

CUSTOMER SERVICE

BENCHMARKING

AUSTRALIA

**Comparative Victorian Energy Utility
Call Centre Performance Report 2009-10**

Prepared for



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Customer Service Benchmarking Australia

Level 5, 10-16 Queen Street

Melbourne VIC 3000

T: +613 9605 4900 | F: +613 9642 1741

www.csba.com.au

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INTRODUCTION

Customer Service Benchmarking Australia's mystery shoppers called twelve Victorian energy retailers over four quarterly surveys during 2009–10*.

In total, 1033 calls were made by CSBA to Victorian Energy Sector companies and 1647 to the overall National Energy sector during 2009–10.

As well as assessing calls overall, this report isolates those calls that are related to hardship issues and in Part Two compares them with non-hardship calls. For this section of the survey, 532 hardship calls were made to Victorian Energy Sector companies over the course of the four quarterly surveys.

The survey results provide a means of assessing the customer service levels delivered by the Victorian energy retailers during the 2009–10 year. The overall results for the Victorian Energy Sector are compared with the results from the 2008–09 survey.

The results are also shown by quarter and are compared with the National Energy Sector and a Basket of Companies which comprises: Optus, Qantas, National Australian Bank and the RACV.

Throughout the report, only differences of 3 or more points are highlighted, unless specified otherwise.

Victorian Energy Companies Surveyed during 2009–10 include the following:

AGL
Australian Power & Gas
Country Energy
Energy Australia
Jackgreen Energy
Neighbourhood Energy
Origin Energy
Power Direct
Red Energy
Simply Energy
TRU Energy
Victoria Electricity

*

Note: In 2009-10, Australian Power & Gas was excluded in the Q1 Survey, Neighbourhood Energy was excluded from the Q1 and Q2 Surveys, Power Direct was excluded in the Q2, Q3 and Q4 Surveys and Jackgreen Energy was excluded from the Q3 and Q4 Surveys.

Summary of Key Measures

The Key Measures Table (Table 7 on page 19) provides a summary of changes since the last survey (2008-09) for the Victorian and National Energy Sectors, and highlights the highest and lowest results of the 12 Victorian Energy Companies surveyed in 2009-10.

In 2009-10, the Average Time to Connect to an Agent at the Victorian Energy Sector companies (99 seconds) was seven seconds longer than the previous year (92 seconds) and three seconds slower than the National Energy Sector (96 seconds). The National Energy Sector was 15 seconds longer than the previous result (81 seconds). The fastest Victorian Energy Company was Neighbourhood Energy at 58 seconds while Origin Energy was the slowest at 154 seconds this year.

Sixty one percent of the calls to the Victorian Energy Sector companies were answered within 30 seconds of dialling, three points below the previous result (64%) but consistent with the National Energy Sector at 62% (a fall of three points from 65%). With 91%, Power Direct was the best company, while Red Energy at 36% was the worst company.

The Greeting Skills Average of the Victorian Energy Sector companies remained virtually stable at 93%, on par with the National Energy Sector (93%). Agents providing an appropriate Salutation (98%), the Company Name (94%) and Agent Name (99%) remained stable, while Sign Off (99%) and Offer to Help (75%) results showed improvements of eight and nine points respectively. With a Greeting Index of 96%, Australian Power & Gas was the best Victorian Energy Company, while Red Energy (88%) was the lowest performer this year.

The Best Practice Agent Manner of the Victorian Energy Sector declined to 71% this year (74% in 2008-09), in line with the National Energy Sector (73%). While AGL (82%) was the top performer, Victoria Electricity at 54% was the lowest performer. The Victorian Sector's Total Acceptable Manner was consistent at 96%, on par with the National Energy Sector (96%).

The Enquiry Handling Skills Index of the Victorian Energy Sector was stable at 83%, in line with the National Energy Sector (consistent at 84%). With the exception of Good Product Knowledge (up three points to 84%), the remainder of the criteria were in line with the 2008-09 results. The highest and the lowest performing Victorian companies in this area were AGL (93%) and Power Direct (70%) respectively. While Courteous and Helpful remained stable at 90%, all other Enquiry Handling criteria results for the National Energy Sector showed an improvement ranging from three to four points.

Hardship Calls:

Overall, as in 2008-09, the Victorian Energy Sector companies Agents handled the hardship calls in a similar fashion to the non-hardship calls in 2009-10. Best Practice Manner for hardship calls at 71% was in line with the non-hardship calls (72%). Agents exhibited Total Acceptable Manner in 97% of the hardship calls, three points above the non-hardship calls (94%). However, looking at individual companies, five displayed notably improved Best Practice Manner when dealing with hardship calls while seven showed notably poorer Best Practice Manner.

For the Victorian Energy Sector, the Enquiry Handling index for both hardship (83%) and non-hardship (82%) calls was similar in the current year. Agents Showed Good Product Knowledge in more hardship calls (86%) than the non-hardship calls (82%). For the remainder of the Enquiry Handling criteria, Agents achieved similar scores for both the

hardship and the non-hardship calls. Most companies dealt with hardship enquiries at the same level as non-hardship enquiries, three of them were notably better when dealing with hardship enquiries and two were notably worse.

PART ONE - Overview of Victorian Energy Sector Companies

Customer Service Benchmarking Australia measured the customer service levels of 12 Victorian Energy Sector companies in 2009-10, including the gas and electricity lines for AGL, TRU Energy and Origin Energy (the other nine companies provide electricity only). The gas and electricity results for those three companies have been amalgamated to form a composite energy result for each.

The Victorian Energy Sector results are compared with an aggregate of all energy companies surveyed in Australia, (classified as the National Energy Sector) and a Basket of Companies total which comprised: Optus, Qantas, National Australia Bank and the RACV.

Strengths

- The Greeting Skills Index maintained was up two points to 93%, a good result.
- Offer to Help (75%, up nine points) and Sign Off (99%, up eight points) showed marked improvements this year.
- The Victorian Energy Sector Agents displayed Total Acceptable Manner in a high 97% of the hardship calls (94% for non-hardship calls). Agents Showed Good Product Knowledge in 86% of the hardship calls, four points better than the non-hardship calls at 82%.

Weaknesses

- The Time to reach an Agent was slow at 99 seconds, seven seconds longer than in 2008-09 (92 seconds).
- The Victorian Energy Sector's Best Practice Manner declined by three points to 71% (74% previously) and there were four percent instances of Unacceptable Manner.
- Agents at seven Victorian Energy Companies displayed poorer Agent Manner when dealing with hardship calls.

Areas to Address

- Connect Time continues to be long.
- Callers reaching an Agent within 30 seconds of any IVR delay have dropped further, to 61% this survey.
- Though Offer to Help improved to 75% this year, it leaves room for improvement.
- Best Practice Manner was reported only in 71% of the calls, while 24% of the callers encountered Businesslike Manner. There were four percent instances of Unacceptable Manner in 2009-10.
- Agents should aim to improve their skills in Clarifying a Caller's Needs properly.
- Agents at some companies should aim to maintain consistency while handling both hardship and non-hardship calls.

