

The 11-Minute Rule:

How Customers Think and How Utilities Can Respond

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CONSOLIDATED UTILITY DISTRICT

Rutherford County, Tennessee

**What does the
11-minute rule
refer to?**

Research from consulting firm Accenture:

“ ... the average customer of a regulated U.S. utility spent about **8 minutes** interacting with their utility through digital channels and about **11 minutes** with a representative.

That's over the course
of a year.



**What do ratepayers
want from public
water utilities?**

Convenience, ease of use, responsiveness, proactive communication



In other words, a clean,
reliable, nearby gas station
that's open 24/7

**What do utilities want
from customers?**

- **Utilities benefit from feedback – as long as it's actionable**
- **Awareness**
- **Recognition/Appreciation for our work**
- **Understanding of the role of water in society**
- **Political understanding**
- **Trust/Goodwill**

**What does the 11-minute rule
mean **internally**?**

**How does that change your work if
you're aware of this?**

“When customers are aware of the work utilities are doing to maintain infrastructure and they feel confident drinking the water, **overall satisfaction scores rise considerably.**”

John Hazen, managing director of utilities intelligence at J.D. Power.

Key findings of the J.D. Power 2024 study:

59% of residential customers say their unfiltered tap water supply is safe or very safe to drink. The remaining 41% of customers do not perceive their water is safe to drink.

Communication is the most important step water utilities can take to increase customer satisfaction. Among customers who say their utility does a good job regarding infrastructure, satisfaction scores rise 229 points (on a 1,000-point scale).

<https://www.jdpower.com/business/press-releases/2024-us-water-utility-residential-customer-satisfaction-study>

**How do you learn what
ratepayers care about? Ask them.**

**The alternative is ignorance,
which will undermine convenience, ease of use,
responsiveness, proactive communication**

Recognize that most people HATE taking surveys.

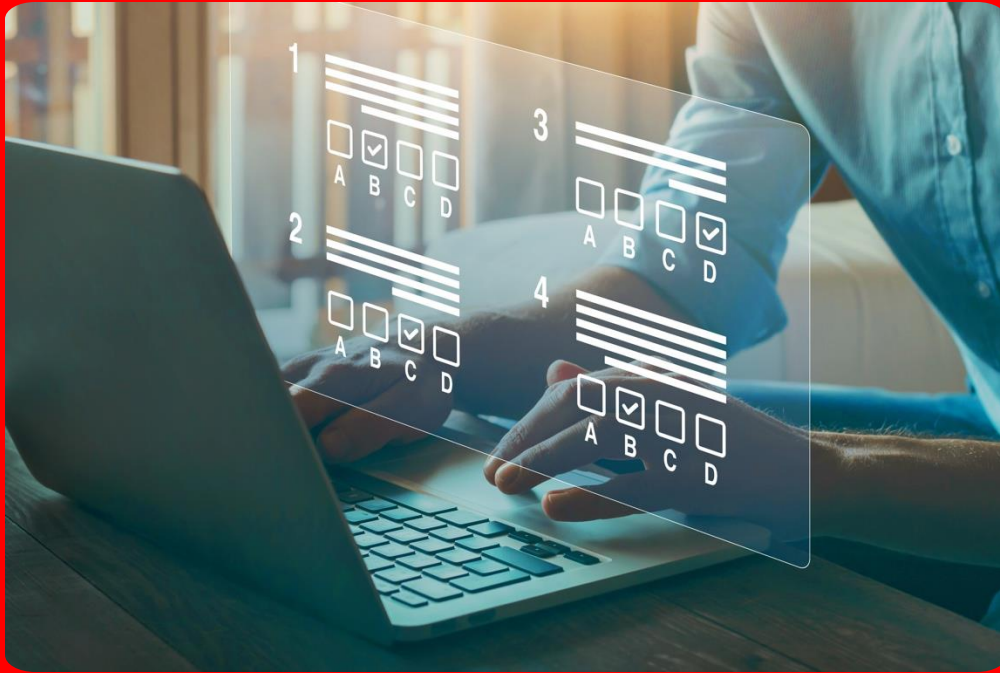
Recognize that most people HATE taking surveys.

Top 5 activities preferred over taking surveys ...

Recognize that most people HATE taking surveys.

Top 5 activities preferred over taking surveys ...

