

Central Networks

2008/2009 Electricity Distribution Customer Service Reward

Priority Customer Care

One afternoon in June 2008, Helen Kimberley, a Central Networks Call Handler, was on the phone to an elderly female customer when she heard a loud crash and a scream for help. Our customer had suffered a fall leaving her distressed and in pain. Reacting quickly, Helen asked a colleague to call an ambulance and continued to talk to the customer to calm her down. Helen was able to liaise with the paramedics en route to provide as much information as possible, while a colleague contacted the customer's husband to inform him of the situation. Thankfully the customer only suffered a bruise and a fright, but due to the focused training our staff receive to assist priority customers and the calm, professional way in which Helen reacted, the situation was brought under control and was not as bad as it may have been. Everyone at Central Networks is very proud of Helen, but we are all also confident that not only could we react as well in a similar situation, but the welfare of our more vulnerable customers is something we do our utmost to protect, as demonstrated by the many safeguards, measures and new initiatives we have in place.

Once Registered – Dedicated Contact For Priority Customers

We know power cuts can be extremely worrying for our customers, especially if they rely on electricity for medical reasons or are particularly vulnerable during an interruption. Restoring our customers' electricity as quickly and safely as possible, whilst providing information, advice and support throughout the incident, is our top priority. We feel strongly that priority service customers require extra care and a more sensitive approach.

We carried out a series of market research focus groups in 2008 and 2009, and used this feedback to shape our decisions as to where and how to make improvements to the service we provide to customers, in particular those on the Priority Service Register (PSR). We have also been careful to make full use of the financial reward received following our success in last year's Customer Service Rewards, to invest in projects that are of real and lasting benefit to our customers.

Dedicated PSR Telephone Numbers and Registration Welcome Pack

We know that priority service customers may want to contact us and they may need to do so as a matter of urgency. In January 2009 we created two **dedicated PSR telephone numbers for priority service and vulnerable customers** to use during a power cut (one for the East and one for the West of our region). The priority free phone numbers allow customers to jump any queue we may have in order to reach us quickly at all times. All of our call handlers are trained to offer practical help, advice and support to all customers, and in particular those with a priority need.

Once customers are registered with us, we contact them to confirm that they're included, and send them their **New PSR Customer Welcome Pack**. Our newly developed pack publicises the dedicated telephone number. Acting on market research results, we have created a bold, **eye-catching telephone sticker** designed to be fixed to the customer's telephone handset or medical apparatus. The stickers enable PSR customers to quickly contact us should they experience a problem with their electricity supply.

The welcome pack also includes a letter explaining the purpose of the register, confirming each customer's inclusion on it, and explaining what we do to help during a power cut, and a **leaflet offering some practical advice and guidance**. Simple pieces of information, such as letting customers know that digital, cordless phones won't work in a power cut, can make a big difference in helping customers be prepared.

As well as writing to all newly registered customers, we are again **writing to over 170,000 current PSR customers** on our register, to provide them with vital advice and let them know the dedicated number. We also include a prepaid envelope and easy to complete form, for customers to tell us if their circumstances have changed and to identify the type of medical assistance they currently require. This is the second consecutive year we have carried out this data quality task – demonstrating our commitment to ensure accurate data through annual checks. We know priority customers' circumstances can change quickly, so it's important that our information is kept up-to-date. The detailed information we continue to receive back has already led to a significant improvement in the accuracy of our data.

Analogue Phones For Customers With Critical Electrical Dependencies

We have invested in a project that has a significant benefit for customers with critical electrically-dependent medical needs. Because digital phones won't work in a power cut and mobile phones can't be charged up, we advise all of our customers to keep an analogue, corded phone in their home. In January 2009, we purchased **4000 analogue telephones, with our dedicated priority service contact number printed on the handset**. We are sending these out to customers with the most critical medical dependencies, including those who use a kidney dialysis machine, heart and lung machine, ventilator and nebuliser. This helps us to make certain that our most vulnerable customers can seek assistance from us whenever they need to. Now all these customers have to do if they suffer a power cut is simply plug in their new telephone and call us on the priority number.



