The 11-Minute Rule:

How Customers Think and How Utilities Can Respond

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What does the 11-minute rule refer to?

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Research from consulting firm Accenture:

“ … the average customer of a regulated U.S. utility spent about **8 minutes** interacting with their utility through digital channels and about **11 minutes** with a representative.

That’s over the course of a year.

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What do ratepayers want from public water utilities?

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Convenience, ease of use, responsiveness, proactive communication

In other words, a clean, reliable, nearby gas station that’s open 24/7

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What do utilities want from customers?

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- **Utilities benefit from feedback – as long as it's actionable**
- **Awareness**
- **Recognition/Appreciation for our work**
- **Understanding of the role of water in society**
- **Political understanding**
- **Trust/Goodwill**

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What does the 11-minute rule mean internally?

How does that change your work if you're aware of this?

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“When customers are aware of the work utilities are doing to maintain infrastructure and they feel confident drinking the water, **overall satisfaction scores rise considerably.”**

John Hazen, managing director of utilities intelligence at J.D. Power.

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Key findings of the J.D. Power 2024 study:

59% of residential customers say their unfiltered tap water supply is safe or very safe to drink. The remaining 41% of customers do not perceive their water is safe to drink.

Communication is the most important step water utilities can take to increase customer satisfaction. Among customers who say their utility does a good job regarding infrastructure, satisfaction scores rise 229 points (on a 1,000-point scale).

https://www.jdpower.com/business/press-releases/2024-us-water-utility-residential-customer-satisfaction-study

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How do you learn what ratepayers care about? Ask them.

The alternative is ignorance, which will undermine convenience, ease of use, responsiveness, proactive communication

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Recognize that most people HATE taking surveys.

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Recognize that most people HATE taking surveys.

Top 5 activities preferred over taking surveys …

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Recognize that most people HATE taking surveys.

Top 5 activities preferred over taking surveys …

1. Root canal – without painkiller
2. Getting pepper sprayed
3. Tax audit
4. Papercut across your eyeball
5. All-day sales pitch about a timeshare

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Ask your customers for opinions painlessly and quickly

- Never ask a question you're afraid of – or without the intent to take action
- Build your audience based on ratepayer email addresses you already have
- Keep the survey brief (10-15 questions)
- Offer an incentive. In our case, Amazon gift cards for a raffle. For $100-$200, you get thousands of dollars worth of data.
- Use Google Forms or Microsoft Forms (free)

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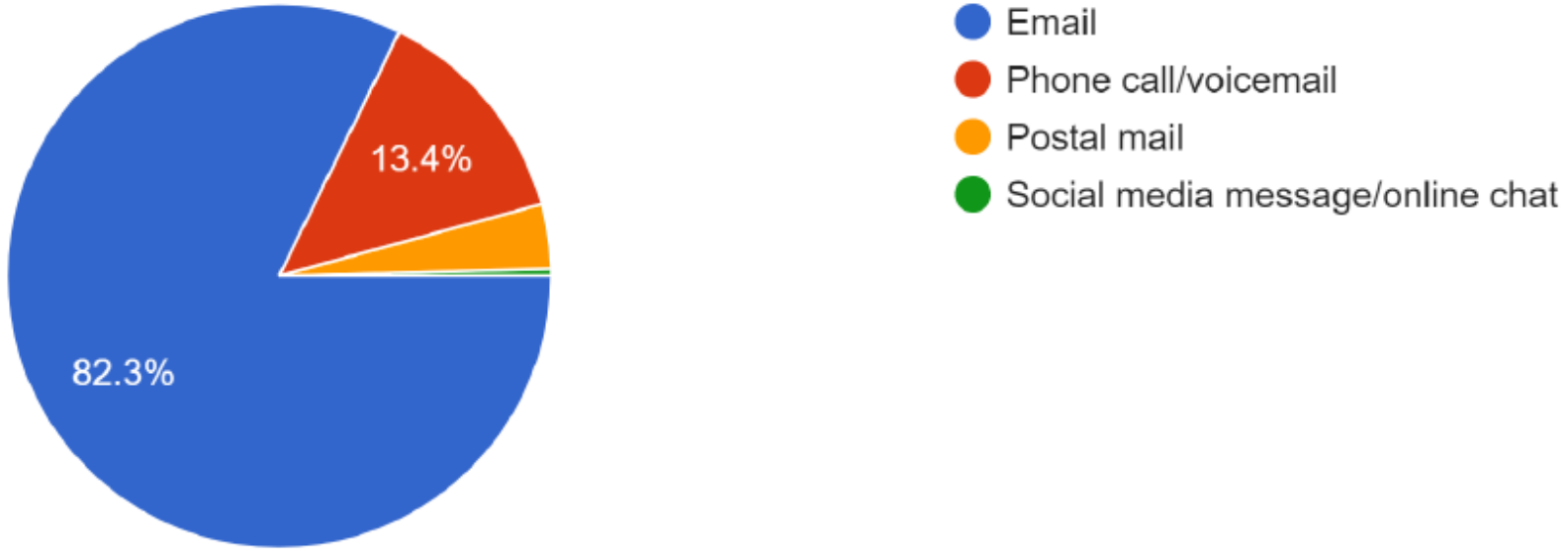
From our survey …

1. What is your preferred method for CUD to contact you?

3,264 responses



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From our survey …

3. If you would like to subscribe to our free newsletter, please type in your email below.

NOTE: Our privacy policy (which is available on our website) states that CUD will never sell or give your email to a third-party company, and we will never attempt to sell you any third-party product or service.

