, and it is not uncommon for the sustained and targeted customer interaction required to achieve high levels of energy efficiency reductions to be relegated to the bottom of the priority list. Perhaps more importantly, asking Account Executives who have been tasked with load building to now also pursue load reduction from efficiency creates a conflict of purposes. For all of these reasons, dedicated efficiency AMs have the potential to better support aggressive efficiency programs and capture higher savings for the PA.

For PAs, successful Account Management implementation provides a tool to address the barriers to energy efficiency program participation by large energy users by:

- developing relationships with the appropriate decision-makers within the firm;
- developing an understanding of the firm's energy and business needs;
- developing the value proposition for decision-makers; and
- providing ongoing value to facility management staff.

The relationship between the PA of an efficiency program and the utility customers it serves is somewhat different from the typical buyer-seller relationship, because the PA likely acts as a third party in a buyer-seller transaction between the customer and a vendor of energy-efficient equipment and/or efficiency services. For example, the customer may be purchasing energy efficient motors from its usual vendor or contractor, supported by a financial incentive and technical advice from the PA.

Regardless of the relationships between the customer, vendor, and PA, all parties need to achieve their goals in the business deal. The customer wants the products they need at a competitive price and with attentive customer service; the vendor wants to increase profitability and achieve their sales goals; and the PA wants to influence the transaction to capture energy savings in accordance with its own goals. Specifically, the PA wants to help the customer maximize energy efficiency savings while minimizing the transaction costs necessary to capture those savings and meeting the vendor's profitability criteria.

By developing an understanding of the customer's energy and non-energy needs, the AM is in a position to "sell" retrofit efficiency opportunities and capture the substantial efficiency resource these opportunities represent. Second, a more robust and trusting relationship increases the chances that the PA is in a position to capture time-sensitive efficiency opportunities by influencing important decisions such as annual capital planning or replacement of failed equipment on short notice. The customer also benefits from the account-managed relationship. Rather than dealing with multiple efficiency program outreach efforts (e.g., HVAC, motors, prescriptive lighting), they get "one-stop shopping" for unbiased project design and implementation review for efficiency-related products and services. Consistent contact with the AM means the customer does not have to re-educate PA staff on their business and their energy needs. Ideally, an AM with deeper understanding of the business can identify efficiency projects that are highly cost-effective while capturing non-energy benefits and providing additional value to the vendor and/or installer.

Protocols for Dedicated Account Management

The protocols presented here represent an evolution of the need to more systematically and comprehensively engage large C&I customers in efficiency efforts and achieve deep savings with those customers. They consist of eight primary tasks with the objective of developing a long-term, high-value relationship between the PA and the customer. AMs implement each of these tasks in conjunction with their supervisors and with the support of other technical and financing resources as needed. They are:

- **Initial account research** - Because the AM's relationship is with a company, not just a single physical facility or location, the first step is for the AM to develop a comprehensive picture of the company's operations. The AM should identify all of the company's locations and electric meters to develop a census of the facilities involved and an estimate of the company's total energy usage, peak demand, and contribution to the public benefits fund. Equally important, the AM needs to develop as sophisticated an understanding of the company's business operations as possible. Finally, the AM needs to review available records to identify any past engagements and any individuals (whether

company staff, contractors, vendors, engineers or architects) with whom the company and the PA share relationships.