"That would be great. I've got an hour back up on my main phone but that's not much use really is it? This would make me feel safer knowing I can phone someone if I need help."

Verbatim customer comment during our market research, carried out by 'Accent'

Proactive Contact During A Power Cut

We understand that customers with priority needs may find a power cut distressing. We also know that being able to quickly and proactively reach customers can be a huge help and reassurance. On a daily basis, we receive hourly reports detailing priority customers who are part of a known interruption. Our dedicated team of Call Handlers phone them to check that they're ok. As well as reassuring them we're aware of the problem, we offer them up-to-the-minute information which allows them to make informed decisions and important arrangements. We then phone the customer back regularly to keep them updated.

Now into their 7th year, we continue to operate our **pioneering Customer Support Vehicles (CSVs)** – offering valuable face-to-face support to customers during a power cut, including a warm drink, a winter warmer pack, information and a friendly face. The CSVs were used 7 times over the Christmas and New Year period, including Boxing Day and New Year's Day.

Promoting The PSR – Making It Easier To Register

Over recent years our PSR has seen a huge increase in numbers, but we know there are still many people in our region who should be registered. We've therefore made it easier for customers to register directly and improved promotion of the PSR. Our market research showed that our customers have different preferences when it comes to contacting us, and are more likely to register if it's made as quick and easy as possible. Now, as well as registering by telephone, in writing, and online, we've produced a **new information leaflet with a tear-away, easy-to-complete application form**.

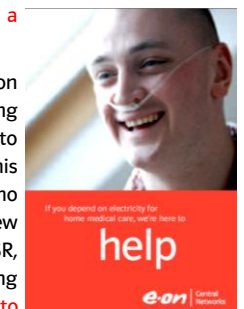
As part of our extensive suite of customer information leaflets, for many years we've offered a leaflet focusing on customers with priority needs and explaining how to register. Customers felt that we should develop this further by offering materials specifically for those who depend on electricity for medical equipment. The new leaflet combines providing information about the PSR, who should be registered and the benefits of being included, with a **simple tick-box form for customers to enter their details on a prepaid card**, and return it to us free of charge. In the interests of making our information accessible for all our customers, our new leaflet also includes **Braille on the front cover**, which explains the purpose of the leaflet and includes the telephone number to dial for further information.

Given the target audience and to make sure as many electrically dependent customers as possible are reached, we contacted over 140 hospitals and medical practices to request to place our leaflets in their waiting rooms. This campaign has seen considerable success - **in the first month, over 3,500 leaflets were requested by various hospitals and GP's surgeries** throughout our region.

Advertising Our PSR Where It Matters

Our research revealed the greatest barrier to people registering with us is an overall lack of awareness of the service. Acting on this, we've expanded the range of methods via which we proactively promote the PSR. Building on, and continuing the successful working partnerships first established in 2007, we have contributed to various **Talking Newspapers** in our region. The short recordings explain who we are, promote the PSR and how to register, and offer some basic advice. **These vital messages reached over 1300 Blind and visually impaired customers** in 2008.

We continue to promote the PSR via **hospital radio stations** – placing 30-60 second recordings that focus specifically on customers with electrically-dependent medical needs. Through these partnerships we have advertisements playing every day of the year in hospitals and throughout the Leicester area, for example – potentially reaching hundreds of thousands of our customers.



Following a reorganisation of our Customer Operations team, we now have a **dedicated Stakeholder Relationships Manager**, who is responsible for attending, alongside other members of the team, events throughout the year focusing specifically on priority customer care. This further demonstrates our commitment to establish effective and lasting relationships with customers and key stakeholder groups. Notably, we support numerous local emergency planning forums - focusing specifically on 'Vulnerable Persons in a Crisis' - including Gloucestershire, Northamptonshire and Derbyshire. Here we offer vital information regarding priority service customers and the services we provide. We also regularly attend various **local Elder's Forums, Parish Council meetings, 'Safe&Wise', 'Wise&Well', 'Wellbeing' and 'Preparing for Winter' events** - all of which specifically target those groups of elderly and potentially vulnerable customers who are most likely to benefit from being included on the PSR. These events are organised by Local Authorities, often in conjunction with Age Concern.