1. Root canal – without painkiller
2. Getting pepper sprayed
3. Tax audit
4. Papercut across your eyeball
5. All-day sales pitch about a timeshare



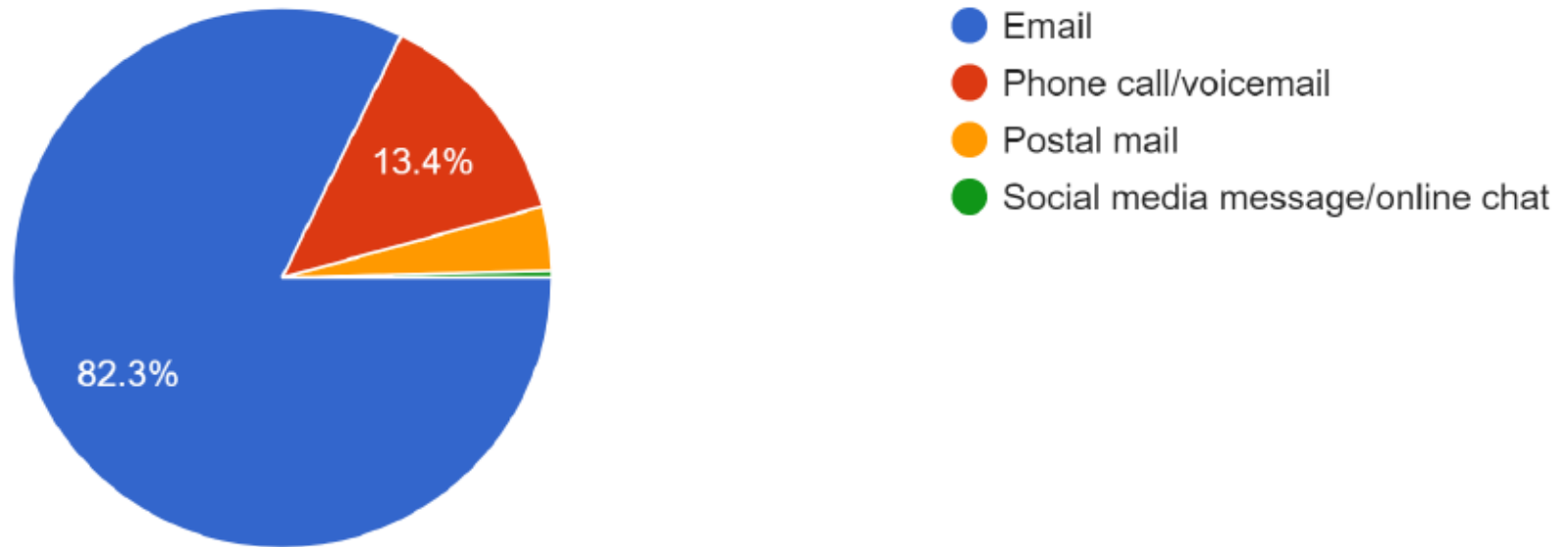
Ask your customers for opinions painlessly and quickly

- **Never ask a question you're afraid of – or without the intent to take action**
- **Build your audience based on ratepayer email addresses you already have**
- **Keep the survey brief (10-15 questions)**
- **Offer an incentive. In our case, Amazon gift cards for a raffle. For \$100-\$200, you get thousands of dollars worth of data.**
- **Use Google Forms or Microsoft Forms (free)**

From our survey ...

1. What is your preferred method for CUD to contact you?

3,264 responses



From our survey ...

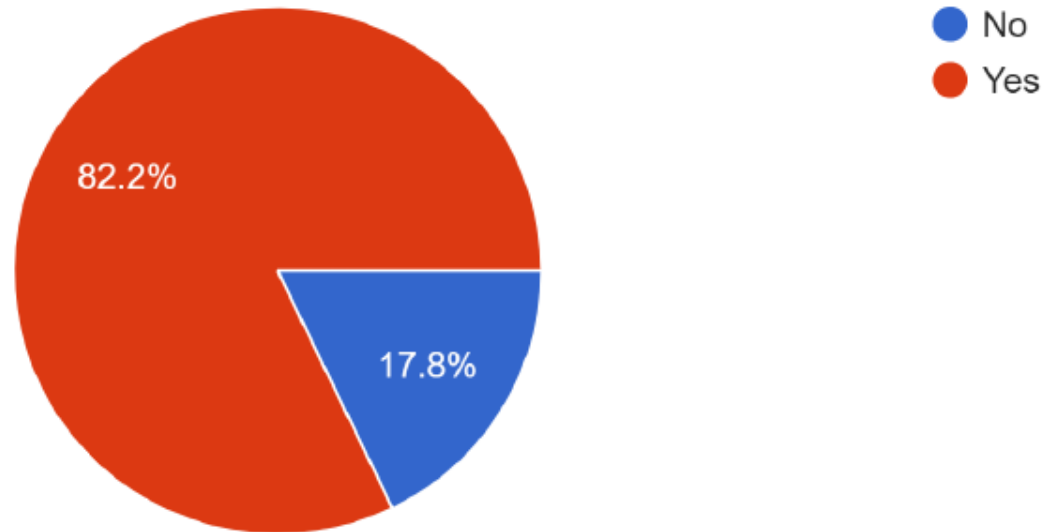
3. If you would like to subscribe to our free newsletter, please type in your email below.

