

How can businesses respond to the rising expectations of their customers?

We live in a world where we expect to receive a service on time and with minimal inconvenience. For the likes of John Lewis and Amazon, this is at the heart of everything they do to outperform their competition — and we have now all come to expect this type of service when we interact with organisations.

The utility sector can learn a great deal from other industries in the way we interact with customers.

But ironically in our business, to provide a stellar customer experience, customers would rather not interact with us at all! But when they do have to do so, they would like to be kept informed, for us to listen to their needs, to be able to trust what we say and for us to keep to our promises.

The eight₂O partnership aims to make a positive customer experience a key outcome of our work. During the next five years eight₂O will deliver a multi-million pound programme of improvements to provide a reliable supply of water and an efficient service for the removal of waste water.

We know our customers want a seamless service, they don't want to be affected by the work we do and, if they are, they would like to know what's happening.

So, we think about how a project will affect the customer right at the start. We encourage everyone involved to put themselves in the customer shoes, so innovative solutions that avoid disruption are considered first, including solutions to not dig, off-site solutions to minimise time on-site, and collaborations with local authorities and other service providers.

If we do need to dig a hole we will work with the construction team to consider working hours, where we dig and how we manage the site, and how we will communicate progress. We often meet customers face to face or write to them directly. Or, where many of the people we affect will be transient, we use onsite signage, social media and our website so they can access information directly. And we get customer feedback throughout the project, so we can make changes where we can.

Informing, listening, responding and keeping our promises are the key to responding to the changing priorities of customers in our business, and how we aim to maintain great relationships with them.