



eBook

THE POWER OF UTILITY DATA

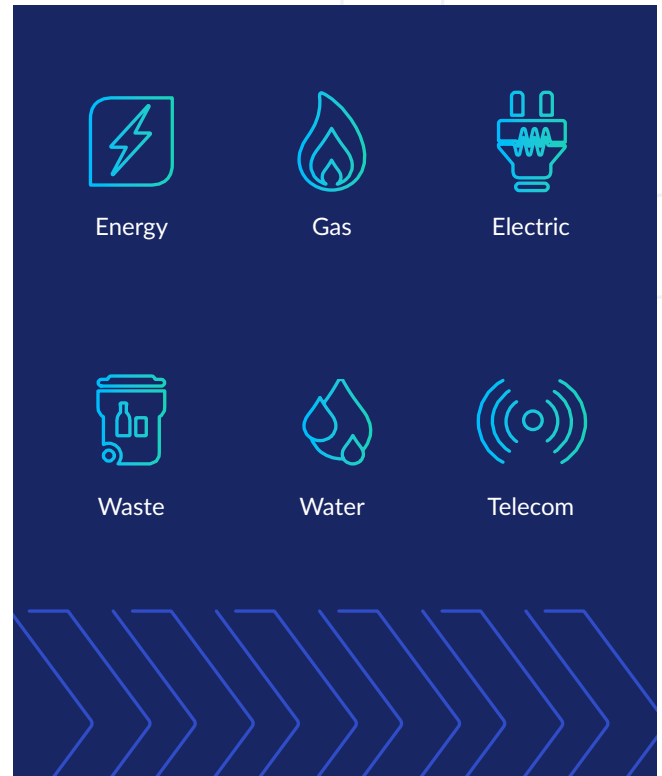
Manage Costs, Establish Resilience, and
Drive Data-Informed Decisions



THE IMPACT OF UTILITY DATA

For multi-site businesses — hospitality, retail, restaurants, banks, and more — utility costs are often one of the highest operational expenses. Not only is it a high cost, but it's also highly complex. Accounts payable, finance, energy procurement, and other departments are navigating potentially thousands of invoices across hundreds of locations, each with different systems, bill periods, and invoice-level detail. All these variables can make efficient utility expense and data management a struggle, resulting in missed invoices, late fees, shut-offs or even overpayments.

Getting bills paid correctly and on time is hard enough, so many companies aren't able to do the additional level of analysis to spot overlapping service dates, billing and meter errors, spikes in consumption and demand, or other usage anomalies — which can significantly limit your organization's ability to strategically manage these expenses.



To top it all off, these monthly utility bills — electricity, natural gas, water, sewer, telecom, waste, and other payables — contain a wealth of often untapped insights that can support your company's fundamental goals, such as:

- Providing all internal departments with reliable energy usage and utility data to support more accurate forecasting, planning, and reporting
- Empowering accounts payable and finance teams to identify savings opportunities
- Empowering energy and facility teams to target and improve controllable inefficiencies and support informed energy sourcing



But for any of this to be possible, you need access to accurate, reliable data.

UTILITY DATA ACCESS AND USABILITY

When it comes to getting good data from utility bills, multi-site businesses face unique challenges. The hundreds or even thousands of locations scattered across your portfolio are being serviced by a host of individual utilities and suppliers.



Each supplier has their own invoice format, tariff structures, and billing practices, making data collection and management a cumbersome task. Missing, estimated, and corrected invoices add to the complexity. Up to four percent of bills are reissued by utilities, and over nine percent of utility bills end up missing or late. In addition, a constantly changing inventory of locations and organizational structures create an environment ripe for inaccuracy.

The impact of bad data extends beyond a single error, since it is the baseline for future accrued expenses, budgeting and trend reporting. Without the consolidation, verification, and usability of good, comprehensive utility data, you lack the information to address stakeholder concerns.

Relying on inaccurate data can erode trust, create confusion, and damage the financial health of your entire organization.

