# How to

## 👍 Improve 👍

### Your

# UTILITY CUSTOMERS'

# Website Experience

# The State of the Industry Is Changing

**1** Behind

**2** Begin to catch up

**3** Almost there

**E Source has been benchmarking utility websites since 2002 and we've seen a shift in the utility website design space over the years.**

At first, utility websites were well behind the curve compared to other industries.
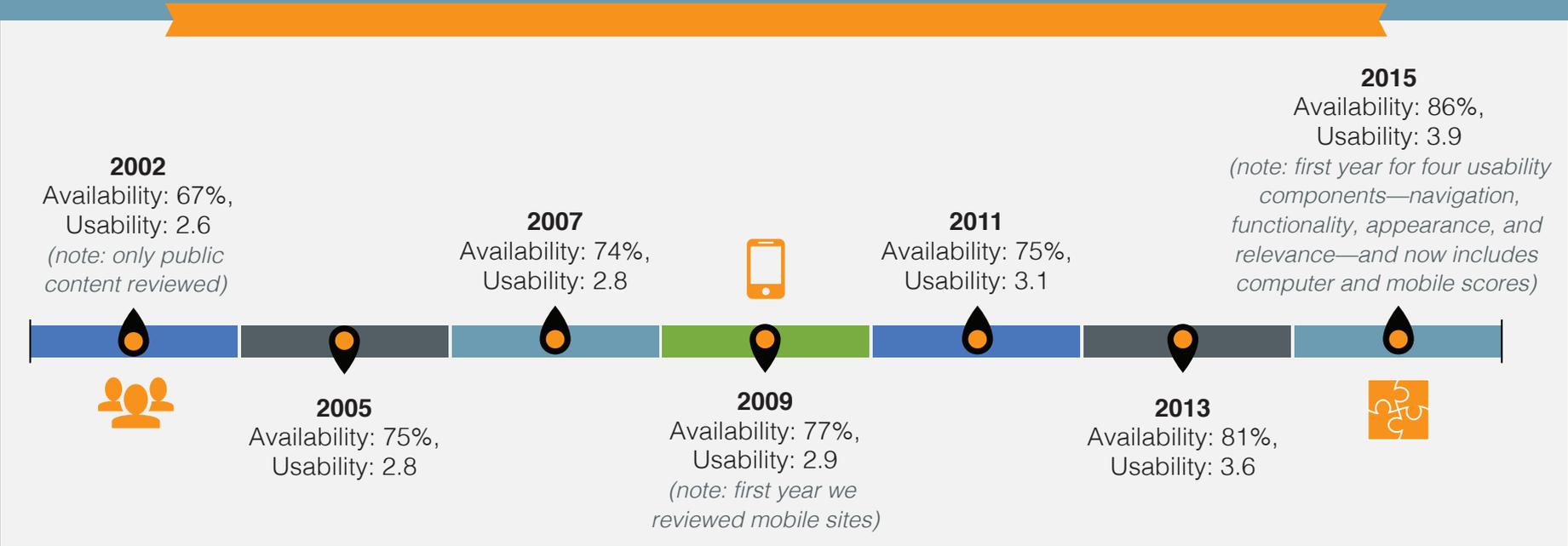
Then, utilities took a good look at the customer and how to serve them using the website, and began to provide a better experience.

Now, many utility websites are on par with other industries and keeping up with customer expectations.

But, website design is a never-ending process and utilities will need to continue the effort to keep up with growing customer expectations.

In our Review of North American Electric and Gas Company Residential Websites: 2015, we found that utility websites were easier to use and offered more of the features we looked for in 2015 than in prior years. The availability of website features rose to **86 percent** in 2015, and the overall average usability score of features improved to **3.9** (on a 5-point scale where 1 means very poor and 5 means excellent).

