

# Communicating with Customers

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LEON SHIELDS

# Reasons for Communication

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Outages / Breaks

Flushing

Roadway closures

Office schedules

CCR's

Public Awareness

Policy Changes

Emergencies

# Benefits of Customer Communication

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- Promotes the utility in the community
- Builds trust and establishes a relationship from the utility
- Easy way of promoting new services and public education
- Helps Community Thrive
- Promotes Positive Culture

# Field Training for Customer Service

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Develop a program in assisting employees communicating with customers.

The utility sent me a water leak notice, how do I check to see if I have a leak?

Our tap water is cloudy, Is it safe to drink?

The bathroom tub will not drain, is my line stopped up?

# Public Information Officer

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The PIO is the individual responsible for communicating with the public, media, and/or coordinating with other agencies, as necessary with incident related information requirements.

Why is it important to have a spokesperson?

# Dealing with Disgruntle Customers

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- Listen
- Apologize
- Show Empathy
- Maintain a Calm Voice
- Address the Customer by Name
- Don't Take it Personally
- Avoid Negative Language
- Resolve the Issue
- Share the Knowledge

# Listen

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Practice active listening rather than passive listening.

Be present and actually hear or read what they're saying.

To show the customer you're actively listening, paraphrase what their complaint is, ask clarifying questions, and don't interrupt them.

This is often the most effective way to handle angry customers at the outset of the situation.

# Apologize

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Apologize for the problem they're having.

Acknowledging the mistake and letting the customer know you're really sorry will go a long way.

A sincere apology shows the customer you care and understand their frustration.

Keep the explanation short and move forward.



# Show Empathy

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Empathy helps guide your response and reaction to an angry customer.

Empathy doesn't necessarily mean agreeing with the customer.

By truly understanding how the customer feels, you'll be able to relate with them on a more personal level.

As you have difficult conversations with customers, showing empathy will help de-escalate the issue and show the customer you respect them and are really listening to them.

# Maintain a Calm Voice

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Don't let frustration get the better of you.

When dealing with an angry customer, you may be tempted to match their tone of voice.

Let them say what they need to so you can respond calmly after they've vented their frustrations.

# Address the Customer by their Name

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There is power in a name and it helps you to put a name to whom you're talking to whether in person, by phone or in writing.

*“Remember that a person’s name is to that person the most sweetest and most important sound in any language.”* -Dale Carnegie, author of ‘How to Win Friends and Influence People’.

# Don't Take it Personally

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Remember, this is work, not your personal life.

Don't take a customer's anger personally, as if they're angry with you.

They're not angry with you, they're angry with your product or service.

They had a certain expectation when they purchased a product and they experienced a problem.

# Build and Maintain Trust

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It's likely the level of trust this customer has for your company has been damaged, and it's important to rebuild and maintain that trust moving forward.

When handling an angry customer, make sure you have all of the background information for that customer.

This will show the customer you're confident and capable of helping them.

Be honest and transparent with the customer. Follow up with updates as needed.

# Avoid Negative Language

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If you use negative language it will just add fuel to the fire.

Using positive language will help disarm the situation and may change the customer's mindset faster.

It's best to not imply they are wrong or accuse them.

# Resolve the Issue

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Your primary goal when handling an angry customer is to resolve their issue.

Is there something you or the customer can do themselves immediately to satisfy their needs?

If so, let them know. If it will take longer, explain and set realistic expectations on a resolution.

# Share the Knowledge

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Angry customers can teach us a lot.

More often than not, the root cause of an angry customer points to some operational or product changes that need to be made.

Have an easy way to share feedback from angry customers with utility staff. Then, the entire team can collaborate on coming up with long-term solutions to keeping your customers happy.



# Be Nice!

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Finally, handling angry customers can be difficult, but it's not impossible.

The most important thing you can do is let the customer vent their frustrations. Then, meet them with respect, patience and empathy.



# Special Needs Customers

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Hearing Impaired

Visual Impaired

Non Communicative

# I'm Just Like You

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# Employee Hidden Talents?

