



## Putting ourselves in our customers' shoes . . .

For Central Networks this means making ourselves easy to deal with, and being able to effectively tell people, who we are, what we do and how we can help them, in a format that suits them best. Our customers have told us they have a wide range of needs and preferences when it comes to getting in touch with us, and they do so for many reasons - not just during power cuts. We use a range of communication methods to meet our customers' needs and are constantly looking for ways to improve the service we offer. This means giving customers a choice about how they receive information, as well as being more proactive and innovative about the ways we get in touch with specific groups of customers. Whoever the audience - from MPs and key stakeholders on our Customer Panel, to vulnerable customers - it's about having a holistic approach, with effective and tailored communications that help make life easier for our customers. And having tangible outputs is vital - we only do things if our customers tell us they're worthwhile and make a difference.

## Engaging with suppliers - to improve communication with vulnerable customers

Power cuts can be distressing for anyone - especially if you rely on electricity for medical reasons. We want to make sure all vulnerable customers in our region are included on our Priority Service Register (PSR) and their details are regularly updated, so we can provide the extra care, tailored communications and the more sensitive approach, they deserve. Key to this is ensuring we effectively share data with suppliers. In 2009, following our efforts to maintain regular contact with our PSR customers, CN sent almost 40,000 updated records to suppliers.

### About the initiative

We currently inform one another whenever a customer joins, amends their details, or asks to be removed from the PSR, via an automated data flow between our systems (supplier to Distribution Network Operator (DNO)), but manually via emailed spreadsheets (DNOs to suppliers). In recent years the number of PSR customers across the industry has rapidly increased - our efforts at CN alone have seen our register increase by 225% in 3 years.

Keen to take a lead on improving the way we share this data, in March we organised, hosted and ran an engagement workshop with suppliers, involving British Gas, Scottish & Southern, Scottish Power, E.ON and npower, with the aim of sharing knowledge about our respective provisions to support vulnerable customers and to improve the process for exchanging PSR data across the industry.



The session proved extremely worthwhile, with us reaching an agreement on how to improve the process, building ongoing relationships and sharing best practice about the support and information we offer PSR customers. It proved an excellent opportunity to discuss some key topics including the different ways suppliers and DNOs use PSRs - for example, we share a core concern to provide invaluable information and support during power cuts, but suppliers also use the data to offer customers things including preferential tariffs, support managing bills and free gas safety checks.

### Outputs: The benefit for customers

- **Improving the data exchange process** - Suppliers agreed to our proposal to automate the current manual exchange process (from DNO to supplier).

*"The proposal is better for customers because it is more secure and can be done 'real-time'. The workshop was very worthwhile. It is always better to understand how other industry stakeholders deal with vulnerable customers. For two reasons - it enables sharing of best practice, and makes it more likely to spot any gaps".*

**Representative from npower**

- **Valuable knowledge exchange** - We explained our respective processes for contacting all new customers, and the provisions we have in place for them during power cuts. This helped to build common understanding in order to ensure that our proposed solution met the needs of all customers.
- **Improving our communications to customers** - We provided our PSR customer "Welcome Pack" to share best practice about our power cut preparation advice, align our messages and let customers know about the information they can expect to receive from their corresponding supplier/DNO to try to avoid any customer confusion. As a result **we've made changes to the welcome letter we send to our customers**, providing more detail about the different support DNOs and suppliers offer.
- **Doing the right thing for ALL customers** - Suppliers suggested that not all DNOs currently send PSR data to suppliers, therefore CN's forthcoming change proposal will benefit vulnerable customers across the UK - not just our own.



## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Customer Communication - Power cut information on the move

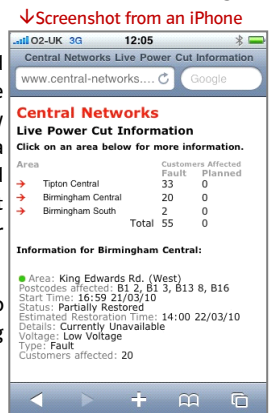
### About the initiative

Customers like to receive information from us in different ways, so we're giving them a choice.

The most widely used feature of our website is our industry leading live power cut map, which got 87,000 hits last year, and over 12,000 during the snow storms in January alone.

The application allows friends, family and customers who are at work, to access the latest information, but we know many customers can't use their PC themselves in a power cut. So we've gone a step further and become the first DNO to launch live power cut information for customers to access via their mobile phone.

Visit [www.central-networks.co.uk/mobile](http://www.central-networks.co.uk/mobile) to find latest details on faults, what we're doing to fix them, and useful contact numbers.



