

CASE STUDY



Reliant is Fanatic About Making Customer Experience Part of its DNA

Reliant uses CX to differentiate themselves in a competitive energy market to retain and acquire customers.

Powering Your Home, your Business and Life on the Go

Reliant brings electricity, home repair services, and security to residential and business customers across Texas. Reliant is part of NRG Energy, Inc., a Fortune 200 company that is at the forefront of changing how people think about, buy and use energy. NRG's retail companies, including Reliant, are focused on powering, protecting and simplifying life for almost 3 million customers in 10 states and the District of Columbia. Collectively, NRG's retail brands are the largest providers of electricity in Texas and the largest competitive retail electricity platform in the nation.

RESULTS



- Net Promoter Score is up 152 percent ahead of previous year
- 65 percent reduction in survey/analysis costs
- Highest yearly customer renewal rate in company history
- Increased number of touchpoints surveyed by 220 percent
- Implemented CX workshops for managers/executives; deployed e-learning module across organization
- Successfully launched program where executives contact customers quarterly to hear about their experiences first-hand

Two Biggest Challenges; Customer Retention and Acquisitions

Everything's Bigger in Texas

In many states, electricity providers exist in a regulated market where providers operate as a monopoly. There is no incentive to improve service or innovate. Customers have no other options for their electricity needs. However, Reliant operates in a deregulated market and early on, the company recognized the experience they deliver to their customers could set them apart from the competition.

"In Texas customers can choose from more than 50 different providers and hundreds of different electricity plans," explained Suzie Dieth, Director of Customer Experience for Reliant.

"Customer retention and acquisition are our two biggest challenges. We pride ourselves in listening to our customers and providing a customer experience that differentiates us beyond price."

Reliant implemented its customer experience (CX) program in phases. From 2009 through 2013, the program focused on the company's call center, specifically retaining existing customers by clearly setting expectations and focusing on how customers felt after interacting with Reliant. Reliant relied on metrics and data to understand customer needs and to measure whether or not customers were happy with their service. After seeing success in key call center metrics, Reliant implemented the next phase of their CX program in 2014.

"Elizabeth is a raging advocate for CX," said Wilkinson. "Our CX program really took off when she made it a priority for her executive team and when she devoted time to it in quarterly town hall meetings with the entire organization. What we saw was our initial successes lead to more interest and word began to spread as it got equal importance in broader company meetings."

A Good CX Partner

In 2014, Reliant evolved its CX program, engaging 40-45 customer experience champions across the organization. A big part of gauging success was based on its Net Promoter Score (NPS). NPS is an index ranging from -100 to +100 and measures the willingness of customers to recommend a company's products or services to others. It is used to gauge a customer's overall satisfaction with a company's product or service and the customer's loyalty to the brand.

"We're a very metrics-driven organization," said Scott Burns, General Manager, Home Services & Customer Experience. "We realized that NPS could have pitfalls, specifically trying to achieve a certain NPS score for the sake of achieving a specific number. We decided we needed to educate leadership on best CX practices to manage our NPS efforts to make sure we were not chasing a number and instead adding the cultural side of a successful CX program as part of our DNA."

They were having a lot of success and gaining good knowledge, but there wasn't the level of accountability and responsibility the company wanted and needed to accomplish their larger goals and objectives. The team started to understand the basics of CX, but individuals weren't necessarily accountable for delivering specific results. It was important to not become complacent and to find ways to enhance and evolve their CX program.

In 2016, Reliant evolved its CX program again, working with InMoment (formerly MaritzCX), a global provider of customer experience software and services that help organizations drive higher business impact through better customer strategy, CX program design, broader data collection, and faster insights and internal action. In turn, increasing financial performance and customer retention. The InMoment team are experts at combining both metrics and culture to make CX part of a company's DNA. With InMoment's help, Reliant began implementing and building momentum for its new CX program.

Making CX Part of the Company's DNA

Vision Master; The President's A Raging CX Advocate

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"Customer experience is always an evolution, a process. It isn't a project or plan that lasts for a few months or a year," explains Dieth. "There has to be some level of consistency even if plan elements change. You have to convince the organization that it's not one year and then move on to the next event. It has to be a part of your existing program and something everybody has to take ownership of."

Burns and Dieth along with Jeff Wilkinson, Senior Director, Mass Operations set out to educate and gain executive buy in. The program got an infusion of executive support early in 2014 when Elizabeth Killinger, President of NRG Retail and Reliant, decided the company needed a stronger overall focus on CX. Killinger is the champion and the driving force in establishing the company's CX program and educating the team on the important role it plays in a company's ongoing and long-term success. She was instrumental in shifting the company's focus from believing that CX was only the responsibility of call center representatives to convincing the organization that CX was everyone's responsibility—even those who never directly interact with customers.

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The executive team has taken their support to another level. As part of their commitment to the company's CX program, Reliant executives now regularly contact customers to hear first-hand about their experiences with the company. The feedback is used to help evolve the CX strategy and ensure that leadership and the CX team have the resources they need to execute and deliver the program needed to keep customers first.

Roughly 2-3 times per quarter, Killinger holds a Customer First meeting with a board of cross-functional executives. Burns, Dieth, Wilkinson and the team discuss CX performance metrics and provide updates on key projects and upcoming initiatives. The meetings are an opportunity for leaders to celebrate key successes and discuss strategy so everyone continues to be committed to the CX journey.