NOTE: Our privacy policy ([which is available on our website](#)) states that CUD will never sell or give your email to a third-party company, and we will never attempt to sell you any third-party product or service.

Short answer text

From our survey ...

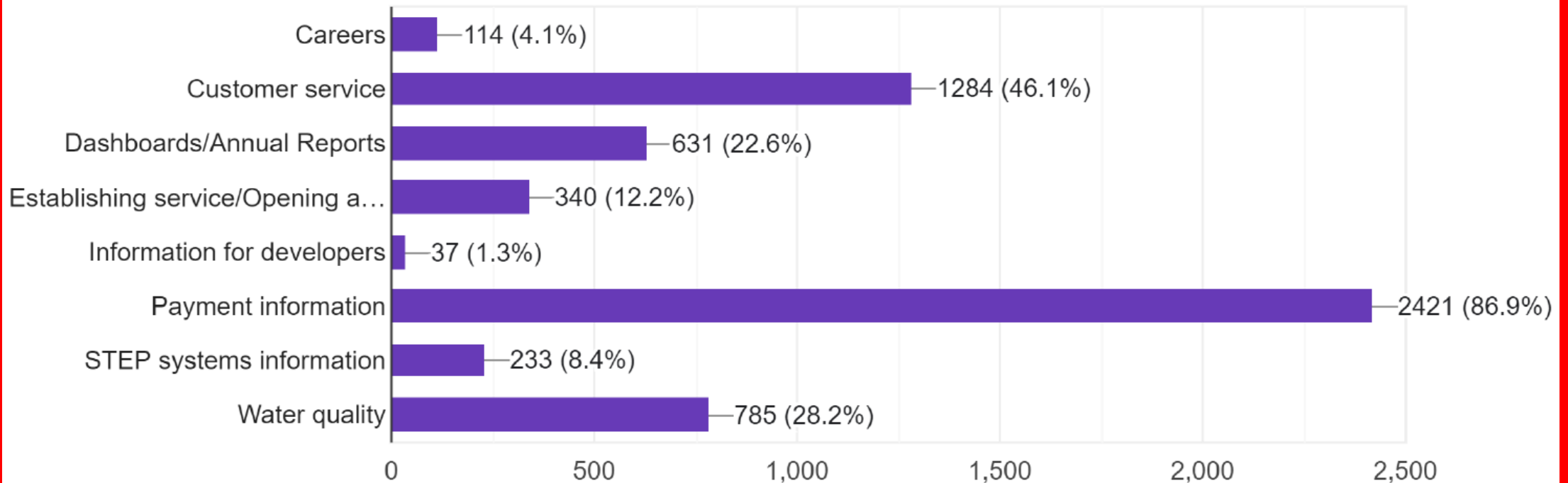
4. Have you ever visited our website, www.cudrc.com? If you have not, please skip to question 6.
3,264 responses



