



DeFG
Consumer • Energy • Performance

2020

**Potential Fault Lines
Under the Utility's
Customer Strategy**

Annual State of the
Utility Customer Final Report

OVERVIEW

As I write this overview, I can't help but hum the great lyric by the Rolling Stones: "You can't always get what you want, but if you try sometimes, you just might find you get what you need." That lyric goes a long way to summarize what many customers think of their utility customer service in 2020.

The Annual State of the Customer Survey is an exercise in "moneyball;" in short, we asked 1000+ consumers across the United States a series of questions to test the most basic assumptions underpinning utility customer strategy.

There are a number of tracking questions from prior years to provide trends analysis. Just as importantly, we have added new questions to explore new dimensions or offerings, e.g., residential solar or electric vehicles, or questions not typically asked, e.g., the level of customer trust of the utility.

The findings provide plenty of fodder to analyze further. As in past surveys, there is good news. Most customers believe utilities provide good customer service and value their utility over other service providers.

However, the findings also point to growing fault lines underneath the utility, especially investor-owned utilities. Our collective assumptions around reliability, equity and ownership may be outdated. Like with all fault lines though, it is necessary to dig to see them. We have begun to ask the tough questions of consumers to get their input, and their answers may surprise you.

Jamie Wimberly
CEO, DEFG LLC
March 2020

WHO ARE WE?

DEFG LLC is a research and advisory firm focused on customers in the utility sector. We provide the building blocks for customer value creation and future earnings.

The Utility Customer Research Consortium (UCRC) is a blue ribbon panel of executives working together to identify opportunities for improvement and innovation in customer service and care. The UCRC members represent large energy utilities and leading vendors from across North America. The current membership represents over 70 million customers.

Jamie Wimberly, CEO
Phone: 202-255-2860
Email: jwimberly@defgllc.com



We explored the level of customer trust and value in their utilities, and responses were positive.

57%

gave their utility company's customer service a top rating.

73%

found it easy to interact with their electric utility.

47%

say that they trust what their electricity says and does.

57%

of consumers gave their utility company's customer service a positive rating.

When asked about utility reliability and compensation for outages, reactions were divided.

49%

believe their utility is prepared to keep lights on during a natural disaster/emergency.

63%

would rather get power back on sooner during an outage over receiving a gift card.

55%

agree that consumers should be compensated when power is shut off.

68%

believe in their utility's reliability to keep lights on with minimal disruptions.

Utilities are providing enough information, but customers are looking for mobile payment options.

56%

say utilities provide enough information to customers to help manage electric usage.

72%

say it's important for electric utilities to offer the ability to pay using mobile platforms.

57%

say it's important that local utilities support reducing emissions.

33%

believe that their utility supports solar and other renewable energy.

When asked about residential solar energy and electric vehicles, customers showed interest.

30%

are interested in purchasing an electric vehicle in the next two years.

46%

would need much more help or information if they go solar or purchase an electric vehicle.

29%

say the best form of utility ownership is public power/local governments or co-ops/customers.

47%

are interested in owning or leasing solar power in the next two years.