

**J.D. Power Reports:
Georgia Natural Gas Retailers Improve Customer Communications**

Walton EMC Ranks Highest in Georgia Natural Gas Retail Customer Satisfaction for a Third Consecutive Year

WESTLAKE VILLAGE, Calif.: 12 June 2013 — Georgia natural gas retailers are contacting their customers more frequently, increasing customer satisfaction with communication from their gas provider, according to the J.D. Power & Associates 2013 Georgia Natural Gas Retailer Residential Customer Satisfaction StudySM released today.

The study measures customer satisfaction with retail natural gas providers in Georgia by examining six key factors (listed in order of importance): price; billing and payment; corporate citizenship; communications; enrollment/renewal; and customer service. Beginning in 1998, the natural gas utility market in Georgia was deregulated and opened to retail competition. According to the Energy Information Administration, approximately 1.4 million Georgia households are served by retail natural gas providers.

Overall satisfaction among natural gas customers in Georgia averages 692 on a 1,000-point scale in 2013, a two point increase from 2012. But customer satisfaction with communications increases 24 points to 650 in 2013.

The study finds that 45 percent of Georgia customers have received communications from their natural gas provider, separate from their bill or payment process, with the average frequency of communications being three times in the last 3 months. Walton EMC has the largest percent of customers (58%) who report having heard from their gas provider with an average frequency of three in the last 3 months.

“It’s no surprise that communication is a key factor in overall customer satisfaction,” said Andrew Heath, senior director of the energy practice at J.D. Power. “But it’s not just communicating for the sake of communication, it’s the message and delivery mode that matter.”

Among the three percent of customers who report receiving communications from their natural gas retail via social media, their overall satisfaction averages 796.

“Social media represents an untapped resource for communications for natural gas retailers,” said Heath. “Social media is a quick and easy way to stay in touch with customers, whether it’s to handle customer service issues, provide energy tips or keep them informed about the company’s role in the local community.”

KEY FINDINGS

- Overall customer satisfaction among natural gas customers in Georgia averages 692 on a 1,000-point scale.
- Satisfaction increases more than 100 points when customers are aware of their natural gas providers’ corporate citizenship activities.
- Only 3 percent of customers receive communication from their natural gas retailers via social media.

Yet Heath cautions that natural gas retailers should develop a communication strategy to make sure their messages are delivered to the right audience at the appropriate frequency via the right channels, otherwise, they risk alienating customers.

“Gas retailers run the risk of oversaturating the market with their communications efforts,” said Heath. “We have seen retailers that have high awareness because of their commercials and newspaper ads and brochures, but lose market share because their messages were not as effective as they had hoped they would be. A plan to deliver the right message to the right audience at the right frequency is essential.”

High Satisfaction Equals High Loyalty

In Georgia, where the retail natural gas market is deregulated, customers can select which retailer they want to serve their natural gas needs. Price remains the leading reason customers selected their current gas retailer (53%), followed by recommendations from family or friends (13%). Low cost/fees is also the key reason they will stay/renew with their gas retailer. Among highly satisfied customers, 79 percent indicate that they will remain loyal to their current retailer and would be disappointed if they could no longer be a customer, while 94 percent are likely to recommend the company to their family and friends. However, customer loyalty and advocacy falls below 10 percent among customers with low satisfaction.

“Natural gas customers in Georgia have a choice of which retailer to use, so if they’re not satisfied with their current provider, there is a probability that they will switch,” said Heath. “The cost of retaining a customer is much lower than the cost to acquire a new customer.”

Corporate Citizenship

Many natural gas retailers in Georgia, like businesses in other sectors, are good corporate citizens—involved in the local community, make efforts to be good environmental stewards and have energy-efficiency or conservation programs in place. The study finds that when natural gas customers are aware of their providers’ corporate citizenship activities, their overall satisfaction with their provider increases more than 100 points. The challenge is making customers aware. For example, only 21 percent of customers are aware of their provider’s efforts to improve its impact on the environment, 29 percent are familiar with their provider’s energy efficiency or conservation programs and only 12 percent have seen their provider’s employees volunteering/working in the community.

Enrollment and Renewal

First impression on recently acquired and renewing customers impacts customer satisfaction. In the last 12 months, 49 percent of customers renewed their natural gas contract and 21 percent enrolled for the first time. The customer’s experience at this stage has a notable impact on overall satisfaction. For example, customer satisfaction increases from 6.7 (on a 10-point scale) with their previous provider to 7.3, on average, with their new provider when a customer switches. Providers that have high overall customer satisfaction also tend to have high satisfaction among acquired or renewed customers.

Georgia Natural Gas Retailer Residential Results

Walton EMC ranks highest among natural gas retailers in Georgia for a third consecutive year, achieving a score of 731 and performing well across all factors. Scana Energy improves significantly in 2013 to rank second with 710¹, while Coweta-Fayette EMC ranks third with 705.