Short answer text

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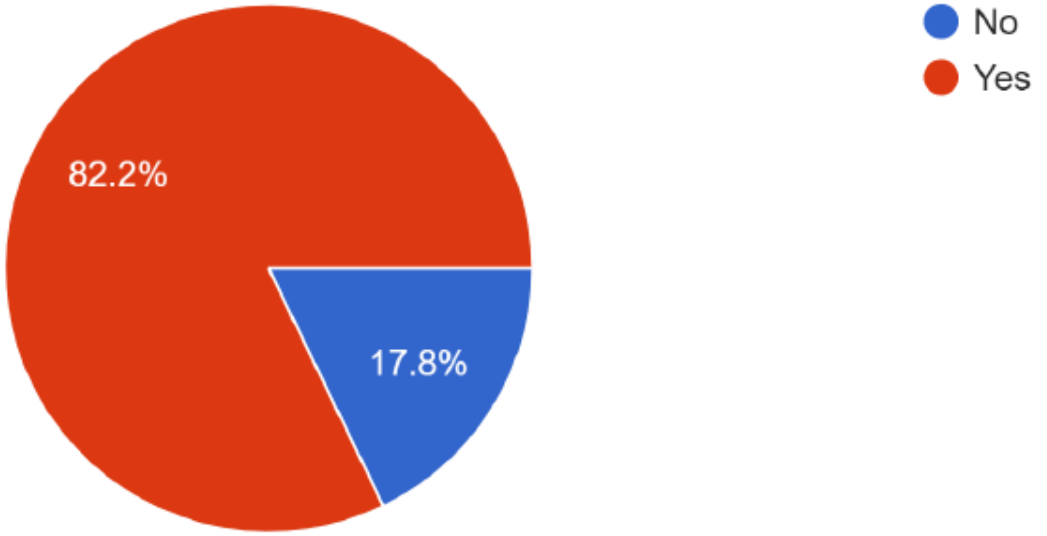
From our survey …

4. Have you ever visited our website, www.cudrc.com? If you have not, please skip to question 6.

3,264 responses



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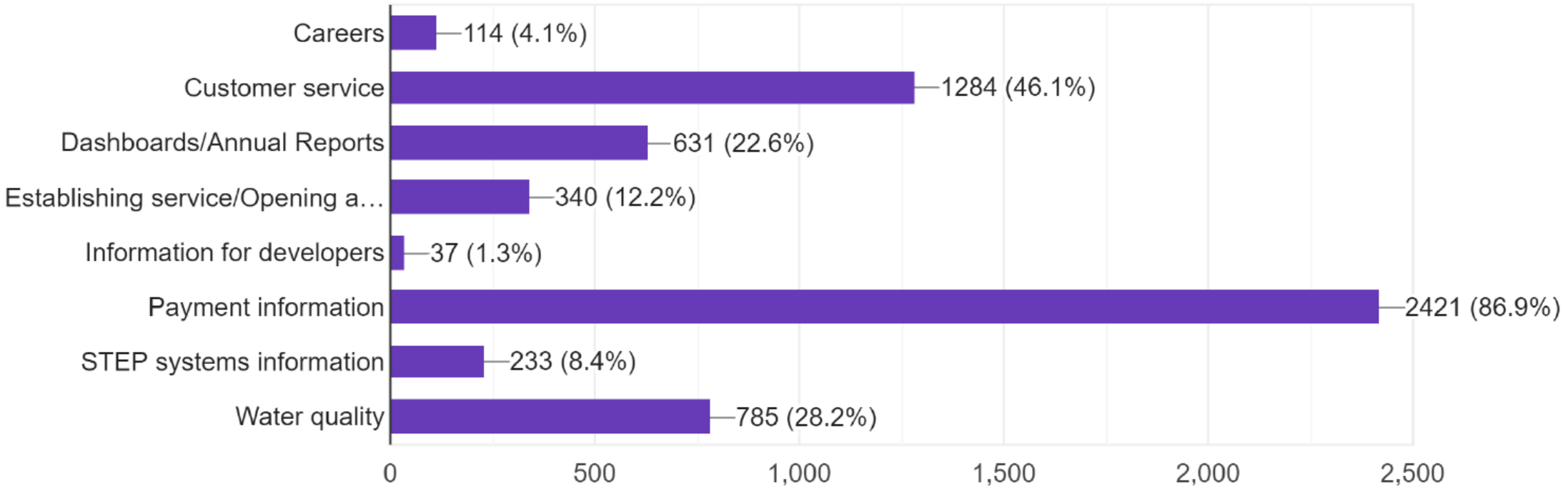
From our survey …

