

# Improving Customer Care Activities in Electric Construction Consulting Industry in Vietnam

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**Abstract:** The paper analyzes the current state of the electricity industry and consulting to build electricity in Vietnam, an industry that is being monopolized by the state. However, as a service provider, customer care and service need to be improved in the context of the electricity market being gradually privatized with foreign players participating in the market. The article proposes a number of solutions to improve customer service in a number of state-owned companies in this industry.

**Keywords:** Customer care, customer service, electric industry, construction consulting industry, Vietnam.

## 1. THEORETICAL BASIS OF CUSTOMER CARE ACTIVITIES

### 1.1. CUSTOMERS AND CUSTOMER CARE

The concept of customer is defined by many researchers as well as business experts in textbooks and books. Prominent and popular are Nguyen Thuong Thai (2007), Peter F. Drucker (1954), Tom Peters (1987). The concept of customer today is understood in a broader sense, the customer is the entire object that has or will have a demand for certain products and services that need to be satisfied.

In business, customers play a vital role to the survival of the business. Therefore, customer care to satisfy needs as well as retain, and open up opportunities to find new customers is an important and necessary element of each business. The goals of customer care will often revolve around: building customer trust, creating loyal customers, attracting new customers, saving costs (Tien, 2019, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d).

In customer care operations, two commonly mentioned factors are:

- Customer satisfaction: defined by Bachelet (1995), as well as mentioned by Oliva, Oliver and Bearden (1995), Oliver (1997), Zeithaml and Bitner (2000), Kolter (2001).

- Customer loyalty: defined by Engel and Blackwell (1982), as well as mentioned by Oliver (1999).

Today's science care activities are developed and plentiful. However, each activity has certain advantages and disadvantages. To choose the most suitable method, businesses must base on their goals as well as resources. According to Manish Nepal, customer care activities can be divided into the following categories (Tien, 2017; Tien & Anh, 2017):

- Walk-in service department: The type of customer care service is slow and inconvenient if customers need to visit the store directly. When moving to a digital platform, this type has almost been superseded by other forms.

- Support by phone and e-mail: preferred by traditional businesses. However, many customers expressed dissatisfaction with the repeated listening to the pre-recorded voice and the long waiting for e-mail.

- Support through online chat: is a combination of traditional and modern, very convenient and the mechanism of action is similar to support by phone and e-mail. However, this type of response is much faster and has a lower investment cost.

- Self-service (self-service): today, customers ask for more than a quick response: almost immediately, friendly, accurate... Self-service takes place through chatbots, FAQs (frequently asked questions), basic knowledge articles, product guides, instructional videos, ...

- Support via community and forum: community and forum are channels whose "power" is decided by users. The response rate in this type of customer service is erratic because it depends on how active the community members are and whether the topic is "hot" or not.

The customer care process can be divided into the following phases (Tien & Anh, 2017):

Pre-purchase stage (information gathering stage): This is the first step that influences customers' decisions to buy and use products and services in the future.

Purchase decision stage: After evaluating the purchase criteria, the customer comes to the purchase decision.

Post-purchase stage: After buying, in the process of using, the customer will continue to analyze, evaluate, compare products of other businesses or products that can be replaced. This is the stage to increase decision-making for a customer to buy back a business next time, because:

- When satisfied: The customer will continue to buy this product, service or other products of the same business; or refer others to buy.

- When not satisfied, customers will take the following actions:

Criteria to evaluate the quality of customer care services in each business include (Gronroos, 1993):

- Activities to bring convenience to customers to use the service
- Activities related to the human element providing the service include:
- Other customer support and care activities

In this study, the author chose the Gronroos model to evaluate the quality of customer care services of the Power Company according to the following criteria:

**Table 1. The criteria for evaluating the quality of customer care services**

STT	Criteria	Review unit
1	Technical quality assessment	Quality design, consultancy, supervision; customer satisfaction levels (03 levels)
	Perceptions of customers about the quality of services provided by electricity construction consulting businesses	Good - Acceptable - Poor
2	Functional quality assessment (quality of customer care)	Customer satisfaction level (03 levels)
2.1	According to the human factor	
	Customer assessment of employee's service attitude when communicating with customers	Customer satisfaction level (03 levels) Affordable - Acceptable - Not friendly
2.2	Support policies	
	Customer reviews of the customer care support policies that the business provides	Customer satisfaction level (03 levels) Satisfied - Acceptable - Not Satisfied
2.3	Operational evaluation offers convenience	
	Time for electricity enterprises to troubleshoot problems with the currently used customer services	Customer satisfaction level (03 levels) Fast - Timely - Slow
	Payment methods, contract performance	Customer satisfaction level (03 levels) Convenience - Acceptable - Cumbersome
	Contact method to solve the problem	Customer satisfaction level (03 levels) Convenience - Acceptable - Cumbersome

