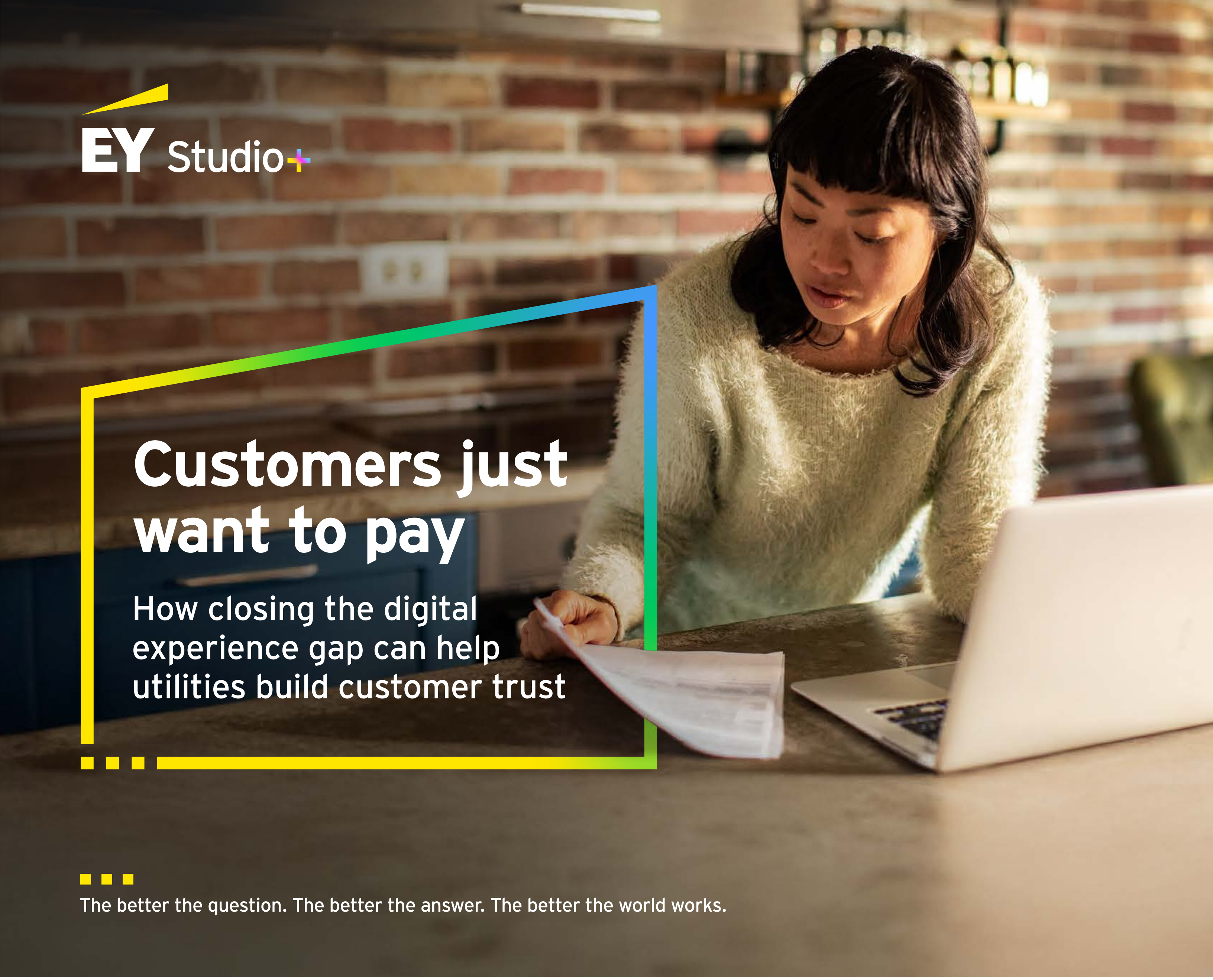

EY Studio+

Customers just want to pay

How closing the digital experience gap can help utilities build customer trust

The better the question. The better the answer. The better the world works.

Unclear and unpredictable bills drive utility customers to scrutinize their charges before paying, while outdated digital tools contribute to distrust.

Nearly half of Americans — 49% — believe utilities intentionally make bills confusing, and more than a third don't trust their bills to be accurate.[1]

49% **of utility customers believe utilities intentionally make bills confusing.**

In an era defined by digital ease, utility customers are comparing their experiences to the seamless, transparent and empowering interactions they have with banks, airlines, streaming services and retail brands.

They command most of their lives with just a few taps, and they expect the same experience from their energy providers. Yet many utilities lag behind, constrained by outdated systems and complex billing operations that frustrate customers, inhibit trust and force extra steps between receipt of a bill and payment.

Today's customers demand better.

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1. *2025 U.S. Electricity Bill Confusion Survey*, Arbor.

Cryptic bills and digital friction fuel customer distrust

Unpredictable bills drive scrutiny

Picture this — you're sitting in the back of a taxi. You and the driver agreed on $20 for the route when he picked you up from your house, but as you pull up to your destination, the driver turns to you and with a neutral expression, he mutters, "That'll be $115." You're flabbergasted. Why did the price change? Why didn't the driver warn you earlier about the price increase? You've taken the ride so now you have to pay, but how will you get home without another huge fee? Your trust is broken, and you're left feeling like you've been robbed.

