

Project Title
Re-designing the British Gas
billing experience

Category
16. Information

Client Company
British Gas

Design Consultancy
Lippincott

FOR PUBLICATION



Mr. Justin Leahy
17 Park Avenue
Bedford
United Kingdom
MK40 2MY

Your customer number:
85 88 08 31 28 35

Your summer gas & electricity bill

Bill date: 26th Sept 2012
Bill period: 3rd July - 24th Sept 2012

1 What do I owe?

Your summer payment is

£182.67

Gas total: £109.15
Electricity total: £73.52

You're on our Standard tariff for both gas and electricity

2 When do I pay?

Your payment is due by

**10th
October**

Your estimated energy use this summer is

= 2648 kWh (kilowatt hours)

Gas total: 2171 kWh
Electricity total: 477 kWh

Your estimated meter readings

Gas	2	3	5	5	
Electricity	0	3	0	4	1

I'd like more detail
See step 4

3 How can I get in touch?

britishgas.co.uk/Make-A-Payment
britishgas.co.uk/SubmitMeterRead

Speak to one of our team
0800 072 9060
Mon-Fri 8am - 8pm / Sat 8am - 6pm

Where can I get more help?
See step 8

Project Title
Re-designing the British Gas
billing experience

Category
16. Information

Client Company
British Gas

Design Consultancy
Lippincott

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Calls reduced, money saved, design acclaimed

Over the last few years the major companies supplying energy to the UK market, known to most as the "Big Six", have received an unprecedented level of criticism. Spiralling energy prices and ever increasingly complicated bills and tariffs ensured customers were feeling bruised by the extra cost burden, while frustrated at what seemed like a lack of transparency from the energy companies who continued to make big profits.

In the face of this, British Gas, the largest of the Big Six, was determined to rebuild its relationship with customers. As part of a company wide initiative aimed at regaining trust, the re-design of their bill was to be one of the key projects to show a more customer focused British Gas. As the bill goes to over 10 million customers each year, it was one of the perfect vehicles to do this.

The priority for British Gas was to re-design the bill in a way that would move it from being a 'demand for money' to a 'way of saving money'. This required making the existing bill much simpler, placing customers' needs (and not the company's or even the respective regulators and other stakeholder interests) at the heart of the re-design.

At its core were two clear success criteria for the bill: increase customer satisfaction and reduce query calls. Customer testing of the new bill was universally positive, with 15% average uplift in immediate approval for the new bill versus the old, with even positive feedback from the government. In fact the new bill has received wider acclaim from the EU who have recognized it as "Best Practice" in bill design.

The most significant result though was the immediate 10% reduction in calls from usual billing call rates, which represented well in excess of 3,000 per week, a financial saving of £750,000 per year.

£750k

Cost savings

10%

Reduction in customer queries
about their bill

15%

Average approval improvement
from old to new bill

NB: As you read through this submission you will also see customer comments in the bottom left of each page

Project Title
Re-designing the British Gas
billing experience

Category
16. Information

Client Company
British Gas

Design Consultancy
Lippincott

“Got to hand
British Gas...
who'd have thought
your gas bill in
2012 would be
an infographic?”

“This is fool proof,
colourful and easy
to understand”

PROJECT OVERVIEW

A piece of paper that goes to 10 million customers is more than a simple re-design

Outline of the project brief

The overall objective of this project sounds simple: a re-design of the British Gas bill. However a piece of paper that goes to 10 million customers is more than just a simple re-design of how a bill looks. It is a vast undertaking and it has many moving parts and many interested parties to cater to, internally and externally. At its heart though there was a Board level desire to use this re-design as part of a wider initiative to help rebuild customer trust in the business. Therefore the list of overall objectives were as follows:

- Create greater overall simplicity in the billing experience, helping drive down costs for both the customer and British Gas
- Ensure the bill worked across all the billing formats – dual fuel, single fuel, direct debit, etc
- Cut out unnecessary jargon and make the customer experience more approachable and in-line with the British Gas brand
- Reframe the way customers think about the bill – from a demand for money to a means to save
- Comply as closely as possible with Ofgem and other consumer and governmental recommendations

Description

British Gas supplies energy and home services solutions to the UK market. It is best known for the energy it supplies to our homes and it does so to in excess of over 10 million customers. It is a major UK PLC, employing 30,000 people and can trace its roots all the way back to the early 19th century. More recently it was one of the many companies privatised in the late 80s after having been the incumbent state energy supplier for many years.