Commendations

- Neighbourhood Energy achieved the quickest Connect Time of 58 seconds and perfect results for the Total Acceptable Manner.
- Power Direct for Answering 91% of Calls within 30 seconds of any IVR delay in one quarter, an excellent result.
- Australian Power & Gas Agents for their good Greeting Skill results (96%) in three quarters.
- AGL Agents displayed Best Practice Manner in 82% of calls and possessed good Enquiry Handling Skills (93%). AGL Agents also achieved excellent results for the hardship calls with the highest level of Best Practice Manner (85%), equal-

highest Total Acceptable Manner (100%) and highest Enquiry Handling Skills (94%).

- Country Energy Victoria had excellent scores for the Total Acceptable Manner for both hardship and non-hardship calls. Others were a bit better but not surveyed for four quarters.

1. Connect Times

The time to reach an Agent at the Victorian Energy Sector was 99 seconds in 2009-10 survey, slower than both the previous year (92 seconds) and the National Energy Sector (15 seconds longer than previously at 96 seconds) by seven and three seconds respectively.

The Connect Times of Jul-Sep 09 (98 seconds), Jan-Mar 10 (97 seconds) and Apr-Jun 10 (94 seconds) quarters of the Victorian Energy Sector were consistent with the National Energy Sector results (Q1 - 96, Q3 - 98 and Q4 - 94 seconds respectively). The Oct-Dec 09 quarter had the longest Connect Time for the Victorian Energy Sector at 107 seconds, nine seconds slower than the Jul-Sep 09 quarter. Connect Times of the National Energy Sector across the four quarters ranged from 94 to 98 seconds.

There was a four second improvement to 107 seconds in the Connect Time of the Basket of Companies in 2009-10 (111 seconds in 2008-09). While Jan-Mar 10 recorded the slowest Connect Time at 112 seconds, Oct-Dec 09 had the quickest Connect Time of 105 seconds. The Connect Time for the Jul-Sep 09 and the Apr-Jun 10 were 108 and 106 seconds respectively.

Table 1 (below) shows that, the Connect Times of the Victorian Energy Sector improved gradually from Quarter 1 to Quarter 4 with Quarter 2 (107 seconds) being an exception. The Average Connect Times for the National Energy Sector remained stable throughout the four Quarters.

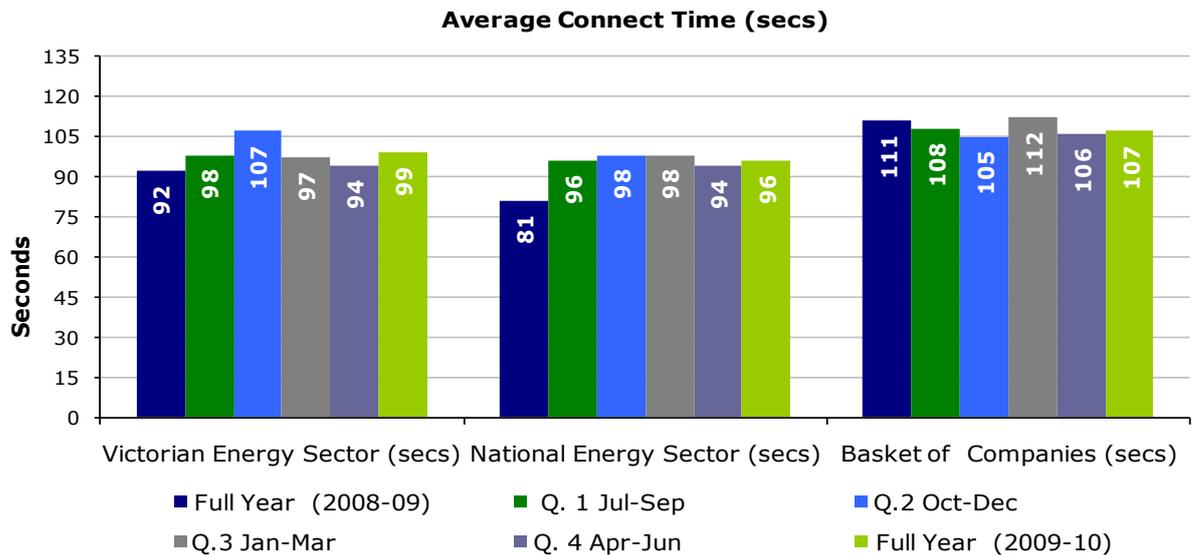
With an Average Connect Time of 58 seconds, Neighbourhood Energy was the Best Victorian Energy Company for the 2009-10 survey. While Victoria Electricity achieved the quickest Average Connect Time in Jul-Sep 09 (67 seconds) and Oct-Dec 09 (78 seconds), Neighbourhood Energy was the best Energy company in Jan-Mar 10 (61 seconds) and Apr-Jun 10 (56 seconds).

Table 1. Average time to reach an Agent (seconds). Comparison to Prior Quarter and 2000-10 compared with 2008-09.

	Full Year (2008-09)	2009-10				Full Year (2009-10)
		Q. 1 Jul-Sep	Q.2 Oct-Dec	Q.3 Jan-Mar	Q. 4 Apr-Jun	
Victorian Energy Sector (secs)	92	98	107	97	94	99
National Energy Sector (secs)	81	96	98	98	94	96
Best Vic Energy Company (secs)	Jackgreen (67 secs)	Victoria Electricity (67 secs)	Victoria Electricity (78 secs)	Neighbourhood Energy (61 secs)	Neighbourhood Energy (56 secs)	Neighbourhood Energy (58 secs)
Basket of Companies (secs)	111	108	105	112	106	107

5+ Seconds Faster	5+ Seconds Slower	No Change
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Note: each quarterly result is rounded, so the average of the four quarters may not match the Full Year result.



Calls Answered within 30 Seconds of any IVR delay

Customers like to reach an Agent within 30 seconds of a phone call being answered. CSBA has measured the incidence of Callers reaching an Agent after any interactive voice response (IVR) delay. The data shown in the Table and Chart below compares 2009-10 with the data from 2008-09.