- **Communications** - The objective of communication in Account Management is to create a relationship through which sustained and meaningful interactions take place. The AM needs to work with his or her customer to establish agreed-upon mutual, annual objectives, and to gain a seat “at the table” in the capital planning process. During this effort, the AM listens carefully to customer objectives, identifies items of critical importance to the customer, and determines what services the PA can provide to help the customer achieve their objectives. The AM should conduct at least one physical visit to the company and its facilities each year, in addition to maintaining timely written communications. Each year, the AM should prepare an annual summary of accomplishments and progress toward goals. Communication also includes summaries of agreed-upon action items and updates of the status of those action items as project activity progresses. It is not uncommon for the frequency of communication to increase when there are active projects.
- **Technical profile** - The AM must develop a technical profile of the company’s facilities to support identification of energy- and demand-saving opportunities. In general, the AM will develop an assessment of how the facilities use energy, with an emphasis on electricity. This entails a complete facility walkthrough to gather electrical load information on all electrical, mechanical and process equipment. For example, the technical profile of an industrial customer should include a process flow chart, summary of the industrial process (from materials consumed to products made), an inventory of processes and equipment employed (including possible generating equipment), and operating schedule. AMs must develop similar profiles for commercial or institutional customers.
- **Organizational profile** - In parallel with the technical profile, AMs develop an organizational profile of the company. This organizational profile lays out the corporate structure, the key decision-makers within that structure, the decision criteria used by decision-makers, and the processes through which the company makes investment decisions. The intent of the organizational profile is to create a roadmap to inform communication strategies, such as when to engage multiple levels of the company or when to use a more sophisticated financial analysis of project costs and benefits.
- **Identification and development of energy-savings opportunities** - As noted earlier, one of the primary rationales behind the Account Management protocols is to secure energy and demand savings toward the PA’s performance targets. The protocols provide a series of strategies to succeed in identifying and developing these opportunities, including taking comprehensive views of facilities, using benchmarking where possible, aligning key non-energy benefits with proposed projects, and learning how to work within the customer’s decision-making processes and styles. Despite the focus on securing energy and demand savings, the AM relationship should NOT be limited solely to electric savings. Successful account management will include providing value to the customer throughout their operations. The customer does not view their facility solely from the perspective of electricity consumption, and neither should the AM. As long as the customer site has the potential to provide electric energy and demand savings, the AM should be free to help the customer with any energy related projects or to identify projects with energy savings as a secondary, rather than primary outcome. For example,

the customer's primary objective might be to improve the lighting quality in a poorly lit space. To the extent that savings from such a project are small (because more light is being provided), there is still an opportunity to assist the customer in achieving their objectives.²

- **Account management plan** - The AM consolidates all of the above information into a written Account Management Plan developed in collaboration with his or her supervisor. It establishes a timeline for activities, a value proposition, and goals for both energy savings and further relationship development. The plan is intended to serve as an active resource for organizing, measuring and managing each Account Manager's efforts.
- **Supervisor participation** - The AM supervisor is an active participant in the development and implementation of an Account Management plan. Because AM activities may not directly align with the strengths of more technically-oriented staff, supervisors mentor AMs in the art of building relationships and navigating decision-making politics.
- **Documentation of activities** - The PA should implement a central information repository or database where AMs can enter all activities (e.g., site visits, meetings, e-mail or phone contacts). The database should contain customer contact information; workflow process information such as meeting dates, installation protocols, quality assurance visits; and data on installed energy efficiency measures, their cost, incentives, and energy and demand savings.

These activities compose just one potential framework for implementing account management within an efficiency program. They were developed to support the account management effort at Efficiency Vermont, as described in the next section.

Account Management Case Study

Efficiency Vermont

Efficiency Vermont is Vermont's statewide energy efficiency utility - the first of its kind in the United States. It was created by the Vermont Public Service Board and the Vermont Legislature in response to a request from the Vermont Department of Public Service, Vermont's electric utilities, and a dozen consumer and environmental groups. Before the creation of Efficiency Vermont, the state's electric utilities provided energy efficiency services in their own territories. Through Efficiency Vermont, all Vermonters can now participate in the same services.³

Efficiency Vermont is known for its long history of aggressive energy savings. Even after seven years of running efficiency programs, it continues to acquire an additional one percent reduction in energy consumption each year; preliminary results from 2007 point to even greater savings. From 2000 through 2006, cumulative annual savings are 318 GWh, compared to total statewide consumption of 5,600 GWh. Significantly, it has kept the cost of acquiring efficiency savings well below alternative supply. In 2006, the lifetime cost per kWh saved was just 3.7

² As another example, the AM may note that the customer is paying penalty charges for a poor power factor and provide technical advice toward reducing or eliminating these costs.

³ The one exception is the area served by Burlington Electric Department, which continues to provide efficiency services to its customers directly.

cents. Although it is often stated that efficiency gets more expensive as additional opportunities are pursued, Efficiency Vermont's yield (energy savings accomplished per dollar of spending) has decreased by only 10 percent from 2000 to 2006.

Efficiency Vermont divides its services into two broad categories: Business Energy Services-focusing on commercial and industrial (C&I) customers-and Residential Energy Services. Each of these two departments is divided into New Construction services and services to Existing Facilities or Homes. An additional set of services related to efficient products (e.g., lighting and appliances) is housed under the Residential Energy Services umbrella.

