

1 **Q. In reference to the Direct Testimony (page 15, lines 11 to 13) of M.J. Erbland in**  
2 **Newfoundland Power's 1995 rate application which states that Newfoundland**  
3 **Power's customers have come to expect an increasingly sophisticated array of**  
4 **options, what steps have been taken by Newfoundland Power since 1995 to increase**  
5 **the array of options to its customers?**  
6

7 A In the referenced portion of his direct testimony, Mr. Erbland was addressing his view of  
8 the future impact of information technology on Newfoundland Power. As reviewed in  
9 some detail in Section 2 of the *Operations & Customer Service Evidence*, Newfoundland  
10 Power has availed of advances in information technology since that time to increase its  
11 array of customer service options. In addition, the Company has identified other  
12 opportunities to improve customer service by improving business processes. The more  
13 significant customer service improvements implemented since 1995 include the  
14 following:  
15

16 ***Internet website***

17 The Company's Internet website was introduced in 1995, offering general information on  
18 the Company as well as information on the provision of electrical service, the wise use of  
19 electrical energy and electrical safety. Enhancements to the website between 1998 and  
20 2001 have provided customers with the ability to avail of self-service options, including  
21 account balance inquiries, submission of meter readings, and the ability to open or close  
22 an account or to revise account information online. The Company's website now serves  
23 an average of more than 10,000 customers per month.  
24

25 ***Introduction of a Pre-authorized Payment Plan***

26 In January 1997, the Company introduced its pre-authorized payment plan (PAP). The  
27 PAP allows participating customers to pay their electrical bill each month by way of an  
28 automatic deduction from their bank account. As of year-end 2002, approximately  
29 19,000 of the Company's customers participate in the PAP.  
30

31 ***Implementation of extended hours at the Contact Centre***

32 In 1997, the Company extended the hours of operation of the Contact Centre to 8 p.m.  
33 each weekday evening, thereby providing customers with the added convenience and  
34 flexibility of speaking to a Contact Centre agent after regular business hours.  
35

36 ***Introduction of a debit card payment option at each Company cashier location***

37 In light of the growing popularity of debit cards, the Company has added debit card  
38 payment to the methods by which electric bills can be paid at all of the Company's 8  
39 cashier locations across the island.  
40

41 ***Introduction of a 10-month Equal Payment Plan (EPP) to complement the existing 12-***  
42 ***month EPP***

43 The Company has offered an Equal Payment Plan for many years. The original EPP  
44 allowed customers to equalize their monthly electric bills over a 12-month period by  
45 means of 12 equal monthly payments. In 1998, the Company introduced a 10-month

1 EPP. This option allows customers to pay their annual electric charges by making equal  
2 payments over 10 months instead of 12, thereby eliminating one payment obligation  
3 during the vacation months of July and August. As of year-end 2002, the EPP has  
4 approximately 30,000 participants.  
5

6 ***Implementation of advanced telephone technology in the Contact Centre***

7 The introduction of an advanced telephone system at the Company's Contact Centre in  
8 1998 has resulted in faster response and improved quality of service, virtually eliminated  
9 abandoned calls and busy signals, and provided customers with the option of obtaining  
10 certain services, such as account balance or payment information, via an automated  
11 response without having to wait for an available agent. The automated telephone service  
12 is available 24 hours per day.  
13

14 ***Introduction of Single Point of Contact and 1-800 telephone service***

15 Prior to 1997, the Company had four separate telephone numbers for inquiry, credit,  
16 engineering, and energy management service requirements. Since that time, customers  
17 have been able to access these Company services or personnel through the Contact  
18 Centre via a single toll-free number.  
19

20 ***Introduction of automated outage notification system***

21 The introduction of an automated telephone call management system in 1998 improved  
22 the Company's ability to respond to telephone requests for information on power outages.  
23 The system allows customers to report outages, and automatically provides customers  
24 with recorded voice messages containing information on existing outages. During  
25 widespread outages, the system is able to provide up-to-date outage information to over  
26 2,000 customers per minute. This allows the Company's System Control Centre staff to  
27 concentrate on power restoration efforts rather than customer inquiries, while ensuring  
28 that customers get the information they need, including the cause of the outage, if known,  
29 and the expected time to restoration of service.