



One of the world's largest nonprofit member-owned electric cooperatives provides electric power to over 200,000 members in the US state of Florida and needed to provide better customer service to them through their website.

## The Problem

The Coop needed to provide a greater level of online service to its community and members. Their existing website was visually and functionally outdated, had broken links and missing pages throughout, lacked real-time connectivity to the backend systems, and membership demand for lacking self-service functionality was mounting. All this was negatively impacting the overall happiness of the Coop's members and their satisfaction with the electric cooperative. In addition, the existing online credit card processing solution in use was being phased out by the vendor creating an immediate threat to the Coop's ability to collect payments online which would have broad downstream implications.

They had to do something, and they had to do it quickly. They needed a solution that would fill all the requirements of its members and bring the Coop's website into the modern age with everything its members would expect for a complete and satisfying experience.

The Coop also needed the solution to help them provide better customer service to their online members by automating and improving the process for which customer service requests coming in from the website were handled. And, they wanted a solution that they could manage in house with their own team or have a choice of vendors. Their current site vendor often took several months to complete or even respond to change requests. They did not want to be in that situation again.

## The Solution

The Coop chose Surround Technologies' Accelerator to create the new customer facing responsive website for people surfing the web from their desktop, tablet, or mobile devices. The new solution provided online functionality for non-registered site visitors, registered members, and job applicants. The Accelerator solution was also used to provide a site management system that included site content management, registered member management, customer service business process workflow, and HR Job board and applicant management.



## Responsive Web Site for Guests and Registered Members

The new website works with the vast majority of web browsers and devices with the interface responding to provide the best possible experience at any size.

At its core, the site fulfills the basic requirement of providing informational content on who the Coop is and the service they provide. Additionally, as Florida is known for strong storms and record hurricanes, notifying site visitors of emergency situations, and even alerts of scams or other important information was paramount to their new site. A strategically placed, highly visible alert banner provides up to date information, benefitting all those in the area. The site also provides information on power outages and the ability to report outages or damaged street lights in the Coop's coverage area. This has resulted in a higher rate of user return for access to localized information, overall increased member satisfaction and a furthering of the brands identity as a truly user-friendly local utility.

Beyond the public, or guest, access to the site, members can pay their bill with a Credit card, connect new service, or register to access account information and additional self-service functions.

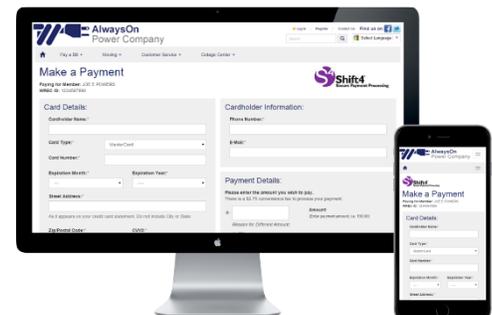
## Member Self-Service Account Management

Members who choose to register on the website to get access to their account information can manage their account through several self-service functions. These members can view and update their account information instantly. They can view current charges, past bills and payment history. Customer service functions have been simplified for connecting, disconnecting, or transferring service in the coverage area. Program enrollments and management for EFT (electronic funds transfer), E-Bill, Operation Round Up, and Surge Stopper were made to be simpler and easier to understand. All this functionality was integrated directly with the Coop's back end systems and reflected in their account immediately.



## Bill Payment Options

The new solution provides fresh options for members to pay their bills online. All members can easily pay their bill by credit card through a new in-house solution that integrates with Shift4 for credit card processing and directly with the back-end Coop systems for real-time updates to the member's account. This has significantly reduced calls into customer service regarding questions about member bill payments, especially those payments intended to stop possible service disconnection.



In addition, registered members can schedule payments using their checking or savings account to avoid the credit card processing fee, safely and securely store bank and credit card payment accounts for future use, and easily enroll in the Coop's Electronic Funds Transfer program to have the monthly bill payment automatically deducted from their bank account.



## Website Content Management System

The site was implemented using the Accelerator Content Management System, CMS, allowing the developers to put control of the content in the hands of Content Managers and Website Administrators. This both freed developers from these interruptive tasks and freed the marketing and other site content providers from having to go to developers for content changes. Using secure logins and security roles, CMS users can essentially control any aspect of the Coop's website and its pages where they are authorized. Different users can be given authority to different sections.

Site Administrators manage website users and site security, monitor site operations, and evaluate site analytics and operational logs. Using site analytics to review current trends and metrics, changes can be made to the website to maximize the site's optimization as needed.