Efficiency Vermont began its Business Energy Services operations in 2000 focusing primarily on "lost opportunity" strategies, offering both prescriptive and custom services for new construction and equipment replacement projects. It created a separate "track" for early retirement projects. These program "silos" fragmented customer relationships into project-by-project engagements. It was possible for C&I customers to work on individual projects (either concurrently or in sequence) with different Efficiency Vermont staff who were not charged with establishing a framework for building relationships or identifying and pursuing additional efficiency opportunities, particularly discretionary or early retirement projects.

Prior to the implementation of their account management protocols, Efficiency Vermont did initiate a more integrated approach in a limited set of markets – notably ski areas, K-12 schools, wastewater treatment facilities, and low income multifamily dwellings. In these markets, the efficiency utility developed relationships with relevant trade associations (e.g., Vermont Ski Areas Association, Vermont Superintendents Association), worked to learn about opportunities at earlier stages of project development, and provided training and other services to market players to promote energy-efficient opportunities. In response to comments received from customers, the Business Energy Services group also began to assign "single points of contact" to simplify customer engagement and interaction. This effort can be considered an early, informal Account Management strategy. The full Account Management protocols were developed during 2006 and rolled-out in the last quarter of that year.

Quantitative Results

In 2007, the first full year of account management implementation, Efficiency Vermont completed 106 projects with large commercial and industrial Account Managed customers, a 28 percent increase over the prior year. The savings for the large commercial and industrial sector were approximately 15,000 MWh, over 3 times the amount in 2006. These projects generated summer peak reduction of 1,600 kW and winter peak reduction of 3,000 kW. The savings from these energy efficiency projects is significant, representing approximately a 2 percent energy reduction of the total annual electrical consumption of this group. Efficiency Vermont paid incentives of just over \$800,000 for these projects. In addition, savings from Account Managed customers account for approximately 33 percent of total Business Energy Services savings for 2007.

To further assess the initial results of Efficiency Vermont's Account Management protocols, we looked at the net savings for all projects conducted at Account Managed customer facilities from 2000 through 2007. In general, we looked for indications that the results in 2007 were different from those in previous years. These data were collected from Efficiency Vermont's in-house data tracking system. Although the protocols were initially applied to the largest 65 utility accounts in the state, this currently represents only 57 distinct corporate entities.

