

Winter preparedness checklist for utilities: A guide to proactive customer communications

**PREPAREDNESS TIP**

Confirm all communication channels are set for winter events: SMS, email, wallet card, app, and website notifications.

**WINTER STORM REMINDER**

Review winterization plans and ensure emergency contacts are accessible for all teams.

**STAY PREPARED**

Update customer communication templates for real-time alerts and safety reminders ahead of winter storms.



Keep your
community safe
when winter
storms put your
grid to the test.

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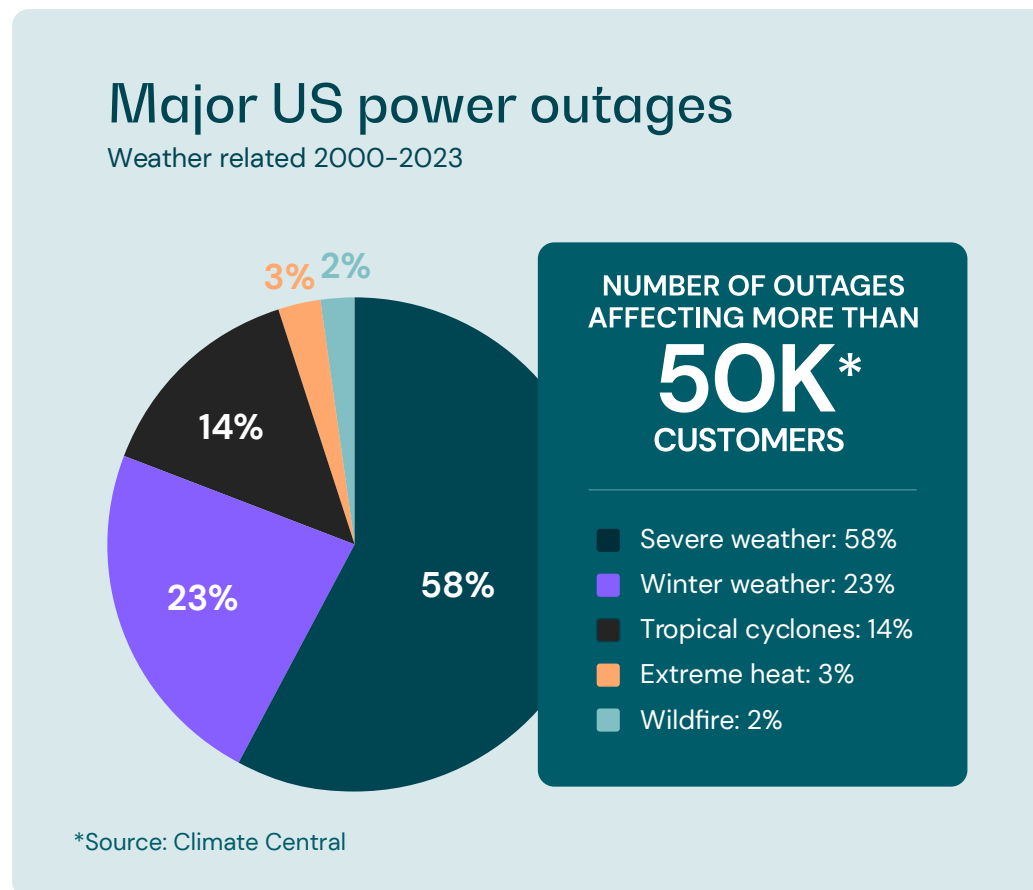


INTRODUCTION

Between 2000 and 2023, winter storms accounted for 23% of major weather-related power outages in the US, with the Northeast and Ohio Valley experiencing the highest number of such disruptions.¹ Notably, the historic January 2025 snowstorm brought unprecedented conditions to the Southern US, impacting regions rarely affected by severe winter weather and setting new outage records.²

As winter approaches, utilities face unique challenges in maintaining reliable service while keeping their customers informed and safe. Proactive communication and preparation are essential to help reduce disruptions, keep customers safe, and strengthen service reliability.

The following playbook provides actionable strategies to enhance your winter preparedness and customer communication efforts.



1

Why winter preparedness matters

For utility companies, winter is not just another season, it is a time that demands increased attention to both infrastructure and customer communication.