*Source: Christian Gronroos(1984)*

**1.1. PREVIOUS RESEARCHES**

*Table 2. Previous researches*

STT	Research work	Author	Year of publication	Content
<b>International</b>				
1	The SERVQUAL model	Zeithaml, Parasuraman& Berry	1988	Building a scale of Servqual includes 22 variables measuring 5 components of service quality
2	Model Zeithaml and Bitner	Zeithaml and Bitner	2000	Customer satisfaction is a more general concept, from this point of view, customer satisfaction is affected by many factors: product quality, price, circumstances factors, personal factors.
3	Factors affecting customer satisfaction at Ethiopian commercial banks Ababa branches	Fikirte Mersha	2016	Customer satisfaction is a vague and abstract concept. Satisfaction will vary from person to person, product to product and service after service. The state of satisfaction depends on a number of unifying factors such as psychology, economic and physical factors
4	Economic strategy, international business and management	Nguyen Hoang Tien	2019	In the section "Customer satisfaction", the author mentioned the correlation between quality and customer satisfaction, as well as the influence on the company's revenue. Thereby shows the importance of scientific care activities
<b>Domestic</b>				
1	Completing the customer care work of Duyen Hai Power Company	Nguyen Thanh Hung	2017	The author gives 6 key factors in customer satisfaction: power supply reliability, information to customers, electricity bills - electricity recording, customer service, business image. joint, social consensus
2	Award for completing customer care activities at Go Vap Power Company	Lam Vinh Phong	2017	The author gives 6 key factors in customer satisfaction issues: Information to customers, business image, customer service, reliability of electricity supply, invoices and records. power number, social consensus
3	Some solutions to improve the quality of customer care services at Cu Chi Power Company - Ho Chi Minh City	Tran Huy Binh	2018	The author gives the key factors in customer satisfaction that are: technical facilities, policies for employees directly in charge of customer care, awareness of public officials. staff, organizational structure, ...

Source: Own synthesis

**2. CURRENT SITUATION OF CUSTOMER CARE AT ELECTRICITY CONSTRUCTION CONSULTING JOINT STOCK COMPANY 3 (PECC3)**

**2.1. COMPANY OVERVIEW**

Power Construction Consulting Joint Stock Company 3 is one of the four consulting units of Vietnam Electricity.

Areas of business include:

- Recycled energy
- Thermal
- Hydropower
- Grid
- Environment
- Survey

Organizational structure and position of the customer care department

(1) Department of Customer Care

Department of Customer Care under the Business Planning Department

Currently, the Customer Care Department has only one official member, Ms. Tran Diem Khanh - Deputy Head of Business Planning Department. When there is a job related to the customer care activities, Ms. Khanh will assign tasks to the staff in the room (for example, when surveying customers, Khanh will come with 2-4 members). In fact, the Customer Care department is only a small part of the Business Planning Department, and does not really have a voice or an important role in the company. Therefore, the writer will raise solutions to improve the quality of medical care, thereby enhancing the company's position, which are detailed in Section 3.

**2.2. REAL SITUATION OF CUSTOMER CARE ACTIVITIES**

**2.2.1 Comparison of scientific care activities over the years**

(1) In 2018

If the satisfaction score is from 1 to 5 (with 1 being the lowest level), it can be summarized how customers evaluate PECC3's customer care activities as follows:

*Table 3.Satisfaction assessment table in 2018*

STT	Content	Satisfaction level				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	Progress					
2	Survey					
3	Estimates					
4	BCKTKT					
5	Consistency, synchronization					
6	Line agreement work					
7	Profile form					
8	GSTC					
9	Combination					
10	Improve					

Source: PECC3's 2018 Customer Care Report

Through the table above, we can see that the stages that need much improvement in quality are: Survey, Estimation, Financial Reporting, Synchronization. The stages that are well appreciated are: Formality, Coordination and Improvement (compared to previous years).