THE IMPACT OF BAD DATA



Budget Discrepancies

The CFO wants to know why budget to actual trending is off.



Bad Investments

Finance wants to see the results of the capital investment funds that were given to support efficiency projects – but you aren't reporting reduced costs, what happened?



Loss of Credibility

Field managers question accuracy of financial and trending reports, and their commitment to efficiency programs begins to suffer.

3 KEY STEPS FOR COLLECTING AND REVIEWING UTILITY DATA

To overcome these challenges, you need to capture the detailed cost and consumption data on each bill to successfully audit all of the resources your organization uses, such as electricity, natural gas, water, sewer, telecom, waste, and other payables. The following strategies will help you identify billing errors and potential shut-offs, and give you visibility into how and where your resources are being consumed. With this data, your organization has the ability to conserve resources and reduce costs.



STEP 1

Capture Line Items Across All Utility Bills

Have a process for collecting data from utility bills, such as energy measures — kilowatt hours (kWh), service dates, demand (kW) and demand charges. It's critical to capture all of these elements to gain and share the insights this data can provide and spot exceptions, such as incorrect meter readings or meter multipliers.

Data collection and storage should be done consistently across all locations and all bills to create a database for reporting, supporting trend analysis and benchmark reporting.



Expert Tip

Watch for different types of invoice formats, billing cycles, and charges as each can vary from utility to utility.



STEP 2

Conduct a Pre-Payment Audit

Audit your bills to check for overlapping or missing service dates, types of charges, and usage. Identifying potential billing errors prior to payment will help ensure you do not overpay for the resources you actually used. It also eliminates the time-consuming task of working with vendors to obtain a credit on your next bill.

9%

As many as **nine percent of utility bills arrive late**, so having a system in place to identify these in advance of late fees or shut-offs is critical.



STEP 3

Create a Baseline To Support Trend Analysis

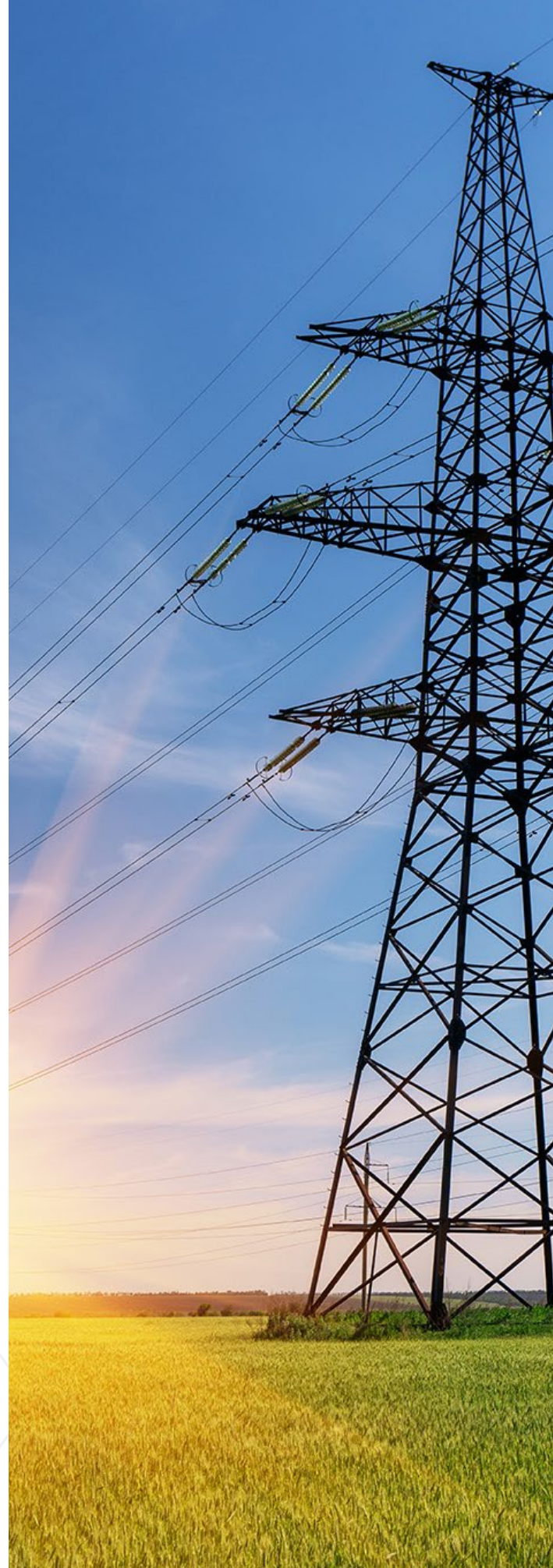
You need to capture and know where your true costs are and how your spend breaks down. With line-item data from utility bills, you can identify separate charges by resources, and create a baseline for each of these utilities. This data will be useful to finance as well as energy and facility teams in support of year over year and month over month trend analysis and can be applied to managing both your supply and your demand — as well as your company's comprehensive energy and sustainability management strategy.

