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Contact: Jamie Wimberly
(202) 255-2860

**The Chimera of Customer Satisfaction in the Utility Sector:
EcoPinion Consumer Survey Points to Nuances and Need for Alternative Customer Metrics**

Washington, DC ... EcoAlign, a strategic marketing agency in the energy sector, released the findings today of a consumer survey examining customer metrics utilized in the utility sector and other sectors, including customer satisfaction scores and alternative customer metrics. One thousand Americans nationwide responded to the survey conducted in September 2011. EcoAlign conducted the survey in conjunction with the Customer Care Research Consortium (CCRC).

“The survey findings reveal a strong foundation of customer satisfaction and consumer trust in the utility sector which utilities can build on,” stated Jamie Wimberly, CEO of EcoAlign. “Yet the traditional focus on customer satisfaction has produced a paradox in that the score may not reflect what is actually going on in regard to customer operations or service levels due to the fact that customer satisfaction in the utility sector is largely driven by exogenous factors such as price. Moreover, a key challenge will be to align future utility customer operations with evolving consumer needs and expectations, especially in regard to more humanistic/ emotional components of customer service and the customer relationship. Once you start digging into why people respond the way they do to customer satisfaction surveys, there is a lot of variability underneath the top line response to how satisfied they are which is worth exploring further.”

The top line findings from EcoPinion No. 13 include:

- In general consumers appear to be satisfied with the customer service they are receiving. When asked for one word to describe their satisfaction with the customer service provided by their local electric utility both “good” and “expensive” were mentioned most frequently. Other terms mentioned at lower levels were “OK,” “happy,” “helpful,” and “reliable.”
- Nearly six out of ten consumers felt it was easy to do business with their local electric company (58 percent rated 8, 9 or 10 on a ten-point scale). However, when specifically asked about the ease of conducting specific tasks, a few ratings were lower.
- Between five and six out of ten consumers rated their utility company as being trustworthy (8,9 or 10 on a ten-point scale, with those over age 55 and home owners the most likely to feel this way.

- The majority (87 percent) indicated they would be likely to share the news of utility programs, incentives or information that they find to be attractive and useful with family and friends, with 56 percent saying they would be very likely. Home owners and those over age 55 would be the most likely to share news of this type.
- In terms of how they respond to satisfaction surveys, respondents were most likely to say that their responses to customer satisfaction surveys are a complete representation of how they feel (approximately half felt this way). Seventeen percent indicated that they give high scores when they like the CSR rep and 16 percent said their response is generally how they feel, but there are other things they can't express.
 - ✓ Twelve percent gave the answer "depends" and explained that their answers to a satisfaction survey is dependent on the level of service received (47 percent net mentions), mainly due to the specific representative (26 percent) or on the type/quality of service they received (12 percent).
 - ✓ They also mentioned that it depends on their personal situation (28 percent net mentions), specifically their mood (11 percent) or how much time they have/how busy they are (10 percent).
 - ✓ And finally, it also depended on the survey (18 percent net mentions), specifically they types of questions (9 percent), type of survey (4 percent), or length of survey (4 percent).
- When asked for the two most important factors impacting their satisfaction with the electric utility, price was mentioned most often (61 percent selected it as being among their top two factors). This was followed by customer service (47 percent) and keeping the lights on (38 percent)
- Americans considered their access to the information collected and held by their local utility to be important to them.
 - ✓ Fifty-five percent mentioned that the ease of accessing the information was very important to them.
 - ✓ Approximately half mentioned that the amount and kind of information they were allowed to access was very important, as was the speed with which the utility company released the information.
 - ✓ The older adults (55+ years) and to a lesser extent the home owners were the most likely to find these information access variables important.

"The findings from EcoPinion No. 13 validate the need for a more nuanced view of customer satisfaction in the utility sector," stated Jamie Wimberly. "Utility customer service will become a more important factor, especially for opportunities to improve customer satisfaction or to mitigate negative trends tied to price/ rate increases. The survey findings also point to the growing importance of non-traditional dimensions, e.g., human/ emotional, along with improvements in delivery and offering. As such, alternative customer metrics will be important as well, such as measuring the ease of doing business and trust."

EcoAlign is making the survey report available to the public at no charge on our website: www.ecoalign.com

EcoAlign is the energy and environment marketing agency and a wholly-owned affiliate of DEFG LLC. We develop and execute marketing strategies for utilities, renewable energy providers and vendors operating in the energy and environment space. We are uniquely suited to help companies achieve their business objectives, from reaching efficiency program targets and improving customer satisfaction, to launching new products, increasing market share and repositioning for growth in the clean tech space.

The Customer Care Research Consortium (CCRC) is a blue ribbon panel comprised of North American utility executives focused on collaborative research on utility customer strategy and operations. The executive panel convenes twice a year to set a research agenda, discuss findings, and share customer-facing challenges, opportunities and best practices. The CCRC research agenda covers such issues as optimizing customer engagement capabilities enabled by smart grid, identifying and implementing best metrics to measure performance and customer satisfaction, developing capabilities to serve as the trusted energy advisor of the future, among other research initiatives. The CCRC is co-managed by DEFG LLC and Navigant Consulting.

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