(2) In 2019

Combining direct customer consultation sessions in 2019, the Business Planning Department has sent the opinion survey to customers present to evaluate comments and immediately collect with the number of handouts. 59 votes and received 54 votes of customer reviews (equivalent to 91.53%) with the following contents:

- a) Model of consulting products

*Table 4. Evaluation table of consulting product form*

STT	Content	Assessment			
		Weak	Avg	Fair	Good
1	Cover page, fonts, print quality, bound		2	17	<b>32</b>
2	The form of presenting the project		1	23	<b>26</b>
3	Project content		5	<b>32</b>	14
4	Attached documents		7	<b>26</b>	17
5	Profile payment settlement, liquidation	1	3	<b>24</b>	19
6	Contract documents, minutes of contract negotiation		1	18	<b>26</b>

Source: PECC3's 2019 Customer Care Report

b) Progress

*Table 5. Progress Assessment Table*

STT	Content	Assessment			
		More than 1 week late	1 week late	On time	Early
1	Filed for the first time	11	1	<b>28</b>	3
2	Submit corrections	5	6	<b>31</b>	3
3	Record settlement, liquidation	1	4	<b>36</b>	3

Source: PECC3's 2019 Customer Care Report

a) Human resource

*Table 6. Human resource Assessment Table*

STT	Content	Assessment			
		Weak	Avg	Fair	Good
1	Professional qualifications and experience of employees TV3		5	<b>25</b>	23
2	Human resources are sufficient to meet the demand for quality and progress of the project		7	<b>29</b>	15
3	Present at the scene and handle the incident at the request of the customer		4	<b>25</b>	19
4	Communication, behavior and exchange of customer information of TV3 employees		2	14	<b>37</b>
5	Communication, behavior and customer information exchange of TV3 leaders		3	13	<b>36</b>

Source: PECC3's 2019 Customer Care Report

c) Level of customer satisfaction with products and consulting services

*Table 7. Assessment of Customer Satisfaction*

STT	Content	Assessment			
		Not satisfied	Temporarily Satisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied
1	In terms of quality, form of the project		6	<b>35</b>	8
2	Project personnel		11	<b>31</b>	5
3	Project implementation progress	1	19	<b>25</b>	5

STT	Content	Assessment			
4	Relationship, communication, cooperation with customers	1	5	28	16

*Source: PECC3's 2019 Customer Care Report*

**2.2.2 Customer care and the company's performance**

Through the steps of surveying, collecting opinions and improving service quality, at the same time honestly recognizing the unsatisfactory aspects and promoting their strengths, it can be seen that the customer care activities of PECC3 are comparable. for good. However, the writer realized that there are still shortcomings in the scientific care process, for example, the official staff is too few (only one member), so there are solutions to improve the customer care department detailed in Section 3.

**3. SOLUTIONS TO COMPLETE CUSTOMER CARE ACTIVITIES AT ELECTRIC CONSTRUCTION CONSULTING JOINT STOCK COMPANY 3**

**3.1. VIEWPOINTS AND OBJECTIVES TO COMPLETE CUSTOMER CARE ACTIVITIES**

With the current situation of customer care activities and the analysis in Section 2, the development orientation of customer care is shown as follows:

- Improve every aspect of doing the project
- Using advanced software to manage and respond to customers' schedule and requirements
- Minimize errors in calculation and design, especially in volume declaration and cost estimate
- Need to strengthen the coordination between departments and divisions in the company.
- Strive for the average customer rating to shift from “Fair” to “Good” and the satisfaction level from “Satisfied” to “Very Satisfied”.

The top targets are outlined as follows:

- Constantly improving human resources, paying special attention to high-quality human resources
- Developing and modernizing the technology used
- Regularly exchanging information, promptly grasping customers' requests
- Solve complaints skillfully, friendly, and amiably
- Build trust and reputation with customers
- Improve the quality of customer care programs

**3.2. SOLUTIONS TO COMPLETE CLIENT ACTIVITIES**

**3.2.1 Solution 1: Improve the efficiency of training health care specialist**

Currently, customer care activities are mainly undertaken by members of the Planning and Business Department. The customer consultation meetings or survey organization are in charge of the Business Planning Department. However, in order to be more professional in customer care, it is necessary to train professionally professionals to take on this job. Practical activities can be listed as follows:

- (1) Organize channels to receive customer comments

Currently, on the website of PECC3 in the contact section, there is only one form, after filling in the information and submitting it, the system will transfer to the company's office, from which the Office will classify and send to related departments / departments for handling. However, it can be improved by establishing a hotline and a separate customer care channel so that when comments are sent from customers, the customer care department will be the first recipient and have a direction to handle, immediate feedback demonstrating the professionalism and efficiency of the company.

