

Pepco Holdings, Inc.

Pepco Holdings is one of the largest energy delivery companies in the Mid-Atlantic region, serving about two million customers in Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland and New Jersey. As a regulated industry, Pepco's interactions with the customer had been transactional in nature and were typically limited to answering questions about a bill.

The Challenge

Over the past several years, the organization – and the entire energy industry – had been undergoing transformation, building a more reliable electrical system. And, they began using information from this system to give customers more detailed information about their energy usage so they could conserve energy.

“We knew there needed to be more of a relationship, backed by trust and persuasion, to get the customers to change their behavior and take advantage of the new tools and technology,” said Nicole Carter, Group Manager of Customer Operations, Credit, Collections, and Remittance at Pepco Holdings Inc., Utility Operations. “To make that happen, the call center reps would be on the front line of helping us make the transition to higher customer sat scores by becoming energy advisors.”

Even though customers didn't have a choice to do business with Pepco, it became increasingly important to the company to ensure its customers were satisfied. Dissatisfied customers could impact overall company perception and commissions, along with its relationship with regulators.

“From a customer standpoint, while they may not be able to leave us, their expectation for service is set across multiple industries. We are competing with the best experience a customer has had, whether it was with a utility or as diverse as an airline or retail,” said Carter.

Pepco also had many reps with a long tenure – some have been with the organization for more than 20 years. This meant the new program needed to be able convince reps to swap highly engrained habits for new ones.

“As we started to make the transition to implement the new technologies, we knew the customer interaction relationship needed to change.”

– Nicole Carter, Group Manager of Customer Operations, Credit, Collections, and Remittance at Pepco Holdings Inc. Utility Operations.

The Solution

To help turn its reps into energy advisors and to help the organization improve its customer satisfaction scores, Pepco Holdings partnered with Ulysses Learning to help develop a training and coaching solution.

“We chose Ulysses Learning because their program was strong on developing soft skills and persuasion, along with their reinforcement around coaching. Plus, their program was highly structured with online and in-class instruction, backed by ongoing support. They were able to put the pieces together that we needed to be successful,” said Carter.

Before implementation, Pepco and Ulysses Learning did a full-scale evaluation of the contact center, looking at everything from hiring and floor layout to coaching goals and performance management. They also worked closely with the leadership to ensure the program had high-level support and that communication was in place.

During implementation and training, Pepco used a mix of classroom training along with online simulation based e-learning that allow reps to practice the new service skills in a safe environment. Next, the Ulysses and Pepco team worked closely with the coaches (supervisors and quality team) to ensure they received the training and reinforcement they needed to become more effective and efficient coaches. They set goals and expectations with both the front line and all levels of leadership, scheduling time for regular coaching and feedback sessions, along with just-in-time coaching.

To measure the program's success, Pepco regularly looked at customer satisfaction surveys, customer verbatim, feedback from reps about their coaching interactions and information from Ulysses Learning's AIM coaching database to look at trends in coaching and feedback.

Pepco also had regular calibration sessions with Ulysses Learning, the quality team and the supervisory team, listening and evaluating calls and discussing the type of coaching the rep needed to further improve the customer experience.

"This program works extremely well and we're very pleased. What sets the Ulysses program apart is the combination of training, coaching, technology and structure, because without structure and reinforcement, the changes and training won't stick."

– Nicole Carter

Results

By improving their customers' experience and turning their reps into energy advisors, Pepco Holding's new program has seen sustained success.

- Pepco's customer satisfaction scores were consistently at 90% or higher
- Pepco's ASCI score rose 28% over the previous year
- The program has received buy-in from both upper management and the frontline reps

Since 1995, Ulysses Learning has helped organizations of all sizes improve their customer service, sales and coaching performance. Using online, role playing simulations, Ulysses helps build decision making and advanced interaction skills in contact centers and at all points of customer interaction through the organization. We spent four years in research and development to create the validated content and proven methods to help companies effectively train their frontline, engage their leaders and ultimately boost their customer base.

Our simulations deal directly with the different type of emotions and challenges that customer service agents face today.