

Advance Your Customers' Bill Paying Experience with Today's Technology

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Not long ago, paying bills was a strictly analog activity – spread out your bills, grab the checkbook, write a stack of checks, and put everything away as the taste of stamp glue still lingers on your tongue. Thankfully, we've come a long way in a short time as consumers have embraced online and mobile billing and payment options. And the technology is not stopping there. As text messaging has proliferated, for instance, consumers are now comfortable using this medium for conversational communications with companies and other organizations beyond friends and family. Now, it's commonplace to confirm a dental appointment via text message exchange, or be alerted that a package has been delivered to your doorstep.

This onward march of tech means that utility companies have even more ways to improve their customers' bill paying experience. In many ways, it means "meeting them where they are" both physically and where they are on their digital journey as consumers.

Let's look at three ways utilities can use today's tech that's already infused in every day communication to improve customer touchpoints:

Text to Pay

So many of us – utility customers included – are never far from our smartphones these days, and texting is a big part of that connection with our phone. Since texting is ubiquitous, utilities can leverage that "always on" state to give customers a convenient way to get information. With today's "text to pay" technology, a busy parent can have a simple text conversation – with a system that can even understand and respond to emojis – to get information on their account and questions such as "when is my bill due?"

Using text to pay leverages a preference by consumers to pay directly to their biller, such as a utility, over paying through their financial institution. According to the Fiserv Expectations and Experiences Consumer Payments Survey, more consumers use direct biller payment (70%) than use bill payment through a financial institution (61%). Confirmation of payment and speed are the top reasons given, with 42% of respondents citing receiving confirmation that their bill has been paid, and 39% citing assurance that their payments get to billers quickly.

"Alexa, When is My Gas Bill Due?"

Many customers are already using Amazon Alexa to get quick information on the fly – a teaspoon-to-tablespoon conversion while elbow-deep in a cookie recipe, or pausing a show on TV to ask Alexa something about an actor who stars in the show. Utilities can help their customers in the same way, by offering conversational connections, through Alexa and other personal digital assistants, to provide information about their account, their usage, and other important information.

Donation Payments

As consumers, we see growing opportunities to donate while we're paying for goods; it could be an online retailer that lets you donate to a cause you care about, as does Amazon Smile, or "would you like to donate a dollar to heart health?" as you use your credit card at the drug store. In that same way, utilities can add that capability. As you think through adding this to your customer experience, are there donation opportunities that your customers would find meaningful?

The Payoff

As digital technology continues to advance, consumers are increasingly empowered to do more for themselves via mobile and through voice, with personal digital assistants. They expect simplicity, security and convenience, driven by billers – including utilities and other service providers – that are “raising the bar” by providing an engaging digital experience.

These technologies are already here, people are already using them, and their expectation is that more and more, the companies they do business with will integrate them into their customer touchpoints. Now is the time to get ahead of the curve and delight your customers by making bill paying and account management a more seamless – and easier, if not more enjoyable – part of their lives. You will be meeting the expectations of your increasingly connected customers. And if you exceed their expectations through the surprise and delight of a conversation with Alexa, who’s raising the bar now?