Utility billing practices can greatly affect your accruals and financial reporting. Re-bills, or bills that are issued more than one time due to corrected data, are one of the most common reasons for organizations to feel the impact of bad data. Without the proper processes in place to address these re-bills, organizations will find their accruals and financial reporting is significantly off, as the incorrect invoices are now the baseline for future accrued expenses and budgeting and tracking of your trending.



Address Stakeholder Concerns

Detailed focus on comprehensive, accurate data and a proactive approach to correcting errors ensures all stakeholders have reliable data for strategic decision making.





USE GOOD DATA TO CREATE ACCURATE, DEFENSIBLE UTILITY BUDGETS

Utility budgets are complicated. Beyond creating your annual budget, adjusting to the performance of the previous year, and working within the established budget as the year progresses, strong financial management requires careful planning and access to quality cost and consumption data.



BEST PRACTICE 1

Start with site-specific baselines

In the utility budget, the simplistic approach of a top-down baseline may lead you astray. Vendor bill timing or erroneous accrual calculations that affect your general ledger can cause issues if used solely to plan for next year. Instead, start at the account level and establish baselines for both usage and unit price. This will make your budget much more accurate, while providing better insight into how to respond to unforeseen changes. In determining this baseline, consider billing periods and how they relate to your financial booked expense. Also be sure to involve stakeholders early in the process. While this approach is more intensive initially, early buy-in will garner support for the process and deliver a more accurate and reliable budget.



What really impressed me is the detailed, yet simple way ENGIE Impact can provide us with energy consumption information. With a few clicks, I can find expense and consumption data for a single site, a selection of multiple sites, or the entire enterprise.

Jason King, SVP of National Bank of Arizona

[→ Read Case Study](#)



BEST PRACTICE 2

Track accruals against budgets

Unlike other budget category expenses, you cannot simply track accruals based on the bills paid:

- The length of billing cycles can vary dramatically between utilities. Some water companies, for example, bill every three months, while many electric and natural gas providers bill monthly.
- Bills received in a given month largely reflect usage from the prior month. It is important to align your resource budget according to the month used, rather than month billed.
- In shoulder months, when you are transitioning from winter to spring or from summer into fall, heating/cooling usage is either declining or increasing. Both seasonality and weather patterns need to be considered when projecting expenses.

Creating accurate and timely accruals will minimize your exposure to budget variance.



Electric vs Natural Gas as Percentage of Annual Spend by Month





BEST PRACTICE 3

Track variances by both cost and usage

While accounts payable's primary focus is on the dollars, it is important to consider how usage affects and drives resource expense. As you build your utility budget, track and document the individual components of resource costs: unit cost and consumption. This will support variance analysis when budget discrepancies occur and help you address questions about why your budget is off. This information can then be shared with your energy and facility team to help them understand the drivers and help you address stakeholder questions about why the variance occurred.



