



New Utility Shopping Websites Empower Consumers

A DIGITAL INK CLIENT STORY





The Client

The **Maryland Public Service Commission (PSC)** regulates public utilities, including gas, electric, water, telephone, and sewage disposal, plus select transportation companies, for residents across the state. The Commission's five-member board is appointed by the Governor and sets utility rates. The PSC also reviews utility service plans, inspects equipment, approves the construction of overhead power lines, audits financial records, and fields consumer complaints. Offices for this independent state agency are located in Baltimore.

Project Highlights

- An improved WordPress template made the Commission's main website easier for citizens and organizations to use.
- Bold new Electric and Gas Choice websites launch ahead of state deadlines to offer utility consumers an informative resource and suppliers a critical platform.
- Backend Supplier Portals on the Electric and Gas Choice websites allow vendor representatives to easily access the website to register or upload rate offers.

The Challenge

The Commission's main website was dense with content serving a number of different audiences; the homepage was particularly congested. The PSC needed support housing a trove of critical documents and data online with a more contemporary, easier-to-navigate interface.

With so much content to manage, the Commission also sought a website platform that multiple users could update seamlessly. This adaptability became especially urgent during COVID-19, when the Commission had to quickly inform the public on the pandemic's effect on utility service and operations.

In 2019, new state legislation required the PSC to create two new websites to empower utility customers to shop a competitive marketplace of electricity and gas suppliers. These two stand-alone sites needed to be similarly-branded but not identical, with one of the sites to replace the older residential electric choice site housed within the Commission's website.



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The Solution

Starting in 2013, **Digital Ink** helped the Commission develop and optimize the PSC’s main website on a customized WordPress template to improve user experience. The new site better showcased Commission news, including press releases and hearing information. The redesign was based in part on survey results and complied with evolving state requirements. More recently, Digital Ink quickly generated a new COVID-19 landing page to keep Maryland utility customers informed amid the crisis. Digital Ink complemented and augmented the programming and database-centered work of the Commission’s information technologists, and continues to provide support to the Commission for its main website today as needed.

“We were really impressed from the beginning. It was very easy working with Digital Ink, they were very supportive all along the way. They were always available when we needed them and met all the deadlines. We didn’t have a rough patch anywhere.”

DAVE COLLINS
DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
MARYLAND PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION



MD Electric Choice



MD Gas Choice



Maryland Public Service Commission Marketing Support

- Website Design
- Website Development
- Supplier Portal Development
- Website Management



In addition, Digital Ink helped the PSC design, build, launch, and manage the MD Electric Choice and MD Gas Choice websites to meet state legal requirements. These sleek new consumer-facing sites are simple enough for citizens to readily compare utility provider options and make informed decisions based on their location and usage. The bold sites present complex information without appearing text-heavy or overwhelming.

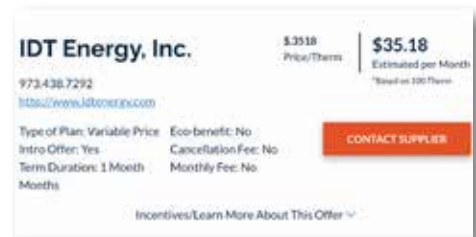
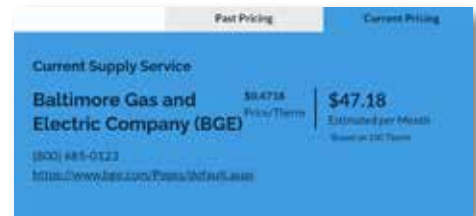
The flexible sites also host Supplier Portals on the back end, where representatives from electric and gas vendors upload their latest rate offers, including pricing and environmental benefits, and new vendors can register. Digital Ink is on call to help the Commission untangle technical snags that suppliers may have using the portals.

The Results

The PSC’s main website is refreshed, with smoother navigation and enhanced functionality. A large volume of organizations are able to search the site

“We really love the utility choice websites. We’ve gotten a lot of kudos and good feedback.”

DAVE COLLINS
DEPUTY EXECUTIVE SECRETARY,
MARYLAND PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION



for legal documents. Digital Ink's WordPress template formatting allows content to be more readily updated by multiple PSC content managers.

An efficient, client-centered approach by Digital Ink enabled the Commission to roll out the Electric Choice website in March 2020, ahead of the state-mandated deadline. The Gas Choice site followed in September. The companion sites were immediately met with positive feedback from regulators, consumers, and the media. Electric and gas suppliers are able to easily access the website on a daily basis to register or update rate information, and are seeing increases in customer traffic from the new sites. This online success has positioned the PSC for a strong, post-COVID marketing push to reach additional customers.

Digital Ink also monitors activity on the electric choice site—which features colors of the Maryland flag—and the gas choice site, to analyze web metrics for the Commission

“Digital Ink really put the needs of the customer and client first.”

TORI LEONARD
COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR,
MARYLAND PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION



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