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¹ Scana Energy is ranked separately from Scana Energy Regulated Division. The Scana Energy Regulated Division provides natural gas service to low-income and elderly customers and to individuals whose credit history prohibits them from obtaining service from other gas retailers.

The 2013 Georgia Natural Gas Retailer Residential Customer Satisfaction Study is based on responses from more than 2,900 customers of natural gas retailers in Georgia. The study was fielded quarterly between July 2012 and April 2013.

About J.D. Power

J.D. Power is a global marketing information services company providing performance improvement, social media and customer satisfaction insights and solutions. The company's quality and satisfaction measurements are based on responses from millions of consumers annually. Headquartered in Westlake Village, Calif., J.D. Power has offices in North America, Europe and Asia Pacific. For more information on [car reviews and ratings](#), [car insurance](#), [health insurance](#), [cell phone ratings](#), and more, please visit JDPower.com. J.D. Power is a business unit of McGraw Hill Financial.

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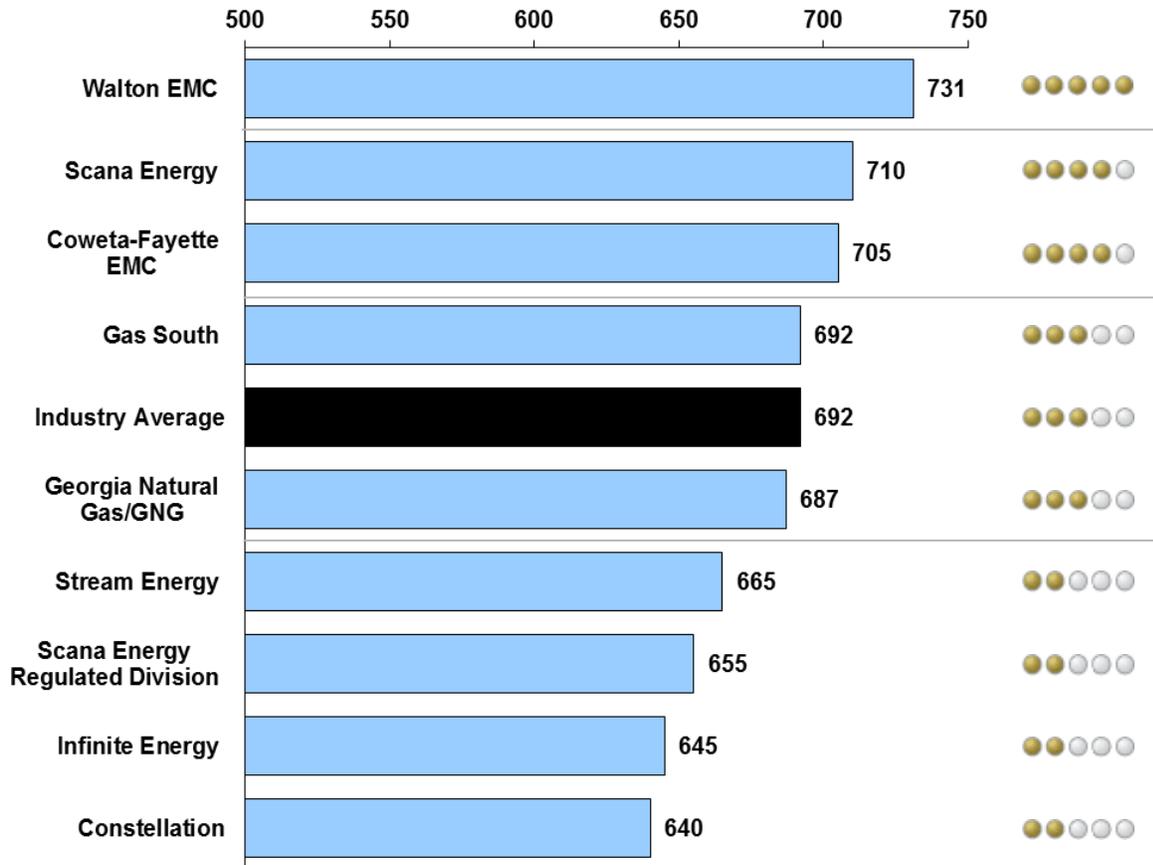
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NOTE: One chart follows.

J.D. Power & Associates 2013 Georgia Natural Gas Retailer Residential Customer Satisfaction StudySM

Customer Satisfaction Index Ranking (Based on a 1,000-point scale)

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for consumers:**



Scana Energy is ranked separately from Scana Energy Regulated Division. The Scana Energy Regulated Division provides natural gas service to low-income and elderly customers and to individuals whose credit history prohibits them from obtaining service from other gas retailers.

Source: J.D. Power & Associates 2013 Georgia Natural Gas Retailer Residential Customer Satisfaction StudySM

Power Circle Ratings Legend

- Among the best
- Better than most
- About average
- The rest

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