

Northumbrian Water

Northumbrian Water is the North East section of the wider group Northumbrian Water Limited (NWL), providing water and sewage services across the region.



The Organisation

Northumbrian Water Limited (NWL) operates in the North East of England, where it trades as Northumbrian Water, and in the South East of England, where it trades as Essex & Suffolk Water. Northumbrian Water provides water and sewerage services to 2.7 million people with an operating area of 9,422km² through 16,965km of mains and 29,724km of sewers. It supplies the major population centres of Tyneside, Wearside and Teesside, along with large rural areas in Northumberland and County Durham.

The Challenges

With the utility company's customer focused and results driven ethos, obtaining and analysing customer feedback is crucial to developing and improving customer service across the business.

Historically, Northumbrian Water used an outbound system in place for manually gathering information on whether the service that a particular customer received was satisfactory, and if the issue had been resolved, therefore obtaining a score of the overall service delivered, and any additional customer feedback. The collated data was proving itself valuable to the business by providing insight into customer service performance and procedures; Northumbrian Water wanted to take advantage of this and expand the process. However, given its manual nature, such an expansion would be extremely costly, especially in terms of labour. There were also issues with the length of time required to collect the volume of data desired by Northumbrian Water to complete the process.

Richard Seales, Customer Contact Manager at Northumbrian Water, said: "We simply didn't have the resources to achieve the desired results by scaling up the same manual process. We needed to increase the volume of feedback, while simultaneously reducing the number of resources required to obtain it.

"Our manual customer feedback systems were also confined to the operational contact centre side of the business, and, while very valuable here, this meant that we had no visibility on these same service issues with customers who called in with a billing query," he continued.

The Solution

Northumbrian Water realised that the solution lay in technology that could automate the entire process, providing detailed customer satisfaction surveys on a day-to-day basis.

"After attending a series of workshops, forums and presentations over the course of twelve months, and speaking with a variety of providers, we struck up a relationship with members of the team at Aspect. One of the major

factors that contributed to our initial interest was the opportunity to enrol in a free trial – given our relatively restricted budget for the project,” Seales commented.

Aspect PES is a SaaS-based advanced suite of customisable outbound customer engagement applications. The suite is designed to provide personalised, compliant, and cost effective interaction experiences entirely in the cloud. Integrating with Aspect’s Interaction Management capabilities, Aspect PES allows businesses to complement their agent-based outbound campaigns with a fully automated solution requiring no additional hardware or telephony, no capital upfront investment and without requiring additional headcount.

Aspect PES was implemented at Northumbrian Water’s contact centre on a one-month trial basis on a percentage of voice-based contacts in the operational side of the business in December 2013. This gave Northumbrian Water the chance to proof the product, see the sort of information it would produce, and ensure that the concept was the right fit for the business before making the full investment.

After very positive results, the wider suite was implemented the following month (January 2014), adding an SMS feature, and expanding the operation to include billings operations.

“Aspect PES is based on access via the cloud, which fits with our strategic focus on agile IT. With the trial in place within two weeks, providing the foundations for the full implementation to take place over another two-week period, we found both the product and support team were very flexible. The lack of a complicated procurement process also facilitated moving everything forward with speed, so we could meet our need for immediate implementation: a fantastic and efficient customer experience,” said Seales.

The Results

The one-month trial of the voice feature of Aspect PES was very successful, producing a 10 per cent response rate, widening the range of customers from which feedback could be gathered in the process and providing a better overview of customer satisfaction within that area of the business.

Seales discussed the success of the project, and said: “We found the software was easy to use, but support was always on hand when needed to ensure that everything was up and running smoothly as soon as possible. After the positive results in the trial, we didn’t feel the need to have Service Level Agreements put in place. However, the results we have received at this stage have far exceeded any that we would have put in place. The volume of data has enabled us to identify and analyse customer feedback performance on both a team and individual employee basis.”

With surveys being conducted between 5-7pm on weeknights, Northumbrian Water had achieved around 22,000 responses in the first three months since full implementation of Aspect PES, with a roughly 50:50 split between the voice and SMS features. Progressing from the initial trial period, the suite is now operating at over 20 per cent response rate, further demonstrating the value of incorporating SMS and expanding the technology to the billings processes.

“The fact that so many people are taking the time to give feedback demonstrates the value of the process, both to Northumbrian Water and our customers, as we continue to strive for the optimal customer experience. We have been delighted with both the results and service we have received from the support team, and we look forward to a productive relationship moving forward,” Seales concluded.

Further to this, Northumbrian Water has seen an improvement in its already-impressive scores for Ofwat’s Consumer Experience Survey, part of the Service Incentive Mechanism. In between the years 2012-2013 and 2013-

2014, Northumbrian Water has seen a .16 point increase from 4.46 to 4.62, making the organisation joint second highest scoring water and sewerage company in the whole of the UK.

Due to the project's success, NWL may look into the possibility of expanding the use of Aspect PES to the other sectors of the business – Essex and Sussex Water, and, with a webchat offering on the horizon, a similar survey feedback process could also be used in this area as well.

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About Aspect

Aspect is on a mission to simplify and improve customer engagement. Our enterprise software is used by millions of agents every year and supports billions of consumer interactions around the world. Our best-of-breed contact centre and workforce optimisation applications help companies keep agents engaged while providing exceptional customer service experiences. Our flexible, highly scalable solutions for self-service and live interaction management and workforce optimisation are available on-premises or in any hosted, private or public cloud environment. For more information, visit www.aspect.com/uk. Follow Aspect on Twitter at [@Aspect_Europe](https://twitter.com/Aspect_Europe). Read our blogs at <http://blogs.aspect.com/uk>.

