



Billing is re-energised

Energy company E.ON has cut costs and reduced customer enquiries by switching to statements and customer documents generated by HP Exstream software.

If you buy your electricity or gas from E.ON, when the bills arrive it may be slightly comforting to recall that they are digitally printed. Actually they are sophisticated personalised documents, generated by an extensive HP Exstream document system. If you buy both your gas and electricity from E.ON, all the charges are contained in the same statement. At present the statement information is digital black and white variable data on pre-printed offset colour shells. However if you pay the switch game and move to E.ON as a supplier, then you'll receive a sophisticated four-page welcome pack with information, graphs and special offers, all digitally printed and personalised to your particular deal.

From E.ON's viewpoint a major benefit has been almost £500,000 savings on postage, because documents are now printed in sort order. Paper usage has been cut because pre-printed inserts are no longer needed, with both cost and environmental benefits, while the greater clarity of the personalised information has meant a reduction in enquiries to its call centres. Lead times for new document creation have also been reduced from up to ten weeks down to a matter of days.

Donnelleys handles the statement overprinting, while DSi CMM (formerly K2) prints the full colour digital welcome documents. E.ON supplies a pre-sorted print stream rather than being dependent on printers' in-house systems. This means it can potentially switch between print providers relatively easily, which its current printers may regard as a mixed blessing.

If you're not sure which of the many energy companies E.ON is, then here's the précis. It's a German multinational that claims to be the

world's largest investor-owned power and gas company. In 2002 it took over the UK based Powergen, which was set up in 1990-91 as the privatised, non-nuclear part of the old nationalised Central Electricity Generating Board.

Exstream Software was set up in Kentucky in 1998 to challenge established corporate documentation players, and started selling in Europe in 2000: it prospered and was bought by HP at the beginning of last year. Other big users in the UK include CDMS, Communis, and Donnelley.

In 2001 Exstream was commissioned by Powergen to migrate its complex mainframe document applications to Unix without extensive programming, and also to save on training and labour costs. Exstream also created the 'OneBill' programme, which combines all of a customer's utility charges into one statement.

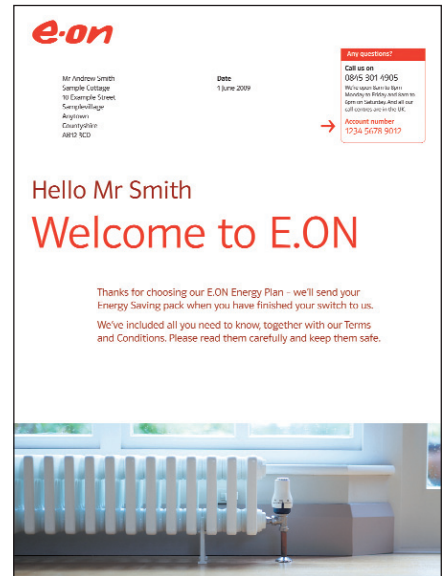
'Our proposition to E.ON was that this was not just for printed statements, says Simon Reynolds, HP Exstream's group manager for UK and Ireland. 'It can handle any document – letters, welcome kits etc. So initially we got them off the mainframe and onto one-part bills. If they change the underlying technology, such as going to paperless billing, the information is the same and can still be handled by Exstream, which simply directs the information to a different output stream.'

Transpromo potential

A possible future direction may be transpromo, he says, by putting colour messages on the bills. 'E.ON has already tried a boiler cover promotion as part of the statement pack, not an insert,' he says. 'This saw seven times the sales of the previously inserted booklet.'

Originally, new customers received a black and white letter with one or more pre-printed colour inserts from a choice of about 40. This sometimes included information on products and services that customers already had or were not relevant.

Starting late in 2006 the company held focus groups with consumer customers, to learn what kind of document they liked most. Two options were offered – the original black and white letter with inserts, or a four-colour, all encompassing, glossy leaflet. Consumers



Cover page of the new personalised one-piece welcome document.

said they preferred their information in a single A3 colour document folded to A4.

E.ON once again looked to Exstream. 'A key driver in initially selecting Exstream was its modularity that gave us the flexibility to easily implement new ideas in the future,' says Louise Pearson, fulfilment delivery manager for E.ON. 'So, when it came to meeting our latest business requirements of targeting new customers more effectively, Exstream was the right solution in place.'

Last year, using Exstream and working with writing and design consultant AndOrlf, E.ON redesigned its new customer document. The new one-piece, full-colour communication has individually tailored messages throughout, personalised by Exstream's rule-driven technology. It 'walks' customers through their whole transfer process, using flow charts, diagrams and images to explain what they will receive, when they will receive it and what the process is. 'This is unique and E.ON is very pleased to be the first utility company to produce fulfilment in this format,' Ms Pearson said. 'HP Exstream has now enabled us to respond to our research findings and reach out to our new customers in a more efficient and personalised way than ever before.'

Contact: www.hpexstream.co.uk



E.ON UK's Coventry HQ. The company used to be Powergen.