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Sign Language

Bilingual

Passive Personality

Great at handling Customers

# Communication Aid

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## Communication Sheet for the Hearing Impaired , Special Needs, or Non English Assistance

Please indicate the number you are needing assistance for

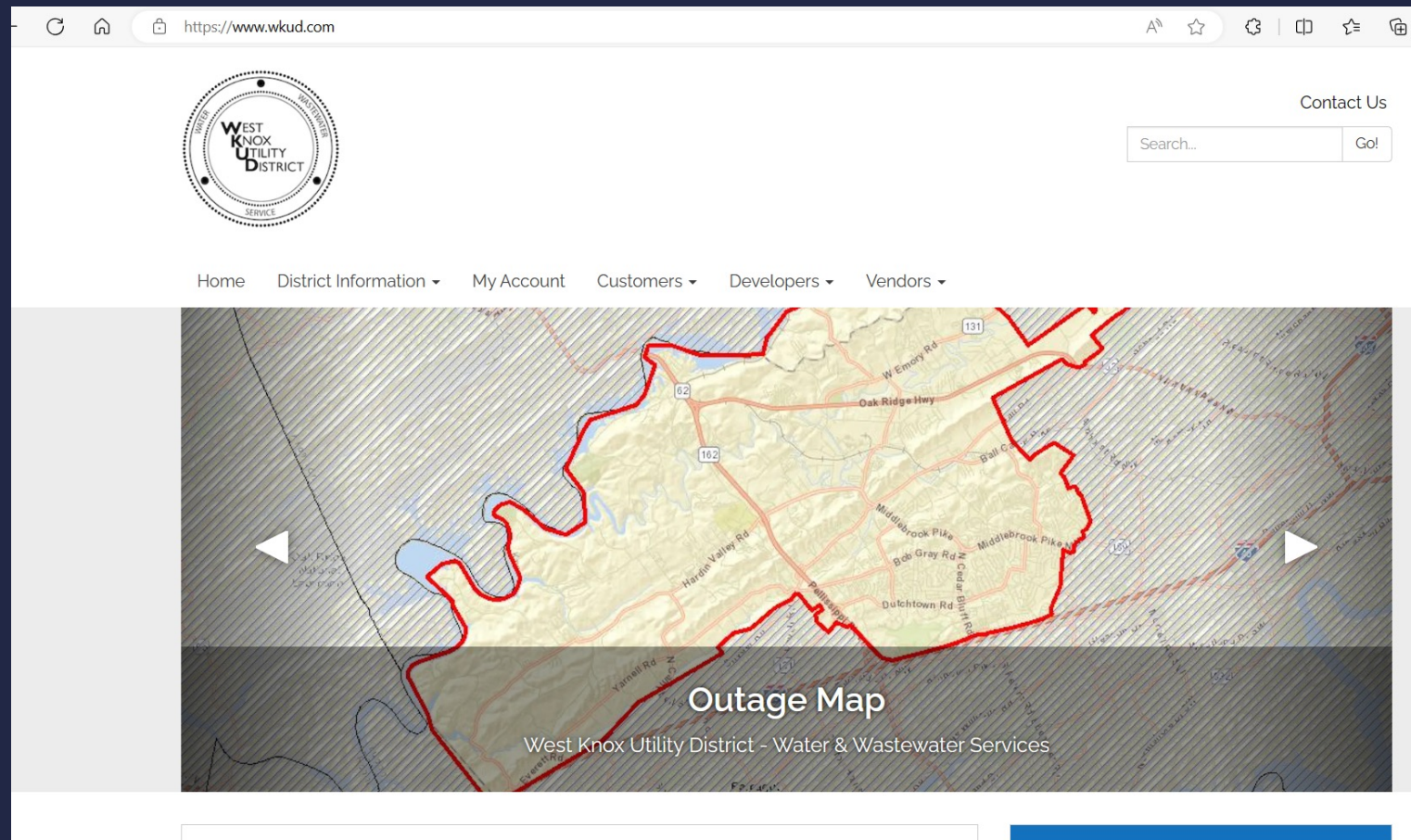
- 1) I'd like to pay my bill.
- 2) I'd like to apply for electric service.
- 3) I'd like to apply for water service
- 4) I'd like to apply for wastewater service.
- 5) I'd Like to apply for Natural Gas service
- 6) I'd like to apply for Broadband service
- 7) I'd like to have my services disconnected
- 8) I'd like to report an issue with my service
- 9) My utility service is not working
- 10) I would like to report a leak
- 11) I need a service person to come to my address to check for an issue with my service

Por favor, indique el número para el que necesita ayuda.

