

Are Friends Electric?

Can you love an energy company?

Martin Stead, Marketing Director at EDF Energy thinks so, and he wants people to love EDF Energy.

It's a good strategy, of course - all businesses should pursue it. We all need our customers to love us.

But how can you love a commodity?

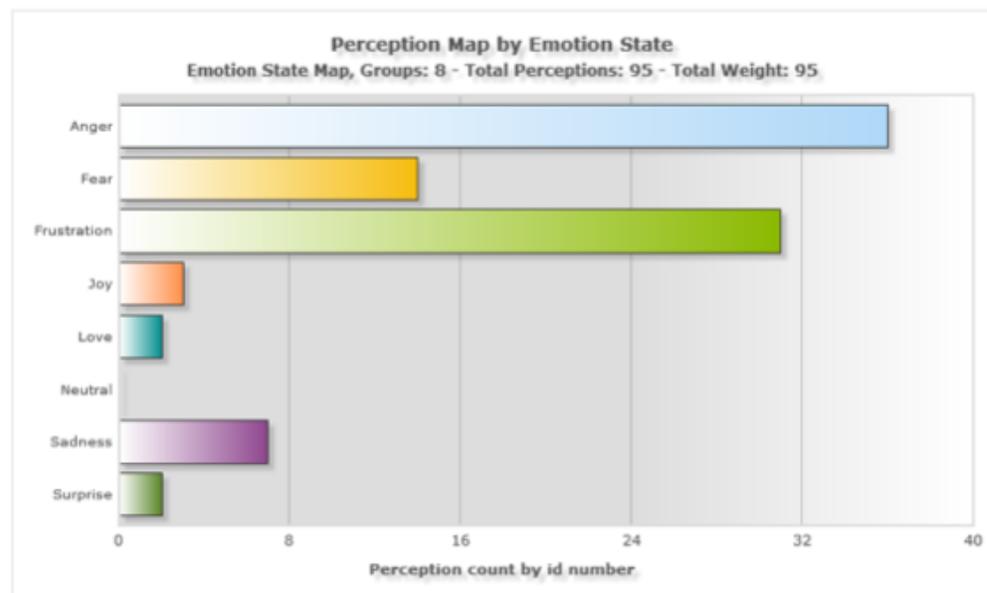
Well you might start by loving the experience of engaging with the organisation. So how is EDF Energy engaging with its customers (and we don't mean the blank, bland, bobbing little mascot, Zingy)?

We analysed 100 detailed customer perceptions from blogs, forums, review centers, and other publicly available sources. Our analysis identifies the emotional content of each perception, as shown in the bar chart below. We analysed four interfaces where the customer interacts with EDF Energy - EDF's technical support, the sales process, the website, and the Call Centre. And - oh, dear.