5. When you visit our website, which section(s) are most relevant to your needs? Choose all that apply.

2,786 responses



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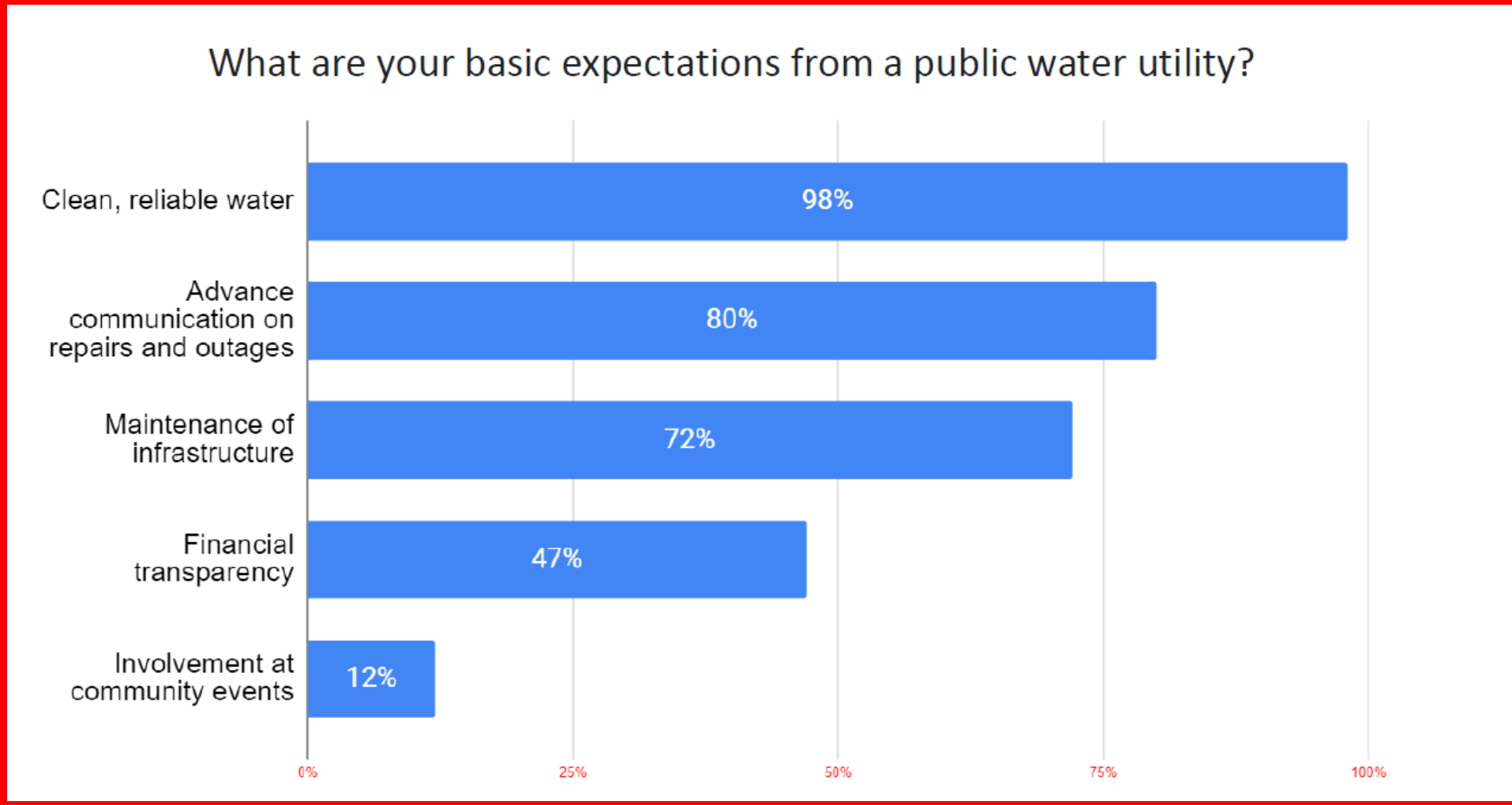
From our survey …