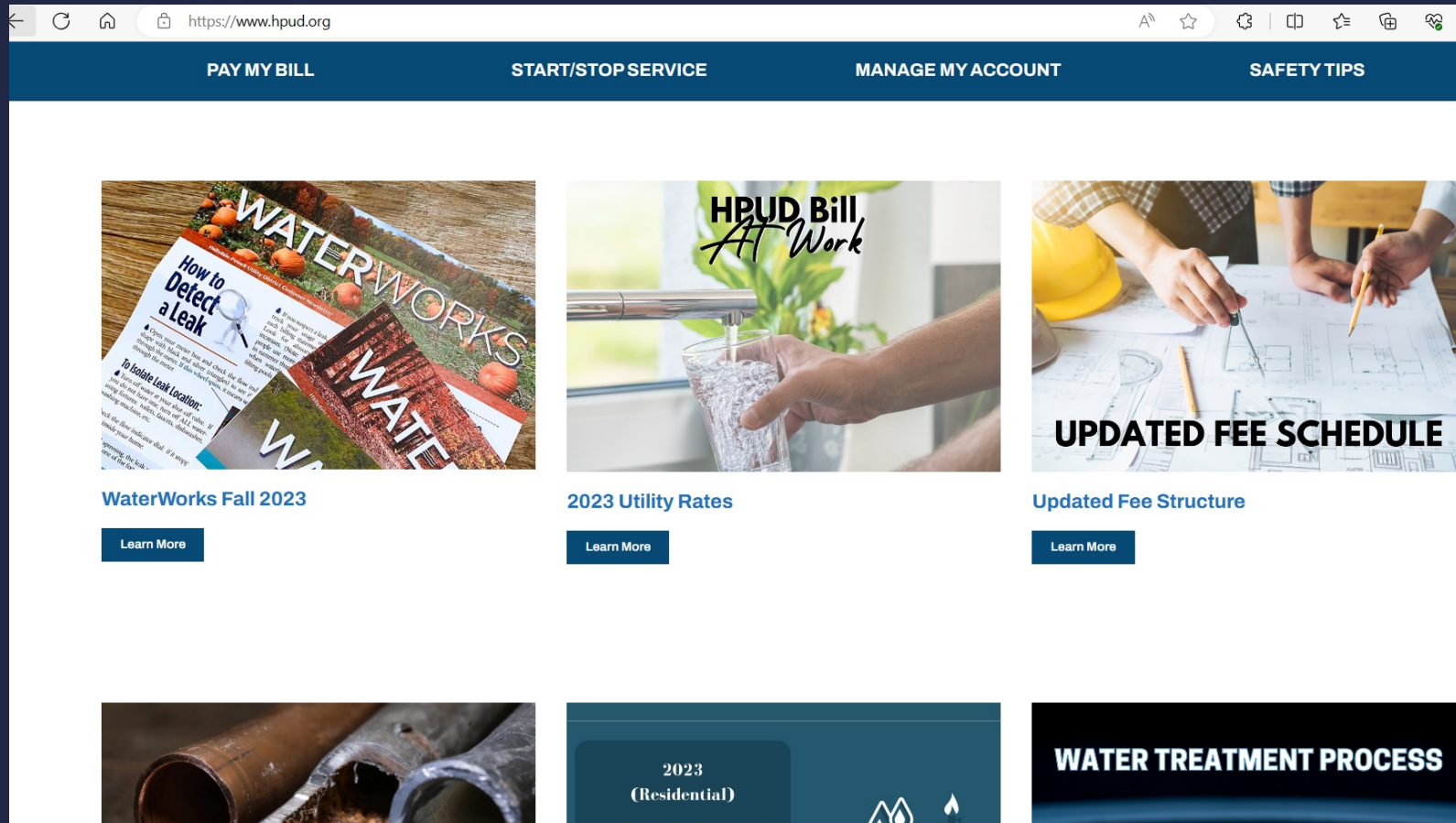
- 1) Me gustaría pagar mi factura.
- 2) Me gustaría solicitar servicio eléctrico.
- 3) Me gustaría solicitar el servicio de agua.
- 4) Me gustaría solicitar el servicio de aguas residuales.
- 5) Me gustaría solicitar el servicio de Gas Natural
- 6) Me gustaría solicitar el servicio de banda ancha
- 7) Me gustaría que desconectaran mis servicios
- 8) Me gustaría informar un problema con mi servicio
- 9) Mi servicio público no funciona
- 10) Me gustaría reportar una fuga