CX Employee Engagement; Employee's Catch The Vision

Killinger's leadership provided immediate credibility throughout the organization. With executive support, the Reliant leadership and CX teams extended their CX strategy to expand support companywide.

Instead of having more than 45 CX champions with limited accountability and responsibility, Dieth became the hub of the program with what CX leadership started calling Customer First Fanatics embedded throughout the entire organization. Each team and department has its own dedicated fanatic that is now accountable for their efforts and the CX success of their department. Each fanatic is graded on their performance and contribution to the CX program as part of their annual review. So instead of an external CX entity trying to push initiatives, CX is now "owned" by each part of the organization. When the company kicked off this new structure, they conducted an internal survey to gauge interest amongst the teams. They were looking for responses about willingness to be involved in and contribute to the program. As could be expected, responses varied greatly. Many in the company said they had no idea what CX was, but were willing to help and participate.

One common concern Reliant kept hearing from customers was in relation to billing. Issues such as weather and the size of the home or business can affect a customer's usage and monthly bill.

Dieth remembers one team member in particular that was adamant that CX had nothing to do with him or his department.

"One member of the IT team stood out to me because he didn't think CX related to him," recalled Dieth. "In that case, we had to prove to him that it was applicable not just to him but to all functions and departments within the organization."

The entire company now celebrates Customer Experience Day every October. The company had more than 300 employees engaged in what CX leadership called a "Customer Room." The "Customer Room" was created from real customer experiences and simulates actual customer journeys with Reliant to help demonstrate and educate team members on how they can influence a customer's experience and satisfaction.

Since identifying the fanatics in their organization, Reliant has introduced a number of other internal initiatives to help create excitement about the CX program and embed it in the company's DNA.

Reliant created a program where they ask employees to nominate colleagues that have shown outstanding commitment to CX. It's a peer-to-peer recognition where recipients are recognized at regular company-wide meetings. In addition, the company highlights customer comments pulled from its surveys that demonstrate what they're doing well and that customers are noticing, like this one from their Relationship survey:

"I like that they have the monthly averaging plan; they send me a weekly report telling me what my usage was and is; they communicate with me via email; and I like being able to support other customers by giving to their fund." Reliant also conducts company-wide customer experience workshops for managers

and executives. These workshops have been so valuable that the CX team has developed an e-learning module that was deployed across the entire organization.

Reliant's Got its Ears on; Provides Excellent Customer Experience

Increasing the Amount of Listening Posts

With the executive team and fanatics on board, Reliant was able to increase the number of listening posts used to gather customer feedback.

As Dieth and the team worked to educate team members that didn't understand the value of CX and others in the organization, they started reaping the benefits of their efforts.

"We survey our customers across various touch points and drive change at both the relationship level and the transactional level," said Dieth.

One common concern Reliant kept hearing from customers was in relation to billing. Issues such as weather and the size of the home or business can affect a customer's usage and monthly bill.

"We created a weekly email that we send to our customers giving them an update on their bill and usage," said Dieth. "The weekly email uses smart meters to capture usage throughout the day to give customers an estimate of what their bill will be and how they compare to similar homes and neighbors. Customers can then adjust accordingly. It's a way for us to be transparent, remove pain points and a proof point that we're looking out for them. Every day, customers tell us in their survey responses how much they love the weekly email." The

company's ability to listen more efficiently enabled Reliant to significantly increase customer satisfaction. For example, the company's NPS score has increased 152 percent since 2015.

Closing the Loop

Reliant increased the number of touchpoints surveyed by 220 percent. Through their increased listening, Reliant is able to gather more information at various stages of the lifecycle and close the loop on customer concerns. As Reliant receives this feedback and trains its team, they've been able to use the increased knowledge they gather to significantly reduce the number of complaints. When complaints or customer suggestions are made, the Reliant CX team is able to address them quickly internally to find the root cause and determine if

it's a common complaint amongst customers. One example is the company's website.

"It's common for us to get various suggestions about our website from customers," said Wilkinson. "We review every comment and suggestion, follow up with unresolved issues within 48 hours, and go through a process to determine our course of action. I remember one time when a customer made a suggestion that made a lot of sense and would provide value to other customers. We made the change and the next month, that same customer commented how impressed he was that we listened. It feels great to know our customers notice we're listening and making the changes they request."

Reliant is Seeing Amazing CX Results

"Through our partnership with InMoment (formerly MaritzCX) we can drive change quickly," said Dieth. "InMoment has been critical to our ability to listen to our customers more effectively, close the loop on customer concerns, increase our NPS scores and make CX part of our company DNA."

RELIANT HAS ACHIEVED REMARKABLE SUCCESS, INCLUDING:



- Net Promoter Score is 152 percent ahead of last year
- 65 percent reduction in survey/analysis costs by switching to the platform
- Executives contact customers quarterly to hear first-hand about their experiences with the company based on comments customers shared in the surveys
- Hiring questions modified to include several that measure if the the employee candidate will embrace Reliants' customer-centric culture
- Conducted customer experience workshops for managers and executives; deployed e-learning module across the organization
- Celebrated Customer Experience Day in October where more than 300 employees engaged in a "Customer Room" created based on the customer's journey with Reliant
- Increased the number of touchpoints surveyed by 220 percent
- Achieved the highest annual customer renewal rate in Reliant history



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“We’re always striving to improve while trying to find the root cause of customer issues.”

“We’ve seen dramatic improvements and are doing more at all levels to be more customer centric. As a result, customer experience has become a part of our DNA.”

SUZIE DIETH, DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE, RELIANT



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