Regional Utility Reboots Customer Satisfaction by Reshaping the Digital Customer Experience

By developing proactive outage alerts, a highly functional digital customer interface and omni-channel consistency across customer service processes, PNM reduced service costs while empowering customers.

Business Situation
PNM, an electricity provider that serves more than 500,000 New Mexico residents, wanted to improve its customer satisfaction ratings, which had declined as the result of an outdated Web presence and fragmented customer service systems and processes. Among other challenges, the utility was unable to provide consistent information to customers across its phone, Web and mobile channels.

Customers were not using the utility’s Web site to the extent that the company expected. As a result, PNM service reps continued to resolve customer issues over the phone, which inflated the utility’s support costs.

The Challenges
PNM operated two Web sites that provided only limited self-service tools. The sites’ design made it difficult to enhance features or update content; additionally, they were not optimized for mobile devices or integration with back-end systems. PNM’s service processes were inconsistent across its Web, phone and mobile service channels, including common transactions such as address and service changes, or notifications of unplanned outages. The lack of an omni-channel technology infrastructure made it difficult for the utility to encourage customer use of lower-cost, self-service channels for routine transactions.

Information delivery was also hampered by the company’s Web, mobile and interactive voice response (IVR) systems, which relied on different methods and business logic to pull data from the company’s multiple, siloed systems, and used inflexible, tightly-coupled application interfaces. As a result, data was presented in a variety of formats and was updated at different intervals to various channels. This increased the time, effort and cost of conducting routine transactions and resolving customer issues.

The Solution
Using our Digital Transformation Framework, we performed a digital platform assessment for PNM and then provided an end-to-end overhaul of the online customer experience, from requirements gathering, to business process reengineering and delivery of new technical capabili-
ties. (For more on this topic, see our white paper “A Framework for Digital Business Transformation.”) This program involved several of our teams, including Customer Experience Management, Cognizant Business Consulting, Cognizant Interactive, Cognizant Content Management, Cognizant Business Process Interface (TIBCO services), Digital Testing, and Digital Security and Performance Engineering. Our teams worked with roughly six departments within PNM, and conducted a delivery workshop with key PNM stakeholders.

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We began with a business consulting approach, by identifying all customer touchpoints, engagement channels, processes and transactions. We then reviewed current business processes and systems and developed an execution plan that reflected best practices used at other utility clients, as well as PNM’s vision for improved customer service.

We designed, developed and implemented a service-oriented architecture-based approach to provide new business capabilities to reshape the customer experience. This foundation establishes a single interface for all of the utility’s support channels to access its back-office systems for information such as customer payment status and service outages. Our design services team developed initial wireframes for the new Web site, as well as detailed design elements to deliver a compelling customer experience.

Based on our analysis of the overall customer journey, we reviewed and modified a number of business workflows that were dampening customer satisfaction. For example, we helped develop the utility’s first process for proactively notifying customers of unplanned outages and resumption of service. We also built and implemented interfaces and workflows that consolidated previously siloed information about outages, along with estimates for service restoration.

To improve the process of making address or service changes, we identified gaps in existing workflows and – following industry best practices – ensured simplified execution of these transactions through online and mobile channels.

By using the capabilities of our newly designed enterprise service bus, it is now easy for the utility to create interfaces with outside parties such as credit bureaus and credit card processing companies.

A new content management system (CMS) speeds the flow of timely information to customers by allowing business managers to update the Web site without help from the IT department. We also delivered a responsive mobile Web site that provides an improved user experience, as well as performance and security testing for the new delivery infrastructure.

The Benefits

The delivery of new digital capabilities and best practice support processes has improved the customer experience at PNM while reducing support costs. This digital transformation was completed in 18 months, half the time originally expected by the customer.

The new CMS has delivered significant benefits by increasing the number and timeliness of information releases, and reducing costs for developing and testing each release. The system also allows customer service reps to see the same information and screens as customers do, which speeds resolution of customer problems.

Technology improvements – including image compression, load-balancing and clustering – doubled the performance of the utility’s Web site while enhancing its security. Other tools used to execute the program included Cognizant’s JPAAS™ (Java platform as service) and the Cognizant CloudSet Continuous Integration platform, which helped automate and accelerate the build and deployment processes.

We provided PNM with the following benefits:

- Improved customer satisfaction ratings.
- Reduced issue resolution time and costs through use of the CMS to share customer views of systems with service reps.
- Enhanced the Web site to allow customers to process address changes, reducing call volumes by an estimated 10%.
- Enabled 90% of all consumer transactions to be performed through lower cost online channels.
- Increased the number of online users by 84%.
- Increased the number of visitors to the mobile site by 70%.
• Increased the number of customers using paperless billing by 80%.
• Enabled real-time alerts to be sent to consumers for issues such as service outages and payment reminders.
• Accelerated time to market through same-day publication of business content.
• Enabled the use of real-time Google Analytics reports, which provide PNM with insights into which pages customers visit most, such as those describing rebates or energy efficiency programs.

We continue to work with PNM to roll out new online features that will further enhance the customer experience and reduce operational costs. These include the ability to start, stop and transfer services, and to allow authorized agents such as property owners to perform transactions on behalf of consumers.

Online Transformation at PNM
PNM’s old Web site was text-heavy, had limited self-service options and was not optimized for mobile devices.

Its new Web site is visually rich, offers multiple new self-service options, and is optimized for use on mobile devices.
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