BEST PRACTICE 4

Use variance analysis to “manage down” in the organization

Most data analysis will inform a relatively simple explanation of what's going on from a utility spend standpoint across your portfolio. This analysis can help you determine what actions are available to your company for improving results, allowing you to:

- Ensure expenses are allocated correctly
- Identify trends in variance that support re-forecasting usage
- Reduce future surprises by understanding where fluctuations in utility spend originated

Use the financial data to spur a closer look at a specific site where expenses are higher than projected. Is the variance caused by an issue in the budget, or has something occurred at the site that should be investigated or addressed, such as a leak or failed meter?

Learn how a global apparel brand used ENGIE Impact's platform to track energy use, costs, and sourcing worldwide—powered by automated utility bill auditing and data validation.

[→ Read Case Study](#)



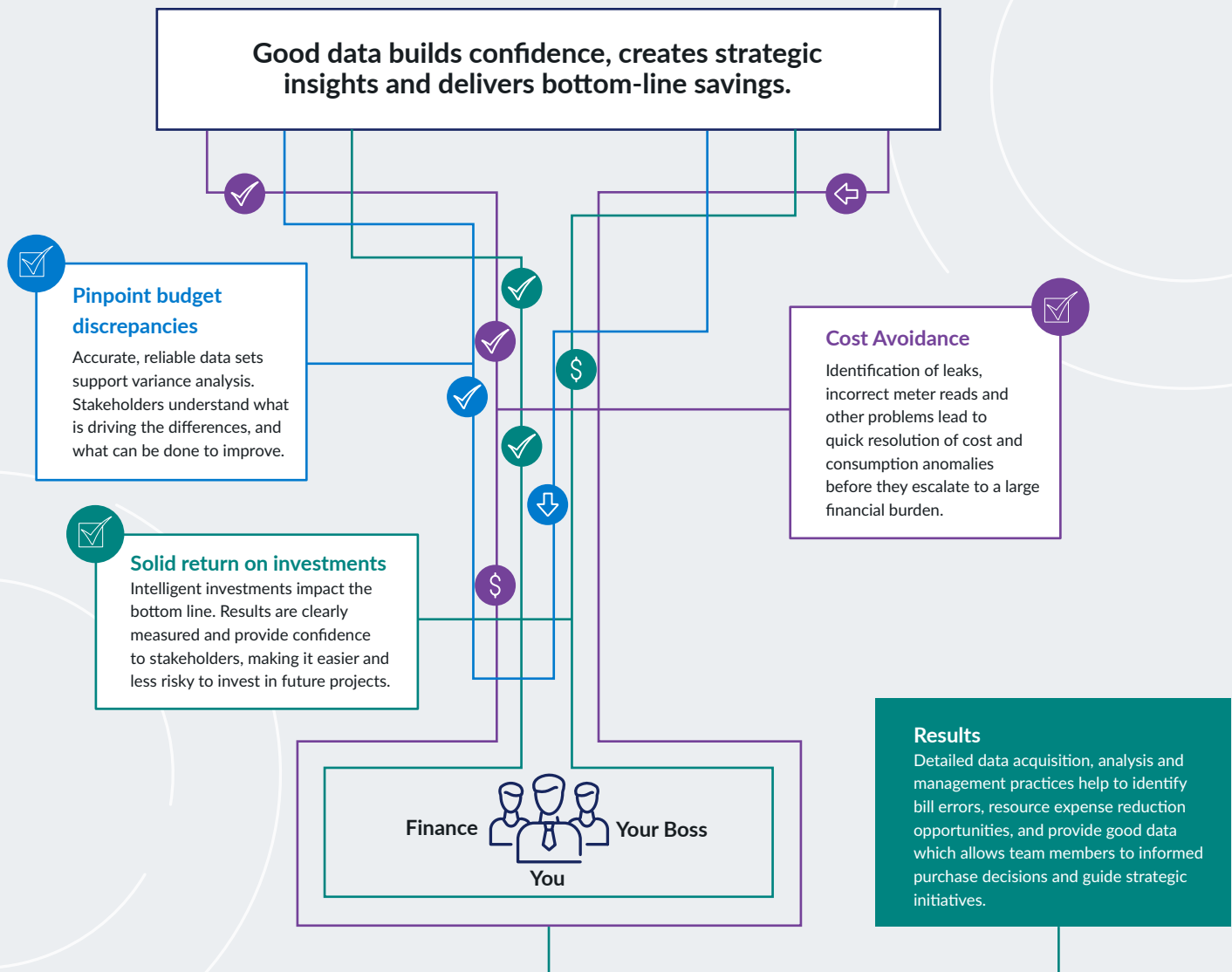


ABOVE AND BEYOND

Data-driven approach extends beyond AP and finance

Not only does good data benefit your AP and finance teams, but this quality resource data can also be leveraged by stakeholders across your organization to support sustainability and improve efficiency.

GOOD DATA



The data driven approach outlined above can not only add value to the AP and finance organizations, but also serve as the foundation for strategic decision making across the broader organization for increased value.



HOW ENERGY AND FACILITY TEAMS CAN BENEFIT FROM GOOD UTILITY DATA