**2002**
Availability: 67%,
Usability: 2.6
*(note: only public content reviewed)*

**2005**
Availability: 75%,
Usability: 2.8

**2007**
Availability: 74%,
Usability: 2.8

**2009**
Availability: 77%,
Usability: 2.9
*(note: first year we reviewed mobile sites)*

**2011**
Availability: 75%,
Usability: 3.1

**2013**
Availability: 81%,
Usability: 3.6

**2015**
Availability: 86%,
Usability: 3.9
*(note: first year for four usability components—navigation, functionality, appearance, and relevance—and now includes computer and mobile scores)*

# What Attributes Are Most Appealing to Residential Customers?

**Attributes from top-performing websites in 2015 included:**

Recently redesigned

Mobile-optimized

Easy to read and use

Simple in look, feel, and content

While there have been positive improvements among the top utilities in providing a mobile-optimized experience that presents an organized and professional look and feel, there is still room for improvement when it comes to providing updated design and personalized content on utility websites with a seamless customer experience across devices.

# Forward-Thinking Improvements for Meeting Customers' Expectations

Offer personalized account features like Communication Preferences, Account Balance, and Payment and Billing History.

Recognize that appearance matters and presents an area of improvement for utilities that affects other usability components.

Emphasize important information on each website page in a format that's easy to use.

Provide a mobile-optimized experience for customers.

Deliver a consistent, seamless experience and work toward an omnichannel experience.

# Offer Personalized Account Features

## Availability

**100%**

## Utilities Have Basic Features

- Contact Us
- My Account
- Payment and Billing Options

## Availability

**52%**

## Utilities Don't Have Personalized Account Features

- Communication Preferences

*(Note: availability = percentage of features found on 2012 utility websites; communication preferences = where customers can control what, when, and how their utility communicates with them).*

The Communication Preferences feature has many design elements to consider, and we found that those utilities that do offer this feature could make some improvements. Enhancements to consider for this feature include:

Position the Communication Preferences feature prominently behind login

Offer choices of subjects and services customers can receive information about

Give customers the option to choose from multiple communication channels

Allow customers to change their contact information together with communication preferences

# Appearances Matter

Websites are reviewed using four usability components for each feature, and **appearance** is consistently the lowest rated, with an overall score of 3.7 out of 5.

**Appearance**
How is the look and feel?

**Navigation**
How easy is it to find?

**Functionality**
How easy is it to use?

**Relevance**
How pertinent is the content?

## How can utilities improve the appearance of their websites?

- Create a consistent look and feel that matches your brand on all pages throughout a website

- Add icons, graphics, or tables to highlight important information

- Organize information with bold headers or use boxes to display sections of information

- Reduce the amount of text and enlarge text so that it's readable from all devices and uses up excess white space

# Emphasize Important Information

Utility websites have abundant information for customers to absorb, but customers feel frustrated when they have to wade through so much text, especially when using a mobile device.

To improve content display, utility websites should summarize essential information up front by:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Providing easily digestible information | Using bullets and drop-down menus | Displaying multiple options with tables for easy comparison |

# Provide a Mobile-Optimized Experience

"I use my mobile device on a daily basis to access the Internet. I want this experience to be easy."

**40%** of all website features reviewed in 2015 are still not mobile-optimized, but our study shows that features with a mobile-optimized experience are rated higher for overall usability than those that are not mobile-optimized.

**Mobile-optimized**
(n = 463 features)

**4.1**

**Not mobile-optimized**
(n = 533 features)

**3.7**

Note: Average usability rating is on a 5-point scale where 5 is the most positive score.

Mobile-specific website

Responsive design

Adaptive design

**Mobile-optimized**

*excludes mobile apps

**For a mobile-optimized website, we recommend designing simple mobile pages that draw attention to the most important information and have an organized layout that makes it easy to quickly accomplish tasks.**

Start with designing content for a mobile device and expand the content as the screen size expands.

Focus on the most important, action-oriented content on a page.

Focus on new features customers want that aren't being offered as commonly as other, more traditional features.