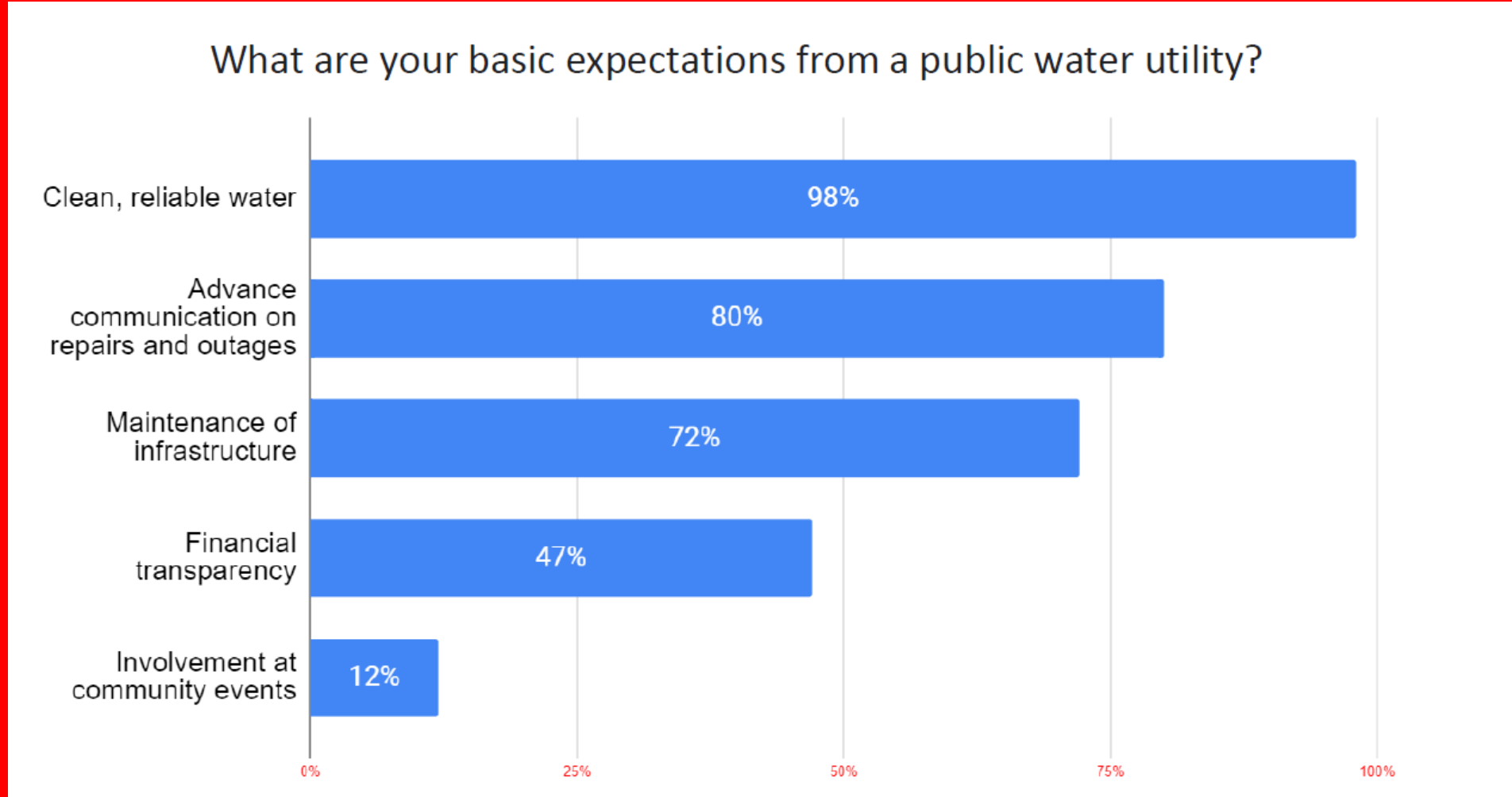
From our survey ...

