

## Introduction

We are passionate about providing excellent customer service and, where we can, minimising the inconvenience and concern that customers (particularly less able customers) may suffer in the event of a power cut through fast and effective communication. This excellence was recognised by the DTI last year who, following an investigation into a major incident, wrote to SSE and said that "supplies were restored in an expeditious way" and that "communications with the public and via the media were successful". In addition, continuous improvement has allowed us to minimise Energywatch complaints (in 2006/07, 3 complaints in total were received about communication issues).

This submission focuses on our initiatives to better support customers with special needs who could be described as 'hard to reach', because communication with them is impeded for some reason. By definition, these are customers that cannot be reached through traditional communication methods and include customers who do not speak English as a first language or have a visual or hearing impairment. This submission outlines two initiatives that are helping these customers.

## 1. Communicating with Asian and Ethnic Communities

### Background

Over many years, numerous pieces of research have been undertaken looking at how to build communication bridges with 'hard to reach' groups. However, until recently, little of this work was done with ethnic minorities.

For many communities, English may not be their first language and so standard communication mediums may not be effective. It appears that many ethnic communities make little or no use of national or local English speaking radio stations. Furthermore, research indicates that many people that only speak an ethnic language may not be able to read text in

that language. Consequently, broadcasting information in English or sending out leaflets in English or in ethnic languages may not actually reach their intended audience.

The challenges mentioned above are exacerbated because our less able customers are more likely to be elderly. Unfortunately the elderly are the very people who can have more difficulty in understanding information about our Priority Services Register because they are more likely to have been born and brought up abroad where English was not the first language.

In summary, the people most likely to have special needs in Asian or ethnic communities may well not be able to speak or read English, they may not be able to read texts in their language of origin, and are consequently truly 'hard to reach'.

However on a positive note, many ethnic groups tend to have a strong community structure, usually focussed around a religious or cultural centre. These communities often have a defined hierarchy built in, with community leaders being a focal point. People in these communities often look to their leaders for advice and guidance on the issues that they should focus on and the actions they should take.

### The Initiative and Outcome

This research led us to investigate using local radio stations which transmit in ethnic languages to provide information about our Priority Service Register for the less able members of those communities.



We have developed a relationship with an ethnic local radio station in Southampton which is broadcasting information about how to register for our Priority Services to an Asian and ethnic audience approaching 30,000 listeners. This information is being transmitted six times a day in Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi and Gujarati. Feedback suggests that the messages are being well received.

Formatted: Bullets and Numbering

# Wider Communication Strategies

We expect to expand the penetration of Asian and ethnic broadcasting this year.

On a parallel topic, we have also developed a network of staff within our company who can speak a variety of languages including Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu, Greek, Gaelic and Arabic. These staff are identified on our telephone systems as having special language attributes and can be asked to support our English speaking staff if the conversation is not fully understood by the caller.

## **2. Reducing the Challenges for Our Less Able Customers**

### **Preamble**

A more traditional approach to the subject of 'Wider Communication Strategies' may focus on communication techniques to inform our 'hard to reach' customers about the existence and benefits of being registered as a priority service customer.

This second initiative supports our less able customers, but from another angle; by reducing power cuts which would otherwise have affected them. If we can stop a problem before it becomes a problem, then this would be a real success and help avoid the need for additional support for our less able, 'hard to reach' customers; our blind, deaf, and language challenged customers.

### **Background**

Our research confirms that many customers described as 'hard to reach' live in urban communities. So this initiative focuses on those communities, and by reducing the likelihood of power cuts in urban areas, the stress and inconvenience is reduced, if not completely avoided for these customers.

Analysis of historic data indicates that around 30% of all power cuts in urban areas can be attributed to third party contractors damaging electricity cables.

For many years we have regularly educated the contractor companies and their staff who damage electricity cables, particularly focusing on reducing the risk of personal

injuries arising from cable damages. We also offer copies of our cable records to anyone who requests them to help prevent damages. Although we undertake these activities free of charge, our underground cables are still regularly damaged, resulting in power cuts.

### **The Initiative**

The initiative relies on the fact that Highway Authorities are now required to facilitate public access to information about planned works in the highway, by displaying this information on their Street Works Registers.

In the last year we have set up 'Street Works Mobile Support Units' equipped with laptop computers loaded with all of our cable records. The laptops are linked to a mobile printer in the vehicles to enable paper copies of our records to be left with the contractors. Now that it is possible to establish where and when road works are taking place, we are able to visit these locations at the specific time that work is about to start. While we are on site, we provide advice on cable damage avoidance techniques, and immediate on-site training can also be delivered where required.

This 'Wider Communication Strategy' initiative does not target communication directly to our less able and 'hard to reach' customers, but innovatively, it directly delivers a reduction in their need for additional support. So even if they have not yet been 'reached' by our wider communication strategies (and it is likely that many special needs customers may not be reached, or may choose not to register for a priority service in any event), they still benefit in the most positive way possible; their electricity supply was not interrupted because a cable damage was avoided.

### **The Outcome**

Since this initiative began, we have seen a reduction in cable damages in urban areas, which directly benefits all our customers including those with special needs; some of whom may not be aware of our Priority Service Register because they are 'hard to reach'.

# **Wider Communication Strategies**

## Supporting Information



23<sup>rd</sup> April 2007

Dear Mike

As you know, our aim at Unity 101 Community Radio is to promote and broadcast music and culture to Asian and minority ethnic communities in Southampton.

Our unique style of broadcasting allows us to reach an audience that has traditionally been difficult to reach, and as the only radio station dedicated to serving these communities in Southampton, we provide a unique channel of communication to your customers. With a potential weekly audience of more than 30,000 we can provide access to a large, yet traditionally difficult market.

We are pleased to have broadcast messages for you in a variety of ethnic languages including Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi. These messages are very important and advise our listeners about your Priority Customer service for people with special needs, so you can keep them informed if there is a power cut. We are happy to tell our audience that Southern Electric is there to help, especially for customers who are dependant on medical equipment at home, chronically sick or disabled, and encourage them to register for your priority service.

We look forward to continuing our special relationship into the future.

Yours

Ram Kalyan "Kelly"  
Project and Station Manager  
Unity101 Community Radio

## Wider Communication Strategies