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ConocoPhillips, U.S. Energy Services Top Mastio's Marketer Customer Satisfaction Ranking

ConocoPhillips topped Mastio & Co.'s eighth annual gas marketer customer satisfaction rankings among the major marketing companies, while U.S. Energy Services was the top regional/niche marketer. The ranking was based on the results of up to 800 interviews with customers, including other marketers, utilities, pipeline companies, producers and power generators.

Other than providing product at a low price, reliability was the top factor customers cited in choosing a gas provider. The next most important things were historical dependability in meeting commitments and integrity.

Despite the tumultuous changes that have occurred in the market since 2000, the things customers deem as important in choosing a marketing company/gas provider have changed very little in the last eight Mastio surveys, said spokesman Kevin Huntsman.

"It's staying in touch, contact. You know, it's not rocket science to take care of your customers," said Huntsman. "There are few key things. You offer a reliable product at a competitive price, and you keep them informed of what is going on.

"Certain customers have certain needs. Some don't need to be called but once every few months while others need to be called once a week. You have to have a good relationship to understand that."

Declining credit quality obviously played a role in determining which marketing companies were not able to satisfy customers last year, which is part of the reason there were fewer companies in the Mastio ranking than in prior years. It also was a popular decision last year to exit marketing because of the cost of doing business, the significant changes taking place in the marketplace, the scrutiny of the credit rating agencies and the increased "interest" of the federal government.

Mastio said there were 44 marketing companies that made the ranking compared to 52 in the previous ranking. It takes 10 ratings (customer responses) to make the ranking. There were more than 100 other marketing companies that were mentioned but did not garner enough ratings to make the ranking.

Noticeably absent this time around were AEP, CMS Energy, Colonial Energy Inc., Cook Inlet Energy, Dynegy, El Paso Merchant Energy, Kinder Morgan, NiSource, Prior Energy Corp., Reliant Energy and Sprague Energy. Many of those companies exited the business for various reasons, while others were purchased by other companies.

The top five major marketers in the ranking (in order) were ConocoPhillips, BP, ChevronTexaco, Merrill Lynch Global Commodities and Tenaska Marketing Ventures. The top five regional marketers in ranked order were U.S. Energy Services, Texican Natural Gas, Interconn Resources, South Jersey Energy and CenterPoint Energy Marketing.

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Each customer respondent rated marketers on 29 customer satisfaction attributes, including reliability of gas supply, consistency of account management, integrity of suppliers, price competitiveness, financial strength to back future commitments and how likely would you be to recommend this supplier to others.

The Mastio survey, which includes proprietary Windows-based software that enables sorting by various demographics and other features, including individual company value measurement, costs \$34,000. For more information, go to <http://www.mastio.com/>.

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