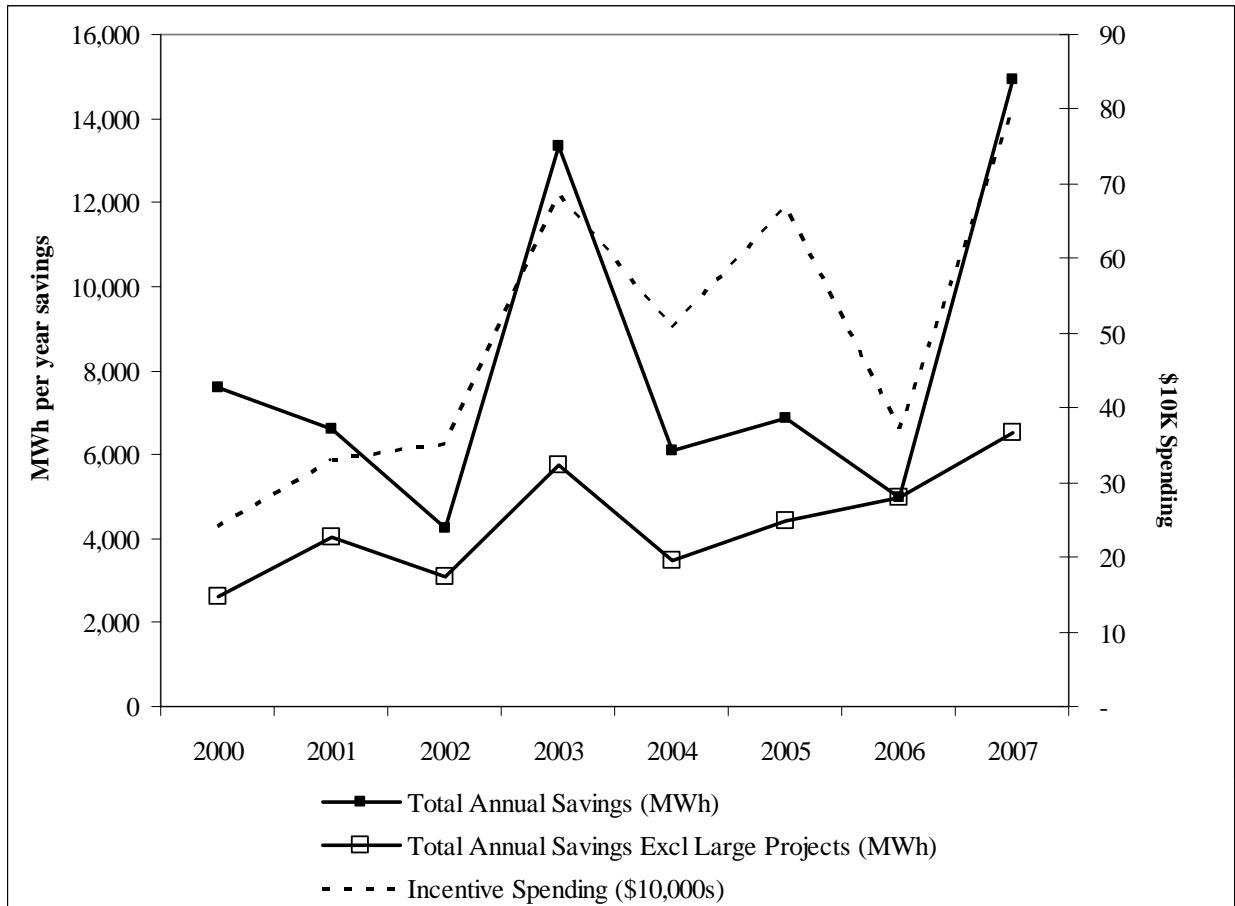
Some companies have more than one facility or meter, and two of the largest accounts have ceased operations since the initial list was generated. While it is difficult to draw firm conclusions based on only one year of post-implementation data, we believe that there are indications that AM is generating increasing savings in the target customer group.⁴

Figure 1 shows the total annual savings for all projects with AM customers (solid line, filled boxes, left-hand axis). There is little consistency in the total savings from year to year, but this is to be expected with such a small population. Savings were greatest in 2007, more than double that of any year except 2003. Results for this customer group in 2003 and 2007 are dramatically different from the other years in the dataset. In 2003, the dramatic increase in savings is attributable to several large projects, each with annual savings of more than 1,000 MWh, accounting for nearly 60 percent of total savings. The solid line with open boxes on Figure 1 shows that year-to-year results have been more consistent when projects greater than this size are excluded. While large projects vary widely from year to year and represent a large fraction of the savings in most years, savings from smaller projects have increased each year since 2004, reaching their highest level in 2007.

Figure 1 also presents data on the incentive spending among this group. The final data series (dashed line, right-hand axis) shows the total incentive dollars spent to achieve the total annual savings in that year for AM customers. Spending generally tracks total savings, except in 2004 and 2005. In each of those years, one or two large projects received incentives of greater than \$100 per MWh, lowering the overall yield for this group of customers. Program yield, the relative cost of achieving the measured savings, is another metric of interest in assessing the performance of Account Management. While reducing the cost of achieving savings is not a primary objective of AM, there are reasons to expect this outcome. First, incentives are paid to utility customers as a means of overcoming several concurrent barriers to the implementation of energy efficiency measures, only some of which are financial. To the extent that the efforts of the AMs to understand their customers' needs and build lasting relationships with critical decision-makers helps to lower non-economic barriers (e.g., informational, transactional, etc.), one might expect that the financial incentive required to overcome other economic barriers would be lower. Table 1 shows the relative yield of the projects completed by AM customers, expressed in kWh per dollar spent. The yield varies, ranging from a high of 31 in 2000 to low of 10 in 2005, but no trend is evident. Based on these data, the Account Management program does not appear to have returned higher yields for these customers.

⁴ As noted earlier, the Account Management protocols were released in the Fall of 2006, but full roll-out did not occur until early 2007.