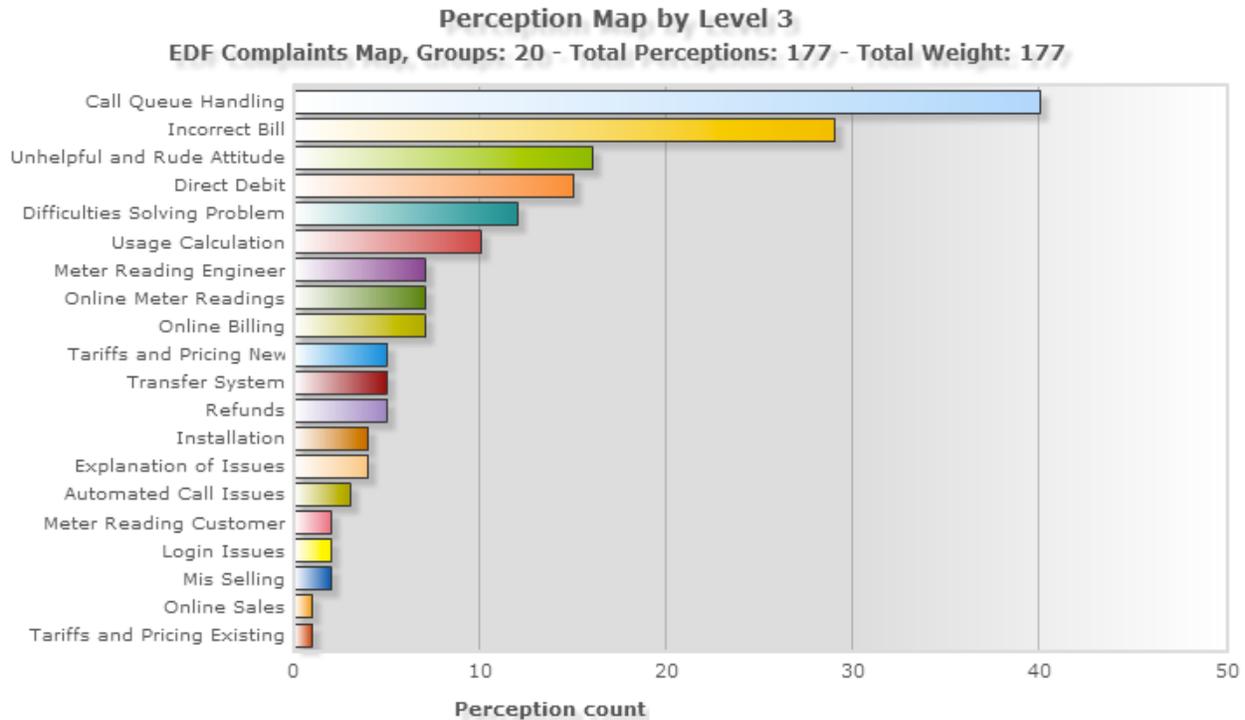
We found general contentment with EDF's technical support, the sales process, and the website. But the Call Centers, it would seem, are providing a major opportunity for a lovers' tiff.

The range of emotions we uncovered when

we analysed all of the text written by EDF Energy's customers run from joy to anger. But then, the course of true love never did run smooth.

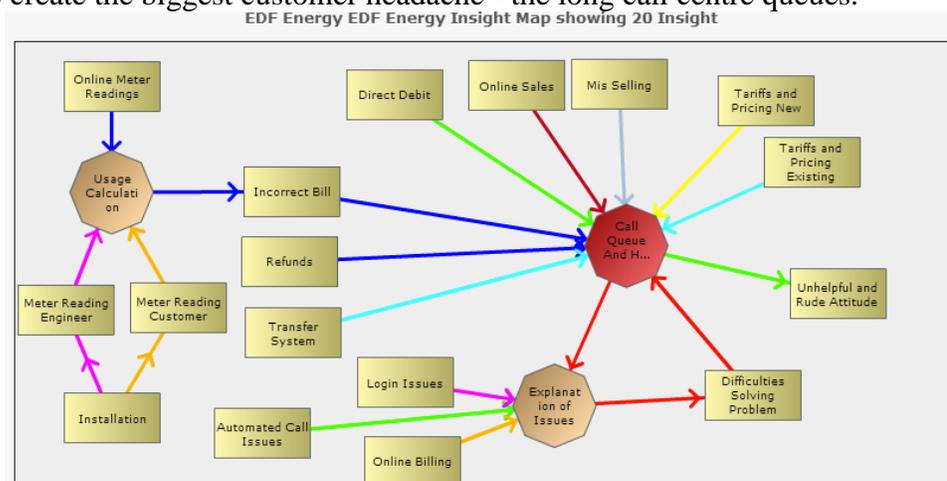


So what was generating this outpouring of emotion? Specifically, we found 21 recurring issues, predominantly associated with Call Centers, as shown in the figure below. Call queue handling and incorrect billing were the most-often complained about topics on the forums we looked at.

