Bridging the Digital Divide with Conversational Engagement Software
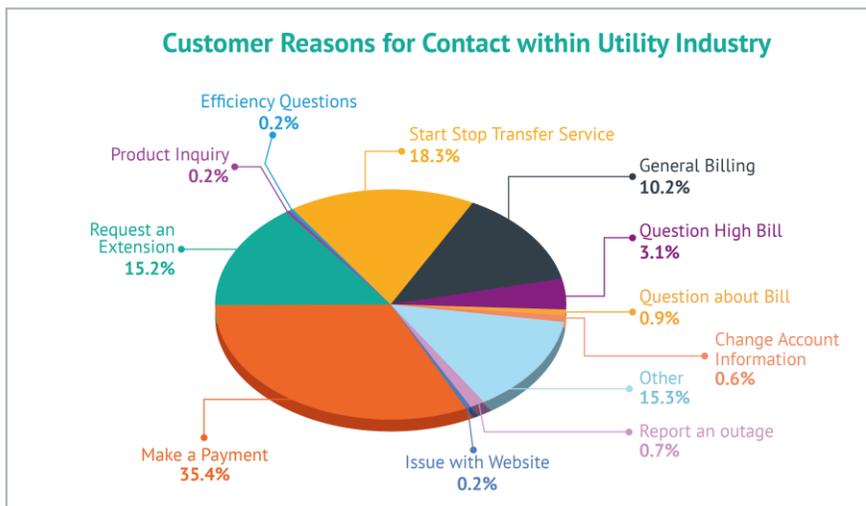
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Situation

Utilities companies are at a crossroad. Many used to hold a monopoly on utilities as consumers had nowhere else to go. This has changed, however, with start-up utility companies and deregulation separating delivery from generation, allowing green energy/start-ups to be able to deliver a better product and service, thereby stealing market share from the mainstream utility companies. What's more, customer expectations are through the roof. Many consumers expect their utility provider to behave like their bank or mobile provider, or even their favorite online retailer. Public utilities commission/regulators are also raising the bar for customer service expectations across the industry, adding even more pressure to make improvements or risk failing to achieve price increases in their annual rate case reviews.

As a result, utility executives are focused on adding customer service/experience strategies to bolster their service capabilities.

> The average Net Promoter Score® in the utility sector is about the same as the US Postal Service (Bain).

According to management consulting firm Bain & Company, this is a new area for utilities companies:

- "Utilities are developing capabilities to improve the customer experience, in response to new pressures that require them to think more about this aspect of their business.
- These are new muscles for many utility executives, but they can learn how to flex them from the examples set by leaders in their own and other industries.
- A system that focuses both individual employees and the organization on responding to feedback from customers allows executives to identify and prioritize areas where focused action can improve customer experience."

Customer Reasons for Contact within Utility Industry

- Efficiency Questions 0.2%
- Product Inquiry 0.2%
- Request an Extension 15.2%
- Start Stop Transfer Service 18.3%
- General Billing 10.2%
- Question High Bill 3.1%
- Question about Bill 0.9%
- Change Account Information 0.6%
- Other 15.3%
- Report an outage 0.7%
- Make a Payment 35.4%
- Issue with Website 0.2%

Utilities companies used to view customers as "billpayers" or "ratepayers", but now they are thinking more and more about the customer journey and how to become a trusted energy advisor to their users (T&D World).

Utilities are leveraging AI and machine learning in various ways to improve the customer experience and increase engagement (Utility Dive).

A study by J.D. Power found that utilities is one of the

Challenges & Optimization Opportunities

Utility companies communicate with consumers for two primary reasons: (1) Paying their bill or getting an extension to pay their bill, and (2) starting, stopping or their moving service, which typically accounts for 80% or more of all their customer interactions, each interaction offers an opportunity for customer service optimization. Acqueon's conversational engagement suite provides a full range of proactive, predictive, and preventative capabilities to optimize the customer journey. The software facilitates efficient and satisfying customer service and self-service options for consumers to meet their unique needs.

- Customer billing – Fielding phone calls, communicating via SMS when a bill is overdue, etc.:
  - Through seamless data integration with a company's CRM and ERP systems, Acqueon's conversational engagement suite will offer payors different payment options such as "click to pay", "push button to pay", etc. This helps speed time-to-payment resolution.
  - The software can also send automated alerts via SMS, chat, email or phone to customers whose payments are overdue.
  - Acqueon Engagement will present Next Best Action recommendations in hopes of quickly resolving any issue.
  - Acqueon immediately equips agents with full customer journey context when calls or chat messages come in, so they know who the person is and the potential reason for the interaction.

- Start, Stop & Move Service Notifications – Outage communication, drone flight alerts, billing increase notices, consumption usage messages:
  - Acqueon Engagement uses AI and machine learning to automatically trigger notifications to customers in the area of an outage or a planned drone flyover, etc.
  - The conversational engagement software also auto-alerts (via the consumer's channel of choice - SMS, email, chat or phone) consumers who have surpassed pre-set consumption thresholds and will offer one-click energy-saving tips, e.g.
  - These automation features free up agents to focus on other higher priority issues and customer interactions.

- Field service visits – Managing technician service requests:
  - When a consumer contacts the service department to schedule a field service visit, the Acqueon software can send a message via the consumer's channel of choice with various open dates/time slots for the customer to choose from, with a simple one-click response.

- When a consumer selects Once an appointment day/time, Acqueon triggers a confirmation SMS or email (predetermined).
- On the day of a service appointment, the engagement software can send an SMS alert when the technician is 30 minutes away, e.g.
- This streamlined and automated process increases efficiency and significantly enhances the overall customer experience.

- Rapid complaints response, emergency notifications – Fielding and responding to customer complaints (regulatory complaints, customer service escalations, etc.):
  - The Acqueon software can anticipate the purpose of a customer's query based on service history and account information and automatically route the call to the best skilled agent.
  - Acqueon will present an interaction-receiving agent with likely scenarios so he/she is prepared before taking the call: "Mr. Jones, are you calling about your recent service appointment? Is everything still okay?"
  - Once an agent resolves a customer's issues, Acqueon can then automatically schedule a check-in notification two days later, for instance, to ensure no further problems exist.
  - These advanced capabilities help organizations bring complaints to resolution faster.

- Fraud validation – Contacting customers who seek to open a new account to verify their identity:
  - With the Acqueon software, a utility can automatically contact a consumer requesting a new account and ask for name, address and credit card verification, for instance, via one-click responses.
  - This automated fail-safe process helps ensure fraudulent cases are thwarted.

- Program enrollment/energy saver – Offering new promotions and enrolling consumers:
  - Acqueon can contact consumers via their 'channel of choice' and 'best time to engage' to offer new programs (e.g. Energy Saver).
  - Once consent is provided to participate in a new program, e.g., Acqueon Engagement can auto-enroll individuals. Messages will be triggered and sent with program details (costs, links to more information, etc.).
  - These proactive, automated features help to increase revenue without taxing live agents.

The Acqueon conversational engagement suite offers all these preemptive and responsive customer service functions to help utility providers not only optimize service delivery and improve the overall customer experience but also save time, reduce costs, increase revenue and improve customer loyalty.

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