It forms a significant part of Centrica, a UK based energy group, and as the primary customer facing part of this group has a vital role in being its ambassador to the UK consumer.

Project Title
**Re-designing the British Gas
billing experience**

Category
16. Information

Client Company
British Gas

Design Consultancy
Lippincott

“The information
you require... is
highlighted and
takes your eye
straight to it”

“Feels less
stuffy and that
I can finally
understand it”

Overview of the market

Today British Gas faces ever increasing competition and general scrutiny, something which can also be said of its other five main UK competitors; EDF, EON, npower, Scottish & Southern, and Scottish Power, who are collectively known as the “Big Six”.

British Gas is by far the biggest player in the market, with over 40% of the gas supply and over 25% of the electricity. As with all of them customer retention is a factor, with British Gas having a churn rate of 11%, against an industry average of 20%⁽¹⁾. However the company’s ambitions are to continue reducing churn and to grow the business, particularly into new markets, while building upon the additional services it provides to customers beyond the supply of gas and electricity (e.g. insurance and maintenance services).

As a backdrop to this though, over the last few years the Big Six, and the energy suppliers as a whole, have faced unprecedented levels of hostility. Spiraling energy prices and the ever-increasing complexity of tariffs and bills have meant people not only feel the financial pinch, but extreme frustration at the complexity of it all, especially when companies supplying the market are seen to be making large profits.

Champions of the consumer and interested parties come in many different guises, from industry regulator Ofgem and the government itself, to the press and generally anyone who wants to berate the industry – rightly or wrongly.

The industry therefore has suffered a serious trust issue and as part of a broader attempt to regain this trust, British Gas felt that their bill was an excellent customer touchpoint to help showcase a new and different British Gas.

While the previous bill had been industry leading, it was still deemed too cluttered and full of information and jargon. A new, simplified bill would also be an excellent platform to help launch new initiatives aimed at regaining trust – the Better Deal and Simplified tariffs – all of which were aimed at turning the bill from a way to pay to a way to save for customers.

Project launch date

The project was launched in August 2012 and has slowly been rolled out across the UK. With such a complicated initiative, going to so many customers, there are still parts of the UK to receive the complete rollout.

Project Title
Re-designing the British Gas
billing experience

Category
16. Information

Client Company
British Gas

Design Consultancy
Lippincott

“Very modern,
clean, precise,
easy to read
and totally
superior”

“It's like having
a conversation
with British Gas”

Outline of the design solution

Initially we discussed customer issues with those who know them best; contact-centre staff who speak to them everyday. This gave us invaluable knowledge of the major customer gripes and niggles, providing the foundation for structuring a conversation with customers directly. This included the Customer Board, a panel of customers that reports regularly to British Gas on all customer issues. Interviews over the course of a month helped identify two broad groups; ‘Skimmers’ and ‘Scrutinisers’.

From this we were able to identify the key questions customers need answers to when receiving a bill: What do I owe? How do I pay? How can I save? How can I control? How can I understand more? Can you help me? We took different stakeholder groups and cut up the existing bill to see how it answers these questions. It showed there was a significant difference between how ‘Scrutinisers’ and ‘Skimmers’ read the existing bill, and that 30% of the information was not needed.

This insight was added to existing customer research and input from other interested parties (government regulators, consumer watchdogs and internal groups). We translated this into design criteria for building the bill, tackling the design in the following ways.