We were very proud to support a **national day for carers** on 5th December 2008, attending two events organised by the South Warwickshire Carer's Support Service. As well as showing an appreciation for the work they do, we were able to offer vital information about the PSR services we provide.

As a result of a working partnership established with Air Products, who provide home oxygen equipment to over 95% of customers requiring oxygen therapy in our region, we have manually added 16,000 additional customers to our register. This, coupled with our continued efforts to better promote and expand our PSR, has seen brilliant results this year, with **approximately 70,000 additional customers registered over the last 12 months**.

Market Research To Understand Customer Needs

In order to improve the services we offer our customers, with the help of the market research company 'Accent' we carried out a research project specifically with priority service customers. Two focus groups were held with elderly and potentially vulnerable customers (including customers with visual impairment and mobility problems) and a further two sessions with customers who depend on electricity for medical reasons. The research sought their feedback on provisions in place for them, how we could improve the way we promote the PSR and ideas for new initiatives that will be of benefit. Overall, they were very impressed with the provisions in place for priority service customers. In many cases, upon reflecting on the potential impact of a power cut, customers felt they had not fully considered the implications of a supply interruption. There was a strong appreciation that our initiatives are well considered, meeting and exceeding customers' expectations.

"CN is seen as excelling in its approach to providing support and services to vulnerable customers. Initiatives seem well thought out and cover - sometimes going beyond - customers' expectations. CN seems to have thought through potential concerns and issues for customers which customers themselves have not consciously considered." Rachel Risely, Accent Managing Director

The feedback received has already influenced our new initiatives. For example, all attendees felt our efforts, particularly regarding communications, should be most focused on customers with medical electrical dependencies. For this reason, our new leaflet focuses specifically on these users. Customers also welcomed the opportunity to register easily by filling out the tick-box form, which was by far the preferred method of registration. Customers also advised that the 4,000 analogue phones should only be sent to the most critical medical dependencies.

A major focus of the research was to explore ways of better promoting the PSR and targeting customers who would benefit most from inclusion. Following the feedback received, we are also pursuing making our PSR information available at chemists and libraries and placing information adverts in parish magazines.

Blind And Visually Impaired Customer Care

Bespoke Training For Customer-facing Staff

We know that the needs of our customers can be broad and varied, and we maintain a holistic approach that encompasses all our customers. We have worked extensively with the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) over the last year, which has further focused our communications for harder to reach customers. In December 2008, customer-facing staff, including Managers, attended **bespoke training courses delivered by the RNIB**. We strongly believe standard training packages do not best fit the diverse needs of our customers, given the broad variety of interactions we have with them. Working closely with the RNIB we produced a package to promote awareness of visual impairment and the issues faced by blind and partially sighted customers, as well as offering practical tips for telephone and face-to-face communication.

The training was tailored to our operations. For example, we ask customers reporting a loss of power, to check their trip switches. These "simple" checks rely on a lot of visual description that can be difficult for a Blind or visually impaired

customer to follow. The course centred on how we can tailor the way we communicate in such instances. Attendees have become "champions" within the business, cascading the messages and skills to their colleagues. But we know it's not just over the phone that we can make a difference. Our roadworks, signs and banners are all ways we can affect customers, so we provided **bespoke, practical visual awareness training to all our field operatives** (as detailed in our CSR submission), further demonstrating our holistic approach to priority customer care.

"We have a duty of care to our customers. It's important to me that we offer a personal service, tailored to their circumstances and needs. Everyone has a role to play in customer service -bespoke courses are key to making sure everyone has the skills they need." Alan Raymant, Director of Operations & Asset Management

RNIB Customer Panel To Assess Our Written Communications

We are keen to go to every length possible to ensure that our information is clear, accessible and effective for all customers. When producing our new PSR leaflet, we therefore worked with the RNIB at every stage. To make certain that the leaflet would be effective for partially sighted customers, we also sought their feedback first hand. As well as having the leaflet design and all of the information included approved by the RNIB, we also arranged for it to be **assessed by an independent panel of visually impaired individuals to ensure its clarity**. Feedback from the panel led to the leaflet being produced in a larger size than our previous leaflets, with a larger, easy-read font size and **information in Braille on the front of the leaflet**.