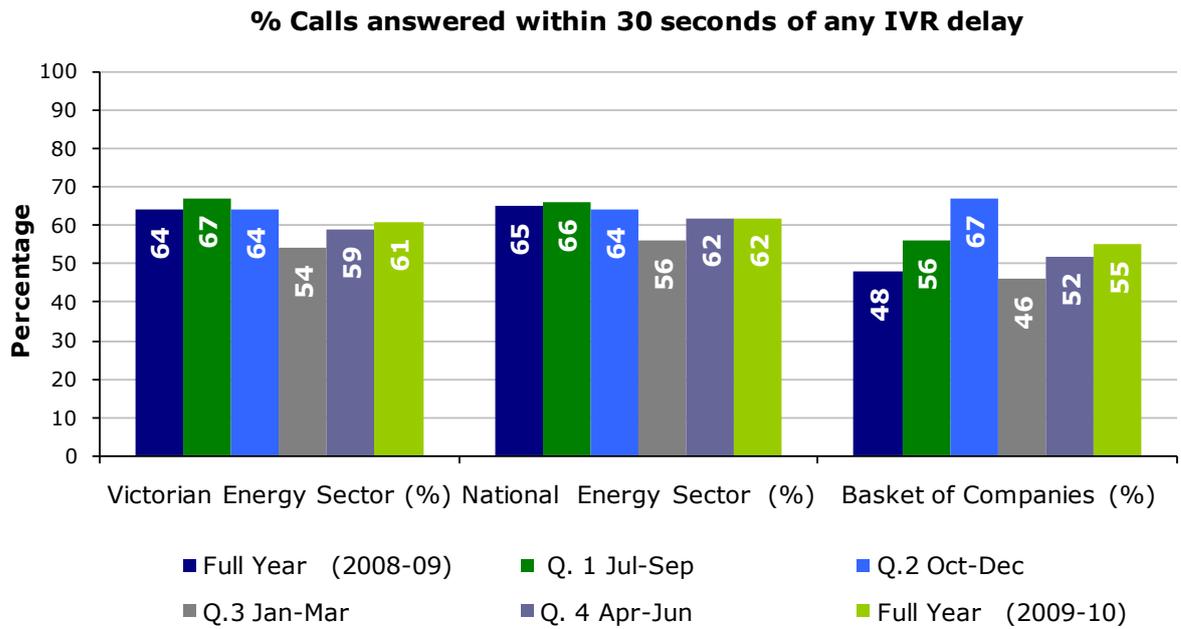
In 2009-10, 61% of calls to the Victorian Energy Sector were answered within 30 seconds, three points below 2008-09 (64%). While the Victorian Energy Sector was in line with the National Energy Sector (62%, down three points from previously), it led the Basket of Companies (up seven points from previously to 55%) by six points.

The Victorian Energy Sector's quarterly results ranged from 54% to 67%. While Power Direct (91%) was the best company, Red Energy (36%) remained the lowest scoring company for 2009-10. The best performers of the four quarters were Power Direct (Q1 - 91%), Country Energy and Victoria Electricity (both at Q2 - 88%), Victoria Electricity (Q3 - 84%) and Australian Power & Gas (Q4 - 73%) respectively. As in the last two years, Red Energy was the lowest performer in 2009-10 scoring 34%, 32%, 41% and 40% in all the four quarters.

Table 2. % Calls answered within 30 seconds of any IVR delay. Comparison to Prior Quarter and 2009-10 compared with 2008-09.

	2009-10					Full Year (2009-10)
	Full Year (2008-09)	Q. 1 Jul-Sep	Q.2 Oct-Dec	Q.3 Jan-Mar	Q. 4 Apr-Jun	
Victorian Energy Sector (%)	64	67	64	54	59	61
National Energy Sector (%)	65	66	64	56	62	62
Highest Vic Energy Company (%)	TRUenergy (84%)	Power Direct (91%)	Country Energy & Victoria Electricity (both 88%)	Victoria Electricity (84%)	Australian Power & Gas (73%)	Power Direct (91%)
Lowest Vic Energy Company (%)	Red Energy (37%)	Red Energy (34%)	Red Energy (32%)	Red Energy (41%)	Red Energy (40%)	Red Energy (36%)
Basket of Companies (%)	48	56	67	46	52	55
	3+ Points Higher	3+ Points Lower	No Change			

Note: each quarterly result is rounded, so the average of the four quarters may not match the Full Year result.



2. Greeting Quality

Customer Service Benchmarking Australia measures five key Greeting Skills:

- Welcome salutation
- Giving the company name
- Giving the Agent's name unprompted
- Making an offer to help the caller
- Sign off (saying good bye and / or thanking the caller)

These measures are aggregated to form the Greeting Quality Index.

In most companies, the Greeting Quality Index tends to not change drastically between quarters. Agents generally score high in four of the five greeting elements but some have difficulty in the requirement of incorporating an Offer to Help the Caller in their standard greeting. This is usually the only area of volatility. A full breakdown of scores obtained on each greeting element by the individual Sectors and Companies is contained in Table 7.

The Greeting Quality Index of the Victorian Energy Sector remained consistent at 93% in 2009-10 (91% previously). The Victorian Energy companies showed a marked improvement in both Offer to Help (up nine points to 75%) and Providing a Proper Sign Off (99%, up eight points) this year. Providing a Welcome Salutation (98%), Providing the Company Name (94%) and Agent Name unprompted (99%) remained good, a commendable result.

There was a three- point rise to 93% in the Greeting Quality Index of the National Energy Sector in 2009-10 (90% in 2008-09). This was due to a 10- point improvement in both Offer to Help (74%) and Providing a Proper Sign Off (99%). Providing a Welcome Salutation (98%), Providing the Company Name (94%) and Agent Name unprompted (99%) were stable this year.

In the 2009-10 survey, Australian Power & Gas with a Greeting Index of 96% was the best performing company. While Energy Australia was the highest performer in Quarter 1 (98%) and Quarter 4 (95%), Victoria Electricity (97%) was the best performer in Quarter 2. With a Greeting Index of 98%, each of Australian Power & Gas, Origin Energy and Victoria Electricity shared the top position in Quarter 3. Red Energy was the lowest performer of the year with the least Greeting Average of 88%. (Refer to Table 7)

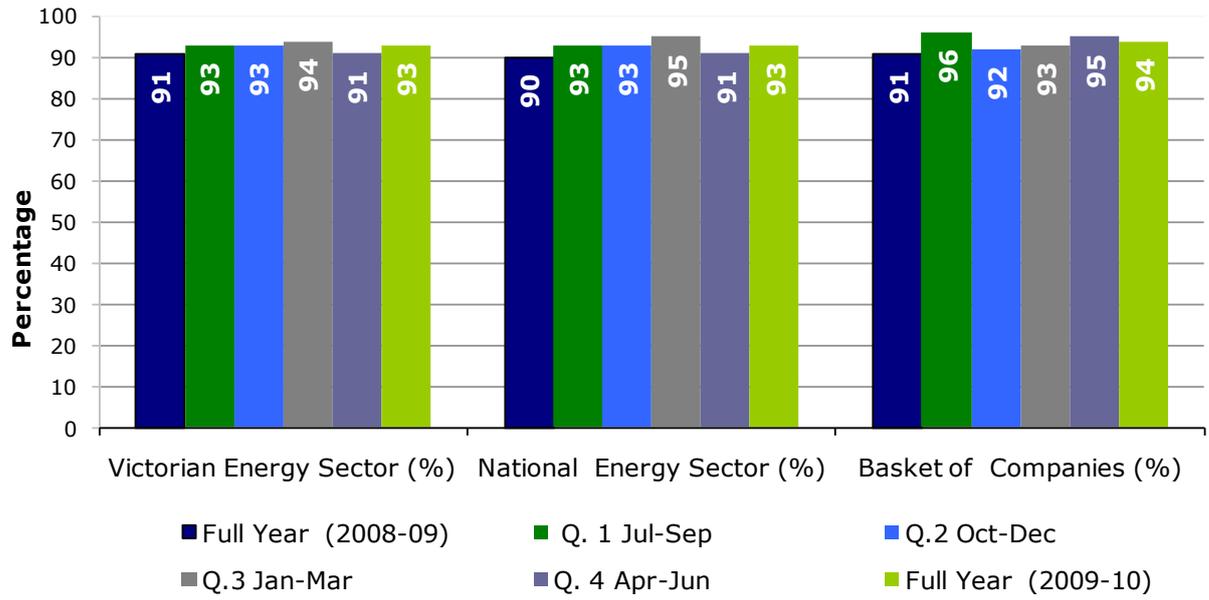
Table 3. Greeting Quality Index. Comparison to Prior Quarter and 2009-10 compared with 2008-09.