# Provide a Consistent, Seamless Omnichannel Experience

A consistent appearance across a website in both brand colors and attributes, as well as between different device types, has become the customer expectation. This anticipation of consistency extends to all four usability components.
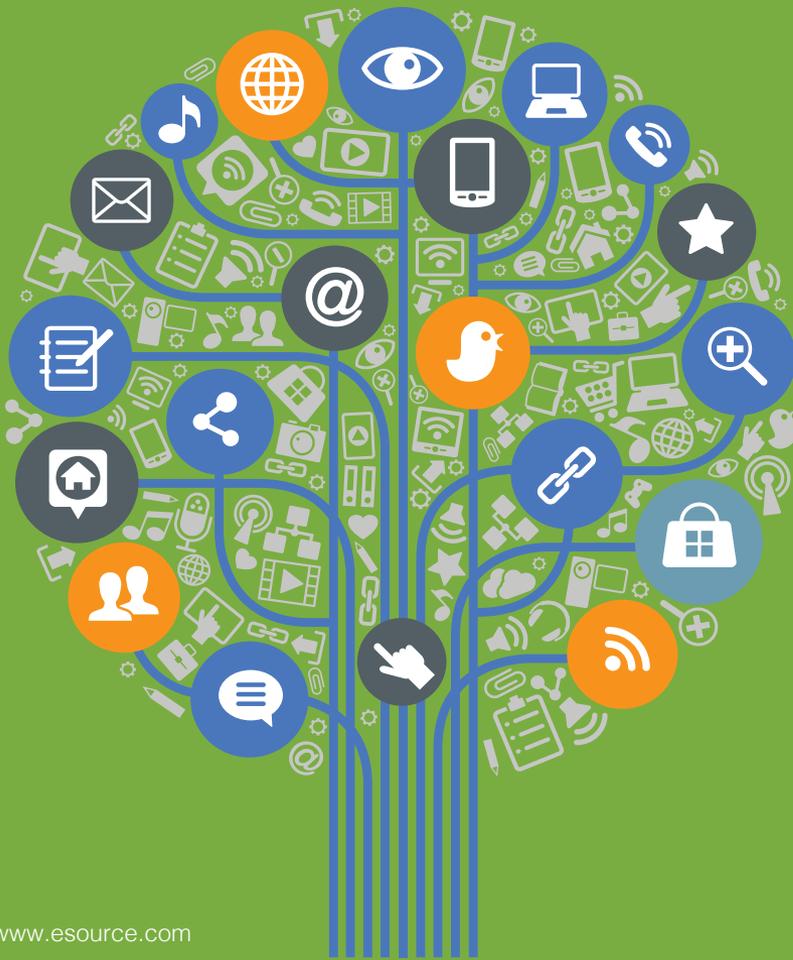
By focusing on a company brand promise, utilities can create a fluid usability experience.

We recommend looking at each usability component in our study to ensure consistency.

Ask yourself these questions when considering an update or redesign:

**?** Does the brand remain at the forefront of each page?

**?** Does the content remain relevant across devices?

# Keep Redesigning!

The most important reason:
**The customer wants a clean and modern website**

Other industries are consistently redesigning websites, which sets the bar high for customer expectations, and therefore utility websites.

It's increasingly important to keep up with customer expectations, with deregulation and competition becoming more of a reality for utilities.

## Where should you start with your website redesign?

Make it mobile-optimized

Add and improve key features

Summarize and organize information

Improve appearance

Provide consistency across devices

Work toward an omnichannel experience

Visit **www.esource.com**

for more data about your residential customers.

For 26 years, E Source has been providing research, consulting, and market research to more than 300 utilities and their partners. This guidance helps our customers advance their efficiency programs, enhance customer relationships, and use energy more efficiently.

The E Source Review of North American Electric and Gas Company Residential Websites: 2015 assessed the websites of 102 US and Canadian utilities. Between January and May 2015, a group of residential customers accessed and used the top 13 features from both a mobile device and a laptop computer. These features are informational or transactional and were identified by E Source market research, input from industry thought leaders, and E Source expertise as the features residential customers most wanted to see on their utility's website.

For more information, visit **www.esource.com** or contact us at **1-800-ESOURCE** or **customer_service@esource.com**.

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