### Outputs: The benefit for customers

- **Information on the move** - Customers who are off supply and out and about, can access information in an easy-view format on their mobile.
- **Responding to customer's preferences** - In recent years the number of web-access mobile phones has increased rapidly, with nearly 10.4m people in the UK surfing the web from their mobile in 2009.
- **Giving customers a choice** - During power cuts, information is crucial to help people make important life decisions. Now customers can give us a call, send a text, view our website or log on via their mobile.
- **Customers of the future** - Many young adults prefer to access information in this virtual format.
- **Constant innovation** - We were the first, and remain the only, DNO to provide outage info via our website. Last year we launched historical information so customers could find out when/if they'd been off supply in the past. This got 12,774 hits in 2009. And now we've gone a stage further.

## "It's good to talk" . . . or text, or email or webchat!

In February we launched a brand new multi-channel telephony system, giving customers the option not only to speak to us, but also to exchange text messages and emails in real-time. It also allows for live web chats.

It means we're giving customers a much bigger choice about how to communicate with us. It makes it easier for customers, by allowing them to access information in the format they prefer - not just during a power cut, but when making a general enquiry or contacting our MPAS line.

It also helps us to better support customers behind the scenes, by prioritizing calls on the basis of customer need; for example, customers with a power cut - particularly if they're vulnerable - will be dealt with before customers with a general enquiry.

*"Contacting providers for up-to-date information by phone can be a difficult process for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. By providing innovative communication methods such as real time SMS messaging CN continue to show best practice in breaking down barriers and providing equal access for deaf and hard of hearing customers. By recognising increasing use of mobile phones, CN are at the forefront of offering alternative communication methods to reach customers with different needs."* **David Haughton, RNID**

# Other initiatives we're proud of...

## PSR customers: effective communication when it matters most

PSR customers' circumstances can change quickly, so having up-to-date records is crucial so we can get in touch quickly and proactively during a power cut. In the last year improved data quality allowed us to:

**Proactively contact 6,000 PSR customers without power** - offering the latest information and advice to help them cope. We extended this during the snow in Dec/Jan, contacting some 1,579 vulnerable customers.



We gave out **10,243 Winter Warmer Packs** (up 2,000 in 2008). Striving for constant improvement and carefully reinvesting the financial award received in last year's Rewards, we've developed a new 'Crisis Pack' that also including an analogue, corded phone, along with a fleece blanket, torch, gloves and hand-warmer.

**Preparing customers for a power cut** - After writing again to every PSR customer in 2009, we were delighted to

receive 69,000 responses (via pre-paid envelope), which we've now manually updated on our systems. Despite 14,885 no longer needing to be on the PSR, our total grew again to just over 219,000 customers, after 55,000 new entries in 2009.

Some of the ways we've achieved this are:

- **Air Products** - Extended our partnership to receive monthly oxygen user updates - totalling 28,960 records in 2009 (up from 16,000 in 2008).
- **Providing leaflets and recorded information** in GP and Hospital receptions, local talking newspapers and hospital radio stations.
- **Attended events with AgeConcern**, Parish Council's and 'Vulnerable Persons in a Crisis' groups to offer information and to promote the PSR.

## Keeping MPs 'SwitchedOn'

We produce a quarterly Newsletter for all MP's and Prospective Parliamentary Candidates.

The initiative gives us the opportunity to build some key relationships as well as better informing MP's and their constituents about who we are, what we're doing, and how we can help/work with them going forward. Topics have ranged from public safety advice, to



doorstep crime and copper theft prevention, to our plans for the future of networks, including the role of distributed generation and low carbon technologies.

**Engagement in action** - In July 2007, Gloucestershire experienced extreme floods and our engineers worked non-stop for several days and nights to restore power to thousands of customers. Two years on, in 2009 we invited David Drew, MP for Stroud, to see how we build our network to avoid the disruption caused by floods, by building substations on 4.5m stilts, allowing flood water to flow underneath.

## Callbacks - if you want a call you'll get it

We've been listening to our customers and asking them how we can make their lives easier, especially during a power cut. They've told us they want timely, accurate and useful information. So in the last year we've responded by offering our customers - not just those who are on our PSR - the opportunity to receive a callback from us, as soon as we have any updated information.

This means we're being more proactive about contacting our customers, and making it easier by removing the need for them to go to the effort of re-contacting us for an update.



Last year we made **118,526 callbacks** compared to **25,334** in 2008.

## Customer feedback shaping the way we're communicating

To ensure we're continually reviewing the quality of our customer communications we've set up a range of ways to actively get customer feedback and we are using it to improve the way we do things.

