

# Switching on to customer engagement



Electricity North West is trialling a new way of managing the electricity network to increase its capacity and keep customer bills down at the same time. Three months into the trial, the company is rolling out a series of customer surveys as the next stage in its customer engagement cycle.

Electricity North West, the company who operates the electricity network in the North West of England, is conducting a trial known as Capacity to Customers (C2C) as part of Ofgem's Low Carbon Networks Fund. C2C will use new technology and innovative commercial contracts to increase the amount of energy that can be transmitted through the region's existing electricity network.

## How it works

The existing electricity network is designed to keep the lights on when things go wrong by keeping some capacity for emergency use. This allows electricity to be re-routed following a power cut (fault). Typically, the majority of customers are affected by a fault once every three years. So for most of the time, only half of the total capacity is used with half reserved for emergencies. By reconfiguring the network and working smarter, this extra emergency capacity can be released for everyday use.

## Talking to customers

Customer engagement is at the heart of this trial and active customer participation is key to its success. The company has been using a variety of channels to talk to new and existing business customers about taking part in C2C. These include a targeted mailshot, a website which features an explanatory video, customer focus groups and seminars and an in-depth customer survey. This helped the company to understand if customers

were willing to take part in the trial and how best to structure C2C contracts.

Now that the trial is live the company is developing a suite of surveys that will be carried out throughout the lifetime of the trial, led by market research specialist, Impact Research.

**Post acceptance survey** – a survey of existing and new customers who have been offered C2C managed contracts. The key focus of the survey is the customer's motivations for accepting the C2C offer and the barriers for those who rejected it.

**Post fault survey** – aimed at customers who have experienced a power cut during the trial. The survey will ask for feedback on the timing, duration and acceptability of the power cut. Customers should experience faster restoration times due to the way the trial network has been reconfigured.

**Ongoing performance measurement** – quarterly surveys carried out until the end of the trials in September 2014. These surveys will compare overall levels of satisfaction of customers served by trial circuits compared to those outside of the trial area.

To find out more visit:  
[www.enwl.co.uk/c2c](http://www.enwl.co.uk/c2c)

To find out more about Ofgem's low carbon network fund visit:  
[www.ofgem.gov.uk](http://www.ofgem.gov.uk)

## Case study

The first manufacturing customer to sign up to C2C was W.Howard, a manufacturer of MDF mouldings based in Greater Manchester. The company has signed up for the maximum eight hours outage duration with no flexible terms such as protected days or protected circuits and with a maximum of two outages per annum.

Jonathan Grant, chief executive said, "We were initially approached with a questionnaire from Electricity North West about our electricity usage, the type of business we are and whether we wanted to take part in a new project. I filled it in because electricity consumption is a hot topic in our business and we ourselves are generally always looking at new ideas."

Jonathan then met with the C2C commercial manager and attended a local engagement workshop to understand the proposition in greater depth.

W. Howard needed to consider how C2C would work for them:

- The length of time they could afford to be without electricity
- How many times per year this could occur without major disruption to their customers, and
- How much this would cost the business and the compensation required.

The company reviewed the potential impact on costs in a number of areas such as labour and overtime, transport, emergency lighting, cleaning equipment and administration costs.

Jonathan told us, "The reason we decided to sign up to C2C was that we understood why this project was necessary. To upgrade the current infrastructure to meet future demand will cost billions which would have to go on our electricity bill as well as other peoples. It, therefore, made logical sense for our business to support the project.

"We also realised that power cuts could occur anyway so it's better to know how long we are going to be off for, having a better line of communication and being compensated for it, whereas under normal circumstances we would not be."

To minimise the impact of possible power cuts the company is considering installing a standby generator for the office. Jonathan said, "We know power cuts don't happen very often but having a generator as a backup means we know we can always keep the computers and telephones working."

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