

Northern Ireland Electricity

HOW WE HELPED

Energy Market Opening

Northern Ireland Electricity (NIE) owns and manages the Northern Ireland electricity infrastructure, a network of 45,000 miles of lines connecting 800,000 customers.

With the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland merging their respective energy markets, NIE entered the All-Island wholesale Single Electricity Market (SEM), run by a Single Market Operator (SMO) who acts as a pool administrator to enable generators and suppliers to trade under common All-Island market rules and regulations.

As part of the transition, NIE needed to redevelop and enhance a number of important IT systems and sought an experienced partner to accomplish this project. Parity, as an expert in project management and systems integration led a consortium that included St. Clements Services and Engage Consulting and won the open tender to manage NIE's technological adjustment to the new market environment.

Meeting deadlines, facing risks

Parity delivered on time and within budget a project that involved numerous risks and presented a very tight deadline. The scale of the challenge went well beyond the integration of the existing and new systems provided by numerous third parties.

Parity also had to resource the suppliers, manage the work of three main subcontractors who included; Oracle, Northgate and PRI Ltd.

Michael Atkinson, NI Programme Director for NIE stated,

"We were looking for a partner with strong systems integration capability and with specific knowledge of relevant systems, with the ability to demonstrate a flexible and pragmatic approach. Parity was able to meet these requirements in a positive way."

Upon the successful completion of an initial project phase consisting of the definition of NIE's IT requirements and the design of the necessary changes to its systems, NIE engaged Parity further to manage the subsequent development phase, which ensured the company entered the All-Island Irish electricity market on time.

With vast experience in delivering similar complex integration projects, Parity accomplished this task within a very tight timescale and demonstrated an outstanding risk management capability, dealing with considerable challenges including the resourcing and management of multiple suppliers and the integration of the work provided by numerous third parties.

Atkinson continued,

“The quality of Parity’s output was consistently good. Apart from technical expertise, both their pragmatic approach and partnership philosophy were crucial to the success of this work programme. This was a large and complex project with high external visibility and a tight deadline. Success would not have been possible without the engagement of reliable partners as was the case with Parity.”

Planning a project with a very rigid and challenging timescale was the first test that Parity had to accomplish. With no time for hesitation, Parity set an early start programme for the requirements definition and design phase. The project team set a series of workshops and reviews to be carried out within a firm schedule, in order to capture the business requirements as rapidly and accurately as possible. This involved bringing suppliers and partners together, which helped establish good working relationships from the beginning and therefore set the foundation for smooth progress of the project all the way through.

One of the key elements for the success of the project was the establishment of a comprehensive communications process that included weekly reviews for team members, steering group meetings involving Parity, NIE and all subcontractors and communications sessions for the entire team, which reached in excess of 100 people. This methodical approach ensured staff was kept abreast of tasks and progress, and that everyone knew their responsibilities and what was expected from other team members.

Complex integration

The intricacy of the second phase of the programme revolved around bringing together all the various software vendors, partners and incumbent suppliers to enhance, develop and integrate the existing IT systems, as well as build in new ones.

A major aspect of Parity’s responsibility was to manage, on behalf of NIE, the contracts of three sub-contractors; Oracle (in the form of SPL and Lodestar), Northgate Information Systems (the incumbent support partner) and the keypad meter supply company, PRI Ltd.

All this has enabled the Single Market Operator to access NIE’s market information, allowing the competitive market to operate. Secondly, the enhanced systems serve to support NIE’s customer offer and services, as consumers can now register with the supplier of their choice. Thirdly, new operational processes are now in place for electricity billing, debt management, data management and market messaging with suppliers.



The future

The experience on this project has now enabled Parity to work alongside its partners on Smart Metering projects, which the Government is committed to in order to achieve significant household carbon savings. Since the inception of electricity deregulation and market driven pricing around the globe, government regulators have been looking for a means to match consumption with generation. Traditional electrical meters only measure total consumption and as such provide no information of when the energy was consumed. Smart meters provide an effective way of measuring and reporting consumption, allowing price setting agencies to introduce different prices for consumption based on the time and season.