5. When you visit our website, which section(s) are most relevant to your needs? Choose all that apply.

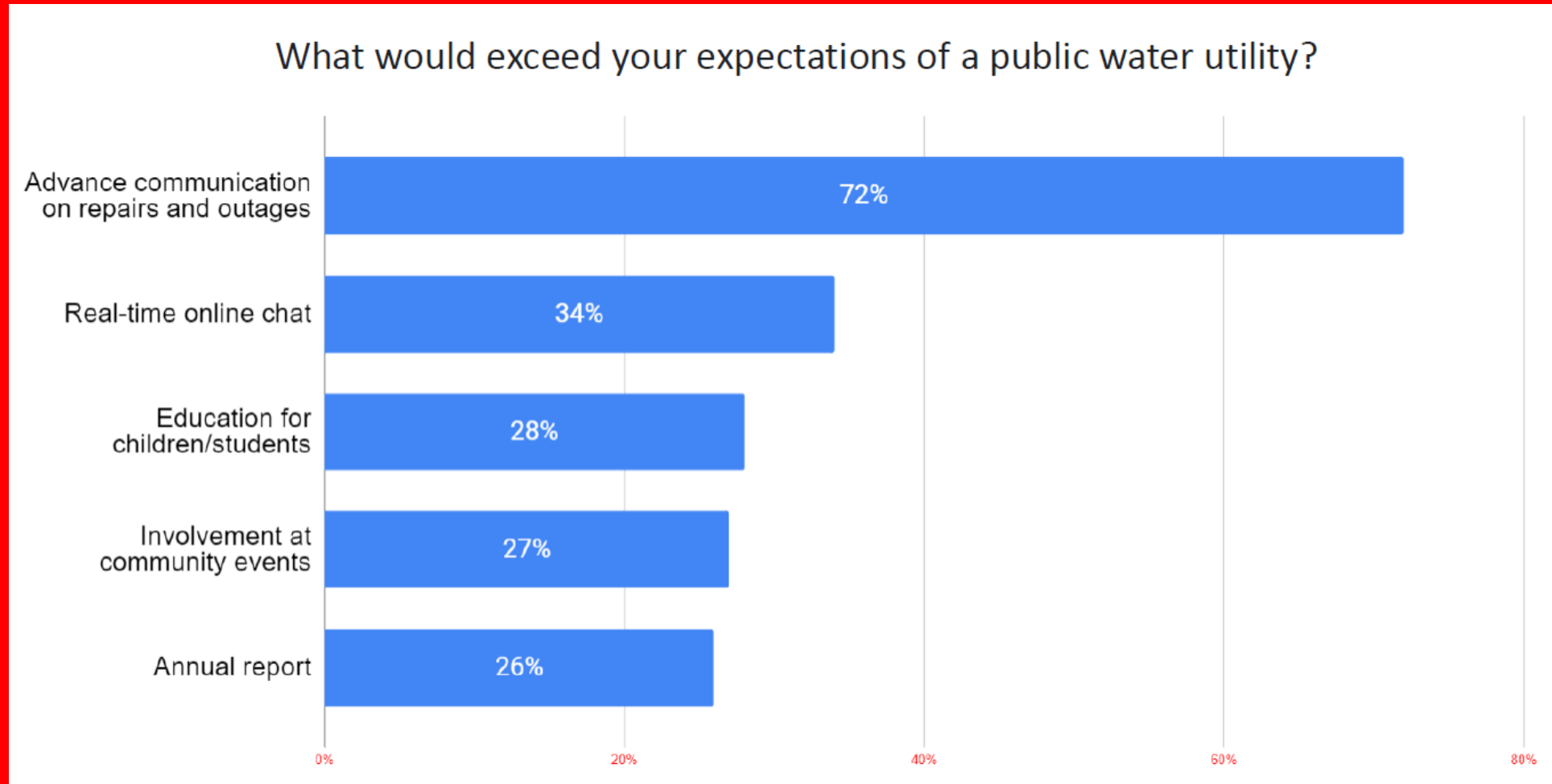
2,786 responses



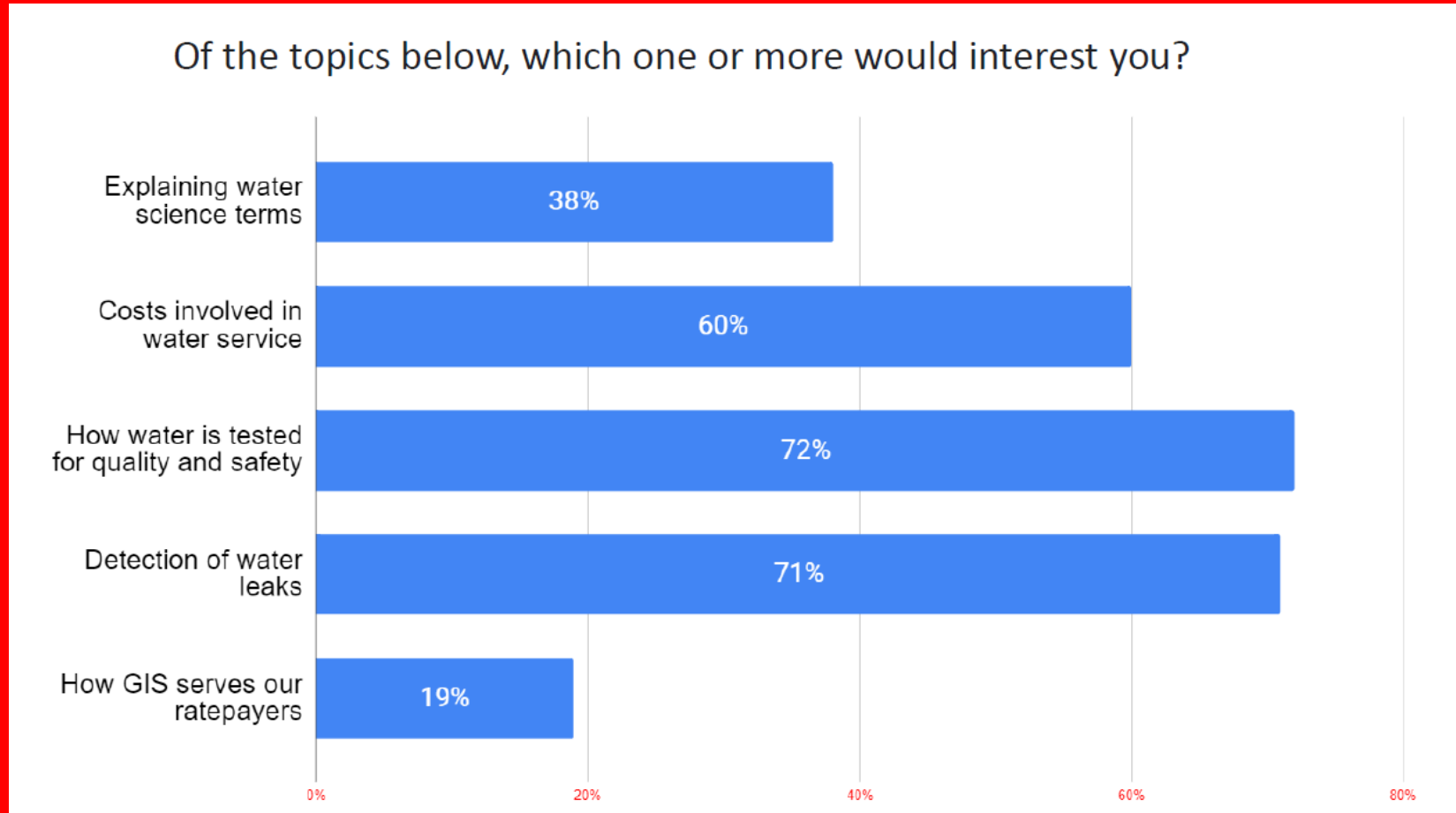
From our survey ...