Once you've identified how and where resources are being consumed, your energy and facility teams can use this data to implement and measure the success of energy conservation measures (ECMs). These efforts can offer significant opportunity for energy reduction and cost savings. Some ideas include:

- Evaluate your current portfolio performance by collecting bill data to create an accurate energy profile of your facilities. This data will determine how and where to focus your energy conservation efforts.
- After identifying high-cost, high-use facilities (outliers), be sure to raise awareness across your organization to get all employees involved in your energy conservation program. Create a competitive environment to encourage participation.
- Identify no-cost, low-cost conservation efforts, such as:



**Maintaining
Temperature Set Points**



**Installing Occupancy
Light Sensors**

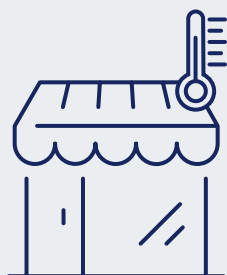


**Keeping Exterior Doors
And Windows closed**



**Turning Off Unused
Equipment**

In addition, you can reevaluate and review your site data to quantify the benefits of energy savings. Get the data to back up your program's return on investment and prove its effectiveness. Determine how much you've saved so you can reinvest those funds in additional energy efficiency projects that do require capital, but have short paybacks.



HVAC ECM Case Study

At a large box retail store located in Texas, ENGIE Impact found the facility's cooling temperature set point was at 74 degrees. By simply increasing that by one degree to 75 degrees, the facility reduced their annual consumption by 30,000 kWh, equating to an annual energy cost saving of \$3,100. This type of ECM should be at the top of your list when you begin reviewing your facility for ways to reduce consumption.