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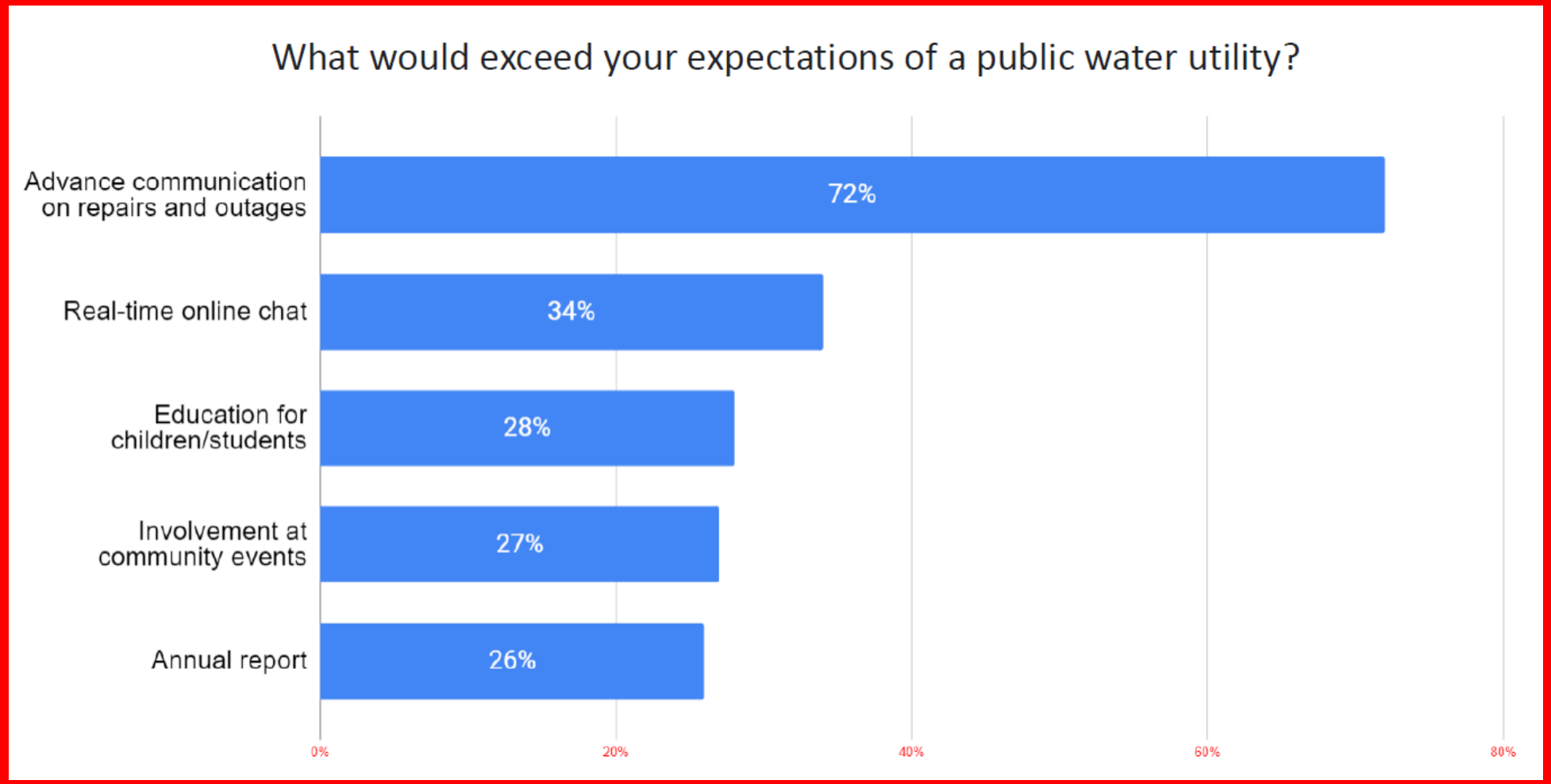

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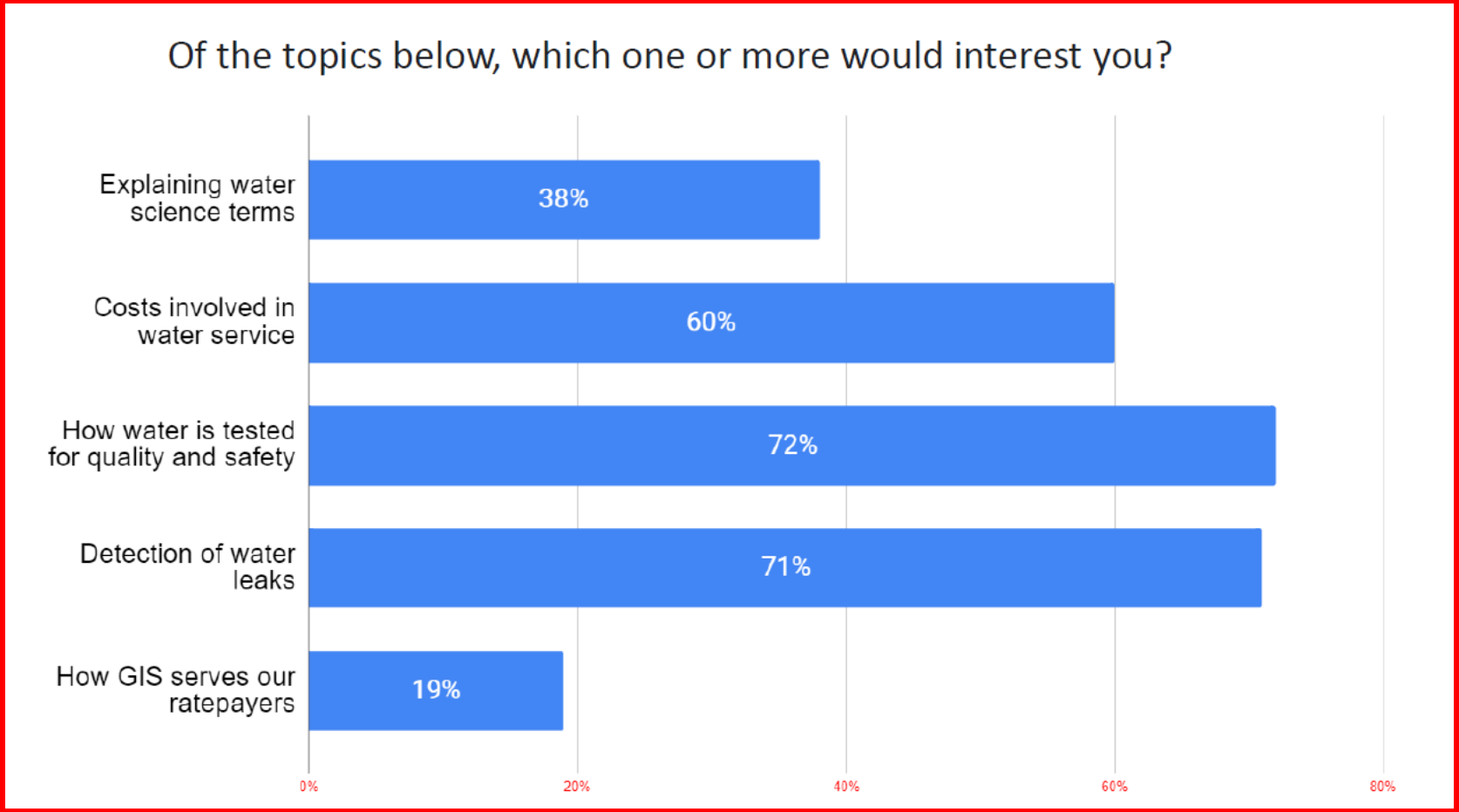
From our survey …



