TRANSFORMING CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE IN THE UTILITIES INDUSTRY

Infosys®
Navigate your next

When Infosys asked about 100 executives from the utility industry to name the most impactful trends in their business through 2020, the list included consumer analytics and omnichannel customer engagement. This signaled that a sector, which was mainly concerned with running operations efficiently, was now turning its attention to the customer, smart meters, and customer choice.

In the last few years, utilities have shed their reputation as technology laggards to transform their operations with a variety of digital technologies. The bulk of these transformation initiatives have been around improving productivity and lowering cost. Providers have used smart meters for real-time two-way communication, gather consumer usage data, provide different tariffs, and reduce field operations cost. Solar and net metering have increased the use of renewable energy and enabled small producers to save money. Consumers are now being recognized more as 'prosumers' in that they are designing and customizing products to their specific needs. Companies are also investing in open platforms and technologies to create marketplaces and ecosystems for energy trading.

However, next-generation consumers are demanding more than efficiency from their utility provider. They are asking for the same levels of service, choice, and engagement that they enjoy in other consumption experiences, such as banking, travel, and shopping. Millennial consumers who value independence desire to monitor their energy consumption and choose the tariffs they will pay. Being environmentally conscious, they look for green energy options, even at a higher price. And of course, they want to be able to interact with their providers anytime, from anywhere and on any device.

Although most utility companies desire to fulfill these demands for superior customer experience, they lack clarity on how to proceed. I recommend the way forward is to define a clear end goal, draw up a roadmap to get from where they are to where they would like to be and avoid common pitfalls in this journey.

Here are a few best practices that utilities could consider while transforming their customer experience:

Establish a 'baseline' current state of experience:
Before defining a target end state, utility providers should have a realistic picture of their current standing in customer service, experience, and engagement. Traditionally, utilities have not tracked such KPIs, but it is important to have a baseline of the current status before deciding where one wishes to be. Benchmarks such as JD Power provide a good view of comparison against peer utilities in the same industry, and techniques such as customer engagement/customer journey analytics would be useful for quantifying experience. Customer and billing operations metrics such as average call handling time, billing efficiency, average days to resolve billing exceptions, etc. are all good metrics to track.

Decide on a measurable and achievable end goal:
The lack of objective measurement is one of the biggest reasons for disappointment in customer experience implementations. Besides validating that transformation outcomes indeed meet stated objectives, concrete, measurable goals act as a guidepost, enabling organizations to take corrective action when they stray off course. The ability to predict an outage or give customers an accurate estimate of restoration timelines is also a tangible aspect of customer experience.

Choose the right technology, vendor, and approach for transformation:
It is easy for a utility company to lose itself in the maze of digital solutions available today. Here, the support of an experienced and proven transformation partner could be an invaluable asset. Competency in leading utility products, emerging technologies such as AI, ML, robotic process automation (RPA) and Cloud, along with domain experience is a must. In addition, the partner should be willing to commit investments for product co-creation. They must also be able to help the utility company navigate all the stages of transformation, starting with building the customer experience strategy, before modernizing legacy applications with the right products and platforms, redesigning and unifying the user experience across all channels, delivering the new digital stack, and finally, managing change and rollout.

Driving business outcomes for an end-to-end customer experience transformation

Usually, 20-30% of customer care and billing implementations exceed their budget and schedule. In addition, in the first six months post go-live, billing accuracy is usually less than 95% with 10-30% higher billing and back-office exceptions. At Infosys, we have set a different standard for business outcome-driven projects.

For example, for a large utility transformation program involving multiple utility systems such as customer care and billing, meter data management, customer web portal, reporting, analytics, mobile workforce management, we were able to deliver on industry-leading business metrics:

- On schedule per plan, and below budget
- 99.97% billing accuracy
- 4.2 billion USD and GL balanced with a difference of 50 cents
- Back-office was current on exception processing within 2 weeks

Customer service KPIs improved within 3 months

- Reduction in Average handle time by 3%
- Reduction in Abandoned Calls by 6%
- Increased Average Speed to Answer by 4%
- Reduction in Year To Date Calls (compared with the previous year) by 2%

Change for the future: All too often, enterprises err by porting the legacy processes on to new technology. This defeats the purpose of transformation. For optimum results, it is necessary to redesign processes to align them with the new solution, and also with the articulated goals. Managing not just the change in process and technology but also its impact on people is a huge factor in transformation success. Here, the partner must contribute by facilitating organization change management and training company staff in handling both the new solution and the new way of doing things.

Regularly monitor performance: The utility company must continuously track performance against its stated objectives, and make proactive revisions when necessary. It must also remain abreast of new trends and industry performance benchmarks in order to adopt them in good time.

The pursuit of customer experience is a continuous journey; the utility industry will need to visit the above-mentioned steps repeatedly to ensure the quality of experience delivered matches the evolving demands of their next-generation customers. All of us in the utility industry have a lot to learn from the constantly improving experience provided by retailers to their consumers.

About the author

Kasturika Supkar
Industry Principal, Utilities

Kasturika has over 21 years of IT services and consulting experience with leading utilities around the world specializing in CIS, contact center, billing, customer facing systems, and mobile solutions. As the Industry Principal for Utilities Customer Service Center of Excellence at Infosys, she advises utilities on customer experience strategy and leads the build out of next generation customer engagement solutions and platforms.

For more information, contact askus@infosys.com

Infosys
Navigate your next

Infosys.com | NYSE: INFY

Stay Connected   SlideShare