ORACLE Documaker Document Factory Dashboard

POWERGRID INTERNATIONAL
THE POWER DELIVERY MEDIA SOURCE

Search

Saved Searches

Save As | Delete

*Object Job

Assembly Line

Job

Priority

Started Time

Ended Time

State

Historical

Search | Reset

Overview

Document Factory Overview

Jobs Breakdown December 2011

12.77%
25.53%
61.70%

Not Started | Errored | Published | In Process | Canceled

Assembly Line	Total	Not Started	Errored	Published	In Process	Canceled
Assembly Line 1	47	0	6	29	12	0

Transaction Trend By Month

160
140
120
100
80
60
40
20
0

A M J J A S O N D J F M
2011   2012

Submitted | Error | Published | In Process

Month	Submitted	Error	Published	In Process
April 2011	0	0	0	0
May 2011	0	0	0	0
June 2011	0	0	0	0
July 2011	1	1	0	0
August 2011	125	28	85	10
September 2011	60	2	41	12
October 2011	110	2	62	36
November 2011	134	4	56	65
December 2011	47	5	29	11
January 2012	35	0	22	12
February 2012	89	0	61	21
March 2012	3	0	3	0

Improving customer service through a Document Factory dashboard (courtesy of Oracle Documaker).

BY JAMES MULLARNEY, ORACLE

Redefining Customer Service

The definition of good customer service in the utilities industry has changed little during the first decade of the 21st century compared with the previous two decades.

The widespread use of technologies such as smart phones and tablets, much less the Internet, and communication channels such as social media, however, is changing customer expectations of utility providers. Customers want the same instant access to the most up-to-date information on the platforms of their choice that they already receive from other service providers such as a credit card company, bank or wireless provider. Why expect any different from utility providers?

CUSTOMER SERVICE AS COMPETITIVE DIFFERENTIATOR

Customers expect utilities to identify and solve their service issues rapidly at a minimum. To remain competitive, utility customer service representatives (CSRs) no longer will get by with knowledge only of payment alternatives and responses to high-bill complaints. They must guide customers to make the best choices by demonstrating the impact of usage alternatives such as the differences between critical-peak pricing and everyday time-of-use rates, forecasting using what-if scenarios such as flooding, and legislative demands.

Considering increased competition in utility markets, this level of change must be addressed. Utilities recognize it is expensive and impractical to draft experts outside contact centers to answer complicated questions and provide customer service. They also are concerned about potentially unfavorable comparisons with conservation utilities and private companies, where CSRs can answer a narrower set of questions in greater detail and seemingly provide more customer service.

Utilities must deploy new processes and technologies to achieve better customer service and remain competitive in the changing landscape.

MANAGING THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Increasing the ability to manage and take action of gathered customer data such as energy usage and billing

is one process utility companies must look to implement. This data can be used to create a fully detailed customer profile that CSRs can access to identify and resolve problems quickly, improving customer service.

For example, a complete customer profile will arm the customer service team with the required information to:

- **Offer performance-based rebates.** During certain seasons, utilities can offer incentives to conserve energy. For instance, customers can be offered discounts for reducing their summer energy consumption by using their washers and dryers off peak.
- **Identify abnormal usage patterns.** An overview of energy patterns can help CSRs instantly flag abnormal usage spikes. This lets them proactively identify and solve problems, adjust bills if required or advise of the least expensive period to consume large amounts of energy.
- **Resolve what-if scenarios.** Unforeseen circumstances create problems that need resolving, often with urgency. Armed with the right tools, CSRs can identify problems and solve them in minutes. For example, if a customer calls about a burst pipe, a CSR can confirm the abnormal water usage, instantly adjust billing amounts and dispatch the nearest engineer to fix the problem.
- **Notify customers of regulatory changes.** Having a view of the complete customer profile ensures CSRs can identify whether customers have been kept up-to-date with industry legislation that might impact their service.

USING SOFTWARE TO IMPROVE SERVICE

To achieve this complete customer profile, utilities must ensure they have the required technology to deliver this service: a solution that can handle every aspect of customer information from meter reads to billing. In addition, the ideal solution should be able to undertake functions such as payment processing, collections, meter management and cross-promotional marketing while evolving with business demands such as new legislation.

The information provided by the solution should be presented across dashboards allowing CSRs instant access to deliver a response and resolution to the query, consequently delivering better service. For example, CSRs can use dashboards to identify peak usage and

offer customers advice on reducing their bills.

The technology platform also must allow customers to get account information and pay bills through direct debits, online and over the telephone, ensuring customers can use their preferred methods. When dealing with customer queries, the platform should be able to integrate information captured from the interactive voice response triage to speed the query time. For example, when a customer enters an account number, the system should remember the number so a CSR need not enter it again manually to access the account. Storing information improves customer service because service times can be reduced.

Considering the communication channels customers prefer to receive information, utilities benefit from implementing a technology that can deliver enterprise document automation. The technology uses document templates, which allow businesses to distribute the same or personalized information via channels. It lets utilities use variable graphics to simplify information for customers. The right document automation solution ensures utilities can liaise with customers in their preferred formats, such as emailing bills instead of mailing them. This improves customer service and utilities can accelerate, better manage and optimize their business operations, drive efficiency and reduce costs.

The adoption of smart grid and smart meter technologies, as well as enterprise document automation, increasingly will improve customer service at utilities. In addition to environmental benefits, these technologies produce complex data utilities can analyze and use to refine customer profiles, helping them better serve customers and open new channels for revenue growth.

USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO INTERACT

According to Pike Research, 57 million customers engaged with their energy providers via social media in 2011. The number is expected to rise to 624 million by the end of 2017. Research from Online Social Media found that businesses must be focused on engaging customers via social media rather than simply amassing many fans. Utilities must implement effective social media strategies to increase service levels. For example, a Twitter account can keep customers up-to-

date on predicted or real-time power outages caused by extreme weather or the potential impact of emergency maintenance. Similarly, a Facebook account can educate customers about utility issues. Demonstration videos, such as how to turn off your water supply in an emergency, could be posted to YouTube.

Alamere Utilities statement accessible from an iPhone.

Utilities will appear more open and proactive—not just reactive—to customer queries by implementing social media programs. Leveraging the data from smart technologies and document automation enables utilities to help develop deeper customer insight, which leads to better customer service. In addition, the data lets utilities proactively target messaging and communications to customers.

INCREASING SERVICE LEVELS WITH SOFTWARE

Utilities can help satisfy customers' evolving expectations and achieve the necessary levels of service by deploying efficient technology and new communication platforms that can deliver the change. Utilities can increase their customer service levels by installing tools that provide CSRs with information to manage customer queries quickly and efficiently and add customer value by adding money- and energy-saving tips.

If implementing the right technology, utilities quickly can respond to and resolve customer queries. The goal is to speed response through business intelligence. CSRs can use customer data captured by the system to improve customer service. The right technologies give utilities an opportunity to gain a deeper customer insight and improve customer service, giving them the competitive edge. ●

James Mullarney is senior director of product strategy at Oracle.