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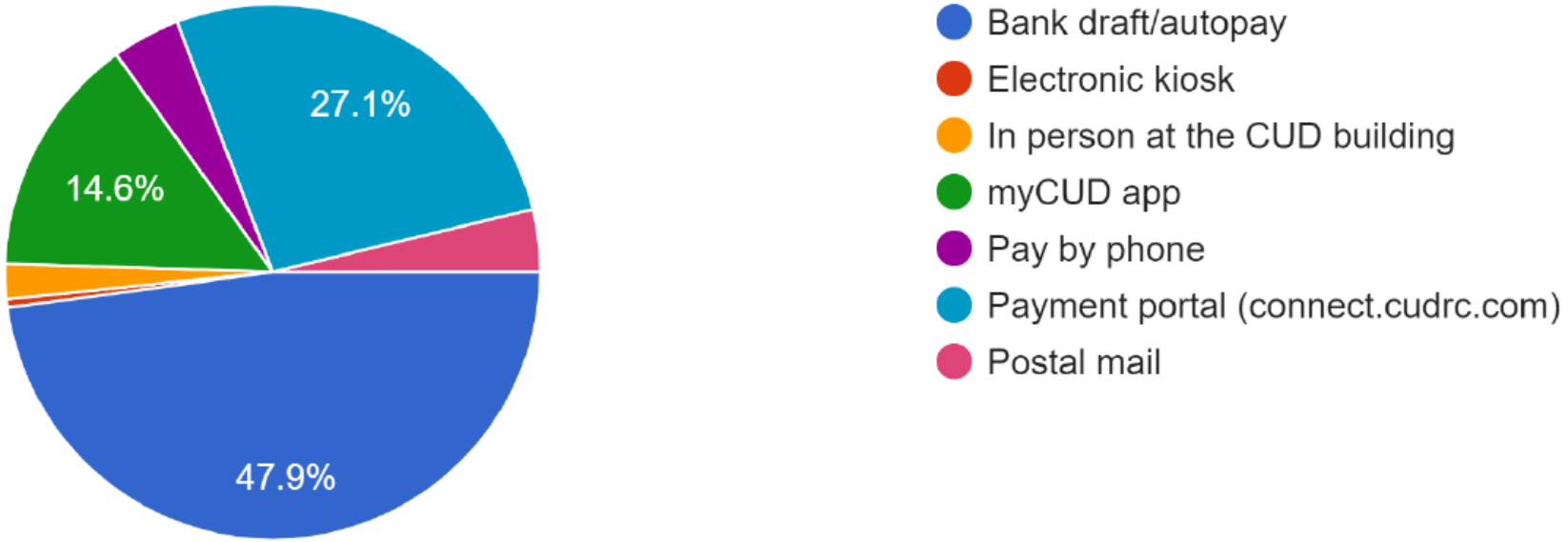
From our survey …

10. What is your preferred way to pay your bill?

3,264 responses



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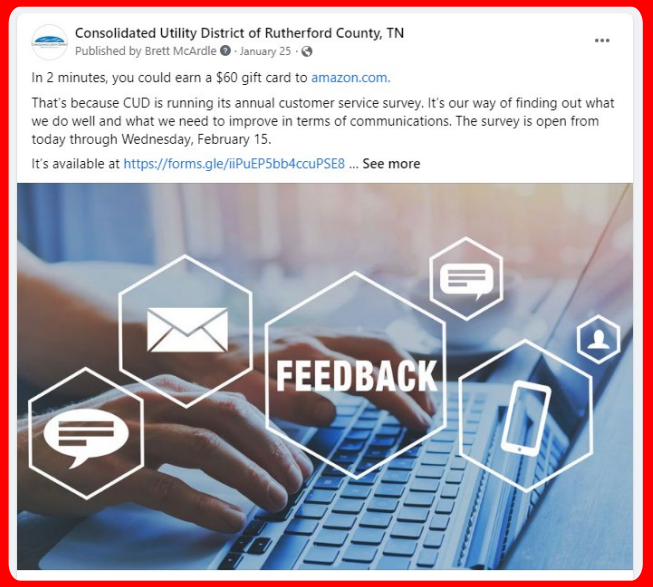

