



CE Electric UK delivers electricity to 1.5 million customers in the Northeast and 2.2 million customers in Yorkshire and north Lincolnshire through its subsidiaries, the licensed distribution companies NEDL and YEDL.

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OFGEM ELECTRICITY DISTRIBUTION CUSTOMER SERVICE REWARD SCHEME 2007

Submission by CE Electric UK

Wider Communication Strategies

Submission

<p>“Equal Access” At CE Electric UK, we try hard to meet the needs of all our customers and we appreciate that some have particular needs. Our approach is to work with partners to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● identify as many customers as possible with particular needs; ● understand their needs better; ● communicate with them appropriately; and ● respond to their needs as effectively as possible. 	<p>Specialised training</p> <p>contact with harder-to-reach customers. It also offers email and minicom facilities.</p> <p>We are arranging for Guide Dogs for the Blind and the RNID to provide training for CRC staff in how we can best meet the needs of customers with seeing or hearing difficulties.</p> <p>The effects of this training will be monitored regularly whenever CRC staff are assessed for their standards of accuracy, willingness to help and usefulness.</p>
<p>Proactive programme</p> <p>“Equal Access” is a proactive programme for our harder-to-reach customers to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● identify those with hearing or seeing difficulties or who have difficulty with English; ● understand their needs better; ● offer them information in a choice of formats; and ● give them equal access to our services by working in partnership with other organisations. 	<p>Downloadable forms</p> <p>Offering harder-to-reach customers information in a choice of formats</p> <p>As part of “Equal Access”, we have launched a campaign to improve the quality of our communications with all customers. An external writer has reviewed a selection of our letters and recast them in Plain English.</p> <p>We also include in all our letters to customers and others a reference to a dedicated phone line that customers can call to get a version in audio, large print, Braille or another language. The line is also promoted in other literature.</p>
<p>Valuable feedback</p> <p>This initiative was given particular impetus by valuable feedback from agencies such as the RNIB and RNID following last year’s discretionary reward scheme and has been developed further during the year.</p>	<p>Dedicated phone line</p> <p>Key publications have been translated into seven languages (Arabic, Bengali, Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, Cantonese and Mandarin). One example is the Preparing for Winter leaflet, which gives advice on what to do during a power interruption. They are distributed either directly to customers or indirectly through community groups and local post offices. We also translate other publications into foreign languages on request.</p>
<p>500 groups contacted</p> <p>Building databases of harder-to-reach customers</p> <p>We record details of all customers with hearing or seeing difficulties on our priority customer register. We have written to more than 130 local groups representing such people, enclosing a comprehensive information pack, and asking if they will encourage relevant people not already on the register to apply.</p> <p>We also sent information to 380 ethnic minority groups, asking them to tell people that we have foreign language versions of particular publications and that we can translate others for them. When asked for a publication in a foreign language, we record the fact in a database of customers who prefer us to communicate with them in this way.</p>	<p>Translations</p> <p>Our company website is an increasingly powerful tool for communicating with harder-to-reach customers. The home page has prominent links in different languages to “If English is not your first language”, where there are downloadable versions, in seven languages, of Preparing for Winter, our notice of rights and our codes of practice document. It is one of the first electricity distributors’ websites to offer this. In the first three months of 2007 there were 16,000 visits to our website. Of these, one in 25 was to the ‘If English is not your first language’ section.</p>
<p>Understanding the needs of harder-to-reach customers</p> <p>Our Customer Relations Centre (CRC), which handles more than a million calls a year, is our main</p>	<p>Powerful website</p> <p>Research has shown that one of the best ways to reach customers who have difficulty seeing or hearing is</p>