- (2) Training and building a division of customer care specialists

The company should study and plan methods of training in the customer care specialist department. It can be through training classes or recruiting to ensure the essentials of a professional customer care specialist: smart, flexible, calm, quick problem solving, good improvisation. Through the channel At this point, the company will quickly absorb customer opinions, and at the same time customers will also have more convenience in communication and information exchange with the company.

**3.2.2 Solution 2: Promote the application of technology in scientific care**

Currently, the application of technology to business and service activities has become very popular. In order to improve customer care activities, the application of information technology is necessary to be more convenient in management and operation while enhancing the image of the company's capabilities.

The proposed technological solutions for application in medical care are proposed as follows:

- (1) Complete customer database system

Until now, the comments, customer survey reports have been done manually, even the archiving is just a collection of scanned files. In fact, PECC3 has not built a detailed and specific customer database system, which leads to time and effort when it comes to data export. Setting up a database to store and manage customer

complaints to serve as a basis for analyzing, evaluating and finding solutions to improve service quality to better serve customers is the real thing. necessary, needs.

(2) Optimize the customer care process

To increasingly improve the quality of customer care services, optimizing the customer care process is essential to create all favorable conditions for customers to communicate with the company. Technology application will help solve this problem effectively

### **3.2.3 Solution 3: Improve the quality of customer care services**

This is the core solution in perfecting customer care activities. Quality and service attitude are always the prerequisites for determining the image and reputation of the company to customers. We need to improve the following:

(1) Improve customer interaction

To do this, in addition to having a team of professional customer care specialists, it is necessary to have good enough facilities to easily and facilitate customers to approach the company. It must be clear to customers that the company has a professionally trained and professional customer care department and a well-invested place to receive customer comments - causing sympathy for customers from first impressions.

(2) Improve customer care strategy

A specific and methodical customer care strategy will help improve the quality of this service. In today's competitive environment, which company has a better customer care strategy, that company will have many advantages and advantages in retaining customers as well as promoting its image. Planning strategic care care is the first and very important step in the CC process.

(3) In-depth consultation and care, establishing sustainable relationships

It is important in consulting services to understand what customers need and expect from their company. Knowing that and performing well their role will make customers appreciate the company's capabilities. To do this, in addition to listening to customers' wishes, specialists must know in-depth advice to customers which options and services are the most appropriate.

(4) Improve service quality

This is very important in improving the quality of CSA activities. When consulting services are performed well, all items are highly appreciated by customers, negative comments will be minimized, thereby indirectly reducing the volume to be handled and handled by the customer care department. The reality shows that, in the period from 2018 to 2020, the negative reviews of customers about the quality of PECC3's contract performance are relatively many. This makes it even more essential to recognize the problem and find ways to improve and overcome the company.

## **3.3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **3.3.1 Conclusion**

From the analysis and assessment of the customer care operations as well as the service quality of the company, and at the same time assessing the level of customer satisfaction with the service, the thesis has clarified the importance of the customer care work. and offer possible solutions to complete this activity. The main objective of the thesis is to analyze and contribute to help PECC3 increasingly improve its image, reputation and improve its capacity in the electricity construction consulting market, the most practical way is to improve the high quality of service and especially having the right view to reform and perfect the company's customer care department.

### **3.3.2 Recommendations to the Board of Directors of PECC3**

For the reasons mentioned above, in order to better improve the reputation and image of the company, the writer proposed to PECC3's Board of Directors to give proper attention and seriously recognize the matter of completing the Customer Care department as well as solutions to improve the service quality of the company.

### **3.3.3 Recommendations to Customer Care**

With the analysis from the current situation to the above solutions, the writer proposes to take steps to improve and perfect the Customer Care department to become more professional and more effective, as follows:

- Expand the scale of the customer care department, if necessary, it can be separated into an independent room/ center
- Professionally trained customer care service staff
- There are hotlines and attached staff to respond to customers as soon as possible
- Apply high technology to service activities

## **3.4. LIMITATION OF THE SUBJECTS AND DIRECTIONS FOR THE NEXT RESEARCH**

Due to the limitations in terms of time to implement the topic and collect data (only data from 2018 - 2020 is provided by the Department of Planning and Business), the thesis still has difficulty in analyzing, evaluating as well as work out a detailed roadmap to solve the shortcomings in improving service quality and customer care. However, the writer believes that the analysis and solutions outlined in the thesis will help the

company in improving its image and capacity in the business sector. In the future, the writer will continue to study more in-depth on scientific care activities, evaluate improvements, changes, and refer and observe customer care services at other companies in order to offer solutions that contribute to improving. High level of customer care activities as well as the image of the company PECC3.

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