

Electricity Distribution Customer Service Reward Scheme 2010/11

Wider Communication Strategies



“Customer care is at the heart of everything we do.”
CEO, Basil Scarsella. A new company and a new approach to communicating with our customers and staff.

We know from our research that customer expectations have changed and we want to adapt and change to meet them. Not our values, beliefs or principles but our activities and priorities. We can't always foresee them but we will rise to the opportunities and challenges as they occur.

There is no better way to find out what customers want than by speaking to them.

From a number of recent customer focus groups along with our own surveys and experience we found out what customers need. Their priority is information. They don't necessarily know who distribution companies are until there is a problem nor do they care much! But we want them to know how to contact us if they need us.

They also told us:

- They want good information during a power cut so they can make their own judgement on what to do for them and their family
- They also want to know why it happened and more importantly whether it will happen again
- They want to know about anything affecting their community which could have an impact on them or their families
- They need to know how to get a new connection or an alteration
- They want to know how to find out more about us and to ask questions about their supply

Some customers told us they prefer different forms of communication to others. We were keen to explore other media and information channels along with building on what we already had in place. Our objective is to allow communication with as many people as possible, using the format that is best for them, without them having to make any effort.

We knew we had to find new and innovative ways to communicate so we did.

We want to communicate with our customers during power cuts

Our aim is for customers to only need to contact us once; one call or one text and we'll do the rest.

Via text

Some customers want to use newer technology and not necessarily speak to a call agent. Customers can now text us their postcode and we will text back information on any problems in their area and send them regular updates. We offer this service to customers who call us too. More than 180,000 texts have been sent since October.

Call backs

During power cuts it's equally important for us to call customers as it is for them to call us.

Some customers prefer to speak to a call agent rather than receive a text so we call them during a power cut to update them with the latest information.

It doesn't end there; customers told us they want to know what happened and what we've done to resolve the problem.

Calling the day after a power cut

Not only do we communicate with customers during a power cut but afterwards too. We call to say how sorry we are they were off supply and explain what happened and what we've done.

One of our customers recently said:
“Other utilities could learn from you”

Proactive letters

If the supply is off on more than one occasion for the same reason within a short time we write to all customers affected, not just the ones who called in, explaining why it's happened, what we've done or what we're doing. If the problem isn't resolved at initial contact we keep in touch until it is. This year we have so far written to 12,449 customers. How do we know this is what our customers want? Our complaints have gone down by 92.3%. This year we have greatly increased

the number of proactive letters which we send to customers and we believe this has contributed to the reduction we have seen in complaints, **falling from 850 per month to less than 100 per month** in the course of the regulatory year 2010/11.

Why have we done this?

Because this is what customers told us they wanted in focus groups, stakeholder meetings and via our survey.

There are times, especially during power cuts, when immediate communication is important for health and welfare reasons.

We can and do give information through our contact centre but what better way to get information during these difficult times than by somebody calling you who can offer information and practical help?

We've continued our long-established and successful partnership with the British Red Cross but building on this we wanted to do a bit more for everybody in fault situations.

Customer Champions – building on our unique British Red Cross partnership - a winner at the 2010 BITC awards

What could be better than on the doorstep? We want to give our customers the best service, especially during power cuts or in a difficult electrical emergency. We are fortunate in that we work in partnership and alongside the British Red Cross, but on occasions we want our representatives on-site to speak to our customers explaining what we're doing and what they can expect from our company. Our field staff do a great job but their priority is getting the lights back on.

So the local customer champions scheme was created. Staff from all areas of the business will go out at short notice to communicate with and support our customers. The information they collate on site, using a robust feedback process, is captured to use as learning points for our future strategy.



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It's not only during power cuts where we communicate with our customers but many areas where we operate in the community and with individuals.

Major projects in our area

Customers told us they want to be part of any decisions on changes to their local services or surroundings. So what do we do? We consult with local groups and councils.

We write to all customers in the area outlining the project and if appropriate send an invitation to meet us at a drop in centre or exhibition if they would like to know more.

We produce leaflets and plans to show visually what we're doing along with clear explanations.

Communication is two way so it's essential we give customers the opportunity to meet us and discuss their issues. We do this in many ways.

- Part of a recent review of our customer communication highlighted the need to meet and discuss any aspect of UK Power Networks with our customers to get good feedback, find out what they want and to improve our service. We wanted to hear from those customers whose voices aren't always heard - the domestic and small business customer.
- We are holding a series of meetings in our three regions which will be held twice a year, normally during the evening, and in locations at opposite ends of our geographical area and if possible within other local events. They will be open to all customers and promoted in local media along with leaflet drops and with the co-operation of local groups such as parish councils.
- We will use the information and comments from these meetings to steer our future communications and deliver service improvements.
- We will feed back any actions we implement locally.