From our survey ...



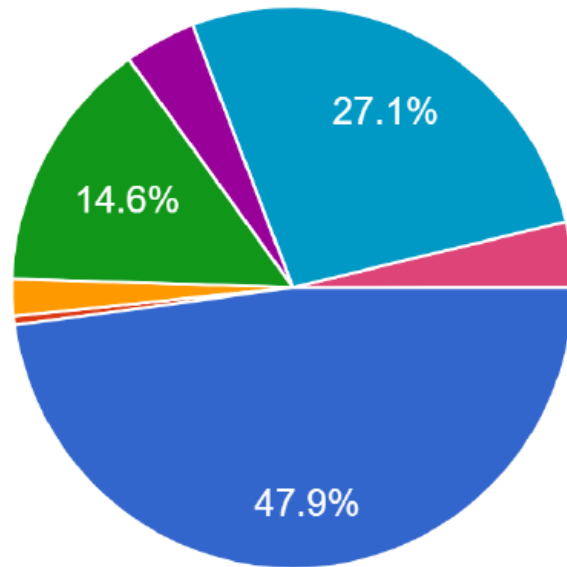
From our survey ...



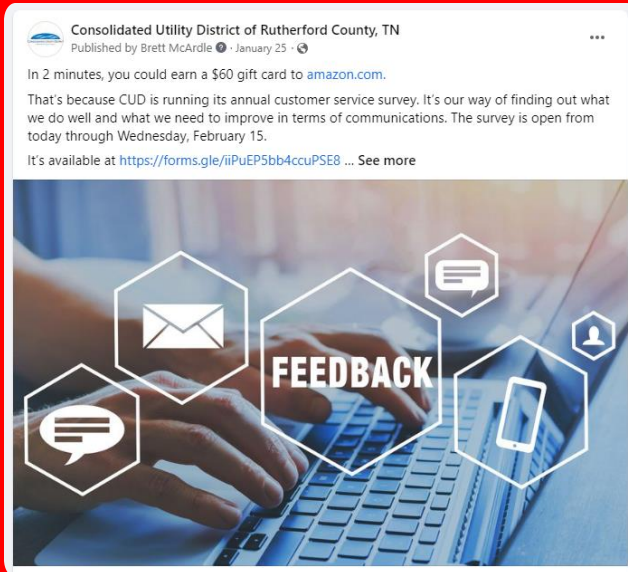
From our survey ...

10. What is your preferred way to pay your bill?

3,264 responses

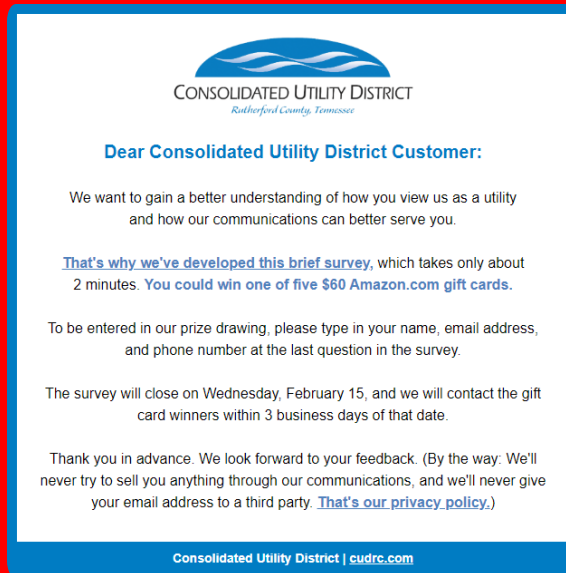


- Bank draft/autopay
- Electronic kiosk
- In person at the CUD building
- myCUD app
- Pay by phone
- Payment portal (connect.cudrc.com)
- Postal mail



Our 2024 survey ...

- Promoted via email blast and social media in January
- Earned 3,500+ responses
- Two years in a row we've received more than 2,900 responses
- Earned 800+ new subscribers to our newsletter



How do we know the data is trustworthy?