Proactive preparation and communication serve multiple purposes:

- Minimize service disruptions through preventive measures.
- Strengthen customer trust with clear, transparent communication.
- Reduce operational costs by preventing spikes in customer service calls.
- Ensure safety and reliability during challenging weather conditions.





Choosing the right channels

Modern utility companies must leverage multiple communication channels to ensure message delivery:



SMS, RBM, and text alerts
Immediate notifications for urgent situations



Website updates
Comprehensive information and resource center



Interactive voice response (IVR)
On-demand updates and personalized guidance through voice



Wallet card
Accessible and tailored messaging right in your customers' pockets



Mobile app notifications
Personalized alerts and account specific information



AI workflows
AI-driven, two-way conversations for customer service and safety



Social media
Real-time updates and community engagement

2

Creating an effective customer communication strategy

Timing is everything

The success of a winter preparedness communication strategy depends on *when* utilities reach out to customers:

Pre-winter communications

- Share winterization tips and resources.
- Announce planned maintenance schedules.
- Provide emergency contact information.
- Detail your utilities' winter preparation efforts.



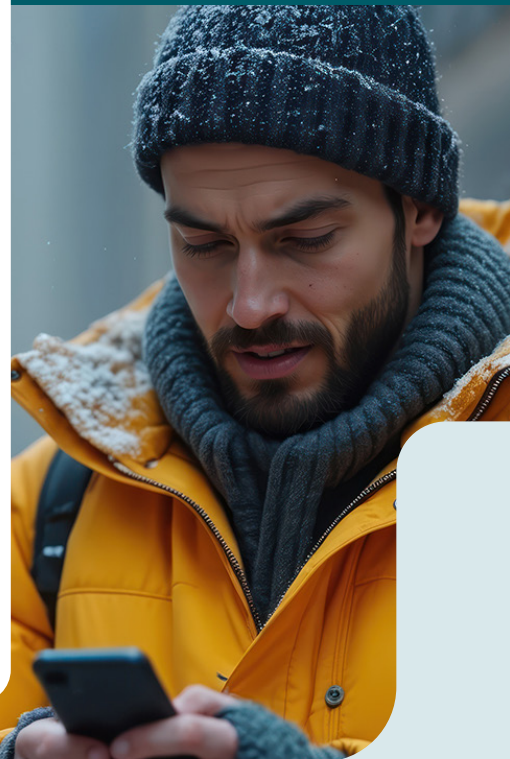
During winter events

- Provide real-time updates during severe weather.
- Distribute service disruption notifications.
- Communicate estimated restoration times.
- Issue safety reminders and emergency procedures.



Post-incident follow-up

- Provide status updates and resolution confirmations.
- Offer preventive measure tips for future events.
- Send customer appreciation messages.
- Invite customer feedback to improve service and track CSAT scores.



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How to write clear and inclusive multilingual messaging



Crafting the right message

The effectiveness of your communication does not just depend on what you say:

