

GUIDELINE: DEVELOP FAQs TO ASSIST THE SUPPORT STAFF

Abstract

FAQs stand for ‘Frequently Asked Questions’. They can help customers solve potential problems themselves and they can ease the work of the support team. This guideline helps you to create a collection of FAQs for all the questions that are important for the customer. The collected questions can range from technical to financial to security related issues. These questions have to be collected – starting from an early phase, for example during the installation process – to prepare the support staff for problems which will likely arise on the side of the customer. The tool [Collecting FAQs during the installation process](#) has been created to support this guideline.

What is it?

FAQs are a fast and uncomplicated way for customers to get help for the most frequent problems. The term FAQ is the abbreviation of “Frequently Asked Question”. FAQs are a list of questions and answers concerning different topics raised by the users themselves. Those collections of questions and answers are common in the IT-sector and help customers to get quick answers to potential problems. The concept can easily be transferred to smart energy products and services. FAQs can optimize the resource management for the support staff.

FAQ for the Creative Commons Licence

A very extensive FAQ with categories can be found for the Creative Commons Licence. Creative Commons license is a public copyright license which is used for the free distribution of otherwise copyrighted work. As you can see, this is not an example from the energy sector. But it will help anyway to understand how a good FAQ could look like. Especially the structure is very well done: The FAQ starts with the collection of questions, which are categorized by the different categories and different target groups. Throughout its wiki format it will be continuously refined and adapted to recent changes.

More info: <https://wiki.creativecommons.org/FAQ>

Additionally to the service for the customer (in the form of a public available FAQ section on the website) the collection of FAQs can be used as an input for the customer support staff to be well prepared for calls coming in from customers.

Furthermore the information that arises from the questions of the customers can be used to improve the deployed appliances. If for example problems with the handling

of a device occur very often it might be that a revision of the user interface or design would ease the user friendliness.

When to use?

The FAQs are a part of the customer support and therefore important for the success of a new product or service regarding the customer satisfaction. The collection of these questions should start as early as possible. If a new product or service is introduced, many questions will raise. Therefore the questions (for the FAQ) should be collected at a very early stage. This could be the first direct contact with the customer, which is in most cases the installation of devices such as smart meters etc. Some rollouts of smart grid technologies come along with a counselling by an energy consultant. In some projects those consultants visited the homes of the participants to make an energy consulting. During this process many question can arise. Therefore these first meetings are a great moment to start the collection of those questions. These collected questions, raised by some of the customers will probably be asked by another one again.

The tool [Collecting FAQs during the installation process](#) will help you to collect those questions already in the installation phase.

A FAQ is an online tool and can therefore only be used if the customers have access to the internet. It won't be helpful to customers who don't use the internet as a source of information. If this is the case for your target group, it can be helpful to create a printed version of the FAQ that can be handed out to those customers.

What do you need to do?

1. Use the first contact

From the customer's point of view, many projects start with the contact to a technician who installs smart grid technologies, such as the smart meter, the in-house display, etc. In this phase the customers can have many questions concerning the new technology. Therefore, it is necessary that the installers are trained in communication with the consumer. For more information about the training programme for installers please have a look at the guideline [Training installers](#).

2. Collect the questions

When the installers are doing the installation they can collect questions to improve the support for the next steps in the rollout phase. Additionally they can also ask the customers for questions. The task for the installers would be to collect the questions and to transfer them into a support system. Therefore the tool [Collecting FAQs during the installation process](#) was designed. The collected questions will give the support staff an insight into the most common problems that the customers do have

with the new product or service. The usage of the FAQ collecting tool is not limited to the installers and can also be used by energy advisers and other people who are in direct contact with the customer.

3. Feed into the support process

The collected questions will improve the quality of the upcoming customer support process. The frequently asked questions can be integrated into the product/project website and they can be integrated into the materials for the customers (manuals and instructions). The staff of the telephone support team will have access to these questions too, for more information see S3C guideline [Setting up customer support in a smart grid](#). The collection of questions can be continued and enhanced through the course of the project.

4. Place the FAQ prominently on your website

The FAQ has to be found very easily when entering the product or company website. It can directly be placed within the help section. When entering the website a maximum of two clicks should be necessary to enter the FAQ website.

SSE Scottish Hydro

The FAQ section of the Scottish energy company SSE. It is well structured and gives a good overview of the different topics and subtopics. The FAQ offers different gateways for different application/user groups. The questions are grouped within the following categories: 'Online billing', 'Estimated bills', 'General billing queries', 'Switching supplier', 'Refunds', 'Paying by Direct Debit', 'Moving house', 'Your meter', 'Pay As You Go meters' and 'Green Deal'.

