

7 Innovation

Keeping ahead of the game

We want to lead the field in innovation but it's not innovation for its own sake. For us to invest in any new idea it has to result in our service being better, cheaper, easier, greener or safer. Once we have researched and tested a new idea, we bring it into the business and run with it. Recent developments include power networks that repair themselves and apps that help our field staff communicate with non-English speakers. Innovation is our lifeblood.

15

Customers can find information and communicate with us through 15 different channels at any time

448,000

Proactive messages sent to customers about power cuts

Innovative communication

We were the first electricity distribution company to launch web chat for customers. We also tested the video chat concept with our customers and it proved popular, so we launched our own. Since then, 4,800 customers have used these methods to communicate with us, with an 88% satisfaction rating.

We know that customers want to know what is happening in their area during a power cut. So, in an innovation unique among utilities, we displayed tweets from customers on our online power cut map. We were effectively answering their questions before they asked them.



How we use Twitter

Our customers enjoy communicating with us through Twitter. That's why we've held more live question and answer sessions this year, along with a 12-hour live Tweetathon. We sent 99 live updates from 8am to 8pm about all aspects of the business.

Innovation

continued

The year from April 2015 to March 2016 was a period of tremendous achievement for UK Power Networks. Customer satisfaction reached an all-time high. Reliability, as measured by the frequency and duration of power cuts, was our best ever. Safety measures, too, showed that we are continuing to accelerate improvements in this vital area.

We have achieved this success by keeping a laser-like focus on the following areas: safety, customer service and costs. We pride ourselves on leading innovation in our sector, and all the technology and new ways of working that we develop are designed to make the experience of our customers better, cheaper, greener, faster or easier, or to help us take better care of the safety and well-being of our employees and the general public. And sometimes they do more than one of these.

We are diligent about our role as a respected corporate citizen. We are working hard to earn our place at the heart of the society and the business community that we serve. That commitment includes the individuals and businesses that we support, the environment where we live and work, and the people who work for us, and their families.

Summary of our performance

Improvement since 2010/11



Lost time incidents improved by

80%



Customer interruptions improved by

42%



Customer minutes lost improved by

53%



Customer satisfaction increased by

15%*

* Since 2011/12

Innovation

Innovation is a key element of our vision for UK Power Networks. It is a standing agenda item for the executive management team and we take pride in our industry-leading position for innovation. We are not interested in innovation for its own sake, however. Any idea that we develop must result in something that is better, easier, greener, cheaper or safer.

For example, we have a project that aims to determine how energy storage could be used as an alternative to conventional network reinforcement. It will also evaluate the additional income that can be gained to maximise value and make storage a more cost-effective alternative than it is at the moment.

Not all of the innovations that we develop are high tech engineering solutions. Sometimes we develop ideas that meet human needs where we find them. For example, a large proportion of our customers have a first language other than English and this can cause difficulties when we need to attend customers' homes to repair a fault. To address this, we use a smartphone app that our employees take with them on home visits. This app has a number of common relevant phrases built into it and it enables the engineer to communicate with the customer via the translator in real time, so that the visit can achieve its purpose.

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26,000 homes

The UK Power Networks 'Big Battery' has enough storage capacity to power over 26,000 homes for one hour during average electricity demand times

Case study

The 'Big Battery'

In 2015 we built and now operate the first and, to date, the largest energy storage facility in Great Britain. The Smarter Network Storage (SNS) project features a 6MW/10MWh storage solution comprising approximately 50,000 lithium-ion batteries, located in Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire. This technology has enabled UK Power Networks to manage electricity demand at peak times without building excess capacity. By charging during the day, the 'Big Battery' stores electricity that can then be dispatched in the evening when residential customers in the town of Leighton Buzzard need it.

Explaining how the 'Big Battery' control software works to Jeremy Pocklington, Director General of Markets and Infrastructure Group at the former Department of Energy and Climate Change.

