TANKLINK HELPS SOUTH FLORIDA GAS CUT DELIVERY COSTS & KEEP CUSTOMERS HAPPY

South Florida Gas
COMPANY INC.

For more than two decades, South Florida Gas has been servicing the far-flung residential and commercial propane markets in its region. As you might imagine, such a varied customer base brings with it an array of demands and usage patterns. For those customers who, say, use clean-burning propane to power their standard appliances, the amount of product they use remains fairly predictable and steady over time.

However, the South Florida Gas customer base tends to be fairly affluent, and a large percentage of them use propane-powered lifestyle products such as pool/spa heaters, barbecue grills, generators, gas lights and patio fire bowls. These customers enjoy entertaining and throwing outdoor parties or maybe having the grandkids drop by for a day of swimming. Then there's the unpredictable weather of the region -- temperature swings, for instance, and even sporadic power outages brought on by the thunderstorms of the warm-weather months -- which can drive usage levels.
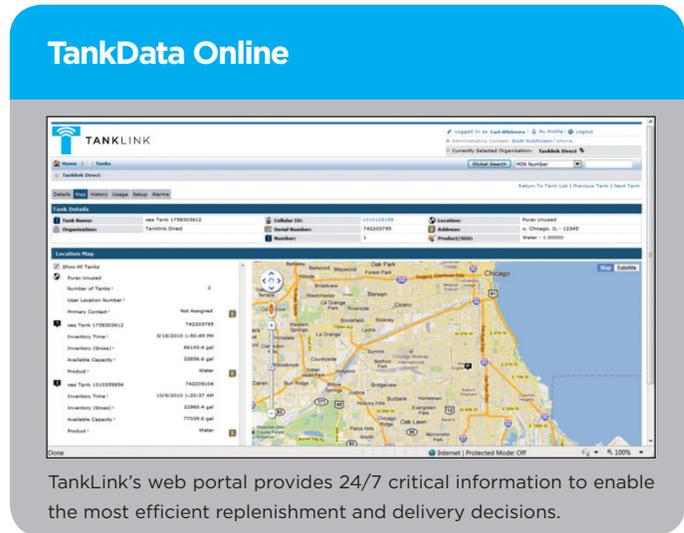
The reality for propane dealers is that a sizeable portion of their customers can't be pigeonholed when it comes to usage patterns and, by extension, replenishment schedules. Unpredictable use surges are a major factor in such markets, and since South Florida Gas must prioritize responsiveness, those surges can be a drain on the bottom line. As well, South Florida Gas had customers in three counties, many of them in outlying areas that aren't easily accessed. Given fuel costs, you want to keep such trips to a minimum. Those erratic consumption patterns can also yield many off-hours emergency fill calls, and those always entail extra costs.

> "We've been able to reduce our deliveries by 25 percent. We're not going out there when we don't need to."
>
> Chuck Robb, South Florida Gas Company

So in search of greater efficiency, company president Chuck Robb made the decision about eight years ago to utilize remote telemetry on many of the buried propane tanks that South Florida Gas installed, refilled and serviced. In those days, installation of monitoring equipment involved burying cable in a trench -- a labor-intensive process that didn't necessarily appeal to customers. However, South Florida Gas' monitoring provider eventually went out of business, which led Mr. Robb to the TankLink tank-level monitoring solution.

With TankLink, the monitoring device installs under the tank cap, where it's protected from lawnmowers and curious children, for instance, and thanks to the wireless technology there's no need to dig a trench in the customer's landscaped yard. For the service provider, TankLink monitoring entails a nominal monthly per-tank cost and no up front equipment expenses. TankLink's remote-telemetry hardware monitors gas or chemical levels and then uploads the data to a server, which is then immediately accessible by the supplier. Such monitoring in essence guarantees the customer with an uninterrupted supply of product. To say the least, that's a strong selling point. "Peace of mind has a lot of value to the customer," said Robb.

TankLink's web portal provides 24/7 critical information to enable the most efficient replenishment and delivery decisions.

What has a lot of value to businesspersons like Mr. Robb is that TankLink monitoring allows his tanks to, in essence, "talk" to him. And therein lies the additional layer of value for the business that invests in tank monitoring. By having easy access to tank data and knowing, for example, which customers use the highest or lowest levels of product and how geographical and seasonal trends interplay with usage patterns, providers like South Florida Gas have new and valuable information and on-demand access to all of it through a secure web portal. Via TankData Online, TankLink users can retrieve instant inventory data by using a desktop or laptop browser or mobile app. "It's working perfectly," Robb said of the TankData system. "I'm able to pull it up on my laptop or wherever, and I'm able to relay the information to whoever needs it."

As a result of being able to monitor inventory data in real-time, South Florida Gas is no longer reactive to usage spikes; rather, they're on top of them before a costly emergency refill becomes necessary.

Presently, South Florida Gas has TankLink set up on about 750 of its 5,000 total tanks in the field. All the data helps Mr. Robb make strategic decisions on which future clients would benefit from monitoring. As a rule of thumb, unless a customer is fairly regimented in his or her propane use, remote monitoring will likely be of benefit.

In the end, South Florida Gas, thanks to TankLink monitoring and the TankData flow of targeted information, has been able to maximize its route and delivery efficiencies. Becoming a more efficient business is always a work in progress, but already Mr. Robb is seeing an improved bottom line because of TankLink. Even though the business is growing, South Florida Gas is seeing delivery costs lowered -- fewer driver hours, less maintenance and upkeep costs for the company fleet, much less of what Mr. Robb calls the "gas taxi" effect (i.e., a driver coming back at the end of the day with a half-filled tank). Now, when the day is done, those drivers come back with empty tanks. "I track deliveries," Robb explains. "We've been able to reduce our deliveries by 25 percent. We're not going out there when we don't need to."

No less important is that the company's customers who have been set up with TankLink have the confidence that comes with knowing that the hot water heater won't run out of fuel and that whole-house propane generator will be ready to kick in at a moment's notice when needed. Improved margins for the provider, peace of mind for the consumer -- TankLink puts those distinguishing advantages at your fingertips. Just ask Chuck Robb and the South Florida Gas Company.