Our 2024 survey …

- Promoted via email blast and social media in January
- Earned 3,500+ responses
- Two years in a row we've received more than 2,900 responses
- Earned 800+ new subscribers to our newsletter

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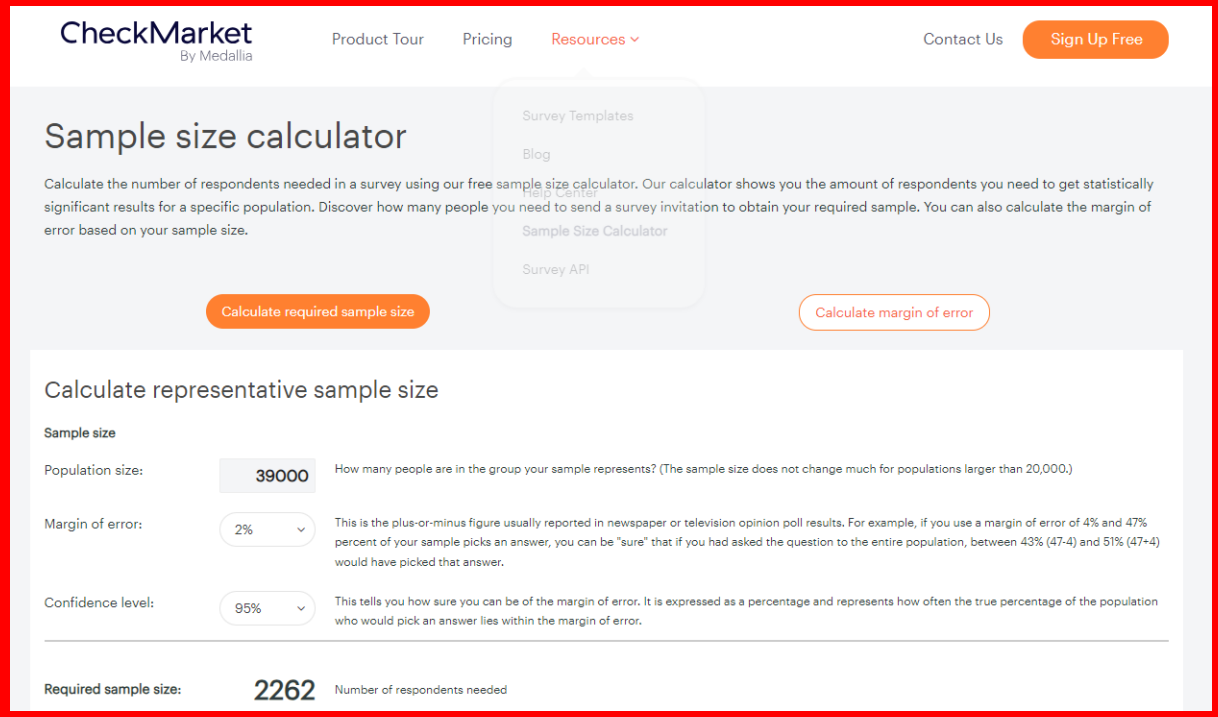
How do we know the data is trustworthy?

- **Statistical significance: # of responses needed to act as the full audience**
- **Sent just over 39,000 emails promoting the survey and raffle**
- **Needed 2,262 respondents to achieve 95% confidence level**
- **The 5% rule = 95% confidence**
- **Survey required only 2 minutes to complete**



https://www.checkmarket.com/sample-size-calculator/

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Here’s what we needed …

Calculate representative sample size

Sample size

Population size:	40000	How many people are in the group your sample represents? (The sample size does not change much for populations larger than 20,000.)
Margin of error:	5%	This is the plus-or-minus figure usually reported in newspaper or television opinion poll results. For example, if you use a margin of error of 4% and 47% percent of your sample picks an answer, you can be "sure" that if you had asked the question to the entire population, between 43% (47-4) and 51% (47+4) would have picked that answer.
Confidence level:	95%	This tells you how sure you can be of the margin of error. It is expressed as a percentage and represents how often the true percentage of the population who would pick an answer lies within the margin of error.
Required sample size:	381	Number of respondents needed
Estimated response rate:	20%	What percent of those asked to participate in the survey will do so. Response rates vary greatly depending on many factors including the distribution method (e-mail, paper, phone...), type of communication (B2C, B2B...), quality of the invitation, use of incentives, etc.
Number to invite:	1905	This is the number of individuals out of the population you need to ask to partcipate, in order to achieve the required sample size based on the expected response rate.