	2009-10					
	Full Year (2008-09)	Q. 1 Jul-Sep	Q.2 Oct-Dec	Q.3 Jan-Mar	Q. 4 Apr-Jun	Full Year (2009-10)
Victorian Energy Sector (%)	91	93	93	94	91	93
National Energy Sector (%)	90	93	93	95	91	93
Highest Vic Energy Company	Energy Australia Vic (95%)	Energy Australia (98%)	Victoria Electricity (97%)	Australian Power & Gas, Origin Energy & Victoria Electricity (all 98%)	Energy Australia (95%)	Australian Power & Gas (96%)
Basket of Companies (%)	91	96	92	93	95	94

3+ Points Higher	3+ Points Lower	No Change
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Note: each quarterly result is rounded, so the average of the four quarters may not match the Full Year result.

Greeting quality index



3. Agent Manner

Customer Service Benchmarking Australia's survey program includes assessment of the Manner projected by telephone Agents.

Manner is assessed by CSBA using four mutually exclusive ratings:

- Interested, Helpful and Warm (the Best Practice option)
- Businesslike and un-emotive
- Laidback and easygoing
- Disinterested and curt

Research conducted by CSBA indicates that quality of Agent Manner is a critical factor in the successful completion of an enquiry call. If the Agent is interested and helpful, or even businesslike, successful elements of the call, including Enquiry Handling, are more likely to be achieved.

Best Practice Agent Manner

There was a three point fall to 71% in the Best Practice Manner of the Victorian Energy Sector's Agents this year (74% in 2008-09). This was in line with the National Energy Sector (stable at 73%) and led the Basket of Companies (down three points to 66%) by five points.

The Best Practice Manner of the Victorian Energy Sector, the National Energy Sector and the Basket of Companies showed a fluctuating trend throughout the four quarters in 2009-10. The Victorian Energy Sector achieved 66% in Jul-Sep 09, 77% (up 11 points) in Oct-Dec 09, 72% (down five points) in Jan-Mar 10 and 70% (a drop of two points) in Apr-Jun 10. The National Energy Sector scored 70% in Jul-Sep 09, 80% (a rise of 10 points) in Oct-Dec 09, 74% (down six points) in Jan-Mar 10 and 70% (a fall of four points) in Apr-Jun 10. The Basket of Companies recorded scores ranging from 51% to 83%.

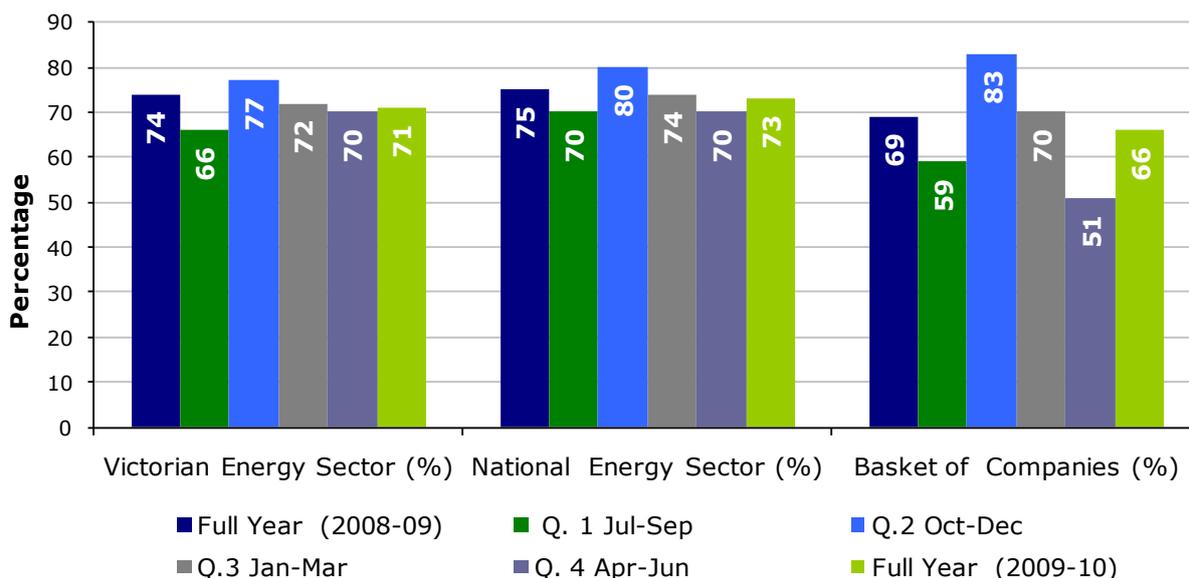
AGL was the best Victorian Energy Company with a Best Practice Manner of 82%, three points below the previous year's top performer (Energy Australia - 85%). The company with the lowest Best Practice Manner result was Victoria Electricity (54%). (Refer Table 7)

Table 4. % Best Practice Agent Manner (Interested, Warm and Helpful). Comparison to Prior Quarter and 2009-10 compared with 2008-09.

	Full Year (2008-09)	2009-10				Full Year (2009-10)
		Q. 1 Jul-Sep	Q.2 Oct-Dec	Q.3 Jan-Mar	Q. 4 Apr-Jun	
Victorian Energy Sector (%)	74	66	77	72	70	71
National Energy Sector (%)	75	70	80	74	70	73
Best Vic Energy Company	Energy Australia Vic (85%)	Simply Energy (85%)	AGL (86%)	Neighbourhood Energy (85%)	Country Energy (86%)	AGL (82%)
Basket of Companies (%)	69	59	83	70	51	66
	3+ Points Higher	3+ Points Lower	No Change			

Note: each quarterly result is rounded, so the average of the four quarters may not match the Full Year result.

% Best Practice Agent Manner (Interested, Warm, Helpful)



Total Acceptable Agent Manner

The Best Practice and Businesslike Manner scores have been combined to present the Total Acceptable Manner results.

The Total Acceptable Manner of the Victorian Energy Sector, the National Energy Sector (both at 96%) and the Basket of Companies (95%) each rose a marginal point in 2009-10.

