

Improvement Needed with Self-Directed Customer Service Channels at Natural Gas Utility Companies

Alagasco; DTE Energy; PSE&G; and Questar Gas Rank Highest in Satisfaction in Their Respective Regions

WESTLAKE VILLAGE, Calif., Feb. 11, 2015 [PRNewswire](#)/ -- Interaction with a customer service representative on the phone has driven satisfaction up significantly among gas utility business customers; however, self-directed service channels are less impactful, according to the J.D. Power 2015 Gas Utility Business Customer Satisfaction Study(SM) released today.

Now in its 10th year, the study measures satisfaction among business customers with their gas utility company in four regions: East, Midwest, South and West. Each of the 52 brands included in the study serve at least 25,000 business customers, or 3.4 million in total. Overall satisfaction is measured by examining six factors: billing and payment; corporate citizenship; price; communications; customer service; and field service. Satisfaction is calculated on a 1,000-point scale.

Overall customer service satisfaction is 695, an 8-point improvement from 687 in 2014. Satisfaction with customer service when using the self-directed online channel remains relatively flat from 2014 (787 vs. 785, respectively). However, satisfaction among customers who use the live phone channel to interact with a representative has improved by 13 points to 758 from 745. Notably, satisfaction ratings improve for a majority of attributes that comprise the customer service factor, including courtesy of the representative (+0.15 point on a 10-point scale); the representative's concern for customer needs (+0.14); the timeliness of resolving the problem, question, or request (+0.14); and promptness in speaking to a person (+0.12).

"It's good to see that problem resolution and customer service satisfaction have improved among customers who speak with phone reps. While this may be a high-quality interaction, this can be an inefficient use of resources for gas utilities of all sizes," said *John Hazen, senior director of the energy practice at J.D. Power.* "Gas utilities need to focus their attention on improving the self-directed customer service channels for their business customers. Providing a robust and effective IVR and website to business customers enables them to address issues on their own, which can help increase customer satisfaction and save time and money for the utility."

KEY FINDINGS

- Satisfaction improves in each of the six factors year over year: billing and payment (+14 points); field service (+14); communications (+10); customer service (+8); corporate citizenship (+8); and price (+6).
- When billing statements contain useful information such as graphs or pictures, customer satisfaction with billing and payment is higher than when statements do not include such information (770 vs. 697, respectively).
- The percentage of business customers who say they recall a communication from their gas utility has increased this year to 56 percent, up 6 percentage points from 2014.

Study Rankings

East Region

PSE&G ranks highest in overall satisfaction in the East region with a score of 690, followed by *BGE* and *National Fuel Gas* in a tie with 688, and *UGI* with 682.

Midwest Region

DTE Energy (723) ranks highest in overall satisfaction in the Midwest region, followed by *MidAmerican Energy* (713) and *Black Hills Energy* (711).

South Region

Alagasco (736) ranks highest among gas utilities in the South region. *Oklahoma Natural Gas* (733) ranks second, followed by *Atmos Energy* (724).

West Region

Questar Gas ranks highest in satisfaction in the West region, with a score of 730. Following in the regional rankings are *NW Natural* (722) and *Southwest Gas* (716).

The 2015 Gas Utility Business Customer Satisfaction Study is based on responses from more than 9,200 online interviews with business customers who spend at least \$150 monthly on gas. The study was fielded from April through July 2014 and August through December 2014.

Overall Customer Satisfaction Index Scores

(Based on a 1,000-point scale)

East Region

PSE&G	690
BGE	688
National Fuel Gas	688
UGI	682
PECO	675
Washington Gas	674
East Region Average	674
Con Edison	666
New Jersey Natural Gas	666
National Grid	662
Columbia Gas of Pennsylvania	661

Midwest Region

DTE Energy	723
MidAmerican Energy	713
Black Hills Energy	711
Alliant Energy	710
Xcel Energy	710
Wisconsin Public Service	707
Atmos Energy	704
Laclede Gas	704
Consumers Energy	701
Duke Energy	694
Louisville Gas & Electric	693
Midwest Region Average	691
CenterPoint Energy	689
We Energies	688
NIPSCO	682
Vectren	679
Kansas Gas Service	678
Nicor Gas	672

Missouri Gas Energy	665
Ameren Illinois	659
Peoples Gas	655
South Region	
Alagasco	736
Oklahoma Natural Gas	733
Atmos Energy	724
South Region Average	720
CenterPoint Energy	718
Piedmont Natural Gas	717
Texas Gas Service	713
PSNC Energy	712
South Carolina Electric & Gas	691
West Region	
Questar Gas	730
NW Natural	722
Southwest Gas	716
Puget Sound Energy	710
Southern California Gas Company	708
West Region Average	698
San Diego Gas & Electric	689
Pacific Gas and Electric	677
Xcel Energy	674
New Mexico Gas Company	646

Note: Included in the study, but not ranked due to insufficient sample size are Avista, Cascade Natural Gas, Intermountain Gas Company, Montana-Dakota Utilities and NorthWestern Energy

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PR Newswire

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