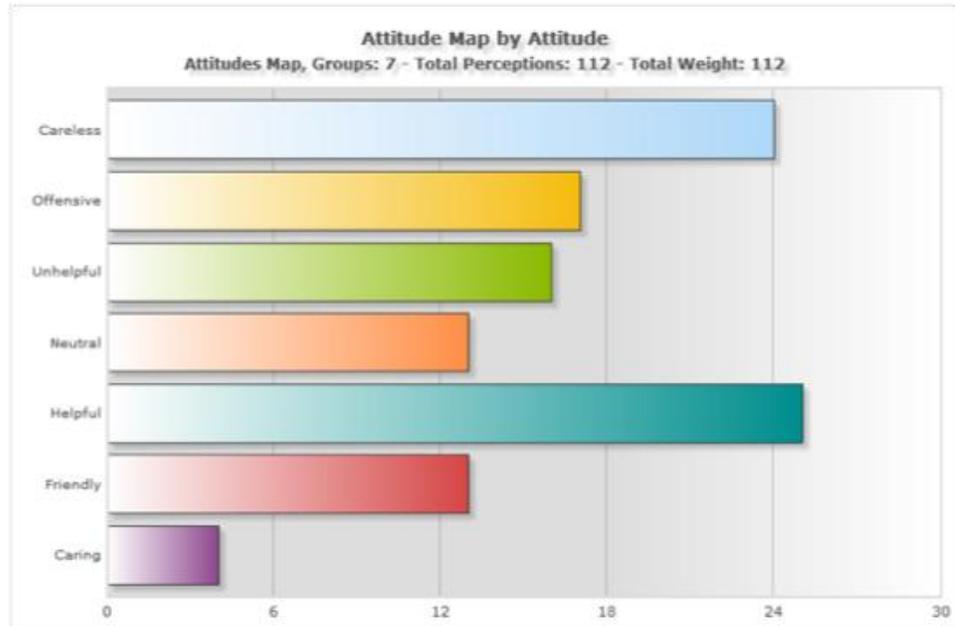


We determined and mapped the relationships between each of the 21 issues, and found that 9 of them are conspiring to create the biggest customer headache - the long call centre queues.

The map shows a downwards spiral where long queues are leading to frustrated customers having difficulty in explaining the issues, which is leading to difficulties in solving the problem, which is leading to long queues, which is leading to frustrated customers having difficulties in....and so on.



A worrying insight from our analysis is the occurrence of rude and unhelpful attitudes arising in EDF staff (See figure, right) Rude and Unhelpful should not be in The Lover's Lexicon, even if you subscribe to the John Mellencamp / Susan Cadogan "Hurts So Good" School of Love.



We believe these attitudes are a symptom of the pressures of dealing with long queues and the downward spiral discussed above.

There's a light in the black though - a light bulb moment, you might say. We could see from the mapping, that the root cause of many of the problems is incorrect meter reading, leading to an incorrect bill, leading to a call to the company, which leads to.....

So perhaps a perfect, hassle-free, LOVELY meter reading experience might be a good thing for EDF Energy to explore? We can immediately see how a focus in this area could differentiate EDF Energy from the competitors, engage with the customer in a more meaningful way, and create the opportunity to look after the customer. Make them Feel Better (about) Energy, as it were.

It is certainly possible to love a commodity. (Coffee is a commodity but I LOVE Caffe Nero and I HATE Starbucks, the tax-bucking little tinkers. But wait - isn't it the case that Caffe Nero hasn't paid corporation tax for two years? Well, yes, but I still love Caffe Nero - the staff are brilliant. I feel loved. Oh, and the coffee tastes better. But if that were to change - if the staff became Rude and Unhelpful, or the queues were too long, or maybe if they consistently got my bill wrong ..)

If EDF Energy wants to be in the Love Game, they need to be an attentive lover, and get much more innovative on their engagement with customers, or it will be "I'll Give It A Year" rather than "Love, Actually".

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