- 1. Key information** – looking across a number of industries, it was astounding to see what was missing or simply hidden. Much like a good CV, seeing all the essential information on one page, with signposting for where to get more detail, was key.
- 2. So what am I paying for exactly?** – Energy is intangible, so how do you create a link between consumption and what people owe? The key was to show people, which meant cutting out language often insisted upon for transparency by consumer groups and watchdogs, and replacing it with small icons and images, a more user-friendly design language.
- 3. Dead simple** – the old bill had too much detail. For example it had no less than 12 different telephone numbers spread across the bill. By placing them in one colour coded section ‘where can I get help?’ and then following this process across the bill for other areas, helped to break things up and signpost things. It also helped contact-centre staff manage conversations too.

Project Title
**Re-designing the British Gas
billing experience**

Category
16. Information

Client Company
British Gas

Design Consultancy
Lippincott

4. No jargon – regulatory and legal requirements meant it was a whole organisational responsibility to replace words that were confusing and didn't help convey a British Gas character. Legal and compliance teams worked with marketing and communications departments to strip out jargon, replacing where necessary with clearer, softer words.

5. From a way to pay, to a way to save – the old bill was resented because of its attempts to cross sell additional services. The new bill took on board this resentment, making simple, more personalised recommendations linked to tariff plans, all placed within a dedicated section.

Final designs were then created to work across all formats – dual fuel and single fuel, direct debit, etc – before being tested with customers in a final round of research before launch.

“Basic info
upfront is good,
can drill down
if I want”

“The different tariff
options help you
decide which one,
like a mortgage”

Project Title
Re-designing the British Gas
billing experience

Category
16. Information

Client Company
British Gas

Design Consultancy
Lippincott

RESULTS

The rollout of the new bill is near complete and the early indications are that it has been a great success

Reduction in costs

When new initiatives of this size and scale go out, they traditionally drive calls to contact-centres as any change from the 'norm', however confusing previously, usually throws people. Not in this instance. Analysis shows a reduction of 3,000 calls per week or 10% less contacts from customers who received a 'new' instead of 'old' bill. This represents a saving of more than £750,000 in cost to the business.

Improved customer approval

In research with customers assessing the merits of the old and new bill, there was an uplift of 15% on average across all questions asked approving the new design over the old. In fact, all of the quotes shown throughout this submission are from customers.

In terms of specific questions there was a 17% increase with people agreeing to the statement "the information is clear", an 17% increase in "it's easy to understand", a 20% increase in "language used is approachable"; and a huge 29% increase in "the design is modern"⁽²⁾.

In the recent quarterly billing survey that British Gas carries out, NPS rated to billing has gone from -21% to -13% in Q4 of 2012, a huge improvement⁽³⁾.

£750k

Cost savings

+17%

The information is clearer

Results show an increase
from 61% to 78%

10%

Reduction in customer queries
about their bill

+29%

The design is modern

Results show an increase
from 43% to 72%

Project Title
**Re-designing the British Gas
billing experience**

Category
16. Information

Client Company
British Gas

Design Consultancy
Lippincott

A knock-on effect

The design format of the new bill is also having a knock-on effect online. After only six weeks of being live on the website (from the beginning of May 2013) NPS for the View Bill page has gone from -29 to -8. As the team internally at British Gas commented "This is a massive achievement and shows that simplification of customers' billing information has worked to great effect online".

Governmental and even EU approval

Government bodies and representatives have been universally positive about the bill re-design and British Gas' obvious attempts to help customers save money.

The Scottish Government Fuel Poverty Team were quoted as saying "These changes are really welcome and a very positive development. The new bill really encapsulates what CFS in particular have been looking for", while Mike McKenzie, MSP and Member of the Scottish Parliament Energy Committee was quoted saying "I think this is a significant step in the right direction".

The European Union however has gone one better and recognised the new British Gas bill as 'Best Practice' across the EU on bill design⁽⁴⁾.

