



Making customers' lives easier by simplifying and personalising their experience

We're working in partnership with **Southern Water** to transform and simplify their customer experience, so that their customers are happier and more able to self-serve online.

Water is essential to every aspect of our lives, and we are fortunate in the UK to have a strong network. Most people never need to contact their supplier once they've set-up an account, but when there is an issue it's important that they can easily access support when they need it.

We've been handling customer calls for Southern Water since 2013 and from speaking to customers, we gathered a huge volume of data that provided patterns and insights into other aspects of Southern Water's customer experience. In-depth analysis helped us to uncover the root causes of frustrations and complaints that were having a negative impact on customers and the company.

We discovered that many customers were receiving bills that were difficult to understand and could be up to 15 pages long, forcing them to phone up

to speak to an advisor. Unusual activity on their account took a long time to resolve, and it was hard to complete simple tasks, such as submitting a meter reading, online. If they were moving house, they often had to contact the company several times to change their details.

To tackle the root causes of customer issues we worked with call centre advisors to explore all of the customer journeys. We mapped customer pain points and used data to quantify, forecast and highlight areas of improvement.

In 2019, this data and insight was used by Southern Water to help inform the case for their organisation-wide transformation programme. We are now working together, as a key customer experience partner, to review and improve all aspects of the customer journey.

Being proactive to tackle the root causes of poor customer experience

By taking a proactive approach we are helping to identify issues and contact customers sooner. One area we have helped to improve is the billing exception process. If there's unusual activity on an account, such as a sudden increase in water usage, Southern Water applies a billing exception to freeze any additional charges while the cause is investigated.

However, in some cases it was taking a long time to resolve, and the customer was faced with a huge bill when the billing exception was finally lifted, which caused a great deal of anxiety. Now, by working with Southern Water to help redesign the process, the time taken to resolve billing exceptions has reduced to 14 days, and rather than wait for the customer to call Southern Water, we contact them first and keep them informed throughout.

This has reduced the number of calls to Southern Water from worried customers by more than three quarters (76%).

If a leak needs to be investigated, we ensure that customer advisors know the right questions to ask, so they can understand whether it needs to be investigated in the customer's home or in Southern Water's network. By being proactive we have been able to reassure customers, offer support and improve their experience.



Together we've also improved the billing experience.

Customer bills have been redesigned so they are easier to understand and reduced in length from 15 pages to three, with further improvements to come.



Personalised support for better customer experience

Personalisation is a key part of excellent service to ensure customers are understood and being listened to. We segmented the different types of Southern Water customers and developed personas to help us tailor conversations and offer appropriate support. During our trial period, customer satisfaction scores averaged 9.8 out of 10 for those who received personal service compared to 8.6 for those who didn't. One customer said:

“They sorted out my request very quickly, gave me choices and gave me information on using water wisely. It was a pleasure to speak with someone so nice and helpful.”

As well as improving customer experience, the number of repeat contacts were reduced by over 15%, providing additional cost and efficiency benefits. We're rolling-out persona-based conversations throughout Southern Water's customer teams, continually testing and monitoring along the way.

By identifying and supporting financially vulnerable customers and segmenting customers based on behaviour, we have also reduced the number of accounts referred to a debt collection agency to 10.5%. Previously, all customers who failed to pay their bill within 50 days were referred to a debt collection agency. Our debt management team took a personalised approach and rather than wait for a debt to become serious, we began to offer support to those who may be in difficulty and to send text and email reminders to prompt habitual late paying customers. This has increased the amount of money paid that's attributable to these channels by 247%.

Rethinking the online journey



Southern Water's online experience was also frustrating customers. After just a few steps on the company's website, many were giving up and emailing or calling instead. We looked carefully at frustrations with the main website and customer portal and embedded a customer experience designer within the Southern Water web team to review how people behaved online.

The team found that less than 50% of customers were able to complete tasks online and nearly 70% gave up after trying to submit a meter reading.

Together with Southern Water, we used this data to redesign the customer online journeys. This made it much easier to pay a bill, submit a meter reading or close an account. Now, 80-90% of customers who start these tasks online complete them.

Successfully transforming customer experience without unintended consequences

When a company embarks on a major transformation programme, and a lot of change is happening at once, there can be unintended consequences for customers. In 2020, we helped to reduce this risk by creating a Model Office team to test and safely implement the multiple changes identified in the transformation programme. We selected experienced advisors, who understood Southern Water's customers, to trial solutions and focus on simplification and personalisation.

The opportunity to trial changes first has been hugely positive. David Lloyd, from Southern Water's innovations team, says: "The model office is instrumental in improving our work with customers. It's de-risked the process, making sure changes don't affect every customer. Having a sandbox like this has been a dream come true."

By working in partnership with Southern Water and putting the customer at the heart of every process,

we have significantly improved their customer experience. Donna Howden, Head of Customer Service at Southern Water, says: "Without the support of Capita, we wouldn't have progressed this quickly. They've accommodated every request for support and put the customer at the heart of everything they do. The way that we work together is the epitome of a partnership."

We're continuing to work collaboratively with Southern Water to adopt innovative ways to improve the customer experience. For example, we are working together to re-design the process when a customer moves home, so advisors can deal with everything at one time, and even proactively predict when customers will move using data modelling. We're also introducing cloud-based technology to overcome issues with legacy systems and Artificial Intelligence to respond to simple customer queries, giving advisors more time to support customers with complex queries.



68%

Reduction in complaints since 2015



76%

Reduction in billing exception calls



9.8/10

Personalised customer experience score



247%

Increase in payments received as a result of the digital collections campaign

[Find out how we can transform your customer's experience](#) >