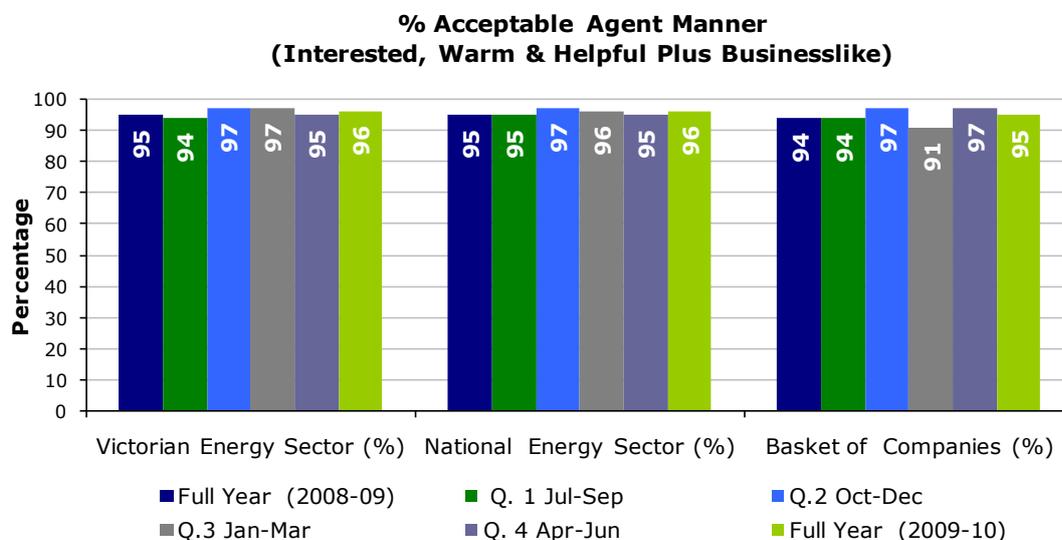
Agents should try to exhibit Best Practice Manner in all calls. The Victorian Energy Sector Agents displayed Unacceptable Manner in four percent of calls in 2009-10 (five percent previously), a less desirable result. Agents should aim to avoid all instances of Unacceptable Manner.

Neighbourhood Energy was the best Victorian Energy sector company with a perfect result for Total Acceptable Manner, while Power Direct and Red Energy (both at 90%) were the lowest performing companies. As in 2008-09, perfect results were achieved by a few companies in the Victorian Energy Sector in each of the four quarters. (Refer to Table 7)

Table 5. % Acceptable Agent Manner. Comparison to Prior Quarter and 2009–10 compared with 2008-09.

	Full Year (2008-09)	2009-10				Full Year (2009-10)
		Q. 1 Jul-Sep	Q.2 Oct-Dec	Q.3 Jan-Mar	Q. 4 Apr-Jun	
Victorian Energy Sector (%)	95	94	97	97	95	96
National Energy Sector (%)	95	95	97	96	95	96
Best Vic Energy Company	Energy Australia Vic & TRUenergy (both 98%)	Origin Energy & Simply Energy (both 100%)	AGL, Energy Australia, Red Energy, TRU Energy & Victoria Electricity (all 100%)	AGL, Australian Power & Gas, Country Energy, Neighbourhood Energy & Simply Energy (all 100%)	Australian Power & Gas, Country Energy, Neighbourhood Energy & Origin Energy (all 100%)	Neighbourhood Energy (100%)
Basket of Companies (%)	94	94	97	91	97	95
	3+ Points Higher	3+ Points Lower	No Change			

Note: each quarterly result is rounded, so the average of the four quarters may not match the Full Year result.



4. Enquiry Handling Skills

Customer Service Benchmarking Australia measures four key Enquiry Handling Skills:

- Ability to probe to clarify customer needs
- Product/service knowledge
- Agent provides a clear outcome for the enquiry
- Agent is helpful and courteous

These measures are aggregated to form the Enquiry Handling Index.

The Victorian Energy Sector's Enquiry Handling Skills Index at 83% was in line with both the 2008-09 survey results (81%) and the National Energy Sector results (consistent at 84%). While Good Product Knowledge rose three points to 84%, Probed Needs (74%), Provided a Clear Outcome (83%) and Courteous and Helpful (89%) were all in line with the previous results. (Refer to Table 7)

The National Energy Sector showed improvements in three of the four Enquiry Resolution criteria. Probed Needs (74%) and Provided Clear Outcome (86%) gained three points each while Good Product Knowledge rose four points to 87%. As in the last year, Courteous and Helpful was consistent at 90%. (Refer to Table 7)

The Enquiry Skills Index of the Victorian Energy Sector companies ranged from 80% to 85% across the four quarters, while the National Energy Sector results ranged from 82% to 87%.

AGL was the best Victorian Energy Sector company with an Enquiry Resolution Index of 93%, while Power Direct at 70% was the low performing company.

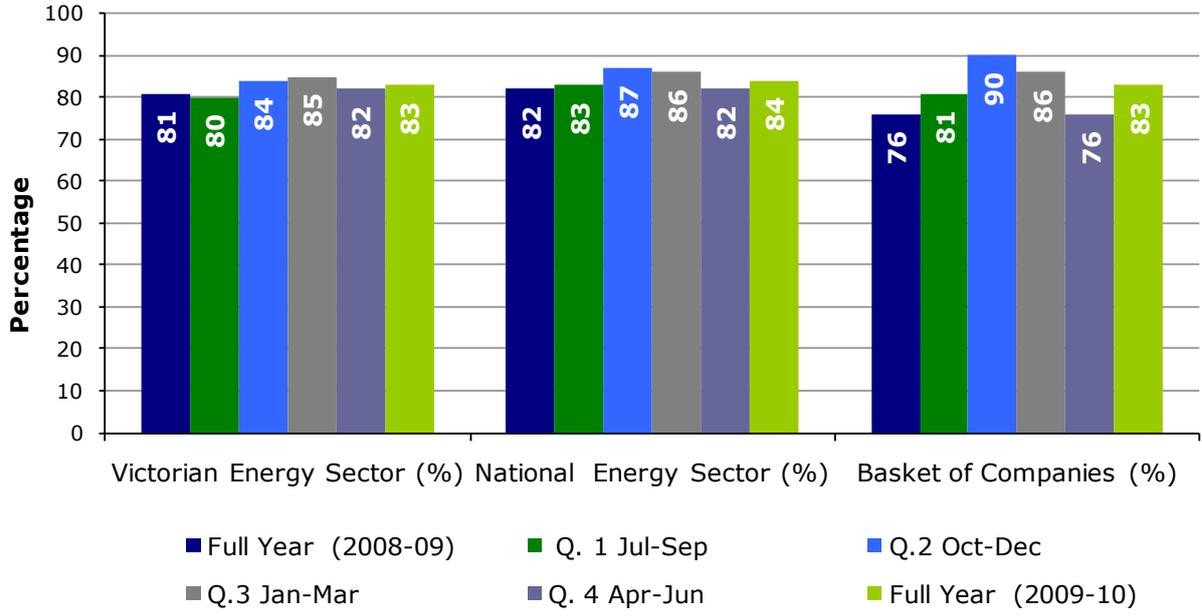
Table 6. % Enquiry Handling Index. Comparison to Prior Quarter and 2009-10 compared with 2008-09.