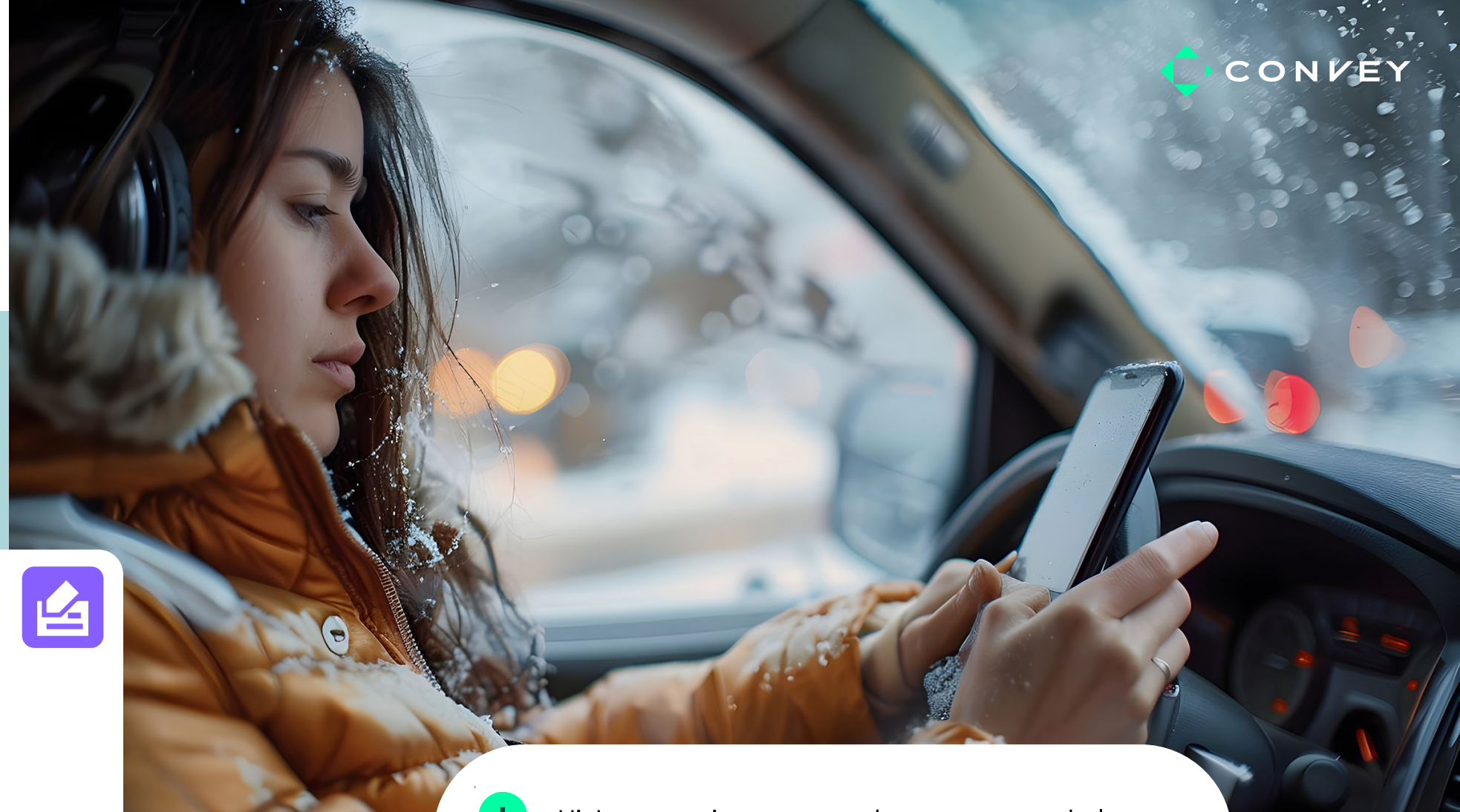
- Keep language clear and easy to understand.
- Maintain a compassionate, customer-focused tone.
- Include specific actions customers can take.
- Provide realistic timelines when possible.
- Offer multiple ways to get additional information.



Accessibility and inclusion

Preparedness means reaching every customer, regardless of circumstance:

- Provide messages in multiple languages to reach diverse communities.
- Make sure communications are mobile-friendly and accessible.
- Offer voice call options for customers who can't access digital channels.
- Reach out to customers with medical or critical service needs to provide essential updates and assistance.



Hi Jane, as winter approaches, we want to help you stay prepared for possible service disruptions. Here are some winterization tips and important safety resources. If you need support, our team is here for you 24/7 at **(555) 123-4567** or through our **mobile app**. Stay safe and warm.



Hola Jane, con la llegada del invierno, queremos ayudarle a estar preparada para posibles interrupciones del servicio. Aquí te dejamos algunos consejos de preparación para el invierno y recursos importantes de seguridad. Si necesita ayuda, nuestro equipo está disponible 24/7 al **(555) 123-4567** o en nuestra **aplicación móvil**. Mantente segura y abrigada.

4

Beyond the customer: Connecting your internal teams and the community

Technology and automation



Smart workflows reduce manual effort and ensure timely updates:

- Automate outage alerts and restoration notifications across all channels.
- Trigger safety reminders when storms are forecasted in specific regions.
- Use AI-driven workflows to personalize updates by customer account and location.
- Monitor delivery in real time and adjust communications as conditions evolve.

Compliance and regulatory readiness



Winter events bring added responsibility to meet customer safety expectations and regulatory standards. Proactive, transparent communication not only protects customers but also helps demonstrate compliance.

- Document all outbound messages and response timelines for reporting.
- Ensure outage notifications meet state and local PUC requirements.
- Provide accessible safety updates in accordance with ADA guidelines.
- Maintain accurate records of customer acknowledgments and engagement.
- Align messaging with regulatory mandates for transparency and accuracy.
- Use centralized platforms to streamline reporting and reduce audit risk.

