



Complaint Handling for Utility Companies

Transforming performance through professional customer services

The efficient and effective handling of customer complaints is an escalating issue for providers of water, gas and electricity services.

In the water industry, the regulator and consumer groups are becoming increasingly vocal about complaint levels. Moreover, the energy regulator Ofgem has introduced tough new complaint handling rules from July 2008, imposing substantial fines for those organisations failing to meet new standards.

Trying to manage rising customer service expectations while driving down overheads is a major challenge for utility companies. Hazell Carr, one of the UK's leading specialists in complaint handling management and resourcing, offers a professional, proven and economical solution to the problem.

Raising the stakes on complaint handling

With industry regulators determined to reprimand organisations who fail to meet service standards, the need for utility companies to find new ways of dealing with complaints and delivering improved customer service levels is escalating. Several water companies have recently been hit with record breaking fines for their failures and unless companies take appropriate action, this trend looks set to continue.

While the Consumer Council for Water recently reported record numbers of complaints and enquiries in their sector¹, water industry regulator Ofwat expressed concern in its 2007 annual report² that companies were failing to meet the required standards:

"There are two areas of concern. First, some companies have misreported performance data to us and failed to meet the standards required by the Guaranteed Standards Scheme (GSS). Second, some companies have not provided the service we expect following the introduction of new contact and billing systems."

Meanwhile in the energy sector, stringent new complaint handling standards – backed by heavy fines – have been introduced for the gas and electricity industries by their regulator, Ofgem³.

From 1 July 2008, failure to comply with the new standards could lead to enforcement action by Ofgem, which will be able to fine companies up to 10% of their turnover for non-compliance.

According to Ofgem's chief executive, Alistair Buchanan: *"We expect the new standards to add to customer confidence by underpinning the pressure that competition places on suppliers to treat customers well. I'm confident that the companies will rise to the challenge. But if they don't – we now have the ability to take regulatory action."*

¹ Consumer Council for Water: Annual complaints & enquiries report 2006-07

² Ofwat: Levels of service for the water industry in England and Wales 2006-07 report

³ Ofgem press release 9 April 2008 (source: www.ofgem.gov.uk)



"Hazell Carr was able to deploy in the region of 20 individuals, from an Operations Manager, through Team Leaders, to complaint handlers on a peak load project. Whilst on-site, they worked hard to ensure productivity and performance levels were met, whilst the more senior members of the team assisted with in-house process enhancement and re-engineering work. We would definitely consider using them again for future peak load projects."

**Andrea Owens, Head of Contact Centres
Thames Water**

A specialist solution, proven over a decade

Hazell Carr is one of the UK's leading specialist providers of professional customer service and complaint handling resources.

For more than a decade, we have worked with companies in the utilities, financial services and public sectors to transform their complaint handling environments, through blending first-class customer service skills with robust, proven processes.

We are able to provide senior individuals, from team leaders through to senior operations and customer service managers, to support both our own and in-house teams.

The combination of our experienced teams and established processes means our utility clients are able to remove the risks associated with some of their major customer service tasks:

- Handling and categorising client billing enquiries
- Handling complaints, including escalated and Director's complaints
- Handling telephone calls both on client sites and on our own, utilising our own call centre capabilities

"Hazell Carr was able to swiftly deploy a large team of highly skilled staff to support the clearance of outstanding complaints and escalation cases. They deployed the team in an extraordinarily short space of time and the individuals were all very qualified, had relevant experience, were quick to learn and demonstrated a high level of professionalism. I would definitely consider using Hazell Carr in the future to support peak workload demands."

**Angela Mancini, Head of Escalations and Complaints
British Gas**



Managing peak loads and preventing backlogs

Many organisations have a need for interim resource during peak periods, especially billing periods. When customer correspondence is at its highest level, in-house teams are under increased pressure and backlogs become a real threat.

With our extensive experience and expertise, Hazell Carr is able to provide hands-on support, guidance and motivation to in-house customer service teams.

Our interim resource solutions mean that our clients can select one or two individuals for a day or two, through to teams ranging from tens to hundreds for months and even years.

Strategic improvement and best practice

In addition to complaint handling and overall customer service improvement, Hazell Carr is able to provide a range of additional solutions, including:

- Process documentation, re-design and enhancement
- Root cause analysis
- Effective Management Information
- Systems training
- Provision of best practice advice
- Quality assurance programmes

"Southern Water has used Hazell Carr for over 12 months now. They provided us with a team of skilled staff both on and off site and were able to increase staffing levels at very short notice. They have been an invaluable resource that has enabled Southern Water to clear complaint backlogs, return to BAU quickly and remain there. The staff were quick to learn the relevant skills and have proved to be a confident, professional resource that we would be happy to work with again if workload demands."

**Sally Ansermoz, Customer Relations Manger
Southern Water**

THE BENEFITS

- Increased first time resolution and reduced escalation rates
- Improved consumer satisfaction ratings, delivering competitive advantage
- Reduced complaint handling costs, minimising overheads
- Protection from escalating regulatory demands and rising penalties
- Best of breed procedures, processes and Management Information
- A professional approach contributing to your brand strength

"Hazell Carr has been providing South East Water with senior complaint handlers for over a year. Their ability to provide high calibre resource to supplement our in-house teams has been central to the ongoing success of our operations. We would not hesitate to recommend Hazell Carr's services."

**Dr Howard Handley, Director of Customer Services
South East Water**

What we provide

Hazell Carr offers a broad range of services across the entire customer service arena which we can tailor to meet our clients' needs on every occasion:

- Short-term provision of interim resources to address peak-load issues
- Long-term outsourcing and insourcing arrangements
- Process enhancement projects to revitalise complaint handling operations
- Quality Assurance programmes and audits to assess the quality of complaints work
- IT links and data transfers necessary for complaint outsourcing projects
- Performance management of both contact centres and complaint handling teams

A flexible partnership for success

At Hazell Carr, our goal is to deliver operational excellence for our clients, in an area which, while of vital and increasing importance, is not their core business focus.

Our existing clients attest to the fact that, while we take care of their customer complaint handling issues, they are free to get on with the job they do best – delivering a first class product to their customers.

In the process, we are able to minimise costs, and maximise the beneficial impact of professional complaint handling, in building and maintaining the reputation of a major brand.

If you would like more information on how Hazell Carr can help, please call us on 0118 951 3989, email us at enquiries@hazellcarr.com or visit www.hazellcarr.com



Hazell Carr is one of the UK's leading specialist providers of complaint management, skills resourcing and customer service solutions.

For more than a decade, Hazell Carr has provided companies with complaint handling, customer services, actuarial, pensions administration, project management, process development, performance management, compliance, systems and training expertise.

With experience across many different sectors and projects, our customers benefit from a highly experienced, skilled and versatile resource pool (staff and associates), helping them manage workloads, develop best practice and transform their levels of customer service.

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