	Full Year (2008-09)	2009-10				Full Year (2009-10)
		Q. 1 Jul-Sep	Q.2 Oct-Dec	Q.3 Jan-Mar	Q. 4 Apr-Jun	
Victorian Energy Sector (%)	81	80	84	85	82	83
National Energy Sector (%)	82	83	87	86	82	84
Best Vic Energy Company (%)	Country Energy Victoria (89%)	Origin Energy (93%)	Energy Australia & Origin Energy (both 93%)	Australian Power & Gas (94%)	AGL (96%)	AGL (93%)
Basket of Companies (%)	76	81	90	86	76	83

3+ Points Higher	3+ Points Lower	No Change
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Note: each quarterly result is rounded, so the average of the four quarters may not match the Full Year result.

% Enquiry Handling Index



PART TWO - Victorian Energy Utilities and Hardship Issues

This section of the report shows the scores by Victorian Energy companies for hardship calls, against the results for non-hardship calls. The key areas of call centre activity used in this comparison are Enquiry Handling Skills, Agent Best Practice Manner and Total Acceptable Agent Manner.

Connect Time and Greeting Skills are not relevant.

Enquiry Handling Skills

The Bar Chart below compares the Enquiry Handling Skills Index scores achieved for the Victorian Energy Sector companies comparing non-hardship against hardship calls.

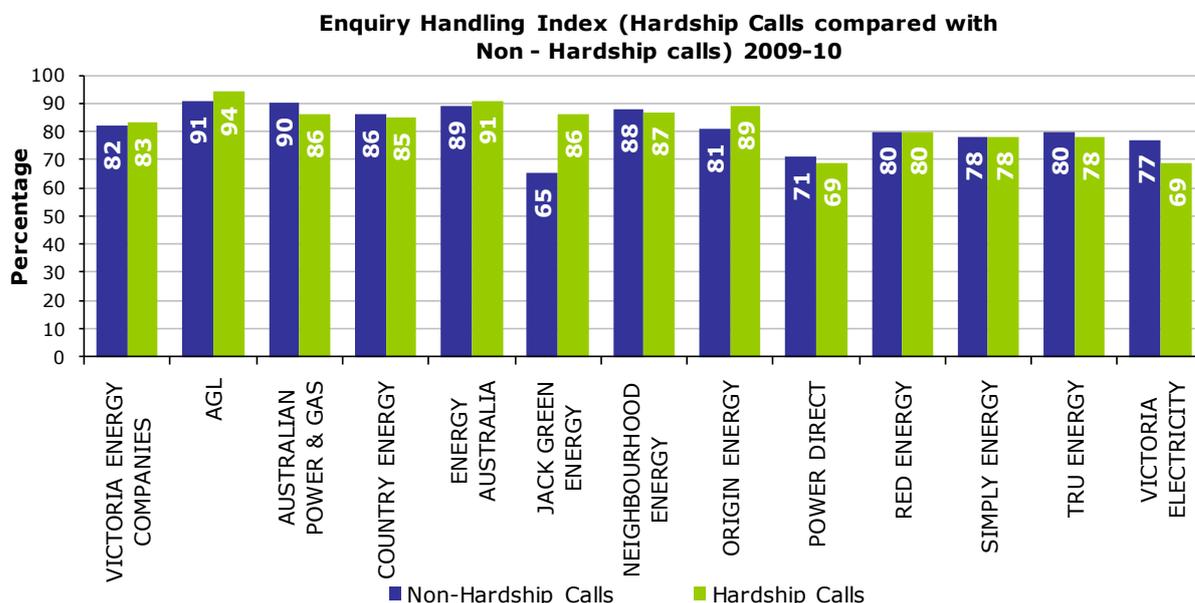
In 2009-10, the Enquiry Handling Skills Index across the 12 Victorian Energy Sector companies for the hardship calls was 83%, while the non-hardship calls were a marginal point lower at 82% which indicates that the Agents' handling of both the hardship and non-hardship calls was essentially equal.

Companies which had notably superior Enquiry Skills when handling hardships calls rather than the non-hardship calls were Jackgreen Energy (86%, 21 points better), Origin Energy (89%, better by eight points) and AGL (three points better at 94%).

Companies with notably lower Enquiry Handling Skills when handling hardship calls were Victoria Electricity (eight points lower at 69%) and Australian Power & Gas (86%, lower by four points).

The Victorian Energy Sector Agents showed Good Product Knowledge in 86% of the hardship calls, four points better than the non-hardship calls (82%). Agents achieved similar results for the remainder of the Enquiry handling criteria for both the hardship and the non-hardship calls: Probed Needs (hardship – 83%, non-hardship – 82%), Clear Outcome (hardship – 84%, non-hardship – 83%), Courteous and Helpful (hardship – 89%, non-hardship – 90%).

A full breakdown on how Agents from each energy company performed in each enquiry handling criterion is available in Table 8.



Agent Manner

The Manner an Agent displays when talking to a caller with a hardship enquiry is important, even paramount. The following Bar Charts show scores for Best Practice Manner and Total Acceptable Manner.