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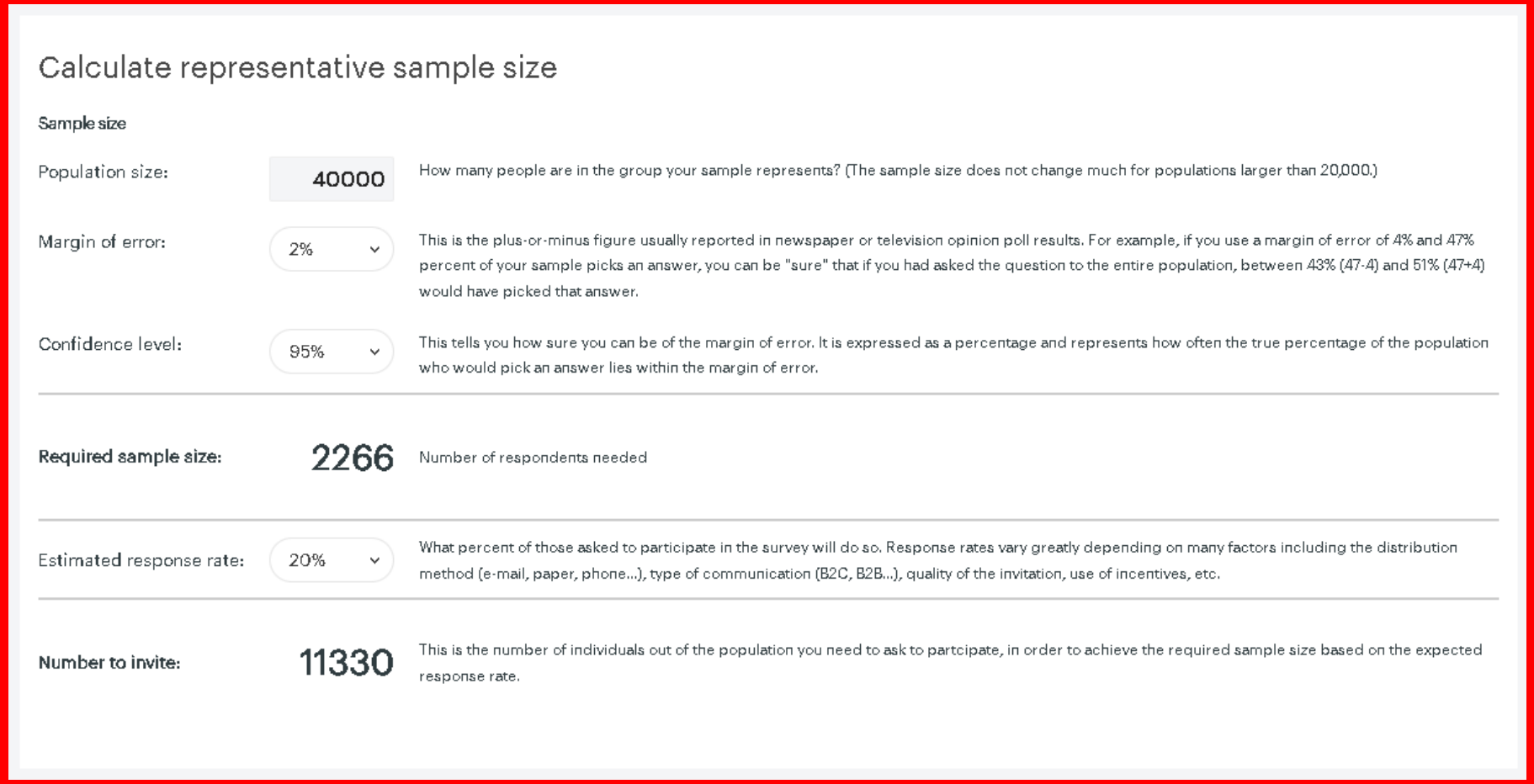
Here’s closer to what we got …



Calculate representative sample size

Sample size

Population size:	40000	How many people are in the group your sample represents? (The sample size does not change much for populations larger than 20,000.)
Margin of error:	2%	This is the plus-or-minus figure usually reported in newspaper or television opinion poll results. For example, if you use a margin of error of 4% and 47% percent of your sample picks an answer, you can be "sure" that if you had asked the question to the entire population, between 43% (47-4) and 51% (47+4) would have picked that answer.
Confidence level:	95%	This tells you how sure you can be of the margin of error. It is expressed as a percentage and represents how often the true percentage of the population who would pick an answer lies within the margin of error.
Required sample size:	2266	Number of respondents needed
Estimated response rate:	20%	What percent of those asked to participate in the survey will do so. Response rates vary greatly depending on many factors including the distribution method (e-mail, paper, phone...), type of communication (B2C, B2B...), quality of the invitation, use of incentives, etc.
Number to invite:	11330	This is the number of individuals out of the population you need to ask to partcipate, in order to achieve the required sample size based on the expected response rate.

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If a ratepayer distrusts his/her local water utility – or holds it in low regard – how does that play out?

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more bottled water

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more bottled water

more complaints to utility

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more bottled water

more resistance to current rates or rate changes

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negative comments on social, which can have a ripple effect

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more bottled water

more resistance to current rates or rate changes

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Political pressure: criticisms to local elected officials

negative comments on social, which can have a ripple effect

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more bottled water

more resistance to current rates or rate changes

calls to media

more complaints to utility

Political pressure: criticisms to local elected officials

negative comments on social, which can have a ripple effect

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more bottled water

more resistance to current rates or rate changes

calls to media

more complaints to utility

more late payments or bad debt from customer accounts

Political pressure: criticisms to local elected officials

negative comments on social, which can have a ripple effect

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Given the 11-minute rule, how can you change customer perception?

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Given the 11-minute rule, how can you change customer perception?

2 ideas …

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1. Water as a Service

Consider your arm: Signal from brain to hand … Behind turning on a tap lies infrastructure and services.

