

## **The IT System as Scape Goat**

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“Customers with complaints about their gas or electricity service typically have to contact their supplier 6 times before their issue is resolved“

A report from the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (OFGEM), that regulates the electricity and gas markets in Great Britain, says that “57% of customers who had complained were not satisfied with the response“.

OFGEM’s CEO, Dermot Nolan, said that the research findings were “frankly awful” and approached the energy company bosses demanding an audit to their complaint handling processes, and improvements in their Customer Service, by being proactive, better communicate and quicker in response.

Customer satisfaction was particularly low with Npower and Scottish Power, who blamed the installation of a new IT system, saying that the transition had been “challenging” and claimed to have recruited more than 250 extra staff to deal with the problems.

Now this is something interesting: a) The report’s findings are not breaking news. Energy sector companies have been laggards when it comes to Customer Experience, and the results are out there – see image below; b) The excuse used by that Scottish Power is recurrent. Given by internal Managers to the Board, and by the Board to the public.

I truly believe that Scottish Power – as well as all the other companies that try to improve their Customer Experience by the introduction of new technology – face a real challenge. But it’s so easy to blame the “IT System” because it is not a person and cannot defend itself.

As a Consultant, specialised in Customer Management (CRM/CX) solutions and working with companies to implement those, I ask: What about the people that chose and bought the “IT system”? The people who designed and managed its implementation? The people who actually implemented it? The people that planned and managed the change?

“IT System” implementation failures are common. But it’s not the “IT System” fault, is people’s fault! Because people forget to focus on Customer and User Experience. Because people forget to put themselves on the shoes of the customer, and analyse his/her journey, in order to have an outside-in perspective of their internal processes and procedures.

Because people forget that such a project should be owned, led and managed by the business (not by the IT department), and implemented with the business. Because people forget to start by the desired outcomes and get it wrong when it comes to scoping. Because people assume that the project has to be big, long and complex, with a big-bang deployment.

Because people build an “IT System” rather than a “Business Solution”. Because people try to adapt their business to the technology, and not the other way around. Because people try to shove all siloed departments into a monster “IT System”, rather than having a broader and strategic approach, re-designing processes and changing the way they do things.

Technology and IT Systems are the best way to improve Customer Experience. They can enable omni-channel, quick, consistent and proactive communications. They can provide a 360-degree view of the customer. They can offer an end-to-end view of the customer journey. But they need to be handled with care, by people who have the right knowledge, experience, specialism and skills.

Supplier	Customer service	Value for money	Bills (accuracy and clarity)	Complaints	Helping you save energy	Customer score
<b>England, Scotland and Wales</b>						
1. Good Energy	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	82%
= Ecotricity	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	82%
3. Utility Warehouse	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	75%
4. E.ON	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	74%
5. OVO Energy	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	73%
6. The Co-operative Energy	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	64%
7. Utilita	★★★★☆	★★★★★	n/a	n/a	n/a	63%
8. First Utility	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	58%
9. Marks and Spencer Energy	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	51%
10. Spark Energy	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	48%
11. Sainsbury's Energy	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★	n/a	★★★★☆	48%
= E.ON	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	45%
13. EDF Energy	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	44%
14. Scottish Power	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	41%
= SSE	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	41%
16. British Gas	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	39%
17. Npower	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	31%