

## Flexibility Is the Key for Customer Service

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Customer Service Assistant **Kiana Carswell** works remotely to answer customer calls.

When the directive came for employees to work at home wherever possible, the Customer Service and Information Technology (IT) organizations immediately swung into action. For customer service representatives, the first challenge was hardware – since they typically use desktop computers. To enable call center reps in Akron, Fairmont and Reading to work remotely, more than 450 laptops were needed in a hurry. Another 50 laptops also were required so Customer Management employees could work from home to help produce accurate, timely bills for customers.

“IT and Compucom, our IT Service Desk partner, scoured the company for every spare laptop they could find,” said **Matt Green**, manager, Customer Service Technology. “When that wasn’t enough, we looked to Customer Service employees who could turn in their FE laptops and work from personal devices like home computers, tablets and cell phones.” Around 120 employees across Customer Service gave up their laptops temporarily to be repurposed.

The next challenge was to set up all the collected laptops with the software specific to the job. In addition, the phone system had to be modified to route incoming calls to the reps’ home locations.

“The technology team did a phenomenal job of making our systems functional for working remotely in only a week or so,” said Matt. He recognized the contributions of **Mike Carr**, director, IT Customer Systems; **Marcus Geise**, supervisor, Customer Service Technology; **Nate Edmunds**, supervisor, Customer Contact Center; **Tim Earnest** and **Josh Gorham**, coordinators, Customer Care; **Chris Martin**, application configuration analyst A V; and **Carrie Carpenter**, senior customer service associate. “They were tremendous partners in making this happen.”

Revenue Operations office and support workers were among those who donated their laptops so customer service reps and billing employees could work at home.

“As a group, we contributed 47 laptops, including mine, to the cause,” said **Alan Michel**, director, Revenue Operations. “Currently I’m using my personal laptop and Office 365 tools to stay connected.”

He, too, recognized the efforts of IT and the technology team for their “non-stop, 24/7 efforts to make sure people have the technology they need.”

To help customers weather the COVID-19 emergency, FirstEnergy has stopped service disconnections, including those for non-payment. As a result, Revenue Operations collectors – who work to gather delinquent payments from customers – have little collection-related work at the present time.

“This is a hard situation, because as a group we’re passionate about managing arrears and uncollectible expense. Now, we’ve had to find other duties to keep these 151 employees active,” said Alan.

In Ohio, West Virginia, Maryland and New Jersey, many collectors are working as meter readers. In Pennsylvania, collectors, in some cases, are serving as flaggers to direct traffic for line crews – since we’ve transitioned to smart meters in the state.

Alan stressed the need to remain flexible in the face of fast-moving events. “It’s a very fluid situation. Right now, working at home or in temporary roles is the new normal.”