



NJUG CASE STUDY

CASE STUDY 9: Customer Liaison Officers

The National Joint Utilities Group (NJUG) is the UK industry association representing utilities on street works issues. The thirty-eight companies¹ we represent work to deliver gas, electricity, water and telecommunications to both individual consumers and UK plc.

NJUG members need to continue to drive forward further improvements. We have therefore developed the NJUG Vision for Street Works, which revolves around six main principles:

1. Safety is the number one priority
2. Damage to underground assets is avoided
3. Utilities work together and in partnership with local authorities to minimise disruption
4. Utilities deliver consistent high quality
5. Utilities maximise the use of sustainable methods and materials
6. Street works in the UK are regarded as world class

This case study is an example of NJUG delivering on these principles and turning the Vision into a reality.

Overview:

Providing an excellent standard of customer care is a key component of Northern Gas Networks' (NGN)² day-to-day activities, linking with the firm's overall strategy of continuous improvement and sustainability. This is a priority which the company has addressed through a number of initiatives, implemented both internally and externally, in close co-operation with NGN's operational partner United Utilities.

For example, in January 2007, a Customer Service Committee was formed. Chaired by the Chief Executive and with meetings held on a monthly basis, the Committee sets targets and represents a forum to discuss any emerging trends in complaint issues and agree action plans to resolve them.

Other initiatives include improvements to all customer-facing literature, warning and information leaflets, and increased notification letters before commencement of planned main's replacement work. Details of projects are published on the firm's website, and all company literature has been endorsed by the Plain English Campaign. NGN has also sought to proactively gain feedback from customers through the introduction of Impression Cards, issued to all customers visited by an emergency engineer and to homes affected by mains replacement projects, and to gas connections customers.

One of NGN's main initiatives implemented by the company and which has made a significant contribution towards improving the standard of service delivered, has been the introduction of Customer Liaison Officer (CLOs). Northern Gas Networks has eight CLOs who are dedicated to liaising with customers on-site during gas mains replacement work.



¹ NJUG's current members are Energy Networks Association (representing electricity and gas), Water UK (representing all water and wastewater companies), National Grid, Openreach, Virgin Media and THUS, a Cable and Wireless Business. Our associate members are Clancy Docwra, Skanska McNicholas, Balfour Beatty, Morrison, Morgan Est, NACAP, PJ Keary, First Intervention, Carillion, Enterprise and Laing O'Rourke. Including members through trade associations, NJUG represents thirty-eight utility companies.

² Northern Gas Networks is a member of NJUG through the Energy Networks Association.

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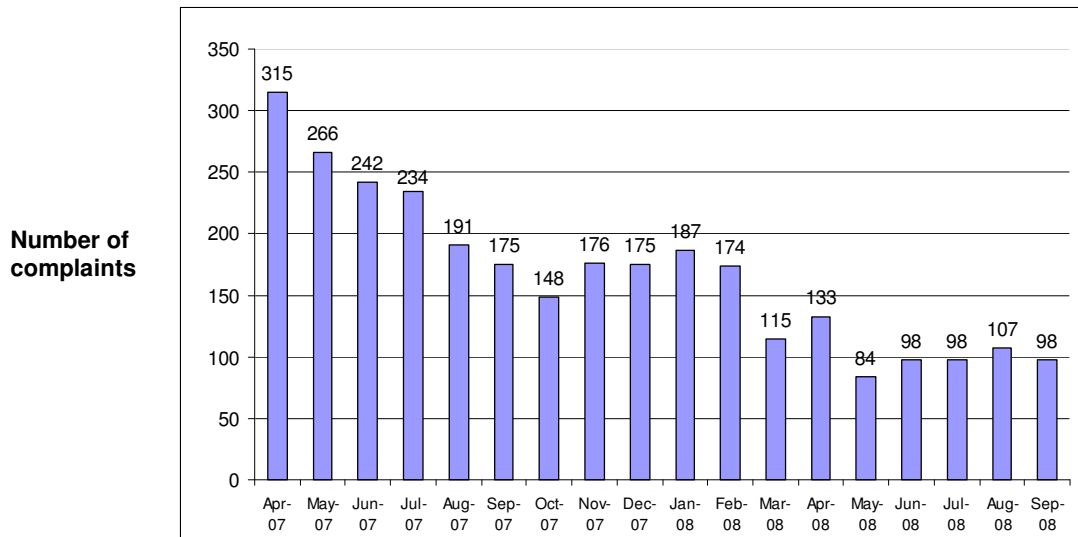
Northern Gas Networks' (NGN) eight Customer Liaison Officers (CLOs) are dedicated to liaising with customers on-site, before, during and after gas mains replacement work. Every year, NGN replace 528km of metal mains with plastic pipe, and while essential to ensure customers' safety, this work can sometimes be disruptive and un-invited.

The CLO 'walks' the roads that will be affected by NGN's work, delivering information leaflets and letters to residents and businesses. They knock on doors to explain the work and address any concerns customers may raise before work commences. The CLO also liaises with the local authority and holds meetings with businesses or organisations that may be impacted by the works. Additionally, they arrange 'Playsafe Staysafe' presentations with local primary schools to ensure children in the area are aware of the dangers of playing near the company's street works.

During 2008, a number of high profile schemes were being carried out in the heart of the historic cities of York and Durham, and to coordinate with the work, the CLOs held a series of public meetings. Such meetings are also attended by the contractors employed to carry out the work, as well as local ward and parish councillors, residents and local businesses. These meetings have proved extremely useful in dealing with any potential issues before the work commences and also to ease the fears of businesses by giving them the opportunity to meet the people who will actually be carrying out the work. Feedback from these sessions, and on these leaflets, has been extremely positive, with a number of high profile schemes successfully completed without a single customer complaint being received, thanks to the presence of Customer Liaison Officers.

The role of the CLO has contributed significantly to the organisation's improved performance in customer service. The face-to-face interaction with customers is essential to provide reassurance and a point of contact. The CLO will also leave behind an Impression Card which the customer can return, free of charge, to Northern Gas Networks. Should any issue need immediate attention following receipt of the card, the CLO will return to discuss and remedy the issue.

The introduction of CLOs has delivered tangible business benefits by driving down customer complaints (see graph below), which in turn can only serve to enhance the company's reputation and the quality of service received by the end user – the customer. Below are a selection of comments received from customers and statistics demonstrating the success of the CLO role:



"Your CLO was very helpful and kept us all informed about what was happening. They were all happy helpful people. Thank you."

"Excellent customer liaison with very pleasant rep. Workmen also very pleasant."

"I am disabled and got all the help I could wish for from the liaison officer. Even one of the young workmen who carried my shopping into my house from my car."

"Chaps all cheerful, helpful and polite in some difficult situations. All grafters. NGN either lucky or very good at choosing. As for Miss White (the CLO) - The 'Diplomatic Corps' loss is NGN's gain."