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The Future of Benchmarking:
A Geography-First Approach

Across the nation, legislative bodies from the municipal to federal level are mandating building energy and water benchmarking requirements. It's no longer just first adopters rolling out these mandates — benchmarking is here to stay. According the the Institute of Market Transformation, the building sector accounts for around 40% of total U.S. energy consumption.[1] To impact that number and curb emissions, buildings must first measure their energy usage. Benchmarking ordinances kickstart that process, but measurement is also increasingly understood as a vital part of energy efficiency.

For building representatives, complying with a benchmarking requirement can involve daunting data acquisition challenges: manual requests, varying utility processes, labor-intensive data collection in multi-tenant facilities. There are also obstacles for utilities: responding to requests efficiently and accurately, interfacing with ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager® and delivering the infrastructure for maintenance. Without a solution in place, a new mandate can flood utility teams with data requests and support inquiries while building representatives struggle to comply.

So, what's the best way to address this quickly changing landscape?

So, what's the best way to address this quickly changing landscape? Utilities and their partners are wrestling with this question. Any solution must be capable of handling requests, delivering aggregate data and submitting it to Portfolio Manager®. An ideal solution would be an easy-to-use interface where a building owner or operator can do it all, regardless of the utilities involved.

But how do you achieve this customer-oriented solution? Today, utilities face a choice: build their own solution in-house, or find technology capable of ensuring compliance. Still, with evolving legislation and requirements, utilities operate in uncertainty. In other words, today's solutions aren't always future-proof. Sharing a solution with other locally affected utilities not only improves the customer experience, it means tackling future changes together, not in silos.

Efficiency occurs on all sides when regional entities use a single benchmarking solution. It's what we call "geography-first": legislative bodies and local utilities working together to deliver a solution. This approach minimizes building owner burden, supports compliance and uncovers potential retrofit projects, ultimately enhancing business opportunities and reducing emissions. And whether ordinance-driven or not, when utilities address a challenge with a shared solution for their collective customers, the entire ecosystem thrives.
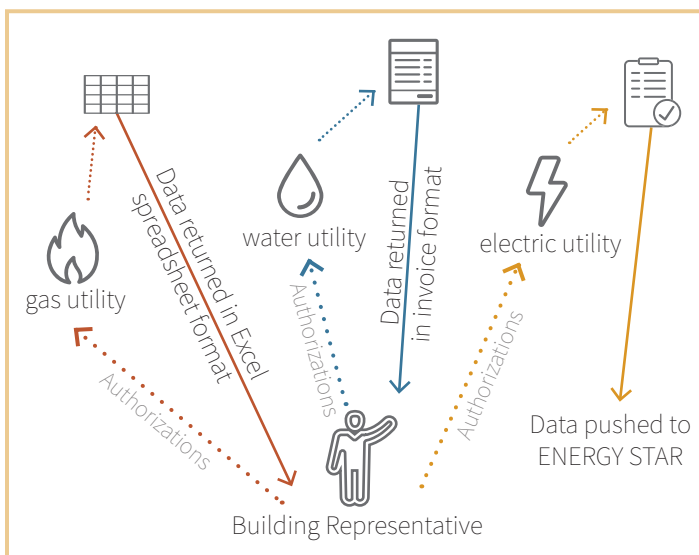
At Calico, we understand what it takes to deliver a whole building benchmarking application. From interacting with the raw data to meeting the needs of building and utility stakeholders, our subject matter experts and technologists work with utilities to implement, launch and maintain our proven Benchmarking Application. But we're also interested in the next evolution of the industry, one characterized by constant change and growth. Geography-first benchmarking benefits all involved, pushing the envelope on how utilities interact with their customers, data and the society at large.

What Geography-First Benchmarking Looks Like

To understand what a geography-first approach to benchmarking entails, it's important to look at the traditional data request processes today. The first visualization illustrates a possible scenario. Depending on the territory and the unique utilities within it, these processes might look different.
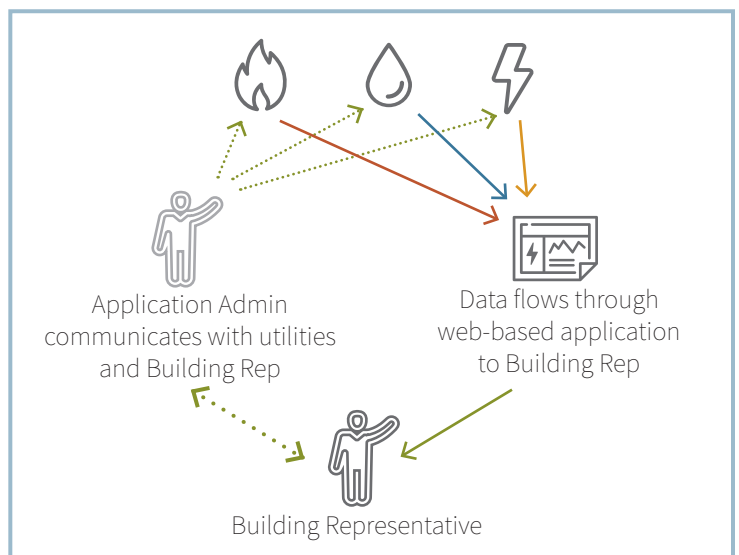
1: Benchmarking Today, A General Landscape