PRO TIP

Demonstrating compliance through proactive customer communication strengthens trust with both regulators and the communities you serve.

Contact [Convey](#) to set up a centralized, consent revocation database to stay compliant with [ENFORCE](#).



Internal readiness checklist

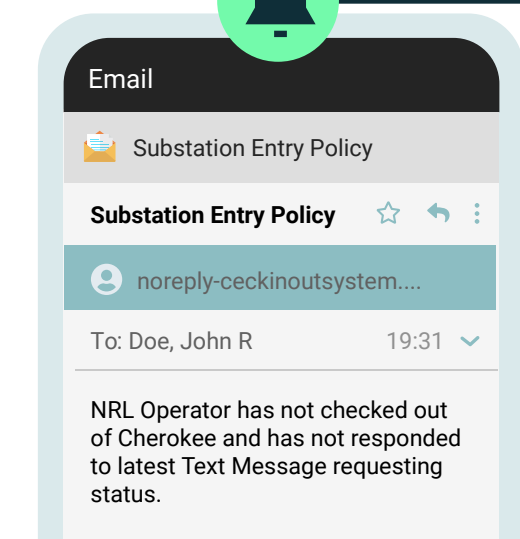
Before reaching customers, make sure your **teams are aligned and ready**:

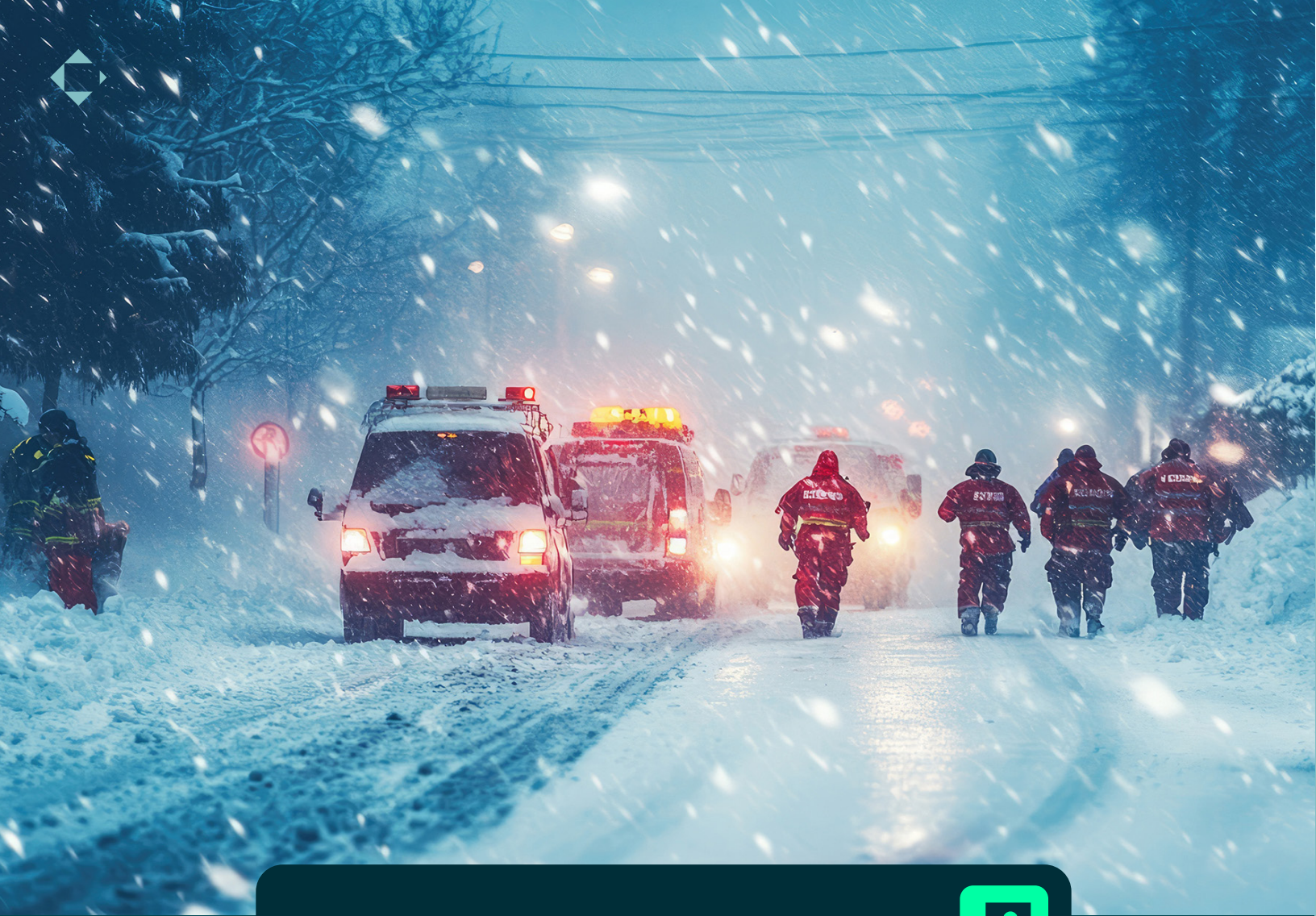
- **Maintain accurate employee contact lists** to enable rapid communication.
- **Review internal escalation paths** for communication.
- **Test response plans** with quick table-top or simulation exercises.
- **Share internal updates consistently** across departments to avoid conflicting messages.