Audio and Plain Text Information

Whilst we have always offered our information in Braille - through our work with the RNIB and On Site Insight Services (OSISS), it came to light that the percentage of Blind and visually impaired customers able to use Braille is low. Whilst Braille is effective for some customers, providing information in audio format was identified as the preferred and most accessible method of communication. We have therefore made **audio versions of our customer information leaflets available online**, as well as via CD's distributed at various community events and on request. We believe DNOs should make audio information available on their websites - in the spirit of the Disability Discrimination Act, this is a very simple adjustment to ensure customers can easily access important information. As well as being highly beneficial for our Blind and visually impaired customers, audio information is also extremely useful for customers with learning or other reading difficulties. **Plain text copies** of all of our leaflets are also available for partially sighted customers. In addition to making PDF leaflets available online in 2007, these further enhancements, collectively mean we excel when it comes to making a wide-range of information available to our customers.

Mencap and RNID Training

Our people are key to delivering the service our customers rightly expect. In addition to the training undertaken with the RNIB and the Royal National Institute For Deaf People (RNID), our customer-facing staff have also received a **bespoke training course, designed in conjunction with, and presented by Mencap**. This course refreshed and built on training received last year, by focussing on a range of helpful face-to-face and telephone communication methods. This year we placed a specific focus on written communication, ensuring we always write in plain English and produce clear and simple materials. We have also been awarded the **RNID's 'Louder Than Words' deaf awareness charter mark** for the second year running - the only DNO and indeed, Utility company to do so. We continue to maintain and expand the provisions in place for Deaf and hard of hearing customers. For example, we continue to deliver bespoke refresher training to customer-facing staff and portable hearing loops are carried on each CSV.

Promoting The PSR: Harder To Reach Customers

We have also given special attention to promoting the **PSR within Asian communities** throughout our region, following research conducted last year that revealed that awareness of CN and our PSR was low. As a result we have written to 30 Asian Community Centres and distributed a number of requested information leaflets regarding our PSR. Additionally, to raise greater awareness, we **promoted the PSR to approximately 150,000 Asian customers in The Asian Today Newspaper**.

In summary, we have worked hard to develop these initiatives and to effectively embed them in our business processes. The projects deliver real and lasting benefits for all our customers, but in particular the elderly and potentially vulnerable. We have significantly expanded our PSR and year on year continue to successfully strive to improve and update our data. We continue to do so through effective promotion of the PSR and by making it quick and easy for customers to register. We have a duty to maintain the PSR, but strive to go above and beyond these responsibilities. Distributing winter packs and 4,000 analogue phones are just two projects that our customers tell us deliver real value to them - we don't do it because we have to, but because we strongly believe it's the right thing to do.

Supporting Information

Advertisement in The Asian Today newspaper for 6 month period

Examples of the thank you letters received from Priority Service customers after receiving our free analogue telephones and Winter Warmer Packs



We're here to help if you have a power cut

the East and West Midlands, if you have a power cut call us and we will do everything we can to get it back on.

If you rely on electricity for medical equipment or feel you have a priority need during a power cut, call us now on 0800 096 3080 to find out how we can help.

Power cut?
East Midlands 0800 056 8090
West Midlands 0800 328 1111



Dear Mr. Marsh,

Thank you for the Binatone phone received on 16 Feb and also for the three leaflets and phone call to my daughter of 7 Feb 09.

Regards,
Mr. A. MARSH

Dear Steph Sherman,

Thank you for the Binatone phone received on 16 Feb and also for the three leaflets and phone call to my daughter of 7 Feb 09.