At Calico we've experienced many flavors of what you see below: utilities with different processes and tools and building owners and operators (and any energy efficiency consultants involved) with substantial leg work.

gas utility

water utility

electric utility

Authorizations

Data returned in Excel spreadsheet format

Data returned in invoice format

Authorizations

Authorizations

Data pushed to ENERGY STAR

Building Representative

2: The Future of Benchmarking, A Geography-First Approach

In a geography-first approach, utilities deliver a single benchmarking application. Building Reps use the same tool to access aggregated data, automation creates much needed accuracy and an App Admin is there to work with utilties and Building Reps.

Application Admin communicates with utilities and Building Rep

Data flows through web-based application to Building Rep

Building Representative

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How Building Owners and Operators Benefit

Right out of the gate, a geography-first approach creates simplicity for building owners and operators.

Instead of submitting a form for water data and sending an email to acquire electric data, for example, operators can navigate to a single application capable of delivering all types of aggregated energy data.

The benefits include:

- Consolidated application for all energy types
- Reduced burden from manual data collection
- Simple process for fast submission to ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager®

How Utilities Benefit

When building owners and operators have a single application to request and submit all types of energy data, the benefits might initially seem one-sided.

But ultimately, utilities reap the many benefits of collabortation, which can impact both short and long term goals.

The benefits include:

- Simplified internal administration
- Reduction in customer support inquiries
- Shared support and maintenance costs
- Customer targeting for energy efficiency programs
- Co-marketing with territory utilities for programs and initiatives
- Collaboration and support amid changing requirements and mandates
- Consistent tenant verification processes across utilities for multi-tenant buildings

There's More to Benchmarking Than Compliance...

Why should utilities in areas without ordinances, or with upcoming legislation, adopt this approach? While compliance is a powerful factor in benchmarking, it's not the only reason to explore a benchmarking solution.

When utilities work together to make life easier for building owners, territories become more amenable for businesses and emissions are curbed.

In today's world, businesses are focused on sustainability and environmental initiatives. Large corporations especially devote entire departments to developing these goals. So, it stands to reason that they're looking for areas that offer simple ways to access and act on energy data. When utilities work together to make it easier for building owners, territories become more amenable for businesses **and** emissions are curbed.

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What's Next?

To make this geography-first approach a reality, information-sharing and collaboration are essential — you need open lines of communication between utilities, technology vendors, sustainability councils, governmental entities, building management, commercial real estate and others.

It's simple in theory, but not necessarily so straightforward in practice. Our industry is complex, and decision-makers across the ecosystem are often siloed. Still, it's also true that the different entities listed above share common goals: driving innovation in the energy efficiency space, building bridges locally to reach business targets, delivering popular, user-friendly services and solutions. The goal of enabling building benchmarking regionally could catalyze conversations that drive meaningful progress across utility initiatives and for a wide variety of stakeholders.

Geography-first benchmarking uncovers benefits in the short and long term, for all involved. A single, territory-wide application delivers simplicity and sustainability. Our space undergoes nearly constant growth, a characteristic that's unlikely to change — but when ecosystem stakeholders find common ground for the benefit of business and customers, everyone wins.

[1] Institute of Market Transformation, Building Energy Policies and Programs, https://www.imt.org/how-we-drive-demand/building-policies-and-programs/.

About Calico Energy

Founded in 2010 and headquartered in Chicago and Seattle, Calico Energy provides trusted technical products and services for utilities and their partners. Working across the energy sector, Calico has solved some of the industry's most complex energy data aggregation and usage system problems. Today, the company continues to pursue big challenges, providing strategic and technical solutions built to meet market needs. With a proven whole building benchmarking application and utility program expertise, Calico focuses on making meaningful progress toward a more sustainable future.

Ready to learn more about Calico's whole building Benchmarking Application?

We'd love to show you how our application enhances processes for building owners and utilities alike.

Visit www.calicoenergy.com to learn more about our solutions and services, or email us directly at contact@calicoenergy.com today.

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