



Powering growth, reduced costs and an enhanced customer experience

National Grid Metering has a busy 24 x 7 contact centre based in Gloucester handling some 2m customer service calls per year.

One of the companies served by the Contact Centre was OnStream, previously a wholly owned subsidiary of National Grid created to offer a metering service to the rapidly expanding unregulated metering market.

“OnStream’s key driver was growth and the contact centre was instrumental in powering it. From a standing start, we helped OnStream install over 5 million gas and electricity meters on behalf of its clients – the national energy suppliers – within 6 years and this required robust contact management processes and operations,” explains James Cole, Contact Centre Manager, National Grid Metering (NGM).

To initiate the installation process, end consumers received a letter explaining that their gas and/or electricity meter needed replacing and inviting them to book an appointment to have a new meter installed. The consumer then contacted the Centre either by phone or via the website – to request a date and time.

“Although the process sounds straightforward, there are several factors that should not be underestimated. Firstly, it takes skilled and knowledgeable agents to get customers ‘on side’ and actually agree to have their meter changed. Secondly, achieving appropriate resourcing levels to manage the ‘spike’ inbound call traffic during peak times is very difficult – if you throw resource at it, it’s very costly due to the disproportionate variance between peak times and ‘lull’ periods, where effectively you have highly unproductive agents. Last but not least, it was vital for us to meet our service levels for critical calls – gas escape calls and ‘no gas’ situations for example, as non-achievement was linked to financial penalties,” continues James.

To help overcome these issues, NGM approached ContactPartners.

A robust multi-channel solution

First of all, ContactPartners worked with NGM to understand customer call patterns and service level requirements for both critical and non-critical calls. Then, enhancements to existing technologies and the introduction of new capabilities to reduce peaks by leveraging offline and self-service technologies – and which would also improve the customer experience and reduce the overall cost to serve – were explored.

After suitable due diligence, ContactPartners optimised NGM’s Interactive Voice Recognition (IVR) by simplifying its architecture and providing links to self-service. ContactPartners also implemented “QueueBuster” in order to smooth peak time call traffic – callers are simply invited to leave their contact details and then hang up.

nationalgrid



CUSTOMER PROFILE

National Grid Metering — a subsidiary of National Grid that provides metering services in the regulated gas metering market. National Grid currently owns some 15 million domestic, industrial and commercial gas meters.

INDUSTRY

Utilities

WEBSITE

www.nationalgrid.com/uk/metering/

LOCATION

United Kingdom

BUSINESS NEED

Rapid and effective customer acquisition

SOLUTION

- Consultancy
- IVR enhancements
- QueueBuster – an intelligent call management solution

BENEFITS

- Customer satisfaction increase of >10%
- Operational costs were reduced by 8%, namely by encouraging people to self-serve, flattening out the calling spikes and by achieving optimal staffing levels
- Service levels met consistently with 90% of all calls being answered within 20 seconds vs. 80% prior to the introduction of QueueBuster
- ‘Up’ and ‘downstream’ process improvements within NGM
- Employees were less stressed at peak times and more engaged overall



QueueBuster then joins the queue on their behalf and reconnects customers with a phone call once it has reached an agent.

“ContactPartners quickly got to grips with our requirements and helped us identify and implement enhancements to existing capability as well as a brand new call management solution: a powerful combination that delivered rapid and compelling return on investment. QueueBuster significantly reduces the number of angry customers and increases overall customer satisfaction – customers hate hanging on the telephone, but are happy to receive a call back without having to wait in a queue,” comments James.

Rapid and compelling ROI

Within a very short timeframe, NGM realised significant benefits:

- The customer experience was improved. A number of surveys showed that customers readily adopted the new and improved technologies and that this led to increased levels of customer satisfaction. Satisfaction levels increased by over 10% and many commented on the novel option to leave their contact details and to avoid waiting in a queue
- Operational costs were reduced by 8%, namely by encouraging people to self-serve, flattening out the calling spikes and by achieving optimal staffing levels
- OnStream consistently met its target service levels with 90% of all calls being answered within 20 seconds vs. 80% prior to the introduction of QueueBuster. This was doubly beneficial in that contractual and financial liabilities were avoided due to call handling standards being achieved
- The introduction of the new ‘self-service’ capabilities enabled ‘up’ and ‘downstream’ process improvements within NGM, resulting in further efficiency improvements and cost savings. One particular example was the introduction of messaging to encourage customers to ‘self serve’ and book meter installation appointments via the web portal. This reduced calls and costs in to the Centre and importantly, enhanced customer satisfaction by providing another option to satisfy the customer’s requirements
- Employees were less stressed at peak times and more engaged overall as they were able to use their skills and knowledge to deliver consistently good levels of customer service

“ContactPartners helped us achieve considerable and tangible benefits extremely quickly. The bottom line is they are experts at making customer contact ‘better’ – and ultimately professional. In terms of ContactPartners’ working style, I’d sum it up with 3 words: focused, passionate and timely,” concludes James.

On 24 October 2011, OnStream was acquired by Macquarie Group for £274M. ContactPartners and NGM continue to collaborate closely on various customer management initiatives.

About National Grid Metering

National Grid Metering is a subsidiary company of National Grid and provides metering services in the regulated gas metering market. National Grid currently owns some 15 million domestic, industrial and commercial gas meters.

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James Cole, Contact Centre Manager, National Grid Metering (NGM)



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