Figure 1. Annual Savings and Spending for Account Managed Customers



Source: Analysis of Efficiency Vermont program data

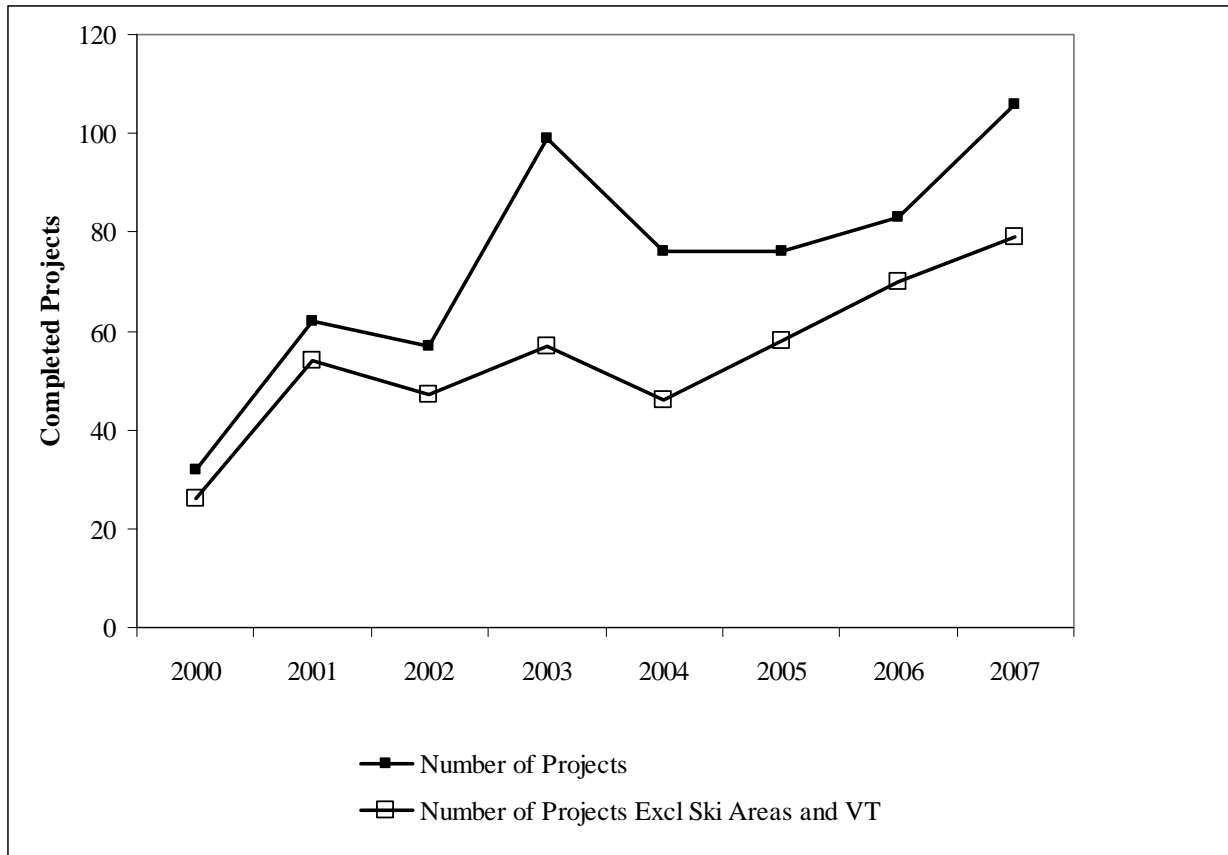
Table 1. Savings Yield for Projects Completed by AM Customers

Year	Yield (kWh/\$)
2000	31
2001	20
2002	12
2003	20
2004	12
2005	10
2006	13
2007	19

Source: Analysis of Efficiency Vermont program data

We also looked at the number of projects being completed by the Account Managed customers over time. Figure 2 presents these data. The line with filled boxes represents the total number of projects completed by all of the largest customers, while the line with open boxes represents the number of projects completed by the same large customer group excluding ski areas and the State of Vermont. We prepared this series because of some unusual events that distort the overall data, including a 2003 project at one ski area that the Efficiency Vermont database tracks as over 20 individual projects.⁵ As with the trend in savings excluding large projects in Figure 1, the number of projects completed has increased each year since 2004.

