

WNS

THE DIGITAL PUSH TO ENHANCE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE IN UTILITIES

A WNS PERSPECTIVE





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The digital revolution is making a serious, albeit delayed, entry into the utilities industry. While distributed generation, renewable energy and smart grids have set the tone for new capabilities and commercial models, the crucial area of customer experience lends itself to future opportunities – especially in a scenario where consumption has hit a plateau due to distribution efficiencies.

The emergence of non-traditional companies (especially in smart energy management systems) holds the key to digital opportunities in the retail side of utilities. Google and Apple have opened the gates to such possibilities with their forays into smart home solutions. Companies such as German telecommunications company Deutsche Telekom are introducing smart home platforms to integrate solutions from multiple providers.

So, what steps can utilities take to transform in today's digital era to provide seamless digital customer experience? How can they engage with customers' preferred channels for maximum impact? More importantly, how can they accomplish this with speed and scale?

Utilities can take a leaf or two from how banking, telecom and retail industries have deployed digitization beyond mere customer touchpoints – and into customer journeys. This will enable utilities to holistically capture their customers' experiences, and identify gaps that negatively impact customer satisfaction and engagement. It will also enable the slashing of unnecessary costs related to repeated actions.

Let's look at the customer lifecycle for a utility consumer. Typical customer journeys include (a) acquisition and onboarding (b) tariffs, billing and collections (c) account management (such as service requests and complaints) (d) emergency services and outages (e) value-additions (such as bundling of services) (f) retention initiatives and (g) support for customer exit, if requested.

The utilities' view of customers has today extended far beyond consumers on the network. Customer-centricity is a top priority, and personalizing offerings to enhance engagement is key to retaining customers. Especially, when consumers can switch service providers.

DRIVING SEAMLESS CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Going digital eliminates inconsistencies due to fragmented processes and disparate systems — factors that impede seamless customer experience. Digital includes the automation of cumbersome manual and paper processes, addition of new digital channels of support, mobile applications to improve the productivity of field workers, efficiency in gathering real-time consumer feedback, or improving stakeholder visibility across the ecosystem.

Automation, when coupled with robotics, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML), enables the wide-ranging application of Intelligent Automation (IA) across the enterprise. Robotic Process Automation (RPA) is already enabling energy and utility companies to achieve newer levels of efficiency and quality.

Utilities are now implementing innovative platforms that offer a 360-degree view of the customer along with inbuilt knowledge management and AI-assisted transactions. This helps utilities improve First Contact Resolution (FCR) and deliver the best experience to customers.

Whatever be the customer journey, utilities can transform the way they deliver customer service. In the process, they can free up employees to focus on more strategic work, and thereby drive new efficiencies and cost savings.

UNDERSTANDING DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION LEVERS

By adopting AI, ML, automation (including RPA) and analytics, utility companies are enabling smart infrastructure, processes and data, and in the process gearing up for digital transformation.

Digital transformation in utilities fall broadly under the following stages:



Mapping customer journeys



Creating a digital operating model



Transforming front and back-offices



Creating cultural change and positive customer experiences

Mapping Customer Journeys

Any transformation initiative needs to be based on consistent, streamlined processes across the customer journey. Such mapping needs to take a customer-centric view by looking at key challenges and customer expectations before designing the processes and deploying the technology around it. Taking an end-to-end view delivers vital process improvements and eliminates waste.

Creating a Digital Operating Model

Once process mapping is completed, the right digital operating model needs to be devised to deliver consistent customer experience across multiple channels such as phone, web chat and e-mail.

Transforming Front and Back-offices

As the hub of direct interaction with the customers, the front office is key to delivering effective customer experience. Accordingly, front office transformation initiatives should include the following:

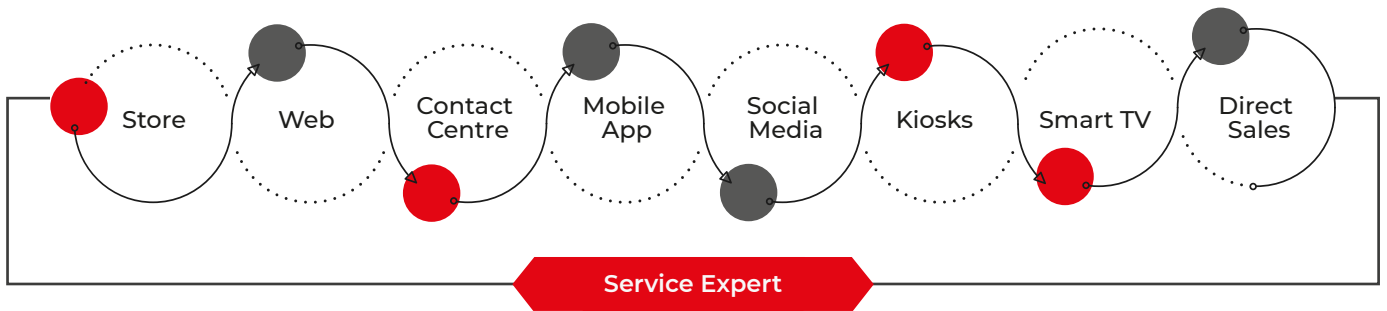


Figure 1: Digital Customer Journey

- Additional channels of omni-channel support, with options for the customers to choose their preferred channel of interaction (web, phone, chat or e-mail). Consistency of experience across channels is vital — customers prize the experience of seamless connects across all channels. Improved customer processes also prove to be cost-effective
- Skilled resources should be engaged as service experts, and must be trained across channels and on end-to-end processes for consistent 'right first time' and quality support
- Data and speech analytics should be implemented to derive meaningful customer insights that can be leveraged for a single customer view across multiple systems. Such intelligence will enable companies to be more responsive, segment customers more efficiently for personalized services (in the areas of demand management, tariff plans, consumption optimization, and device and infrastructure maintenance) and enhanced customer experiences