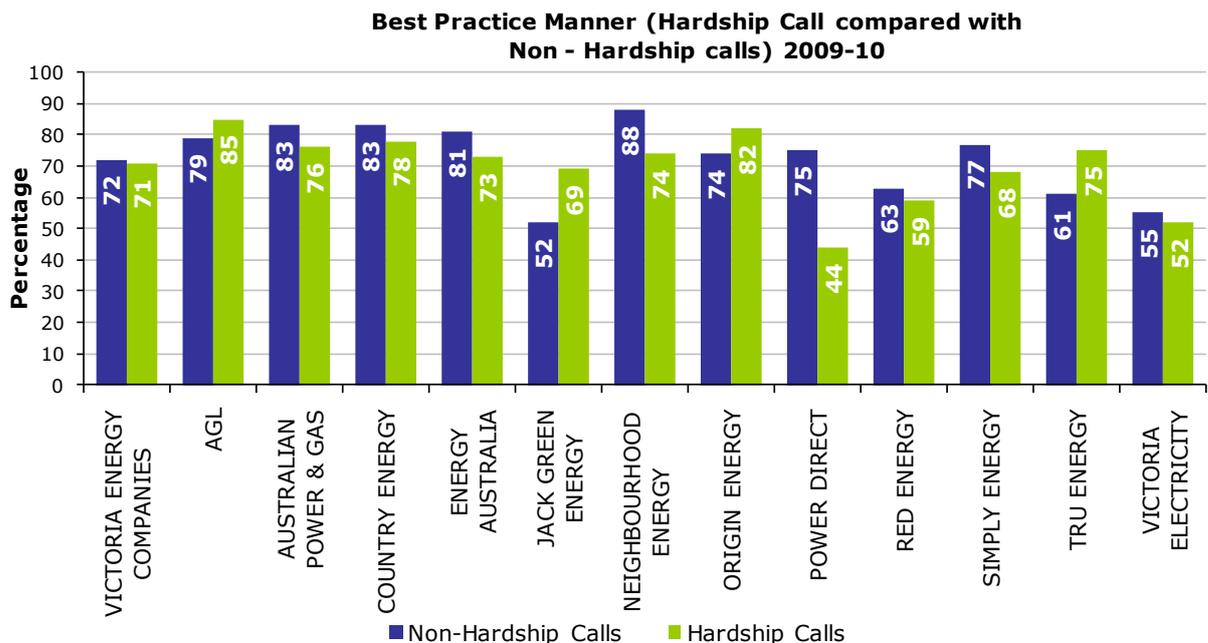
Agent Displayed Best Practice Manner

The Chart below shows the Best Practice Agent Manner (Interested, Warm and Helpful) exhibited by the Victorian Energy Sector companies in hardship and non-hardship calls.

In 2009-10, the Best Practice Manner scores of the Victorian Energy Sector for both hardship (71%) and non-hardship (72%) calls were similar indicating that Agents are displaying consistent manner in all calls.

Companies which were better at displaying Best Practice Manner with hardship calls than the non-hardship calls were: Jackgreen Energy (69%, 17 points better, TRU Energy (75%, 14 points better), Origin Energy (82%, eight points better) and AGL (85%, six points better).

Companies that did not display Best Practice Manner at a higher level for hardship calls were: Power Direct (44%, 31 points lower), Neighbourhood Energy (74%, 14 points lower), Simply Energy (68%, 9 points lower), Energy Australia (73%, 8 points lower), Australian Power & Gas (76%, 7 points lower), Country Energy (78%, 5 points lower), Red Energy (59%, 4 points lower) and Victoria Electricity (52%, 3 points lower).



Agent Displayed Acceptable Manner (Best Practice plus Businesslike)

In 2009-10, the Total Acceptable Manner of the hardship calls (97%) was three points better than the non-hardship calls (94%), as in the previous year.

Perfect results were achieved by AGL, Jackgreen Energy and Neighbourhood Energy for Total Acceptable Manner when dealing with hardship calls.

Companies with better Total Acceptable Manner for hardship calls were: Jackgreen Energy (100%, up by 13 points), Red Energy (96%, 12 points better), AGL (100%, five points better), Victoria Electricity (98%, improved by five points), Energy Australia (up four points to 98%) and Simply Energy (98%, improved by three points).

Companies with less Total Acceptable Manner for hardship calls were: Origin Energy (94%, six points lower), Australian Power & Gas (97%), TRU Energy (91%) and Power Direct (89%) all declining by three points from previous results when dealing with hardship calls.

Country Energy (98%) and Neighbourhood Energy (100%) showed consistent results.

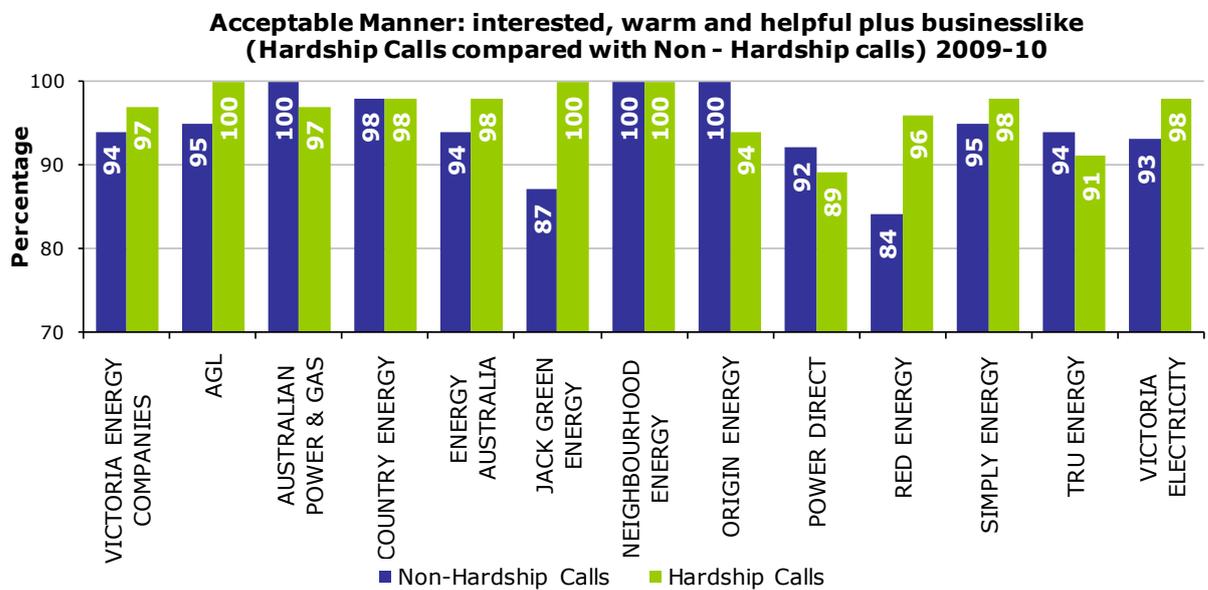


Table 7. Key Measures 2009-10 (highest and lowest result for each measure)

	VICTORIAN ENERGY SECTOR		NATIONAL ENERGY SECTOR		AGL	AUSTRALIAN POWER & GAS	COUNTRY ENERGY	ENERGY AUSTRALIA	JACKGREEN ENERGY	NEIGHBOURHOOD ENERGY	ORIGIN ENERGY	POWER DIRECT	RED ENERGY	SIMPLY ENERGY	TRU ENERGY	VICTORIA ELECTRICITY
	08-09	09-10	08-09	09-10	09-10	09-10	09-10	09-10	09-10	09-10	09-10	09-10	09-10	09-10	09-10	09-10
CONNECTION TO AN AGENT																
Average Connect Time (sec)	92	99	81	96	119	85	100	107	82	58	154	77	93	101	107	78
% Calls answered within 30 seconds during Queue Time	64	61	65	62	52	71	67	57	63	65	43	91	36	70	62	82
GREETING QUALITY																
Av Greeting Quality Index (%)	91	93	90	93	95	96	90	95	93	94	93	93	88	90	94	95
% Salutation	98	98	98	98	99	97	99	99	100	95	100	100	96	94	99	99
% Company Name	94	94	92	94	92	99	98	99	100	100	93	100	80	86	97	99
% Agent Name	98	99	98	99	99	100	99	100	98	100	98	100	100	97	100	100
% Offer To Help	66	75	64	74	87	85	55	80	69	73	77	67	71	72	75	80
% Sign off	91	99	89	99	99	100	100	100	100	100	98	100	94	99	99	98
AGENT MANNER																
% Interested, warm, helpful	74	71	75	73	82	79	80	76	60	81	78	62	61	72	68	54
% Businesslike	21	24	20	22	15	20	17	20	33	19	18	29	30	24	25	41
% Total Acceptable	95	96	95	96	97	99	98	96	93	100	97	90	90	96	93	95
ENQUIRY HANDLING SKILLS																
Enquiry Handling Index	81	83	82	84	93	88	85	90	74	88	86	70	80	78	80	73
% Probed Needs	72	74	71	74	83	83	72	80	62	80	72	62	77	74	69	61
% Good Product Knowledge	81	84	83	87	94	90	89	94	79	87	90	67	80	74	84	73
% Provided Clear Outcome	81	83	83	86	96	89	88	95	71	86	88	71	79	73	79	76
% Courteous/Helpful	89	89	91	90	97	89	92	92	83	98	92	81	85	91	86	81