Our Customer Panel (full details in CSR submission) provides us with a permanent, wide-reaching means of consultation. Acting on their feedback, we have:

- **Redesigned our planned interruption cards** - changing the layout, appearance and size, to reduce the chances of them being missed as 'junk mail'. We've made clearer the key information and advice customers have told us they want to know.
- **Amended our New Connections T+C's and customer leaflet** - making the whole process easier and clearer for customers to understand.
- **Improved communications to residents affected by our streetworks** - It's not just about making customers aware if their power is going off, but improving how we let the wider community know what we're doing when we're working in the area.

## Engaging with stakeholders to facilitate a Low Carbon Society

We're playing a central role - nationally and regionally - to help customers strive towards a low carbon economy. It's not just about the delivery of sustainable energy projects themselves, its about how they impact our customers, and the benefits they offer to the communities we serve.

In 2009 we provided support to communities in Tutbury, Hook Norton and Tinkers Bridge in their applications for government grants. We've held several stakeholder events to better understand their future needs, and have presented at numerous regional and national events, developing strong relationships with the regional development agencies, local authorities and community groups.

## CASE STUDY



**WATER POWER IN TUTBURY**

We're supporting the community and their plans to build a mini hydro electric power scheme, aiming to generate 14.5 kW of clean, green electricity. The power will be used in the village, with net revenues going towards local education and environmental projects. We will connect the scheme to a smart network where power will be fed back into the grid.

As well as reducing the village's carbon footprint, we've been actively involved with the community, talking to, supporting and educating residents. In January we welcomed the Energy Minister David Kidney, discussing not only the technical details but also the community benefits.

At the same time, our Children's Power Discovery Zone visited Tutbury's Richard Wakefield Primary School for two days, teaching 150 pupils how to



stay safe around electrical equipment, and to get them interested in how electricity works.

Our Customer Support Vehicle attended Tutbury's community open day, to raise awareness of what to do, and the support we offer, during a power cut.

*"This is a brilliant scheme. I am extremely impressed by the community involvement. We're moving to a low carbon future, which will change the ways we generate and use our energy. It is important that these youngsters grow up with that knowledge."* **David Kidney MP & Energy Minister**

## Distributed Generation Customer "Surgeries"

We expect the number of small generators wishing to export to the local grid to increase massively over the coming years, so we want to make it quicker and easier for customers. In December, we held several "surgeries" to proactively understand the needs and expectations of would be Distributed Generation (DG) customers. They gave feedback and outlined their expectations at the four key stages of the process - Application, Design, Acceptance & Legals, and Delivery. In particular we discussed key information provision, with customers outlining the need for clear detail on four key questions:

- **What do I have to do to get connected?**
- **Where are the best areas to get a connection?**
- **How much capacity can I connect in that area?**
- **What's the cost to connect this specific DG?**

## Voice of the customer - NPS

We carry out monthly 'Net Promoter Score' customer surveys in our New Connections business, asking customers if they would recommend our service and detailed questions about the different elements of our connections activities. It's an excellent way to get direct customer feedback and verbatim comments, which helps us to identify trends, problematic job types and areas for improvement.

- **In Jan we greatly expanded the survey from 100 to 400 customers a month**, and improved the detailed questions, to make them more specific to each service Delivery Point (see supporting information).
- **We use a similar method to NPS to measure satisfaction of customers affected by power cuts.** Responding to their feedback, we've worked to improve the flow of information coming from site, and made it easier for customers by significantly increasing the number of callbacks - removing the need for them to contact us again. **We've seen a 10% upturn** in satisfaction in 2009 as a result.

# Wider Communication Strategies Supporting Information

## PSR customers: effective communication when it matters

Feedback from some of our customers after they received our PSR 'Welcome Pack' (including an advice card and telephone sticker displaying their dedicated telephone number).

*"I appreciate your interest in helping my age group to survive and have found the advice given along with the contents of the pack very useful."*  
Mrs Jerrald, Derby - Elderly

*"Thank you very much for your concern, it means so much to me and others like me, that there is someone out there that cares"*  
Mrs C Cramphorn, Leicester - Disabled

*"Just to say thank you for your letter that you wrote my husband. To know there are people out there who think about disabled people who have to think about their heating for their need, it was nice of you to send the letter."*  
Mrs Dorby, Birmingham Road, Bromsgrove

An article from "Talkback", Tamworth Borough Council's local news magazine, detailing our attendance at a local vulnerable customers event to distribute our Winter Warmer Packs and share some advice about what to do during a power cut.