Content Managers can add, change and remove content as necessary for static informational pages, dynamic lists, carousel banners, and more as well as monitor, manage, and configure outbound emails sent from the site. The navigation and its presentation hierarchy, which are SEO optimized in location and style, can be edited as needed when services grow or programs are added and will update across the site instantly. This role also provides the ability to post storm and system alerts, news updates, events, and newsletters.



The Content Management System also allows site Administrators and Content Managers to control the navigation and placement of developer-created dynamic content as well. Developers can create complete pages or individual controls and provide the administrators with the code necessary to plug them into the site where needed. As an example, the "Report a Street Light Outage" page is a custom form created by a developer and handed off to the Website Administrators to put where they want it. In addition, the drop-down selection lists on that page are filled based on lists maintained within the CMS. This flexibility allows companies to have all the power and flexibility of a custom-built web application with the agility and freedom of a CMS.



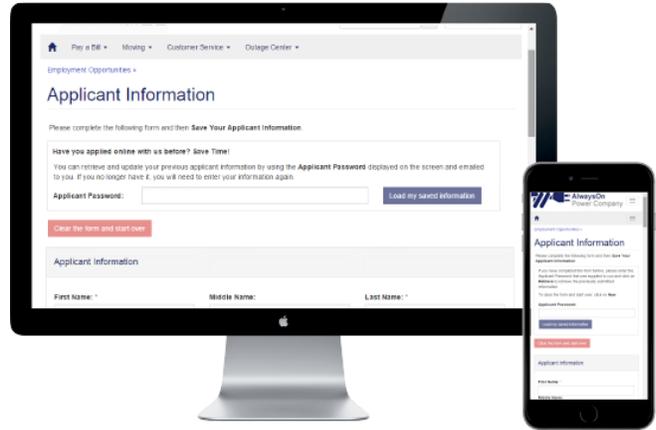
## Workflow and Customer Service Application

High-quality customer service is very important to the Coop's Management. All web site requests are fed into the Coop Site Management Workflow provided with the Accelerator Workflow Application. Many of the requests received are routed and handled automatically through direct integration with the Coop's backend systems and reflected immediately in the website application. Other requests that require customer service involvement are worked by Customer Service Reps and routed through the workflow as they are processed.

Using the Accelerators Workflow Application, Customer Service Managers can monitor operations and manage workflow processes. Managers and Reps can monitor, assign, and work jobs created by website requests from users and members. They can also create additional jobs and enter them into the workflow system based on inbound calls or as a result of other jobs being worked.

## Website Job Board and HR Application

As a large cooperative, the Coop knows its benefits lay not only in the commitment to their members, but also to the community. Keeping job openings easy to find, apply for, and manage was an important part of the project. Hiring is not just about a workforce, it's about empowering and helping the lives of the people in the community it serves. For this, they seamlessly integrated Accelerator's clean, professional, easy-to-use and customizable Job Board into their website. Job applicants can access the Coop's job board 24x7 to view current job openings. They can apply online and upload their resume, cover letter, and other necessary documents. The system will also save the applicant information for the applicant to retrieve and use again with future job openings.



Applicant information is stored in the Coop's HR Management Application, provided as part of the Accelerator HR Application where it can be reviewed and worked.

For the HR team, the new HR Job Management application saves time, reduces duplication, and simplifies the recruiting process to identify more quality applicants for their openings.

HR Managers can define, manage, and categorize job descriptions and then post openings for locations and date ranges. They can monitor and manage applications through the hiring process adding user, date and time stamped remarks along the way. And lastly, they can produce reports for corporate and regulatory reporting.

## The Road Ahead

After just a few short months, the new website has been a great success with greater and greater usage of the site among their membership. Over 30,000 members have registered for online access to their account, there is a much greater participation in the Coop's various programs, and there is a significant increase in bill payments through the site, especially bank payments that the membership was asking for. They have had many compliments from their membership regarding the new site and have improved customer service overall.

With the successful launch of the Coop's new website and CMS, the plan for the road ahead began right away. We always say numbers don't lie, and the immediate return seen from the modernization project paved the way for more enhancements using Surround Technologies' Accelerator and Professional Services team, to scope further future-proof, scalable applications that will drive smarter business, with

faster development and deployments, better products than ever before and more possibilities than imagined.

**Contact:  
For More Information**

To learn more about software from Surround Technologies or to schedule a 1-on-1 demonstration of this or other features of the Accelerator for .NET contact us by phone 973.743.1277 or visit [www.surroundtech.com](http://www.surroundtech.com)



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