Highest result Lowest result

Table 8. Key Measures 2009-10 (non-hardship calls compared to hardship calls)

	VIC ENERGY COMPANIES		AGL		AUSTRALIAN POWER & GAS		COUNTRY ENERGY		ENERGY AUSTRALIA		JACKGREEN ENERGY		NEIGHBOURHOOD ENERGY		ORIGIN ENERGY		POWER DIRECT		RED ENERGY		SIMPLY ENERGY		TRU ENERGY		VICTORIA ELECTRICITY		
	NON-HARDSHIP	HARDSHIP	NON-HARDSHIP	HARDSHIP	NON-HARDSHIP	HARDSHIP	NON-HARDSHIP	HARDSHIP	NON-HARDSHIP	HARDSHIP	NON-HARDSHIP	HARDSHIP	NON-HARDSHIP	HARDSHIP	NON-HARDSHIP	HARDSHIP	NON-HARDSHIP	HARDSHIP	NON-HARDSHIP	HARDSHIP	NON-HARDSHIP	HARDSHIP	NON-HARDSHIP	HARDSHIP	NON-HARDSHIP	HARDSHIP	
Agent Manner																											
% Interested, warm, helpful	72	71	79	85	83	76	83	78	81	73	52	69	88	74	74	82	75	44	63	59	77	68	61	75	55	52	
% Businesslike	22	26	16	15	17	22	15	20	13	25	35	31	12	26	26	12	17	44	21	37	18	29	33	16	38	46	
% Total Acceptable	94	97	95	100	100	97	98	98	94	98	87	100	100	100	100	94	92	89	84	96	95	98	94	91	93	98	
Enquiry Handling Skills																											
Enquiry Handling Index	82	83	91	94	90	86	86	85	89	91	65	86	88	87	81	89	71	69	80	80	78	78	80	78	77	69	
% Probed Needs	74	73	79	88	85	81	73	71	87	75	57	69	89	71	62	79	67	56	76	78	74	74	69	69	66	57	
% Product Knowledge	82	86	95	94	91	89	88	91	91	96	70	90	86	88	85	94	58	78	79	80	68	78	83	85	77	68	
% Clear Outcome	83	84	97	94	91	86	88	89	91	98	62	84	78	93	85	91	75	67	79	78	76	71	81	75	78	75	
% Courteous/Helpful	90	89	95	100	91	86	95	89	87	96	70	100	100	96	92	91	83	78	87	83	95	88	86	85	87	75	

3+ points higher

3+ points lower

Australian Utilities Surveyed

The main principles underpinning the research carried out are outlined below.

INDUSTRY	COMPANY
AIRLINES	QANTAS
BANKS	NAB
INSURANCE	RACV
TELCOS	OPTUS
ENERGY RETAILERS	ACTEW AGL
ENERGY RETAILERS	AGL CANBERRA
ENERGY RETAILERS	AGL VICTORIA
ENERGY RETAILERS	ALINTA
ENERGY RETAILERS	AUSTRALIAN POWER & GAS
ENERGY RETAILERS	COUNTRY ENERGY
ENERGY RETAILERS	COUNTRY ENERGY VIC
ENERGY RETAILERS	ENERGEX
ENERGY RETAILERS	ENERGY AUSTRALIA
ENERGY RETAILERS	ENERGY AUSTRALIA VIC
ENERGY RETAILERS	ERGON
ENERGY RETAILERS	INTEGRAL ENERGY
ENERGY RETAILERS	JACK GREEN
ENERGY RETAILERS	NEIGHBOURHOOD ENERGY
ENERGY RETAILERS	ORIGIN ENERGY
ENERGY RETAILERS	POWERDIRECT
ENERGY RETAILERS	RED ENERGY
ENERGY RETAILERS	SIMPLY ENERGY
ENERGY RETAILERS	SYNERGY
ENERGY RETAILERS	TRU ENERGY
ENERGY RETAILERS	VICTORIA ELECTRICITY

Research Methodology

Call Process

- Calls were made over ten weeks to each entity using questions designed for each industry sector
- Each entity was called between Monday and Friday (excluding public holidays) during business hours. An engaged response was followed up with two further calls before attempt to contact was abandoned
- Call lists and questions asked were varied between interviewers and by time of day to minimise the possibility of call centre staff recognising interviewers
- Assessment criteria rated on every call are listed in Appendix B below.

Customer Expectation Research

In order to assist with questionnaire development and analysis results, **Customer Service Benchmarking Australia** conducts group interviews. The group interviews continue to indicate the following core customer expectations when contacting enquiry centres:

- Phones should preferably be answered by a 'human being' within 30 seconds of the first ring
- Recorded messages are generally not liked, including IVR systems that required the customer to enter a number of keystrokes to reach the required area
- Agent should, in most instances, be able to resolve the matter without transfer to another agent
- Components of greeting including salutation, organisation and agent name, an offer to assist, and a formal sign-off were thought to be desirable; of these, use of the agent's name was particularly desirable
- Callers respond better to an agent who projects an interested, warm and helpful manner
- Providing a clear resolution at the end of the call is critical to minimising misconceptions and possible later call backs.

Indices and Sampling

The concepts of 'greeting quality indices', 'enquiry resolution quality indices' and 'customer satisfaction grids' were developed exclusively by **Customer Service Benchmarking Australia**, and remain its property. The quality of agent greeting index weightings requires the five components of the greeting to be used for a perfect score on a particular call. These components are equally weighted.

The weightings given to the various components of the customer satisfaction grid are necessarily subjective. The 'getting through' axis relates to connection times and the greeting components; the 'service delivery' axis relates to enquiry resolution skills elements and agent manner.

Sample sizes are adequate to draw broad conclusions about the relative performance of individual entities in terms of getting through on the telephone. Nonetheless, care should be taken when interpreting variations in results because of the possibility of sampling error. A poor response received by **Customer Service Benchmarking Australia** is one that 'real customers' may also experience. Our philosophy is that an organisation's response is only as good as the weakest link in its customer communication chain.