With increased digital and self-service interactions by customers, an organization's back-office now plays a pivotal role in creating service differentiation. The back-office also represents the largest opportunity for significant improvements in customer

experience and cost reduction. Based on our experience of running intelligent operations for multiple utility providers, the following components play a key role in transforming traditional back-office functions into digital and intelligent operations:

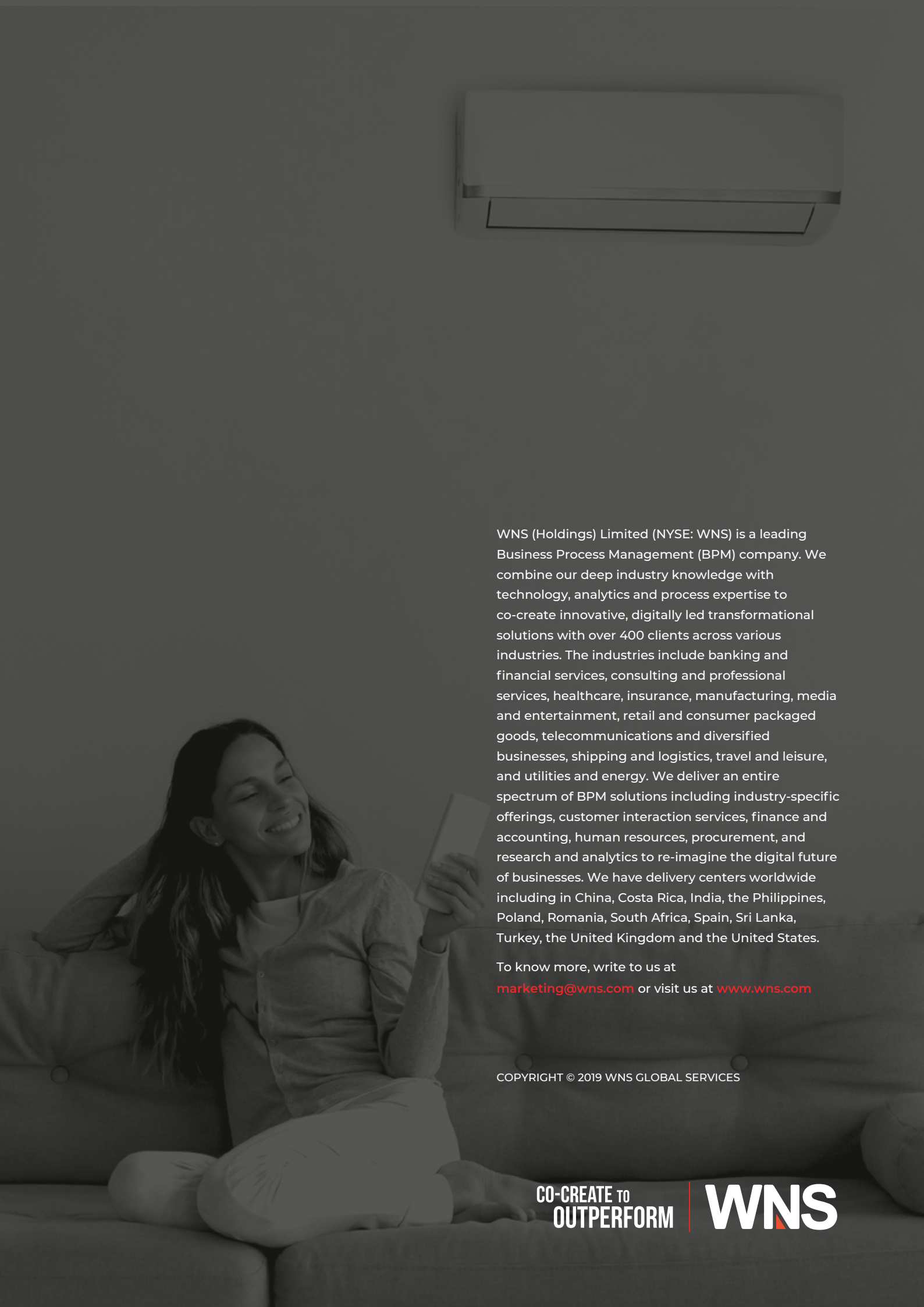
- Automation, fueled by advanced workflow solutions, robotics and AI have the potential to improve the quality, speed and cost-effectiveness of services
- Customer-centric, digital operating models, strengthened by advanced analytics and robotics, will be crucial in transforming back-office operations. The success of a back-office process is traditionally measured by Service-level Agreements (SLAs) and other metrics. However, companies have to look beyond metrics and identify unspoken customer expectations. Design thinking can help in uncovering new opportunities in back-office transformation
- Automation and data-based decision-making enables differentiation through customized bundling of tariffs, plans and offers to meet and exceed customer's expectations. Process standardization and automation should be implemented with equal enthusiasm to ensure it does not get over-complicated

Cultural Change and Positive Customer Experiences

Digital transformation across customer journeys is not just technological transformation. It requires a shift to a service culture that views customers as not mere consumers but as individuals with specific preferences and buying habits – and build lasting relationships. It calls for an ongoing organizational commitment and continued cultural backing to deliver differentiated customer experience. Front-runners and change agents who lead this exercise must be recognized and rewarded.

The challenges of digital transformation in utilities are as daunting as they are promising — opportunities certainly outweigh the risks. The benefits of digitization are huge — improved productivity, increased revenues, better reliability and safety, enhanced customer loyalty, newer avenues of business and much more. Utility companies must hence pick up the gauntlet to surge ahead.





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