### Winter Warmers to help elderly residents

To help elderly residents through the recent cold spell partners banded together to deliver much needed winter packs to residents. The packs were distributed by partners across Tamworth and consisted of a fleece blanket, gloves, torch and reusable hand warmer.

One resident said "this pack could be really useful and might save somebody's life".

The Councils Community Development team worked with partners from Tamworth to ease the winter discomfort for many elderly and vulnerable residents in Tamworth. Neil Mushrow, Community Development Officer made contact with Eon (Central Networks) to see if they could

provide extra assistance during this cold spell. Carl Henshaw East Midlands's Regional Co-ordinator sent 160 winter packs which were gratefully received.

The packs were then distributed by partners as soon as possible to some of our most vulnerable residents. The Fire Service, Age Concern, Staffs CC Social Care and Health, Homelink and Bancroft Residents Association all picked up packs and distributed them around Tamworth.

"We are currently on a waiting list for another delivery of winter packs from Eon" said Neil Mushrow, Community Development Officer. "When they arrive I will work with partner organisations to continue distribution across Tamworth. I would like to thank Eon and all of the partners involved for their help."



Partners deliver 'Winter Warmers'

If you know someone that might require a pack, who is over 60 and living alone please contact Age Concern 01827 315011.

If you are involved with an organisation that works with groups in the community and would like to be involved in future events then contact Neil Mushrow at Tamworth Borough Council by phone on 01827 709388 or by email neil-mushrow@tamworth.gov.uk

## Callbacks – if you want a call you'll get it

The benefit of regular callbacks to let customers know what's going on.

*"I particularly appreciated the call from Alex on Thursday lunchtime when the work was taking longer than expected. Having survived the Coventry blitz one can survive most things BUT it is easier to cope when one know what is going on!"*

Mrs Sharp, Leamington Spa - Hearing Impaired & Elderly

## Keeping MPs 'SwitchedOn'

Some of the topics and articles we've been telling MPs and Prospective Parliamentary Candidates about this year.



In addition to the projects detailed in our Wider Communication Strategies submission, the following initiatives have continued this year:

✓ = Year introduced/continued ★ = Enhanced/expanded

Wider Communication Strategies Initiative	Pre 07	07/08	08/09	09/10
Annually write to all PSR customers to improve the quality of our data	✓	✓	✓	✓
Suite of customer leaflets sent to all citizen's advice bureau's	✓	★	★	✓
Braille leaflets	✓	✓	✓	✓
Foreign Language leaflets	✓	✓	★	✓
Multi-lingual webpages	✓	✓	✓	✓
Live Network Information Map online	✓	✓	✓	✓
Schools education events (including our Power Discovery Zone)	✓	✓	✓	★
Institute of Customer Service member	✓	✓	✓	✓
Customer Market Research	✓	★	★	★
Customer Roadshows / Age Concern / Parish Council / "Preparing fro Winter" events	✓	✓	✓	✓
Media training for staff	✓	✓	✓	✓
Employee opinion surveys to seek feedback on improving our processes and the service we offer customers	✓	✓	✓	✓
Network Investment Map online		✓	✓	✓
The RNID's 'Louder Than Words Charter Mark' for best practice		✓	✓	★
Promoting our PSR to vulnerable and hard to reach customers, including recorded information about our PSR on Talking Newspapers and Hospital Radio		✓	★	✓
RNID, RNIB and Mencap staff training		✓	✓	✓
Dedicated telephone numbers for PSR customers			✓	✓
Audio and plain text versions of leaflets online			✓	★
MP newsletter			✓	✓
Permanent Customer Panel			✓	★
Customer surgeries and Developer Days for New Connections customers			✓	✓
Quality of Supply Report published for customers and stakeholders			✓	✓

## Customer feedback shaping the way we're communicating – Net Promoter Score

Examples of some of the detailed questions our customers are asked at two stages of our New Connections process every month. These help us target improvements to enhance the communications and overall service our customers receive.

Thinking of your recent experience with Central Networks, on a scale of 0-10 how likely are you to recommend us to a friend or colleague?

### Design & Estimating:

Question	Score
The ease of completing the application process	
The handling of any queries you had during your application	
The availability of technical support and advice throughout your application	
The ease of communicating with the team throughout the application process	
Were any potential legal issues explained thoroughly	
The time taken to provide you with your quote	

### Construction:

Question	Score
The quality of Project Manager support through the process	
Did we effectively communicate with you and keep you fully informed throughout your job	
Were you kept updated with the progress of any legal consents	
The value for money of the work undertaken	
The quality of the work undertaken	
The time taken to complete your job from payment	