Figure 2. Annual Completed Projects for Account Managed Customers



Source: Analysis of Efficiency Vermont program data

Although there are limited data on the results of the Account Management protocols and the protocols themselves have only been in place for a limited time, we believe the increases in savings and completed projects shown in Figures 1 and 2 are attributable at least in part to the protocols and the preceding “single point of contact” efforts. This conclusion is also supported by anecdotal evidence that some of Vermont’s largest utility customers who were originally skeptical of the state-wide efficiency utility and the Efficiency Vermont model (primarily because of concerns over the potential cost) are now positively disposed to it, largely through the efforts of Account Managers and other relationship-building actions. We also note that the pre-

⁵ The project involved identical retrofit projects to a number of condominiums at the ski area, for which incentives were paid directly to the individual unit owners rather than to the ski area itself.

Account Management data shows wide year-to-year variability, making it difficult to predict savings in the absence of Account Management with any certainty. Additional data are needed to determine the long-term effects of Account Management on the target customers.

Qualitative Results

Efficiency Vermont has also generated valuable qualitative information about the AM protocols through a series of Quality Assurance interviews with the AMs. Responses to a standard questionnaire were compiled by a three-person Quality Assurance Team and reviewed for trends and discrepancies in the performance and conduct of the Account Management protocol. Several important findings:

- Even in an organization with extensive project management experience, not all project managers will succeed at Account Management. Many project managers are technically competent and efficient at moving projects to completion but are uninterested in or unsuited to the business development and interpersonal tasks required of the AM protocol. *Lesson: Choose AMs carefully.*
- After an initial effort to develop an account plan, little time was spent on strategic account development. Most of the AMs were spending the majority of their account time working on specific projects rather than on developing the account at a strategic level. This is related to the previous point. If the AMs are familiar and comfortable with project management, they will gravitate to this work rather than the new AM-related tasks. *Lesson: Consider separating the functions of AM and project management.*
- Attempts to penetrate to higher level decision-makers within managed accounts were consistently pushed to the back burner, although some AMs did make progress on this goal. AMs were often not sure how to proceed with developing these relationships because of concerns over how to maintain on good terms with existing contacts even as they shifted their attention to these new targets. For example, fostering a relationship with the CFO might engender animosity on the part of the facility manager with whom the AM has an existing relationship. AMs generally felt that they should proceed slowly with this effort. *Lesson: AMs may need to move slowly in developing relationships higher in the company, despite their interest in doing so.*
- In many cases, AMs had not successfully understood and articulated their customers' business goals. Again, this is related to the focus on project work and the challenges of engaging customers at the strategic level. *Lesson: AMs need to continually pursue the non-project related aspects of the Account Management protocol.*

Conclusions

Account management is a tool by which efficiency Program Administrators can pursue greater savings from their large C&I customers. Although it is widely practiced by firms throughout the economy, implementing it with a focus on efficiency has unique challenges. This paper has presented a set of protocols that utilities and other PAs may refer to in developing their own account management approach.

As implemented by Efficiency Vermont, these protocols have begun to show some success, although additional data from a longer time frame are needed. There is limited

quantitative evidence pointing to success in acquiring greater savings from the targeted customers after just over one year of full implementation. Nevertheless, the program is still new as far as efficiency programs go. We expect that, as the program matures, Account Managers will deepen their relationships with their clients and reap the fruits of these efforts. Furthermore, the pre-Account Management data shows wide year-to-year variability. Efficiency Vermont is continuing to collect data on these customers and hopes to provide further information on the results in subsequent articles and publications.

Qualitatively, the program has been a mixed success. There appears to be a gap between the actions and activities prescribed by the Account Management protocols and the actions of the AMs, which may be attributable to lack of experience and the normal challenges brought on by organizational change. Again, we expect that additional experience on the part of both the AMs and Efficiency Vermont will lead to improvements in these areas over time. Among the lessons learned to date is the importance of clearly identifying AMs with the necessary skills and interest in the job responsibilities of account management, acknowledging that project managers with substantial technical skill and experience may not be the best match for this position. Account management is a new concept for many efficiency PAs and requires an approach different from efficiency initiatives that focus on a large number of similar, repeatable transactions such as prescriptive equipment rebates.

Finally, we note that there is anecdotal evidence that some of Vermont's largest utility customers who were originally skeptical of the state-wide efficiency utility and the Efficiency Vermont model (primarily because of concerns over the potential cost) are now positively disposed to it, largely through the efforts of Account Managers and other relationship-building actions. To the extent this is true, the account management protocols have begun laying the groundwork for sustained engagement with an important class of customers that should generate substantial electric savings over time.

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