CONCLUSION

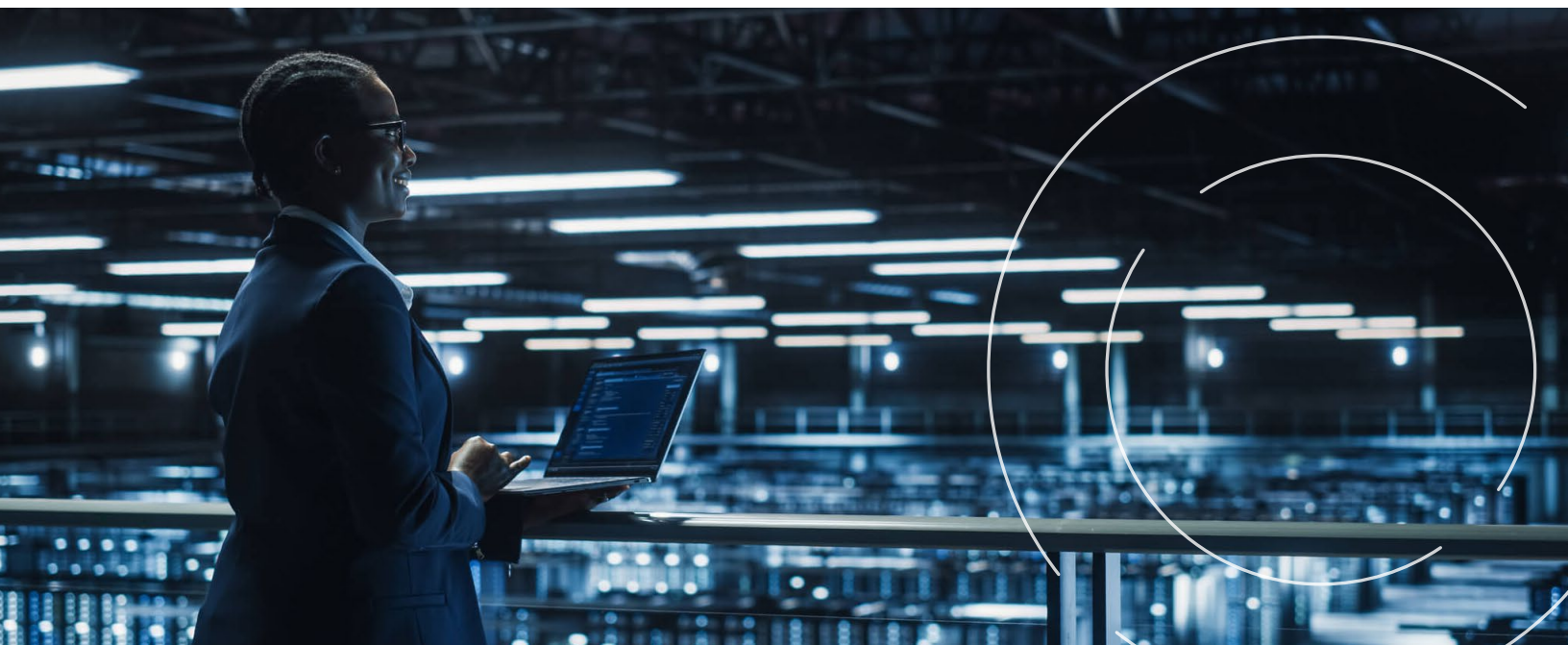
Retail stores, restaurants, banks, hotels, and other types of multi-site companies face many challenges — hundreds or even thousands of sites to manage, ever-increasing costs, and extremely complex information from their utilities.

Inaccurate or poorly managed bill data from these utilities can hinder your company's ability to manage costs and resource consumption. Reliable data is key to reducing billing errors and planning a comprehensive energy and sustainability management strategy. The best practices discussed can provide greater visibility into utility bill data, so you can remedy errors, identify optimal utility rates, and provide your stakeholders with information to make confident decisions about capital investments — resulting in significant cost savings for your company.

HOW ENGIE IMPACT CAN HELP YOU

For companies with many locations across the country, the need to drive down utility costs and improve facility efficiency is critical to stay competitive. Tracking invoice data and doing a comprehensive audit to ensure the correct amounts are being paid is labor intensive and often outside the scope of most accounts payable departments. Dealing with billing mistakes becomes a reactive, rather than proactive, task.

ENGIE Impact provides complete management of all of these tasks so our clients are able to focus on proactively driving cost savings and facility efficiencies. Our [Utility Expense Management](#) solution provides a fully outsourced payment solution with detailed data capture, robust reporting, and best-in-class analysis capabilities. We consolidate thousands of invoices into one simple invoice for the client to process, and provide an automated feed of data to their accounting software. Our clients can better track how each facility manages energy, water, waste, and telecom costs and consumption.



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Your Sustainability Journey**
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