



Overview

Country: Switzerland
Industry: Electronics and automation
Website: www.ecostarter.com

Customer Profile

EcoStarter provides automation systems that enable homeowners to manage the heating, cooling, and lighting systems of their homes.

Challenge

Many European vacation homes are too remote to have an Internet connection, so EcoStarter needed another way to enable homeowners to control their heating and lighting systems remotely.

Solution

EcoStarter incorporated the Nexmo API for SMS into its home automation system management software. When an EcoStarter customer accesses their home automation system remotely, interaction with the controllers takes place via SMS, ensuring that customers can interact with their systems even in very remote locations.

Benefits

By integrating SMS services from Nexmo, EcoStarter has overcome the connection problems associated with remote properties. Now, vacation homeowners can turn off the furnace when they're away, yet turn it on again before they return, ensuring that the house is nice and warm when they do arrive.

Creating that Most Luxurious of Customer Experiences: Warmth

“Our service is really designed to be interactive. Customers want to see that they’ve turned on the furnace when they click that button, so speed and reliability of message delivery is crucial.”

— Jarle Hulaas, CEO and Co-Founder of EcoStarter

The Challenge

Having a vacation home in the mountains or on a remote beach is a wonderful thing, but if you arrive on a chilly evening in the Autumn it may not feel wonderful until you’ve fired up the furnace and brought the house up to a comfortable temperature.

That’s where EcoStarter plays a crucial role. The Swiss company has developed a home automation system that enables property owners to control a range of home systems—from heating and air conditioning systems to whole house lighting systems and more—from a remote location. Using a Web browser at the office or an app on a mobile phone, owners can start the furnace at their weekend homes even before they’ve left the office on a Friday afternoon. By the time they arrive later that night, the home is wonderfully warm and cozy.

But EcoStarter had to overcome a fundamental hurdle for its solution to be truly viable: Many vacation homes in Northern Europe have no Internet access. They are too remote, which meant that EcoStarter needed something other than an IP-based communications mechanism to interact with the systems in these homes.

The Solution

While many vacation homes are too remote to connect to the Internet, those same homes are usually within range of a cell tower. EcoStarter saw an opportunity,

here, and developed a line of home automation controllers that can connect to a mobile network. The company then turned to the communications technology that has long been linking people and devices in even the most remote parts of the world: SMS.

Today, when a client manipulates their home automation controls through the EcoStarter web interface or smartphone app, the software translates those interactions into commands that can be embedded in a text message and sent to specific system controllers in the client’s home. If the client turns up the furnace, for example, the message is sent to the furnace controller, which executes the control command and then sends a reply confirming that the command has been carried out.

Initially, EcoStarter relied on several different SMS providers to interact with the controllers in its customers’ homes—most of which are located on beaches or mountainsides in Northern Europe. The choice of SMS provider was primarily determined by the location of the customer’s property but secondarily by messaging costs.

Yet EcoStarter soon encountered difficulties in this approach. “With other companies, the service was more expensive, slower, and less reliable,” says Jarle Hulaas, CEO and Co-Founder of EcoStarter. “Our service is really designed to be interactive. Customers want to see that they’ve turned on the furnace when they

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To enable a customer experience that delivered a more responsive interaction and greater reliability, EcoStarter began looking at other SMS service providers. Nexmo stood out for its combination of global reach, reliability, responsiveness, and pricing. Integrating Nexmo’s RESTful API into its web-based automation control system in less than a day, EcoStarter quickly discovered that Nexmo could, by itself, facilitate the customer experience it had been seeking.

The Results

Today, EcoStarter customers can log into its website or use its app to take control of their vacation homes easily and consistently. The Web interface is responsive and reliable; when users click the button to turn on the furnace or the lights, they quickly receive confirmation that the action has been completed. When they arrive at the house a few hours later, it is light and warm and inviting.

But the move to Nexmo has brought about more than just warm feelings. As a

result of the reliability and reach of Nexmo’s Cloud Services for SMS, EcoStarter has seen a huge decrease in the number of text message errors and unexplained events. This has improved the customer experience even as it has freed up more time for EcoStarter personnel to attend to other critical tasks.

“By switching to Nexmo we have almost eliminated the need to monitor message performance and investigate undelivered messages,” says Mr. Hulaas. “That probably saves us at least two hours per day—and for us two hours is a significant amount of time. We can concentrate more on sales!”

And that concentration shows: Sales of EcoStarter’s automation systems are expanding—and expanding into wholly new geographies, including Northern Africa and other parts of Europe.

“With Nexmo we don’t have to worry about coverage,” Mr. Hulaas goes on to say. “Nexmo’s reach is great for global expansion. We can reach our customers wherever they’re building a home.”

