



TOP 10 CUSTOMER TOUCHPOINTS



Cities must gain the buy-in and support from the public and elected officials to secure necessary funding for smart water tech.

Optimizing the initial costs of deploying smart water tech are going to vary, mainly depending on the size of the utility. Buy-in and support will only occur when utilities effectively make people understand, what's in it for the customer. Water utilities need to communicate the value of AMI through the lens of what matters most to the end user—your customer, the consumer of your product, the ratepayer.

Investing in AMI can feel like a daunting challenge for any size city, but it's one that makes sense. The promise of AMI and proof found in countless case studies is rooted in increased operational efficiency, new dimensions of customer service, and empowerment customers to be effective stewards of water. You shouldn't wait on the meter change-out before you engage with the customer about the benefits of AMI and a customer portal.

According to McKinsey Global Institute, a smart solution is not "smart" until it has engagement from the community.

Participation will only come with public buy-in. Having a strategic plan for communicating the benefits of AMI is crucial especially if you are including a customer portal.

Define your engagement goal as well as the strategies and tactics needed to achieve that goal prior to deployment. Identify early adopters, stakeholders, and city staff that become advocates and champion your program to help create a smooth transition.

Keep in mind; it's never too early to start communicating the change to your customers.

Frequency builds trust with customers. Seth Godin says it best in his latest book, *This is Marketing*. "The market has been trained to associate frequency, with trust," explained Godin. "If you quit right in the middle of building that frequency, it's no wonder you never got a chance to earn the trust."



TOP TEN CUSTOMER TOUCH POINTS

Water utilities are entrusted with the health and safety of public drinking water. Communication is the first step to building a reservoir of trust with your customers. Here are the Top 10 Customer Touch Points to earn public buy-in and ensure a smooth AMI deployment.



Utility Bill Inserts—Many people depend on utility bill inserts for information. Use a bold graphic or infographic to explain the true cost of water. Break up cost explanations and bite-size pieces of information into a series that span billing cycles for a year.



Events—Show up and be a good neighbor. Attend local events such as festivals, races, and community-wide events. Use a tablet or phone to easily capture e-mail sign-ups. Find out where your customers frequent— coffee shops, farmers markets, breweries, gyms, grocery stores, parks—and go to them.



Blog, Digital or Printed Newsletter— Consistency is important. Commit to a cadence you can deliver. Use themes and content from the social media content calendar and expand upon them. Need to collect customer e-mail? Ask! Every interaction is an opportunity to build a robust e-mail list.



Internal communication with staff— Brand ambassadors are built from the inside out. How are you getting feedback or answering questions from employees? Don't depend on the message trickling down from management. Make internal communication a standing item on the agenda.



Local magazines and newspapers— Stay on their radar and at least three months ahead of any events or program launches. Nurture those relationships and build a bridge between them and your agency. Adding value to the relationship by becoming a trusted resource gives editors more reason to publish the stories you pitch.



Schools—Reach out to the local ISD and find out their process to distribute information to school staff, board members, parent organizations, and students. Make sure content is relevant to families and kids. Don't bombard them with information overload. Summarize information for the quick glance.



Website/City News Site—Do a simple audit of your website. Is information easy to find? Can you get to it in three clicks or less? Don't bury customers in information overload. Summarize information and offer the opportunity to click to learn more.



Social Media—Stay consistent and succinct with posts and include relevant images. Map out monthly content calendars. Use themes and trending hashtags.



Partnerships—Collaborate with local civic organizations, businesses, and community leaders to help cross promote. Tie the value of water story to their narrative. How does water align with their mission and values?



Influencers—Use a “sneak peek” to generate buzz amongst council members, active community members, your local public/prominent figures, local bloggers, etc. Invite them to tour a facility or do a ride along with a crew. How can you give them “insider” access?