11) Necesito que una persona de servicio venga a mi dirección para verificar si hay algún problema con mi servicio.

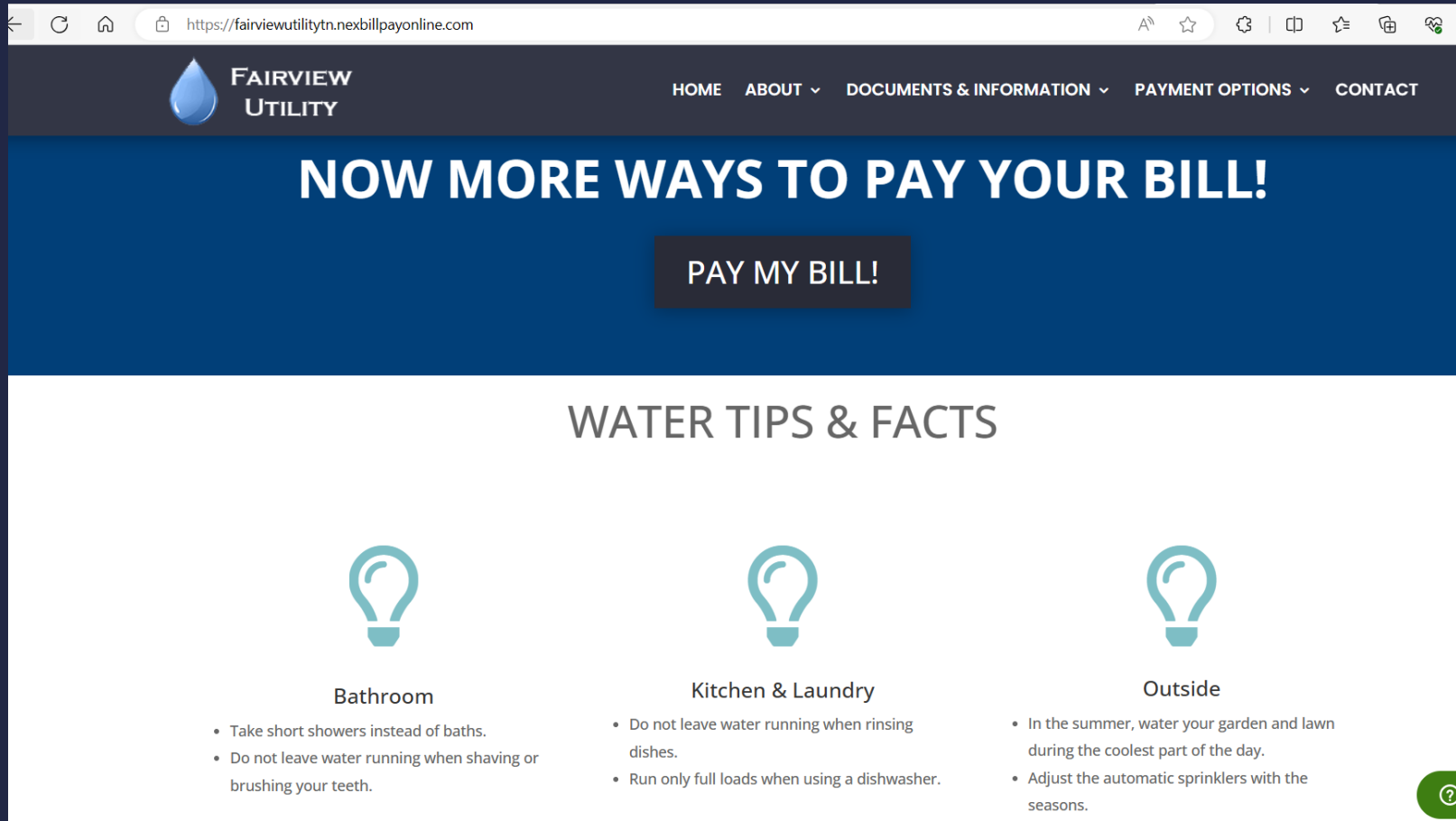
# Websites



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# Social Media

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Social media marketing is a powerful way for businesses of all sizes to reach prospects and customers.

People discover, learn about, follow, and shop from brands on social media, so if you're not on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn, you're missing out!

# First Utility District

**First Utility District of Knox County** Oct 25 · 🌐

Do you think you may have a leak on your service line? This photo explains how to check your meter to see if you do!



The numbers in the black zone are not read. We charge by per 1,000 gallons.

When the red dial is turning and you are not using water, it indicates that you have a leak.