+17%

The information is understandable

Results show an increase
from **59%** to **76%**

+20%

The language is approachable

Results show an increase
from **60%** to **80%**

Project Title
**Re-designing the British Gas
billing experience**

Category
16. Information

Client Company
British Gas

Design Consultancy
Lippincott

RESEARCH RESOURCES

1. Figures relate to 2010 industry churn rates.
Source: DECC, Cornwall Market Research
2. Source: Ideas Factory Bill Re-design Research March 2012
3. Source: British Gas Quarterly billing survey
4. Source: Dr Pauline Lawson, Chair, Supply & Markets Development Committee. Eurogas (The European Union of the Natural Gas Industry), report into Examples of Good Practice, Brussels 25th April 2013

Project Title
**Re-designing the British Gas
billing experience**

Category
16. Information

Client Company
British Gas

Design Consultancy
Lippincott

OTHER INFLUENCING FACTORS

The bill re-design and launch received no additional support, other than PR and the inclusion of a leaflet that went out with the first new bill. In simple terms, this leaflet outlined some of the key changes and why they were making them.

Other than this the bill was left to stand on its own as a piece of communication, therefore making its positive uptake by customers even more significant.



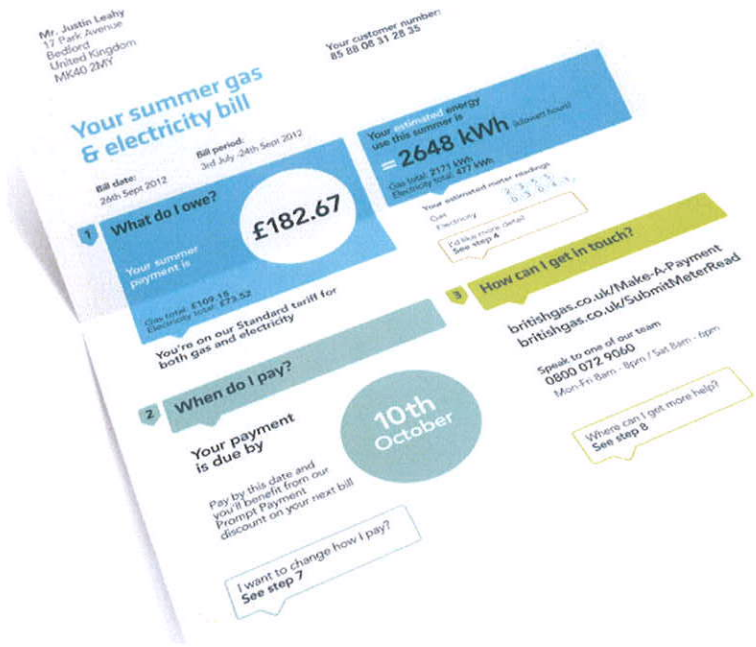
APPENDIX

Project Title
Re-designing the British Gas
billing experience

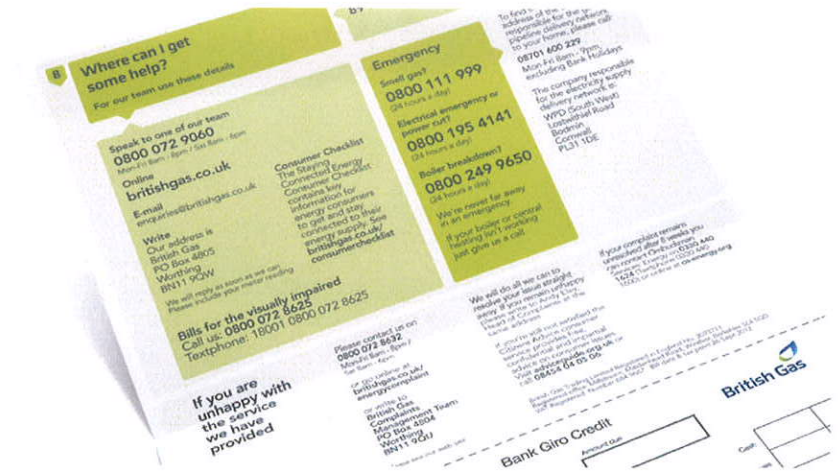
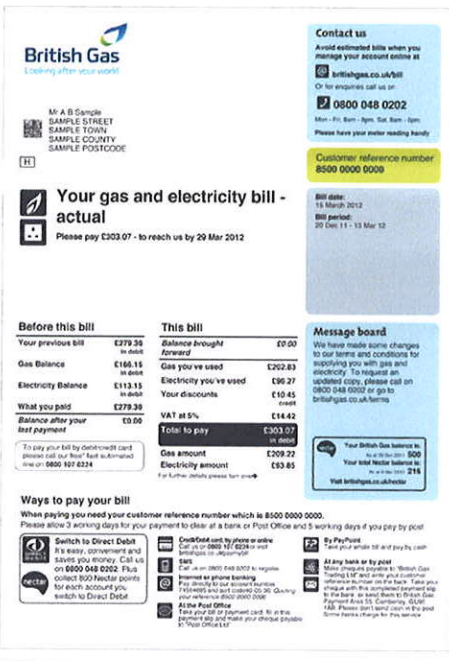
Category
16. Information