Real-time crew location monitoring

Get updates on your field teams with an automated substation check-in system, like [SubTrac](#).

Failure to respond to the text message within a set time-frame.





Community and partner coordination

Customers rely on more than utilities during winter events. **Coordinating with partners builds trust and strengthens response:**

- Align messaging with local government and emergency services.
- Share safety updates with community organizations and vulnerable population networks.
- Deliver consistent, standardized talking points to support public-facing agencies.
- Establish direct communication lines with key partners ahead of storms.

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The financial impact of proactive communication



Reducing call center volume

Implementing a proactive communication strategy will enhance your call center efficiency and availability, especially during the winter months.

By anticipating customer needs and addressing potential issues before they arise, organizations can significantly reduce winter-related inquiries. This decrease in inbound calls not only lowers operational costs by minimizing the need for additional seasonal staff but also elevates customer satisfaction through higher first-call resolution rates.

Proactive communication positively impacts call center operations:

- Decreased inbound calls: fewer winter-related inquiries.
- Lower operational costs: reduced need for seasonal staff.
- Improved customer satisfaction: higher resolution rates for first-time calls.



Schedule a winter readiness assessment with our experts

- **Make sure your customers stay informed and safe this winter.** Schedule a personalized readiness assessment from our team. [Contact us to book your consultation](#) and take the first step towards a resilient and effective communication strategy for the winter season.
- In our complimentary **30-minute consultation**, we'll review your winter preparedness plan, highlight communication gaps, estimate potential savings, and create a strategy tailored to your needs.

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Is your customer communication strategy ready for winter?

Choosing the right channels

- **SMS, RBM, and text alerts** for urgent updates.
- **IVR** for real-time information
- **AI workflows** for quick, two-way communication.
- **Wallet card** for tailored restoration updates.
- **Social media** for updates and engagement.
- **Website** as a resource center.
- **Mobile app** for personalized alerts.