Stakeholder panels

These are being held in each of our network areas to gain the views of our major business customers such as the Bank of England, bodies of customers such as the Electrical Contractors Association, and the National Federation of Builders. We plan to use the ideas and views of these customers to shape our business strategy for the future.

Connections masterclasses

We wanted to ensure our larger customers such as developers understood our processes for new connections to our network. We ran an online survey to find out where our communication channels weren't meeting our customers' needs. The results showed that there were a number of different needs. Some customers were happy to see our process on line, others wanted to talk to a dedicated person and others wanted to speak to us directly. Several new options were created:

- a masterclass for people to attend and have our processes explained
- online information set out clearly and concisely
- a dedicated UK Power Networks contact to see them through the process

Local authorities are a key customer group so we need good two-way communication. Regular meetings along with quarterly and annual regional events are now held, bringing good working relationships where ideas are discussed and new working practices put into action.

We now have a good proactive working relationship with them. Where once we were criticised for our disjointed communications they now say we have effective communication channels.

How did we do this?

- We established a dedicated project team to review our business systems and processes.
- We consulted extensively with the local authorities to seek their input.
- We produced a newsletter to keep them informed of developments.
- We established a group of local authority representatives who fed back to their peers.
- We held local consultations so we could continually test our interpretation of their requirements.

How we are engaging with Independent Connection Providers (ICPs) and Independent Distribution Network Operators (IDNOs) to facilitate competition

We held an 'Embracing Competition' workshop with ICPs and IDNOs operating in our areas, to ask them how we can improve the way we enable effective Competition in Connections.

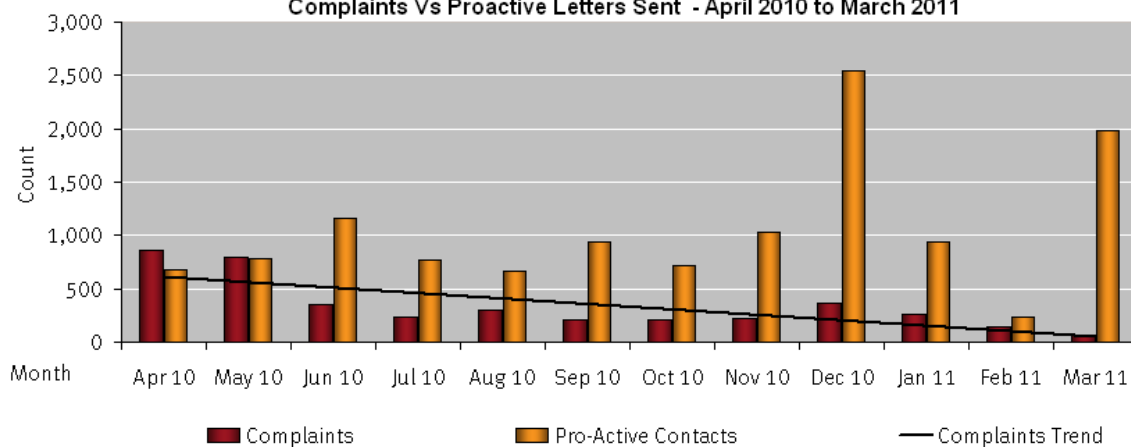
We used their views to create a Competition Development plan, and then met them again to share and further develop the plan, before launching it via the first issue of a Competition Newsletter for ICPs and IDNOs. Feedback at this stage was encouraging: *"Thanks for listening and I hope this is the start of a successful transition"; "Initial feedback was good however UKPN will need to follow up with action"*.

We also interviewed some of the stakeholders about how they feel we are facilitating competition, and what we need to do better, and a video of their responses has been published on our intranet and shown to staff across the company. We give updates on progress with the plan in our newsletters, that also appear online in our Competition in Connections internet pages, now simplified as one of our early improvements. We recently ran a workshop to explore how further extension of the competitive boundary might work, and we plan to bring the ICPs and IDNOs together periodically to ensure we remain aligned.

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Evidence: Wider Communication Strategies

Complaints Vs Proactive Letters Sent - April 2010 to March 2011



ADVANCED WARNING of a POWER CUT in your area

ON

25th September 2011

FROM
(HOURS)

2pm - 5pm

THIS IS
DUE TO

- ☐ We are upgrading the overhead electricity network
- ☐ We are upgrading the underground electricity network serving your area
- ☐ We are carrying out tree surgery to keep branches clear of power lines and help ensure reliable power supplies
- ☐ We are repairing a fault on the electricity network
- ☐ We are carrying out essential maintenance work on the electricity network

We apologise for any inconvenience caused.

