



**DTE Energy**

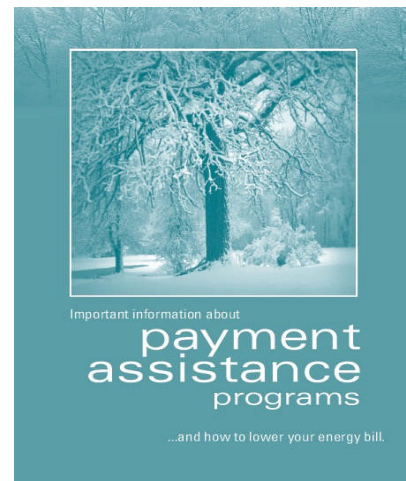
DTE Energy developed a “portfolio” approach to meet the needs of its low income and at-risk customer groups. The Detroit-based company, parent of Detroit Edison and Michigan Consolidated Gas Co., has been on the front-lines of this problem during a severely depressed economy in the last few years. Joyce V. Hayes-Giles, Senior Vice President of Customer Service for DTE Energy, explained, “Michigan is one of the leading indicators for the rest of the country and we are nearly in a depression.”

The economy has created an upsurge in the need for a variety of programs to assist not just traditionally-defined low income customers, but also customers who are facing economic difficulties for the first time. As Ms. Hayes-Giles observed though, this customer group is quite different from the traditional low income community. “Low income customers already know about assistance programs, but this new customer group does not.” So the utility has taken a proactive approach of communicating to all DTE Energy customers through radio, television and print media encouraging customers who are having difficulty making payments to contact the utility.

“These customers are not used to needing to ask for help and we are trying to make it as easy as possible for them to get assistance. It is important for the customers to be proactive before (the situation) gets too far gone and they give up,” Ms. Hayes-Giles said.

DTE Energy also developed an innovative partnership with the local social service agencies to create a one-stop shop referral program for customers in need. DTE Energy’s Case Management Group operates like a small social service agency within the company. “They let the customers know what assistance programs are available, including financial counseling. We are able to help them develop a budget, manage expenses and set up financial plans,” Ms. Hayes-Giles explained.

The utility has also partnered with the United Way’s 2-1-1 referral program to provide a one-stop shop to help customers get linked with all eligible programs. “We’re partnering with them, but we don’t want to tell customers “Take this phone number and call them,” Ms. Hayes-Giles said. “We want to be able to do a warm transfer”—that is, shifting the call seamlessly to another agent. Since the company’s current technology will not allow a transfer outside the company, DTE Energy now has 2-1-1 call center agents set up in the company’s contact center.



Other strategies include reaching out to customers across the state by participating in forums with community organizations, and working with legislators and the governor to continue to develop new types of programs to address this growing need. DTE Energy also provides a way for its customers to help each other through the CENTS FOR ENERGY Program. DTE Energy customers can “round up” their utility bill payments to the nearest dollar and the extra amount funds energy assistance for customers in need.

***DTE Energy- At a Glance***

DTE Energy is a Detroit-based, diversified energy company involved in the development and management of energy-related businesses and services nationwide.

DTE Energy’s largest operating subsidiaries are Detroit Edison, an electric utility serving 2.2 million customers in Southeastern Michigan, and Michigan Consolidated Gas Co. (MichCon), a natural gas utility