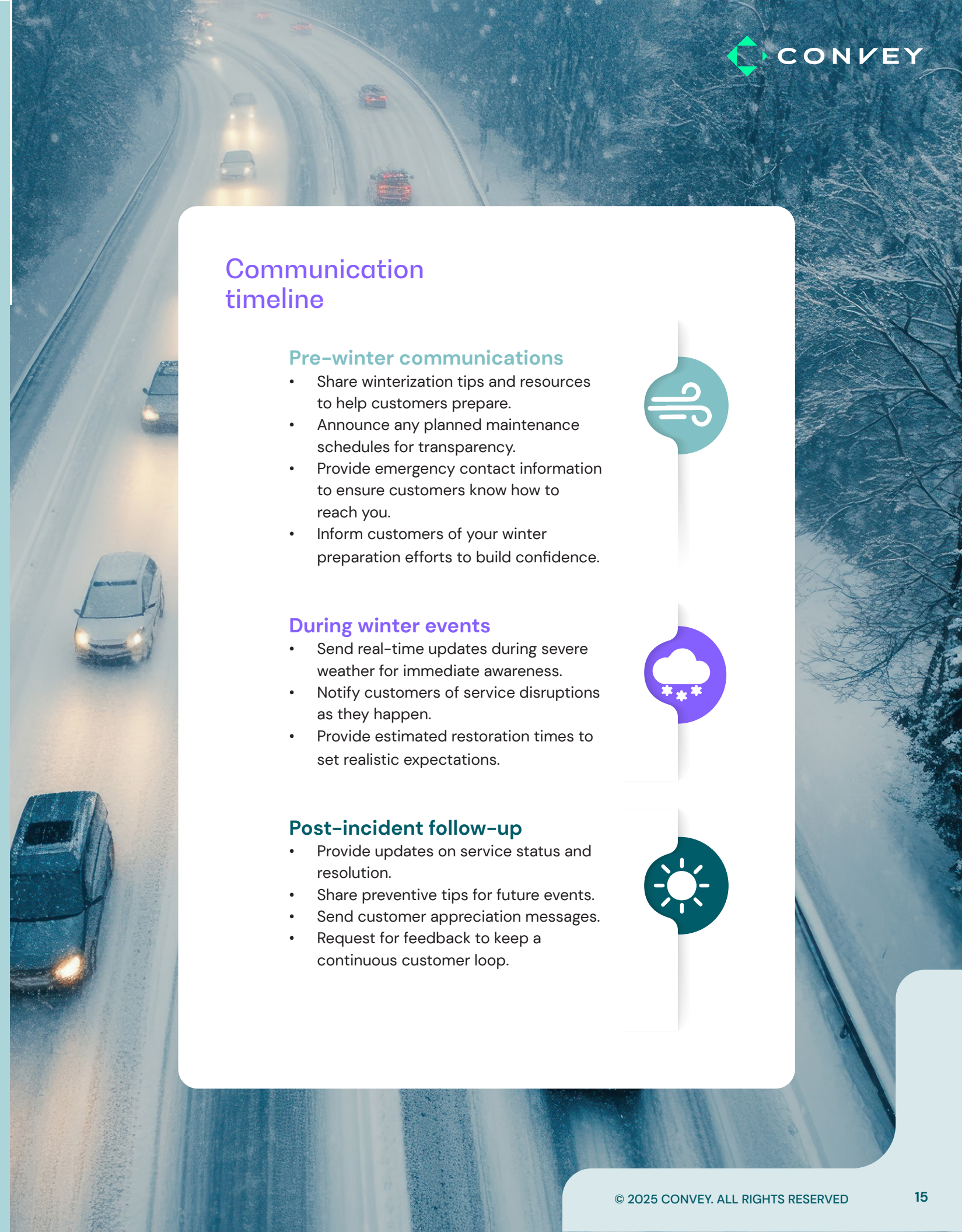


Crafting the message

- Use **clear, easy to understand** messaging.
- Maintain a compassionate, customer-focused tone to **reassure customers**.
- **Include specific actions** customers can take for safety and preparation.
- Provide **estimated timelines** when possible to manage expectations.
- Offer **multiple ways to reach** additional support or information.

Why winter preparedness matters

- Minimize service disruptions through **preventive measures**.
- **Build customer and community trust** through transparent communication and clear leadership.
- **Reduce operational costs** by preventing spikes in service calls.
- **Promote operational readiness** and ensure staff know their roles before, during, and after a storm.



Communication timeline

Pre-winter communications

- Share winterization tips and resources to help customers prepare.
- Announce any planned maintenance schedules for transparency.
- Provide emergency contact information to ensure customers know how to reach you.
- Inform customers of your winter preparation efforts to build confidence.



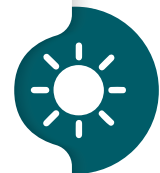
During winter events

- Send real-time updates during severe weather for immediate awareness.
- Notify customers of service disruptions as they happen.
- Provide estimated restoration times to set realistic expectations.



Post-incident follow-up

- Provide updates on service status and resolution.
- Share preventive tips for future events.
- Send customer appreciation messages.
- Request for feedback to keep a continuous customer loop.





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Resources and references



1. **Climate Central**. (2024, April 24). Weather-related power outages rising. Climate Matters.
2. **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**. (2025, January 29). Historic January 2025 snowstorm in the Southern U.S. NOAA Climate.gov.



Reimagining the customer journey



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