If you have any questions or concerns
Please call
at
0800 323 0000
and quote this reference number: 123456

PLANNED POWER CUTS

Helpful Information

Before the power cut

- If electricity is crucial for medical equipment please contact us.
- Before the planned power cut begins switch electric fires and cookers off to avoid accidents when the power is restored.
- Turn off and unplug any sensitive equipment such as TVs, videos, satellite receivers, machinery, computers and other office equipment.
- About 12 hours before the supply is cut, set your freezer to its coldest setting and avoid opening the door (turn back to normal after the power cut).
- Leave one light on to let you know when the power returns.

When your power returns

- Remember to reset any time switches.

Useful information

- During a power cut your land line telephone may not work.
- In extreme weather conditions or if the ambient temperature is below zero we may have to postpone this work.
- Please note that UK Power Networks are unable to provide generators for private use.
- For overhead electricity network upgrading work our engineers often need access to properties to carry out essential safety checks, before restoring power supplies. If no access is available please call 0800 7838838 (East) / 0800 7838866 (South East) / 0800 0280247 (London) on your return.

Power company calls Red Cross

ENERGY supplier UK Power Networks drafted in the Red Cross to help those left in the cold by the power cuts.

A spokeswoman said that the interruptions were caused by a fault on equipment at a substation.

The fault was repaired and supplies were restored by 7.18pm on Monday.

The spokeswoman added: "We recognise how uncomfortable it is being without electricity, especially in such cold weather and apologise for the inconvenience caused.

"Through our partnership with the British Red Cross we arranged for them to work in the area on our behalf to offer practical support to customers without power.

"The volunteers called on vulnerable customers... to check whether they needed help, ranging from hot drinks and torches, to a reassuring chat."

UK Power Networks estimated that about 40 people were affected by the power outages and said engineers "worked throughout the night in freezing conditions to repair the fault".

The spokeswoman said: "There have been a number of interruptions since November 7 and our engineers have reconnected supplies as quickly as possible on each occasion."

She added: "Our customer relations team will be writing to the worst affected customers to explain and apologise."

Impressed by service

I wish to praise UK Power Networks and its subcontractor Haste for their prompt response to the recent power surge that affected premises in Wallington and Carshalton on Friday, November 26.

The surge destroyed the electronics in several of my power transformer plugs.

After a phone call to UK Power Networks, on the Monday morning I was told Haste would call me that day. In fact, a man arrived at my door in the afternoon to inspect the damaged equipment and took it away, promising its return within a few days, either repaired or replenished.

On Sunday, December 5, equipment was returned, repaired. Considering the subcontractors are based in Petersfield, Hampshire, and the recent weather, that is an excellent response.

MERVYN PAMMENT
Wallington



Competition Newsletter

ISSUE 2
APRIL 2011

EMBRACING COMPETITION

New-look website



We've re-designed the Competition in Connections content and layout of our website, to make it easier for customers to understand about competition, and to streamline and improve the information provided for ICPs and IDNOs. Please have a look and let us know what you think.

Making real progress

In this second edition of our newsletter, we bring you news of the progress we've been making on the Improvement Action Plan we shared in Issue 1 (see overleaf). All the actions highlighted in white have been completed - that's everything that was due in March, and one in April.

- We've launched a new-look website - see left.
- Within the information for ICPs and IDNOs section, the GSI content has been improved
- However, we know we still have work to do to get G81 where it needs to be, so in the meantime, we've provided a listing of further engineering documents. If you think one of these may be relevant to a specific design, extracts may be available by discussion with our Competition in Connections team.
- We've reviewed the Competition factsheet that we publish online and provide to customers; this now contains more information about competition and the scope of contestability
- We now provide a breakdown of non-contestable charges when we send you a formal quotation
- We also give a description of any reinforcement work required

... but still plenty more to do

We know there are still times when we fail to give you the service you need, but we hope these early results will show that we're taking this seriously.

Looking ahead, we undertook to identify areas of overlap between yourselves and UK Power Networks by May. To help us achieve this, please let us know what areas you think we should focus on - contact details overleaf.

Extending the scope of competition

Our main focus this month has been to finalise arrangements for our first pilot for unmetered live joining to mains, which is scheduled to start during April. Once we have this up and running we'll be able to concentrate more effort on setting up further unmetered trials, and developing plans for metered live joining to mains. We made a start on 18th March when we met with a small group of you to look at some of the issues we'll need to consider in moving from unmetered to metered live joining to mains. Many of you have contacted us about taking part in trials, and we will be in touch shortly to let you know how we'd like to involve you in getting this under way.

Competition
newsletter
Issue 2