Regards,
Mr. A. MARSH

"Thank you for the Binatone phone received on 16 Feb and also for the three leaflets and phone call to my daughter of 7th Feb 09"

"On the 11-02-09 at 9.27 Shirley called me to see how I was doing and also to let me know that she had sent me a package which is [a] customers with priority needs pack. So from me to your entire team but most of all Shirley, thank you."

Our new PSR leaflet including the easy-to-complete registration form (includes prepaid postage on the reverse)

Register today

To register as a Priority Service Customer, simply fill in your details on this prepaid card, fold and seal and send it back to us. We'll then contact you to confirm that you have been placed on the register. If you have any questions about the Priority Service Register, please call our general enquiry line on 0800 096 3080.

Please complete your details below in block capitals:

Title: _____

First name: _____

Last name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Telephone number: _____

To make sure all relevant parties are able to assist you during a power cut, we would like to inform your electricity supplier of your place on the Register. Please tick this box if you would prefer us not to do this.

Medical equipment used:

Nebuliser Heart and lung machine Kidney dialysis machine

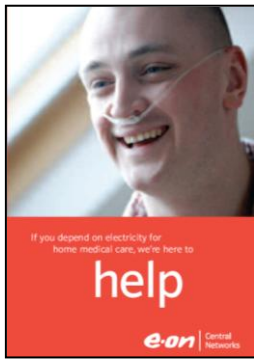
Oxygen machine Ventilator Apnoea monitor

Other medical dependencies, please specify below: _____

Independent market research feedback from Accent following sessions with PSR customers

The PSR exceeds expectations about what can, and should, be delivered. Where's the catch??

- Disbelief that CN would want to do this if they don't have to
- Again, raised the question about whether the cost of these initiatives is passed onto customers through their electricity bills
- The initiatives covered a logical sequence and provided security when certain customers could otherwise feel vulnerable
- As CN are already delivering beyond customer expectation then no other spontaneous improvements or additions were mentioned.



Excellent example of going the extra mile for a vulnerable customer

The caring face of Central Networks



"I can't believe anyone cared enough to do all this for me"

Those were the words of an elderly lady from Birmingham, who is now listed on Central Networks' Priority Service Register following a power cut, which left her without heat or light a day after she came out of hospital.

A cable fault had caused a power cut in the Bordesley Village area of the city during February's big freeze. Mrs Cecilia Prince called the Customer Contact Centre where she got through to Shirley Whitworth, who was on overflow call handling duties because of the high call volumes.

"I could tell as soon as I took the call that she was in real distress," said Shirley. "She told me she'd lost feeling in her fingers and

toes, and was feeling light-headed - all signs of hypothermia.

"I wanted to call an ambulance straightaway, but she'd only just come out of hospital following major surgery and was very fearful about going back. There was no-one else for her to call."

Instead, Shirley contacted Mrs Prince's property management company to arrange access to the top floor flat. Then she called the CN craft team working on the fault and sent a couple of the lads round with a hot drink and a bacon butty.

"They redoubled their efforts and worked really hard to restore power within a couple of hours and then went round again to make sure her boiler was working."

The following day, Shirley called Mrs Prince to check she was alright. She sent her one of CN's winter packs, which contain a fleecy blanket and gloves, a reusable hand-warmer and a battery operated torch, and made sure she is now listed as a priority service customer.

"She was astonished that I had gone to all that trouble for her, but I told her it was my job. Any one of us would have done the same - I just put myself in her shoes."

"PSR Welcome Pack" - a great idea!

- Provides the reassurance that respondents were looking for by confirming that:
 - registration had been received
 - processed
 - the individual is on the register
- Continues to show that CN are serious about their PSR
- Prominence of telephone numbers is important and respondents felt this was correctly addressed
- A fridge magnet (like the ones contained in the "Advice During a Power Cut" leaflet) would be a welcome addition to the telephone stickers

Priority Services emergency line
East 0800 056 8090
West 0800 328 1111

"But the essential thing is as long as you have got a telephone number you can ring to get help. I think that's essential and they've got it done well here."