From water quality to account information to service interruptions, customers seek clarity and reliability.

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2. Utilities are B2B, B2C, and subscription-based, all at once

Traits of subscription-based services …

- Predictability of product and revenue
- Better forecasting
- Long-term customer service
- Automated billing
- Metrics and analysis

Most pertinent to perception: customer service, metrics/analysis

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Happy subscribers get added value

- Customers appreciate communications about issues that impact their water service.
- How often will a customer take a photo and share on social a complaint? They need to be told the what and why behind their service.
- If they still complain, you can point to the communications that were provided. It's on the ratepayer to listen to a voicemail and notice an email.

The results of your survey will tell you what matters.

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Some additional tactics …

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Tap vs bottled

What $2 will buy	
One 20-ounce bottle	300+ gallons
Single-use plastic	No bottle needed
400+ years in a landfill (6,400 years for a case of bottles)	No impact to a landfill
Source water is often tap water with adjusted pH value	Tested continuously for safety and quality

You're competing against bottled water companies. If not in reality, then at least in perception.

- Ongoing testing
- Greater accountability
- Much, much cheaper
- Eco-friendly product

- You know this. Do your ratepayers?

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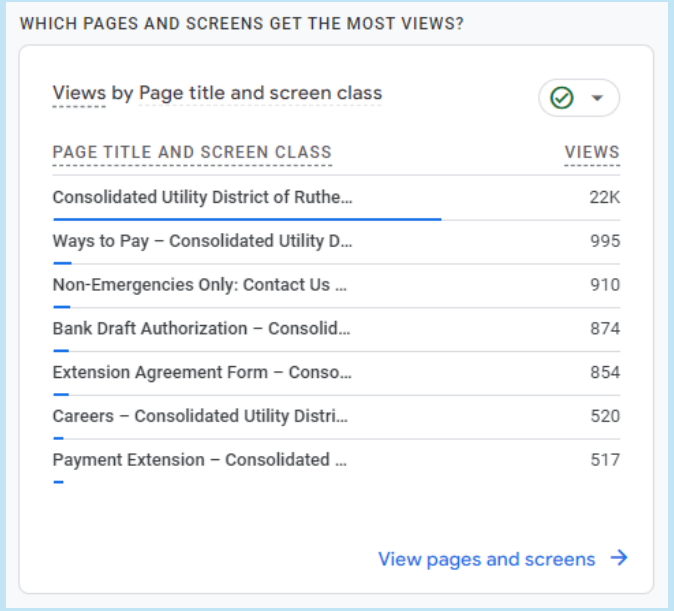
What can you learn from Google Analytics?



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		32,326 100% of total	12,897 100% of total	2.51 Avg 0%
1	Consolidated Utility District of Rutherford County – #1 Through Excellence and Innovation	22,059	11,427	1.93
2	Ways to Pay – Consolidated Utility District of Rutherford County	995	731	1.36
3	Non-Emergencies Only: Contact Us – Consolidated Utility District of Rutherford County	910	581	1.57
4	Bank Draft Authorization – Consolidated Utility District of Rutherford County	874	390	2.24
5	Extension Agreement Form – Consolidated Utility District of Rutherford County	854	335	2.55
6	Careers – Consolidated Utility District of Rutherford County	520	263	1.98
7	Payment Extension – Consolidated Utility District of Rutherford County	517	362	1.43
8	Frequently Asked Questions – Consolidated Utility District of Rutherford County	378	312	1.21
9	Leak Adjustment Form – Consolidated Utility District of Rutherford County	368	141	2.61
10	Report a Main Line Break or Unexplained Outage – Consolidated Utility District of Rutherford County	352	248	1.42

- Your website = gas station
- Structure it accordingly
- Top 10 pages
- Internal links
- No place for human interest
- Ease of use, solving problems

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Remove friction wherever possible

What is friction? Anything that makes customers go through more steps than necessary (anything that resembles a chore).

What should be easy on the ratepayer's side?

- Contacting you: Promote your communications channels
- Paying for service: Should be reliable, and secure. Smaller utilities are hacker targets.
- Receiving notice about outages and repairs

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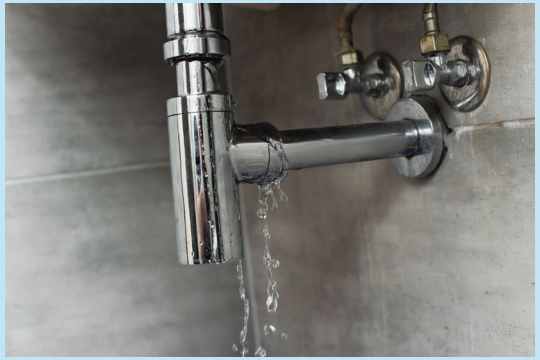
If you have 11 minutes,
how does your lobby look?

- Not “Extreme Makeover: Utility Edition”
- Think clean and messaging

Forget 11 minutes.

What would 30 minutes look like?



I have a workforce of 20 people or less.

How am I supposed to do all this?

- You’re not. Outsource it, if necessary.
- The size of your workforce is less important than the choices you make and the methods you use.
- Be a leader in your community and a source of guidance to similar utilities.

The 11-Minute Rule:

How Customers Think and How Utilities Can Respond

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