**First Utility District of Knox County** Oct 16 · 🌐

First Utility Water Outage Alert -Choto Road, Harvey Road, S. Northshore Drive and surrounding areas. First Utility crews are onsite working to repair a water main break. Crews hope to have service restored by 3:30 p.m. We apologize for any inconvenience.



**WE ARE ON IT.**

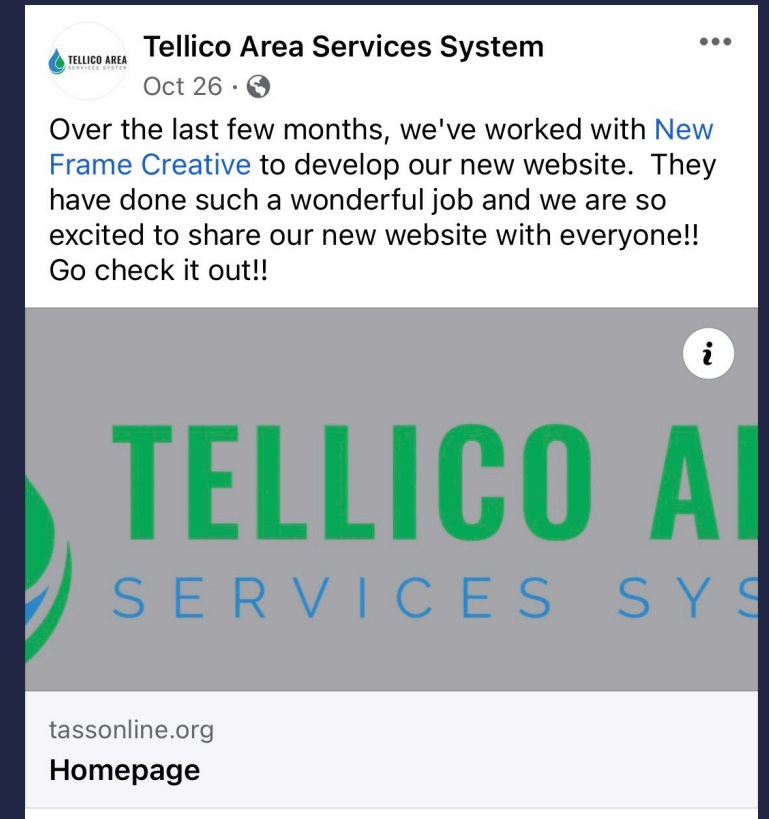
**First**  
UTILITY DISTRICT  
KNOX COUNTY

**First Utility District of Knox County** Nov 13 · 🌐

Be sure to check out our website for tips during the cold weather season.  
<https://buff.ly/3MnR1Xi>



# Tellico Area Service System



# Monthly Bill Notifications

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Addition of announcements or notes to the monthly invoice to customers are a quick, comprehensive, and cost effective way to communicate.

# Home Owners Associations

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Utility participation at area HOA/POA meetings are direct ways to communicate to the customer addressing their concerns and questions.

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Communication starts internally!