<p>Guide Dogs for the Blind</p> <p>To improve our communications with those who have difficulty seeing, we shall also ask Guide Dogs for the Blind where we can make improvements.</p> <p>We are also innovative in using our customer ambassadors, who provide face-to-face help in difficult situations. There are around 80 at the moment and we are seeking more, particularly people with foreign language or sign language skills.</p> <p>All 1,099 parish councils in our area are sent a copy of our customer service magazine, <i>Switched On</i>. We have a programme of proactive contact with them to identify issues and resolve them quickly. One of our employees, Steve Keeney, is our specialist contact with parish councils and other local bodies. In 2006 he attended 87 meetings with parish councils and 59 meetings with other groups such as community partnerships and housing associations.</p>	<p>Parish council liaison</p> <p>Using the media</p> <p>The media also play a vital role in helping us to communicate with harder-to-reach customers. Our experienced team of media-trained staff handle effectively a wide range of media enquiries. We have a programme that trains all directors and senior managers in radio and television interviews. We carry out a proactive programme of press releases to local papers, including the ethnic minority press, in our area. Our press coverage is independently monitored and analysed and we regularly achieve a four-to-one ratio of positive to negative media coverage. The detailed feedback is used to guide future communication strategies.</p>
<p>Responding to harder-to-reach customers’ needs as effectively as possible, often working in partnership with other organisations</p> <p>Although our provision of information in foreign languages has been welcomed, we do not believe that this is enough. We are therefore entering into an arrangement to provide an external organisation to provide a language line. This offers interpreters in more than 100 languages who can facilitate conversations between the customer and one of our staff, whether it is someone in our CRC or an engineer in the field.</p> <p>Engineers carry cards with messages about service disruption in foreign languages and large print English. If customers cannot understand the text, the language line is used.</p> <p>We are also exploring innovative ways of making sure the right literature gets to customers at the right time. A good example is using our two customer support vehicles to carry relevant letters, leaflets and guidance. They are available not just at major incidents but also at more routine events, for example when we are carrying out street works or attending public meetings.</p> <p>To meet the needs of those with hearing difficulties as effectively as possible, we have applied to the RNID to be benchmarked under its “Louder than Words” chartermark. We understand we are the first electricity distributor to do so. An RNID representative has met us to set out what we need to do for the chartermark. We have also given a grant to the Durham Deafened Support Group to improve its training room IT system and update its website.</p>	<p>Mobile leafleting</p> <p>RNID chartermark</p> <p>Customer Excellence</p>