- **Statistical significance: # of responses needed to act as the full audience**
- **Sent just over 39,000 emails promoting the survey and raffle**
- **Needed 2,262 respondents to achieve 95% confidence level**
- **The 5% rule = 95% confidence**
- **Survey required only 2 minutes to complete**

The screenshot shows the 'Sample size calculator' page on the CheckMarket website. The page includes a navigation bar with 'CheckMarket By Medallia', 'Product Tour', 'Pricing', 'Resources', 'Contact Us', and a 'Sign Up Free' button. The main content area features a 'Sample size calculator' section with a description and two buttons: 'Calculate required sample size' and 'Calculate margin of error'. Below this is a 'Calculate representative sample size' section with input fields for 'Population size' (39000), 'Margin of error' (2%), and 'Confidence level' (95%). The 'Required sample size' is displayed as 2262.

CheckMarket
By Medallia

Product Tour Pricing Resources

Contact Us Sign Up Free

Sample size calculator

Calculate the number of respondents needed in a survey using our free sample size calculator. Our calculator shows you the amount of respondents you need to get statistically significant results for a specific population. Discover how many people you need to send a survey invitation to obtain your required sample. You can also calculate the margin of error based on your sample size.

Calculate required sample size Calculate margin of error

Calculate representative sample size

Sample size

Population size: How many people are in the group your sample represents? (The sample size does not change much for populations larger than 20,000.)

Margin of error: This is the plus-or-minus figure usually reported in newspaper or television opinion poll results. For example, if you use a margin of error of 4% and 47% percent of your sample picks an answer, you can be "sure" that if you had asked the question to the entire population, between 43% (47-4) and 51% (47+4) would have picked that answer.

Confidence level: This tells you how sure you can be of the margin of error. It is expressed as a percentage and represents how often the true percentage of the population who would pick an answer lies within the margin of error.

Required sample size: **2262** Number of respondents needed

<https://www.checkmarket.com/sample-size-calculator/>

Here's what we needed ...

Calculate representative sample size

Sample size

Population size:

40000

How many people are in the group your sample represents? (The sample size does not change much for populations larger than 20,000.)

Margin of error:

5%

This is the plus-or-minus figure usually reported in newspaper or television opinion poll results. For example, if you use a margin of error of 4% and 47% percent of your sample picks an answer, you can be "sure" that if you had asked the question to the entire population, between 43% (47-4) and 51% (47+4) would have picked that answer.

Confidence level:

95%

This tells you how sure you can be of the margin of error. It is expressed as a percentage and represents how often the true percentage of the population who would pick an answer lies within the margin of error.

Required sample size:

381

Number of respondents needed

Estimated response rate:

20%

What percent of those asked to participate in the survey will do so. Response rates vary greatly depending on many factors including the distribution method (e-mail, paper, phone...), type of communication (B2C, B2B...), quality of the invitation, use of incentives, etc.

Number to invite:

1905

This is the number of individuals out of the population you need to ask to participate, in order to achieve the required sample size based on the expected response rate.

<https://www.checkmarket.com/sample-size-calculator/>

Here's closer to what we got ...

Calculate representative sample size

Sample size

Population size: How many people are in the group your sample represents? (The sample size does not change much for populations larger than 20,000.)

Margin of error: This is the plus-or-minus figure usually reported in newspaper or television opinion poll results. For example, if you use a margin of error of 4% and 47% percent of your sample picks an answer, you can be "sure" that if you had asked the question to the entire population, between 43% (47-4) and 51% (47+4) would have picked that answer.

Confidence level: This tells you how sure you can be of the margin of error. It is expressed as a percentage and represents how often the true percentage of the population who would pick an answer lies within the margin of error.

Required sample size: **2266** Number of respondents needed

Estimated response rate: What percent of those asked to participate in the survey will do so. Response rates vary greatly depending on many factors including the distribution method (e-mail, paper, phone...), type of communication (B2C, B2B...), quality of the invitation, use of incentives, etc.

Number to invite: **11330** This is the number of individuals out of the population you need to ask to participate, in order to achieve the required sample size based on the expected response rate.

<https://www.checkmarket.com/sample-size-calculator/>

If a ratepayer distrusts his/her local water utility – or holds it in low regard – how does that play out?



more bottled water

more bottled water

more complaints to utility

more bottled water

**more resistance to current
rates or rate changes**

more complaints to utility

more bottled water

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**negative comments on social,
which can have a ripple effect**

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**Political pressure: criticisms
to local elected officials**

**negative comments on social,
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more bottled water

more resistance to current rates or rate changes

calls to media

more complaints to utility

Political pressure: criticisms to local elected officials

negative comments on social, which can have a ripple effect

more bottled water

more resistance to current rates or rate changes

calls to media

more complaints to utility

more late payments or bad debt from customer accounts

Political pressure: criticisms to local elected officials

negative comments on social, which can have a ripple effect

**Given the 11-minute rule,
how can you change
customer perception?**



**Given the 11-minute rule,
how can you change
customer perception?**

2 ideas ...



