

Introducing The PSC's New Customer Experience Department

Gone are the days of calling your local cab company for a ride or flailing your arms to catch a cab driver's attention. Now you can tap a button on your smartphone and a ridesharing company arrives in minutes. If your local grocery store does not carry your favorite spices, no problem, with a click you can purchase your spices with free shipping and receive your purchase the next day.

Companies like Amazon, Google, Apple, Samsung and Uber are transforming the way customers engage with businesses. Customer experience with the aforementioned major players is affecting the way companies across all industries interact with customers. Businesses are asking themselves, how can we enhance customer options and improve the end-to-end journey customers have with our organization.

The Missouri Public Service Commission (Commission) recognizes that the utilities we regulate are eager to keep pace with customer expectations. Utility companies are attempting to meet customer demand by shifting to a customer-centric business model, meaning utilities are prioritizing customer experience and engagement by developing strategies to address customers' growing expectations and demands along with providing reliable utility service at reasonable rates.

Utility customers are not homogenous; therefore, utilities are diversifying and personalizing the customer experience by providing more payment options, products, self-service solutions, rate offerings, and communication channels. Utilities are planning for the future customer. Technology is the primary driver and as technology evolves so will customer expectations.

The Commission's response to the industry's emphasis on new technologies and customer focused initiatives is the formation of a new department. On November 9, 2017, the Commission announced the creation of the Customer Experience Department within the Commission Staff Division.

"Through the creation of the Customer Experience Department, we are acknowledging and embracing a nationwide movement towards more customer-focused utility service," said Commission Chairman Daniel Hall. "This transformation is being fueled by new technology and initiatives that allow customers more options, and it is imperative that regulation keeps pace."

With a focus on customer experience and customer expectations, the Customer Experience Department will provide testimony and recommendations on customer experience issues before the Commission.

"I am excited about the creation of this important department as we continue to engage consumers all across Missouri on utility-related matters," said PSC Commissioner Maida Coleman. Commissioner Coleman is chair of the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC) Committee on Consumers and the Public Interest. "As part of its mission, this department will continue the Commission's role in outreach and education activities."



What is “customer experience” and how does it differ from “customer service”

Defining customer experience varies by industry and organization but the one constant is customer experience focuses on the overall journey or experience with a company. An effective customer experience business strategy takes a holistic assessment of customer contact at every aspect of an organization.

The end-to-end journey for a customer may include the delivery and purchase of a product, navigating the company’s website, interactions with mobile applications, online services, social media messages, utilization of payment and communication channels, to interactions with field technicians, call centers and kiosks.

Customer experience is about the overall experience, and how a customer feels about their journey while the traditional customer service model consists of a department or key individuals

dedicated to responding to customer inquiries. Customer experience is viewed as a proactive approach to meeting current and prospective customer needs, while customer service is considered reactionary, however customer service is a part of the overall customer experience.

“Massive cultural changes are taking place within Missouri regulated utilities and these utilities are developing new products and services, empowering customers to take charge of their usage and developing strategies to transform the customer experience,” said Customer Experience Department Manager Contessa King. “The Commission’s decision to dedicate a department to the customer experience sends a signal to ratepayers that regulators are committed to examining and understanding customer experience management, customer engagement and customer demands.”

The Customer Experience Department will participate in:

- Performance metrics proposals and enforcement
- Utility infrastructure / grid modernization proposals
- Small utility rate cases and management audits
- Monitoring of low income proposals

- Emerging utility issues such as:
 - Energy efficiency
 - Solar subscriber proposals
 - Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) deployment
 - Modified rate design
 - On-bill financing

“While the customer experience can be defined as the sum of all interactions a customer has with a company, most people operate with a narrower view. Some understand it as customer service or service excellence — without recognizing that service is only one element of the entire experience.”

—7 Steps to Deliver Better Customer Experiences
Harvard Business Review