The design is kept simple, to avoid distraction, and the answers are short and precious.

<http://www.hydro.co.uk/GasAndElectricity/FAQs/>

Do's and don'ts

Collection of the FAQs

- **Start at a very early point of time to collect the questions of your customers.** The earlier you start, the more information is available for your support staff as well as the consumers. The tool for collecting the FAQs will support your installers, energy consultants etc. by collecting the questions.
- **Choose the most frequent questions.** Don't include every question that once raised up connected with a product into your FAQ. As the name already said, it is important to include only the frequently asked questions (or the ones you believe to be frequent) to obtain clarity.
- **Stop collecting questions.** An FAQ will never be finished. To facilitate the generation of new questions or the adaption of the questions and answers to the customer's needs, it could be helpful to implement a feedback system. A

feedback system can e.g. be a simple contact field or a ticket system, where customers can ask questions on the website. The collection of FAQ's is usually a user-driven approach, because only the users themselves can define the relevance of a question for the usage of devices. This does also mean that the FAQ isn't a static document and has to be adapted and enhanced continuously. You can also think about a continuous adaptation of the FAQ's within the introduction phase of a new product or device.

How to write the FAQ

- **Think from the customer's perspective.** And use the customer's language. That also means that a FAQ should contain content which the customer wants to know and not the content you want the customer to know. Additionally you should use the same language as your customer to guarantee, that the customer finds the appropriate information (i.e. to aid searching via keywords).
- **Keep the FAQs organized.** Use comprehensive categories to guarantee a fast navigation through the FAQs and a quick search for the best fitting question for the user.
- **Test the FAQs with your support staff.** They have day-to-day contact with your customers, they know their problems, and they should have a better feeling concerning understandable language and can help you to adapt the content to the customer's needs.
- **Include cross references** Try to include as many references as possible, to manuals or other existing material that could help the user to solve problems.
- **Make it multimedia.** If you have sufficient resources you can enhance your FAQ by video tutorials which explain different aspects of functionalities of devices in a practical and demonstrative way.
- **Keep it simple.** Don't overburden the FAQ website with graphics, formatting or other elements that detract from the information. The navigation should be as easy as possible and the design should be content-focused. This becomes even more important if your FAQ is very long and contains many questions. In this case you can even think about using (a limited number) of categories for grouping the questions.
- **Use an easy to understand language.** Don't use marketing language within the FAQ, because this is not the place to promote your products but to help users, if they got problems with your products. Instead use an easy to understand language.
- **Focus on information and use an intuitive structure.** The focus of a FAQ site should strictly be on the information for the end-user. To guarantee a smooth user experience try to sort and group the questions in a logical order.

Further reading

- “9 tips for writing better FAQs” (<http://www.helpscribe.com/2008/01/9-tips-for-writing-better-faqs.html>)
- Almost every website has a FAQ section. Search for them and you'll get a feeling for the necessary content and structure. Therefore it is not important to have a look at energy related products only. Get inspired!
 - <http://www.hydro.co.uk/HelpAndAdvice/FAQs/>
 - <http://www.eon.se/privatkund/Energieffektivisering/100koll/vanliga-fragor-om-100koll/>

This guideline was developed in the S3C project, and is freely available from www.smartgrid-engagement-toolkit.eu.

S3C paves the way for successful long-term end user engagement, by acknowledging that the "one" smart consumer does not exist and uniform solutions are not applicable when human nature is involved. Beyond acting as a passive consumer of energy, end users can take on different positions with respective responsibilities and opportunities. In order to promote cooperation between end users and the energy utility of the future, S3C addresses the end user on three roles. The *smart consumer* is mostly interested in lowering his/her energy bill, having stable or predictable energy bills over time and keeping comfort levels of energy services on an equal level. The *smart customer* takes up a more active role in future smart grid functioning, e.g. by becoming a producer of energy or a provider of energy services. The *smart citizen* values the development of smart grids as an opportunity to realise "we-centred" needs or motivations, e.g. affiliation, self-acceptance or community.

S3C performed an extensive literature review and in-depth case study research in Smart Grid trials, resulting in the identification of best practices, success factors and pitfalls for end user engagement in smart energy ventures. The analysis of collected data and experiences led to the development of a new, optimised set of tools and guidelines to be used for the successful engagement of either Smart Consumers, Smart Customers or Smart Citizens. The S3C guidelines and tools aim to provide support to utilities in the design of an engagement strategy for both household consumers and SMEs. The collection of guidelines and tools describe the various aspects that should be taken into account when engaging with consumers, customers and citizens. More information about S3C, as well as all project deliverables, can be found at www.s3c-project.eu.