Wider Communication Strategies

Stakeholder Support Document

<p>Cheryl Cullen, Director of Employment, Training and Skills Service, RNID</p> <p>“We are very pleased that CE Electric UK has committed itself to achieving our ‘Louder than Words’ chartermark standard. This is recognised as the benchmark of good practice in customer service towards people who are deaf or hard of hearing – about one in seven of the population.</p> <p>“The training we will be doing with their Customer Relations Centre staff will include raising awareness about the different types of deafness and about the different ways of communicating most effectively with deaf people.</p> <p>“These methods include using an advocate, using a text phone or using a type-talk relay service. Through understanding how these methods work, staff will be able to offer excellent customer service, whatever the medium being used.”</p>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>2005</th> <th>2006</th> <th>2007</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Independent research to ensure CRC staff meet high standards.</td> <td>✓</td> <td>✓</td> <td>✓</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Customer call-backs following supply interruptions.</td> <td>✓</td> <td>✓</td> <td>✓</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Staff trained for print, radio and television media.</td> <td>✓</td> <td>✓</td> <td>✓</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Press coverage independently analysed six monthly.</td> <td>✓</td> <td>✓</td> <td>✓</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Proactive contacts with MPs and local authorities.</td> <td>✓</td> <td>✓</td> <td>✓</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Communications for employees include a monthly newsletter, quarterly magazine and regular briefs.</td> <td>✓</td> <td>✓</td> <td>✓</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Code of practice and guaranteed standards on website in different languages.</td> <td>✓</td> <td>✓</td> <td>✓</td> </tr> <tr> <td>CRC offers email and minicom facilities.</td> <td>✓</td> <td>✓</td> <td>✓</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Programme to produce carefully targeted messages for local communities.</td> <td></td> <td>✓</td> <td>✓</td> </tr> <tr> <td>‘Insight’ publication for stakeholders.</td> <td></td> <td>✓</td> <td>✓</td> </tr> <tr> <td>NRASWA programme to improve communication and quality of excavations and reinstatements.</td> <td></td> <td>✓</td> <td>✓</td> </tr> <tr> <td>AONB Ofgem initiative – innovative communication programme with nine authorities.</td> <td></td> <td>✓</td> <td>✓</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Contact programme with 1,099 parish councils.</td> <td></td> <td>✓</td> <td>✓</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Dedicated phone number for parish councils.</td> <td></td> <td>✓</td> <td>✓</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Developed ‘Equal Access’ proactive programme for harder-to-reach customers.</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>✓</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Asked 500 groups for help in contacting harder-to-reach customers.</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>✓</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Guide Dogs for the Blind and RNID to train staff.</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>✓</td> </tr> <tr> <td>All letters refer to a dedicated phone line to request copies of information in large print, audio, Braille, or other languages.</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>✓</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Key publications in seven languages.</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>✓</td> </tr> <tr> <td>‘If English is not your first language’ section added to website.</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>✓</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Downloadable versions of application forms on website.</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>✓</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Language line with interpreters in more than 100 languages.</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>✓</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Two customer support vehicles carrying leaflets.</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>✓</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Work towards RNID chartermark.</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>✓</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		2005	2006	2007	Independent research to ensure CRC staff meet high standards.	✓	✓	✓	Customer call-backs following supply interruptions.	✓	✓	✓	Staff trained for print, radio and television media.	✓	✓	✓	Press coverage independently analysed six monthly.	✓	✓	✓	Proactive contacts with MPs and local authorities.	✓	✓	✓	Communications for employees include a monthly newsletter, quarterly magazine and regular briefs.	✓	✓	✓	Code of practice and guaranteed standards on website in different languages.	✓	✓	✓	CRC offers email and minicom facilities.	✓	✓	✓	Programme to produce carefully targeted messages for local communities.		✓	✓	‘Insight’ publication for stakeholders.		✓	✓	NRASWA programme to improve communication and quality of excavations and reinstatements.		✓	✓	AONB Ofgem initiative – innovative communication programme with nine authorities.		✓	✓	Contact programme with 1,099 parish councils.		✓	✓	Dedicated phone number for parish councils.		✓	✓	Developed ‘Equal Access’ proactive programme for harder-to-reach customers.			✓	Asked 500 groups for help in contacting harder-to-reach customers.			✓	Guide Dogs for the Blind and RNID to train staff.			✓	All letters refer to a dedicated phone line to request copies of information in large print, audio, Braille, or other languages.			✓	Key publications in seven languages.			✓	‘If English is not your first language’ section added to website.			✓	Downloadable versions of application forms on website.			✓	Language line with interpreters in more than 100 languages.			✓	Two customer support vehicles carrying leaflets.			✓	Work towards RNID chartermark.			✓
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<p>Mick Sullivan, Vision Support Services Manager, Guide Dogs for the Blind</p> <p>“CE Electric UK is one of the first electricity distributors to ask us to provide training for its staff. We are putting together a bespoke programme for both its Customer Relations Centre-based staff and its field staff, which will raise their awareness of the issues surrounding sight loss and visual impairment, so they can understand and serve their customers more effectively.”</p> <p>Letter from Peter M. Jones, a Leeds resident, commenting on a Yorkshire Electricity letter which apologised for power interruptions after the January storms</p> <p>“As the recipient of one of your letters referring to a recent interruption of the electricity supply, I did not feel I could let the occasion pass without writing to acknowledge your letter, and to express my appreciation for the courtesy, and clear explanation of the circumstances which gave rise to the unavoidable short breakdown in the services that are provided to me.</p> <p>“I can only confirm to you that I considered your letter to be the most courteous and clear that I have received for many, many years.”</p>																																																																																																					