This scenario mirrors the monthly experience of many modern utility customers whose monthly bills can vary by hundreds of dollars — even when usage remains similar. Time-of-use (TOU) pricing, surcharges, and rate changes introduce swings that are often poorly explained. Only **17% of customers** feel they have a very good understanding of their bill, while **30%** rate their understanding as poor[2] and **43%** of Americans report considerable anxiety each month when receiving utility bills.[3]

Without clear messaging about their costs, customers scrutinize every charge, growing frustrated as they seek to understand where their money is going; this leaves them unwilling and unable to "set it and forget it" with autopay.

Digital tools create barriers, not clarity

Fifty-six percent of customers wish their electric bills were easier to understand, and **59%** feel parts of the bill "seem like another language."[4]

30% **of customers rate their understanding of their utility bill as poor.**

When customers seek answers, outdated digital platforms become obstacles rather than solutions:

- Websites are cluttered and do not flow in an intuitive way.
- Billing details do not display the information that customers actually want, leaving the exact source of price variations unclear and providing no actionable insights.
- Email and mobile notifications happen at the end of the billing period when costs are set, not warning customers about higher-than-normal costs or allowing them to mitigate.
- Live chat, FAQs and support channels are limited or inconsistent.

These gaps fuel frustration and contribute to a cycle of customer distrust.

A cycle of distrust causes further challenges

The consequences extend beyond individual customers; as customers become frustrated in their search for clarity, utilities face increased call volumes, media backlash and regulatory scrutiny.

- Call volumes are **26%–35% higher** when customers cannot easily understand digital tools, resulting in significantly more hours spent by customer service teams.[5]
- Dissatisfied customers go to the media to air their concerns.
- Regulators hear these concerns through public hearings and local news, considering them when determining whether to approve rate increases.
- Autopay rates suffer, with **only ~50% of Americans** autopaying their utility bills compared with **~75%** who autopay for telecom bills and subscriptions.[6,7]

Now envision a better world

Imagine a world where bills are predictable and valuable information is easy to find. The result? Customers can skip the detective work, frustration and delays, and *just pay.*

2. *Electric Bill Clarity: Customer Insights*, E Source email newsletter, 2016.
3. "Three-Quarters of Consumers Confused by Their Energy Bill," Which? article, 2023.
4. "Consumers Struggle to Understand Electric Bills," Renewable Energy World article, 2021.
5. Reddit discussions and Which? data suggest call volumes increase significantly when billing is unclear, with up to 26% to 35% more customer contacts tied to bill disputes or confusion.
6. "Utility Bill Stress and How Americans Plan to Cut Energy Costs in 2024," HOP Energy survey, January 2024.
7. "Report: 75% of Consumers Use Autopay for Bills Like Subscriptions and Streaming," PYMNTS article, October 2023.

A strategic approach to solving the problem

Utilities can transform this cycle through a customer-centric strategy built on four pillars.

1 Assess the current state and set the strategy

- Conduct holistic customer experience (CX) assessments across billing, digital, and service channels.
- Benchmark against leading-class digital brands, not just utility peers.
- Set a transformation roadmap tied to measurable trust and satisfaction metrics.

Utilities that conducted CX maturity assessments saw measurable improvements in payment rates and customer trust.

2 Design for customer-centric experiences

- Apply UX leading practices to bills, web and mobile.
- Simplify language and personalize insights.
- Prototype and test solutions with customers.

Customers who find their bill easy to understand also are more likely to consider their monthly bill amount manageable.

3 Leverage technology and data

- Launch modular, intuitive portals and mobile apps.
- Use analytics to predict usage spikes, flag anomalies and send proactive alerts.
- Provide tools such as usage forecasts, bill smoothing and self-service billing options.

Customers who receive mid-cycle billing alerts, or are even just aware their utility offers them, rate their bill both as significantly easier to understand and significantly more manageable than average.

4 Enable change and track results

- Conduct change management workshops across departments.
- Train front lines in empathy, channel fluency and problem solving.
- Track KPIs, including:
  - Autopay adoption
  - First-call resolution
  - Digital engagement
  - Customer trust scores

Utilities that embed customer feedback loops outperform their peers in trust, retention and satisfaction.

A customer-centric strategy enables customers to skip the detective work, frustration and delays and just pay.

Recommendations for transforming utility CX

Modernized digital experience and personalization

Utility companies are implementing intuitive, modular digital platforms that offer real-time billing data, personalized usage insights and mobile app access. EY teams helped a major utility redesign its customer portal with features such as usage breakdowns (on-peak vs. off-peak vs. super-off-peak), bill projections, carbon footprint tracking and kWh per appliance.

Continued on back

These updates included logical user flows, simplified billing visuals and customer-specific tools like bill smoothing and charge comparisons to previous periods. Customer support channels (live customer service chat, AI chatbot, FAQs, troubleshooting guides) were also redesigned for consistency and accessibility.

Data-driven insights and customer empowerment

Utilities must use advanced analytics that segment customers based on behavior and usage, enabling personalized messaging and proactive engagement. EY teams designed educational programs (e.g., webinars, interactive tools) to help customers understand their bills and usage patterns, and implemented automated push notifications for billing alerts, heatwave warnings and usage tracking. Change management and training verified that utility staff could support these tools effectively, while performance was measured through customer satisfaction metrics and surveys.

Enabling customers to just pay

Utility customers don't want to spend hours scrutinizing every bill – they want clarity, agency and to trust. With the right strategy, transparent communication, and modern digital experiences, utilities can transform frustration into trust. The payoff? Lower costs, streamlined operations and customers who can *just pay*.

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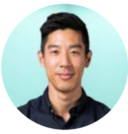

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