

Improving customer experience in the utilities sector

A look at how
Scottish and
Southern Electricity
Networks (SSEN)
became a customer
obsessed business.



Introduction

We understand that Customer experience [CX] is at the forefront of mind for those in the Utilities industry.

We know from our experience of working across the utilities sector that you're very much in the business of spinning plates. Managing and maintaining vast infrastructure networks, undertaking major engineering projects to develop new capacity and driving innovation to lessen the impacts of our increasingly unpredictable climate.

But even that is only half the story. The utilities sector also needs to focus on providing the best possible service to their customers. Not only is it the right thing to do, but regulators are coming down hard on those who underinvest in customer experience.

This paper tells the story of how our team have transformed the culture within Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks [SSEN].

With more than £40m up for grabs for delivering exceptional customer service in the 5 years ahead, SSEN needed help to ensure its customer experience was fit for purpose and able to deliver against tough regulatory targets.



Why CX matters

With the penalty of hefty fines as a consequence, great CX is not simply a nice to have, but a business imperative. The best performing utilities companies in the UK are those who got ahead of the curve and invested in CX early.

British Gas, for instance, helped over 300,000 people manage their debt in 2021 and launched a £2 million fund to help customers with their winter energy bills. The company also formed the British Gas Energy Trust to offer energy debt advice and support to those who need it.

Customers have high expectations around just in time services and want to be kept informed at every step of the way. 65% of customers want to buy from companies that offer quick and easy online transactions, according to the [2021 Zendesk Customer Experience Trends Report](#).



New technologies and operating models enable this, and many consumer goods companies have now normalised it. Customers notice when services don't live up to their increased expectations. This can lead to low Ofwat Customer Measure of Experience [CMex] or Ofgem Customer Satisfaction Survey [CSS] scores.

Ofwat Consumer Survey 'New' findings
the energy transition



Our work with SSEN: the familiar challenge

We were asked by SSEN to assist with their customer journey programme, which had two goals: to identify opportunities to drastically improve customer journeys across key services; and to help SSEN develop a dedicated service design team.

SSEN teams are based right across the regions they serve, from the bustle of West London to the smallest villages in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. They are supported by engineering and customer service teams based in major offices and depots in centres like Reading, Portsmouth, Perth and Inverness - responsible for delivering power to over 3.8 million homes and businesses across the UK.

Increasing pressure from the industry regulator was raising the urgency for change within SSEN. Focus was being placed on customer service and the needs of vulnerable consumers like never before and with the threat regulatory fines of up to £40m, SSEN recognised it needed to act fast to deliver improvements.

A challenge was set to the expert teams at ExperienceLab by SSEN leadership to produce a high-level strategic seven year roadmap for 2021-2027.

The objective of this roadmap was to deliver a holistic insight into their customers to support necessary operational changes across their customer service and customer vulnerability teams. Additionally, consultancy and projects across Service Design needed to be identified to deliver sustainable change needed for the future.



Our approach

We spent the first four weeks leading and adding structure to what a consolidated customer service and consumer vulnerability roadmap would look like. Working hand-in-hand with SSEN project teams, we it was vitally important that people were put at the heart of the process and we were able to clarify and define the roadmap and provide a fresh perspective.

A multidisciplinary team formed of Service Designers, Insight Consultants and Transformation experts ran three workstreams across business immersion and problem mapping; KPI, date and customer services and compilation of existing roadmaps. All at pace under increasing pressure for change.

For the discovery phase, desk research covering performance data reviews, call listening, customer feedback and PSR surveys was delivered alongside primary research covering immersion workshops, stakeholder interviews, and leadership workshops.

In addition, triangulation was undertaken to cover blind analysis of results with problem and objective mapping.

"How Might We" (HMW) Process: We turned problems into opportunity statements by generating solutions via the HMW process.

who	As a WHI customer	When	An outage is planned	Need	I would like to get notified well beforehand	But	I don't receive a notification letter	Why does it matter?	This makes me unprepared when the outage takes place
who	As a retail customer	When	When an outage is planned	Need	I would like to get notified well beforehand	But	I don't receive a notification letter	Why does it matter?	This makes me unprepared when the outage takes place
who	As a business owner customer	When	An outage is planned	Need	I would like to get notified well beforehand	But	don't receive a notification letter	Why does it matter?	This prevents me from making appropriate plans for my business
who	As a customer	When	When an outage happens	Need	I would like to get notified	But	The letter was posted to the wrong address	Why does it matter?	This makes planned outages to unplanned, makes me unprepared

Dynamic outputs were created, which could be adjusted and tracked by the SSEN team. Key problem statements were identified and prioritised, set against a matrix of customer experience, customer impact, contributing factors and business impact. This provided the focus needed to tackle each channel and underrated the interdependency or isolation of each issue.



Outcome

The delivery of the updated Seven Year roadmap delivered a significant advancement in CX capability for SSEN, enabling teams to overcome the key problem statements, deliver on customer promises and achieve strong improvement on existing scoring.

Most importantly, it worked to mitigate the risk of regulator enforcement. With improved governance, driven by an evolving CX team tasked to improve customer centricity, SSEN achieved its mission of becoming a customer obsessed business.

Customer insight was illustrated like never before. For the first time, SSEN had a total visibility of its customers.

443

Ideas generated, translating into actionable improvements

24,000

Date points gathered

17

Customer journey maps presented

13

Customer personas created and published

7

Year transformation roadmap delivered

"We've been really impressed with the complex journey maps and service blueprints that ExperienceLab have delivered for us, especially considering how complex some of the journeys must have been."

Head of Service Design, SSEN

The ExperienceLab difference

For decades, ExperienceLab have been at the leading edge of CX and usability testing – building an established user centred design agency that now preforms as the innovation hub for Serco, one of the world’s most recognised brands delivering for Governments and the public sector globally.

Our work in utilities sector is not only driving service improvements for thousands of customers across the UK, but has helped move leading utilities companies away from position where they were at risk of multi-million ombudsman fines.

We’re proud that the work ExperienceLab has provided to firms, including SSEN, had delivered a customer obsessed culture with a clear strategic roadmap for the future.

Our value to you:

Human Insight.

Beyond a deep understanding of the utilities sector, ExperienceLab’s purpose is to provide you with the insight needed to make products and services better for real life, by putting people and truth at the centre of design. Therefore, all of our work is insight-led and grounded in thorough user, market and business research.



Better Design.

We are expert service design and innovation practitioners who partner with organisations to transform service delivery, devise new concepts and create memorable digital products, websites and applications.



Enabling Transformation.

Training, coaching and measurement is a big part of what we do. We support businesses to develop the capability required to make change stick. At ExperienceLab, we focus on developing the mindset, skillset and toolsets of our clients so when we leave the work can still continue and our impact measured.



Find out more

We have helped utilities companies make huge strides in redesigning their customer journeys. We understand the complexities involved. Not only in serving potentially millions of customers who may need an efficient operational response. But also in managing the business-to-business relationships that are essential for new connections and capacity enhancements.

We also understand that many utilities companies are using outdated and inflexible legacy technologies. So we work with companies to ensure any service transformation is technically feasible.

We would love to share some initial ideas with you and understand more about your requirements or challenges you face.

For a chat with one of our consultants, get in touch with Adam on +44(0)7747 775643 or at adam.gallucci@serco.com today.

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