

Severn Trent Water

Severn Trent Water (Severn Trent), part of Severn Trent Plc, was established 1974 as a regional, state-owned water authority. Based in Coventry, the company is responsible for water management and supply, and waste water treatment and disposal, in the catchment areas of two of the UK's largest rivers - the Severn and the Trent.



Results

- Collected over £1.8m in the first two weeks of going live
- Improved contact strategy for debt collection, increasing right party contact (RPC) levels by over 10 per cent
- Making it easier for the customer to pay, and facilitating re-paying schemes to suit each individual
- Cost saving on hardware maintenance, and saved time for the IT department

Solution

- Aspect Proactive Engagement Suite (Aspect PES)



The Company

Severn Trent is the world's fourth largest privately owned water company, serving over 8 million people across 4.2 million households and businesses in the UK. The organisation covers water supply, wastewater treatment, and operating services for a vast region including the Bristol Channel to the Humber, and from mid-Wales to the East Midlands.

The Challenges

Severn Trent prides itself on offering combined residential bills for water supply and sewerage that are the lowest on average in England and Wales. However, there are number of constantly growing external pressures that Severn Trent has to contend with to keep prices down, including rapidly increasing energy costs, taxes, and regulatory fees, as well as the need for continued investment to meet higher legal and environmental standards. In any circumstance, the company offers several different ways to help customers that are struggling to pay their water bills, with each payment plan suiting individuals' needs and circumstances.

The firm's outbound operations in its contact centre in Coventry have an objective to recoup as much revenue as possible from outstanding bills.

Priya Odedra, Customer Relations Manager at Severn Trent, explained: "The key to successful – but carefully handled – debt collection is to hit as high levels of 'right party contact' as possible. We want to make it easy for customers to pay their water bills within mutually beneficial timescales, and feel like they are being listened to, and understood by us."

"With a move to new premises, out-dated hardware – including a dialler that was no longer supported by the supplier – and a need to be where the customers were in terms of how they prefer to contact their suppliers, including mobile, SMS, and email. It was clear our debt collection operations needed a technology overhaul," she said.

Customers that have not paid their bill on time are sent either a letter, or the debt collection team will attempt contact via telephone.

Odedra added: "We also had to ring fence a lot of IT and operational resource because the dialler required constant maintenance, as well as a lot of manual work if any campaigns needed amending. It was clear that it had become cumbersome and took away time that could have been better spent elsewhere in the contact centre. We knew we wanted to avoid bringing in new hardware, and had some knowledge of the benefits that a cloud, or hosted solution could offer."

This, combined with a desire to improve RPC levels, prompted the utilities provider to perform a tender process.

The Solution

Severn Trent evaluated several suppliers, before selecting Aspect Proactive Engagement Suite (Aspect PES).

Odedra commented: "We went with Aspect for two distinct reasons: firstly, the functionality of the product. When identifying the capabilities we needed in the chosen product, it was the best fit for purpose. Its reporting functionality was a key point for us, as it could be tailored specifically to the key performance indicators we needed to measure.

"Secondly, the service from the team was of a very high standard. Aspect is personable, instant, and easy to deal with," she said.

Aspect Proactive Engagement Suite (Aspect PES) is a Software-as-a-Service, fully automated, advanced suite of customisable outbound customer engagement applications. Through voice calls, SMS, and email, the suite provides personalised, legislation-compliant, and cost effective interaction experiences for Severn Trent's customers, hosted entirely in the cloud. Aspect PES fully supports Severn Trent's live agent-based outbound campaigns, requiring no additional hardware or telephony, no capital upfront investment (subscription based), and no need for additional headcount.

Accounts for multimedia contact are automatically selected & uploaded to the system at the beginning of each day. Depending on the stage of the debt cycle that the customer is at, the account list is split into 'types' of strategy or campaign, with 15 running at any 1 time.

Aspect's Answer Machine Detection functionality prevents the transfer of voicemail to contact centre agents, as they are managed by automatic messages with a call to action, such as to call into the contact centre themselves. This ensures that every call transferred through to an agent is the correct contact.

At the end of each day, all of the activity with each customer on the call list is collated into a results file, clearly indicating the next step, such as whether the customer had paid or not.

Severn Trent's contact centre managers are able to make campaign changes and scale Aspect PES up or down depending on the need for capacity via a secure web portal. Changes can be made instantly, with no downtime, and agents are immediately ready to go live.

Working with Aspect, Severn Trent has adopted a 'blended' approach to its contact centre, in that agents are able to make outbound debt collection contact or take inbound customer enquiries, depending on call volumes. Agents hear a 'whisper' instruction in their headsets, which tells them whether they are able to make an outbound call, or take an inbound one. All business rules regarding blended activity can be determined within the web portal by an authorised user.

The Results

Aspect PES enables Severn Trent to anticipate customer needs and develop an effective and highly targeted contact strategy, by dialling each individual customer at the time that they are most likely to answer the telephone. When combined with the new SMS and email channels, Severn Trent has an increased chance of connecting to the right party.

Aspect PES also makes it possible for Severn Trent to email or send an SMS containing a link a customer to a secure payment gateway, if they would like to pay straight away. This not only increases the chances of recouping debts, but also makes it easier for the customer to pay. Customers are more responsive, and agents are better able to help them to achieve a resolution to recuperate payments with suitable plans and timescales.

The introduction of SMS has been welcomed by customers, as they can be read when convenient, but also since it is used as a proactive reminder that a payment is due, preventing from customers falling into arrears.

One of the key technical benefits for Severn Trent is that the IT department's time is no longer ring-fenced. Since Aspect PES is cloud-based, there is no maintenance to be performed, and scaling up or down depending on both the volume of calls to be made, as well as the staffing levels, is easily achieved by the contact centre manager. Severn Trent's contact strategy is more effective; therefore agents make fewer calls, but recuperate higher levels of missed payments.

Odedra added: "Since we implemented Aspect PES, we can better achieve maximum capacity at the contact centre, because blending agents' time between outbound debt collection calls & inbound customer service means we can make more use of their idle time. If we need more agents, we just log onto the portal & it's live within seconds.

"The relationship we have built with Aspect is very strong, and the project management team there has helped us to evaluate our contact strategy in granular detail to make sure it is the best it can be. They will always come to the table with ideas on how we can improve our debt collection processes," stated Odedra.

She concluded: "We are now able to capture those customers that previously may have been lost, because our contact strategy for debt collection has improved dramatically. It is more targeted and effective than paper, because we now use the channel of choice for our customers."

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About Aspect

Aspect's fully-integrated solution unifies the three most important facets of modern contact centre management: customer interaction management, workforce optimisation, and back-office. Through a full suite of cloud, hosted and hybrid deployment options, we help the world's most demanding contact centres seamlessly align their people, processes and touch points to deliver remarkable customer experiences. For more information, visit uk.aspect.com.