Client Company
British Gas

Design Consultancy
Lippincott



The new bill



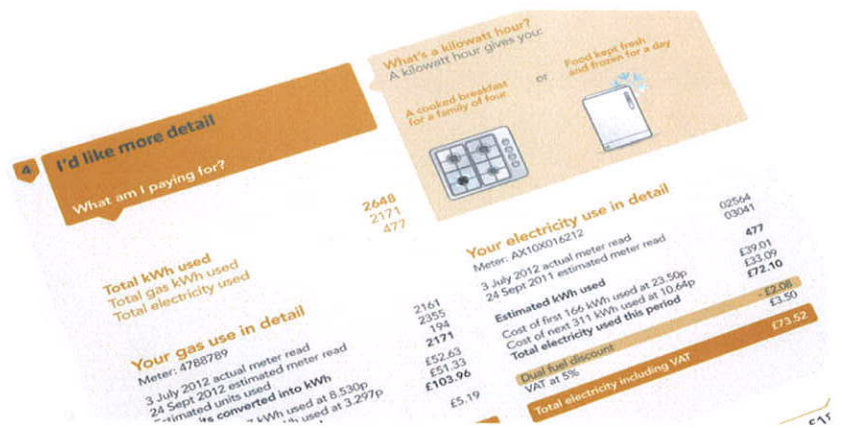
Structuring the bill around key questions, placing information in digestible chunks

Project Title
Re-designing the British Gas
billing experience

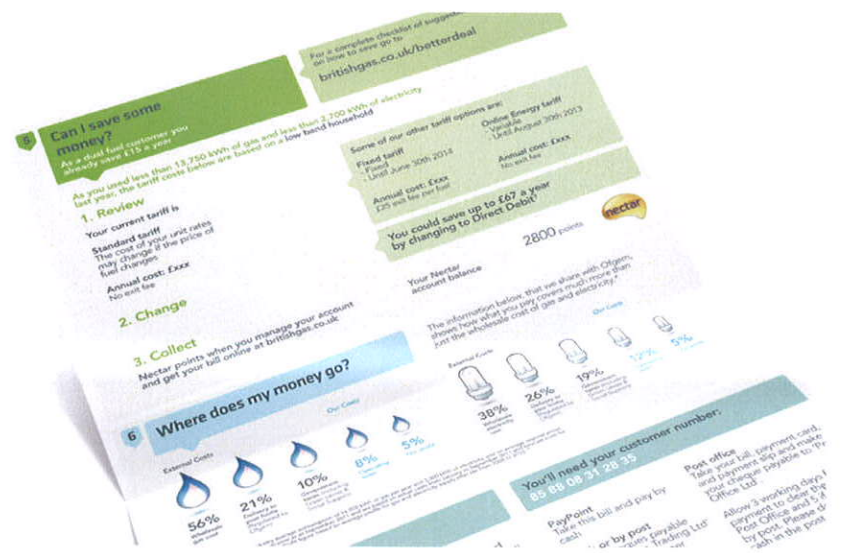
Category
16. Information

Client Company
British Gas

Design Consultancy
Lippincott



Showing customers, rather than throwing jargon
and buzz words at them



The dedicated 'Can I save money?' section