1. Water as a Service

Consider your arm: Signal from brain to hand ... Behind turning on a tap lies infrastructure and services.

From water quality to account information to service interruptions, customers seek clarity and reliability.

Engineering. Maintenance. Wastewater.
Leak Detection. Customer Service. Finance.
Administration. Water Treatment. Warehouse.
Human Resources. Information Technology. Operations.
Water Quality. Billing. Health & Safety. Inspections.
Geographic Information Systems. Meter Operations.

THANK YOU!



Employee Appreciation Day 2024



2. Utilities are B2B, B2C, and subscription-based, all at once

Traits of subscription-based services ...

- Predictability of product and revenue
- Better forecasting
- Long-term customer service
- Automated billing
- Metrics and analysis

Most pertinent to perception: customer service, metrics/analysis

Happy subscribers get added value

- Customers appreciate communications about issues that impact their water service.
- How often will a customer take a photo and share on social a complaint? They need to be told the what and why behind their service.
- If they still complain, you can point to the communications that were provided. It's on the ratepayer to listen to a voicemail and notice an email.

The results of your survey will tell you what matters.

Some additional tactics ...

Tap vs bottled

What \$2 will buy



One 20-ounce bottle

Single-use plastic

400+ years
in a landfill
(6,400 years for a
case of bottles)

Source water is
often tap water with
adjusted pH value



300+ gallons

No bottle needed

No impact
to a landfill

Tested continuously
for safety and quality

You're competing against bottled water companies. If not in reality, then at least in perception.

- Ongoing testing
- Greater accountability
- Much, much cheaper
- Eco-friendly product
- You know this. Do your ratepayers?

What can you learn from Google Analytics?

WHICH PAGES AND SCREENS GET THE MOST VIEWS?

Views by Page title and screen class



PAGE TITLE AND SCREEN CLASS

VIEWS

Consolidated Utility District of Rutherford County	22K
Ways to Pay – Consolidated Utility District of Rutherford County	995
Non-Emergencies Only: Contact Us – Consolidated Utility District of Rutherford County	910
Bank Draft Authorization – Consolidated Utility District of Rutherford County	874
Extension Agreement Form – Consolidated Utility District of Rutherford County	854
Careers – Consolidated Utility District of Rutherford County	520
Payment Extension – Consolidated Utility District of Rutherford County	517

[View pages and screens](#) →

Page title and screen class	↓ Views	Users	Views per user
	32,326 100% of total	12,897 100% of total	2.51 Avg 0%
1 Consolidated Utility District of Rutherford County – #1 Through Excellence and Innovation	22,059	11,427	1.93
2 Ways to Pay – Consolidated Utility District of Rutherford County	995	731	1.36
3 Non-Emergencies Only: Contact Us – Consolidated Utility District of Rutherford County	910	581	1.57
4 Bank Draft Authorization – Consolidated Utility District of Rutherford County	874	390	2.24
5 Extension Agreement Form – Consolidated Utility District of Rutherford County	854	335	2.55
6 Careers – Consolidated Utility District of Rutherford County	520	263	1.98
7 Payment Extension – Consolidated Utility District of Rutherford County	517	362	1.43
8 Frequently Asked Questions – Consolidated Utility District of Rutherford County	378	312	1.21
9 Leak Adjustment Form – Consolidated Utility District of Rutherford County	368	141	2.61
10 Report a Main Line Break or Unexplained Outage – Consolidated Utility District of Rutherford County	352	248	1.42

- Your website = gas station
- Structure it accordingly
- Top 10 pages
- Internal links
- No place for human interest
- Ease of use, solving problems

Remove **friction** wherever possible

What is friction? Anything that makes customers go through more steps than necessary (anything that resembles a chore).

What should be easy on the ratepayer's side?

- **Contacting you:** Promote your communications channels
- **Paying for service:** Should be reliable, and secure. Smaller utilities are hacker targets.
- **Receiving notice** about outages and repairs

If you have 11 minutes, how does your lobby look?



- Not “Extreme Makeover: Utility Edition”
- Think clean and messaging

Forget 11 minutes.

What would 30 minutes look like?



I have a workforce of 20 people or less.

How am I supposed to do all this?

- You're not. Outsource it, if necessary.
- The size of your workforce is less important than the choices you make and the methods you use.
- Be a leader in your community and a source of guidance to similar utilities.

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How Customers Think and How Utilities Can Respond

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