

British Gas installs smart meters faster by equipping engineers with Windows 8 tablets

Customer challenge

To help customers monitor and manage their energy usage, British Gas is rolling out smart meters as standard to homes and businesses across Britain by 2020, as part of a Government mandate. A team of 1200 field engineers (known as Smart Energy Experts) are responsible for this task. To work efficiently, these Smart Energy Experts need appropriate IT devices to support them, but the existing tablet estate was aging, and at the limit of its designed capability.

Computacenter solution

British Gas partnered with Computacenter to help upgrade its tablet estate to Dell devices running Windows 8. Computacenter was responsible for sourcing, testing, pre-configuring and asset tagging the devices before delivering them as required to British Gas sites. The project was successfully completed on time to aggressive timescales.

Results

Smart Energy Experts use the new tablets to support every stage of the smart meter installation process. This includes receiving their jobs and updates through the day, workflow through different types of jobs, as well as the commissioning activities for smart gas and electricity meters. Using the new devices has simplified their day-to-day tasks, and improved employee satisfaction, productivity and customer service. This will help British Gas achieve its goal of ensuring the smart meter installation is a seamless experience for its customers.

Services

- Supply Chain Services
- Mobile Worker

Technology

- Dell Latitude 10
- Microsoft Windows 8

Customer Agenda

- Continuous Improvement/
Innovation
- Risk Avoidance

Customer profile:

Powering homes and business across the UK

British Gas is the UK's leading energy supplier, and serves around 12 million homes in Britain – nearly half the country's homes – as well as providing energy to one million UK businesses. British Gas provides value for money, dedicated customer service, innovative energy solutions and the highest quality Home Services expertise in the country.

Business challenge:

Helping customers be smarter about energy usage

By 2020 smart meters will be rolled out as standard across the country as part of a Government initiative, replacing current gas and electricity meters. British Gas adopted a strategy to introduce smart meters early in order to bring the benefits to customers as soon as possible, and currently leads the industry with more than one million meters already installed in customers' homes and businesses.

Each home receives a smart gas meter, a smart electricity meter and a smart energy monitor. Smart meters communicate how much energy is being used to a smart energy monitor so customers can see their energy use and its costs in pounds and pence in near real-time. The smart meters also record energy use at up to half-hourly intervals and send these readings back to the energy supplier, once a day, putting an end to estimated bills.

Alan Fairhurst, Technical Consulting Manager with British Gas Strategic Systems, explains: "British Gas has already installed over a million smart meters into homes and businesses, and the roll-out is gathering pace as we look towards the Government deadline of 2020."

To ensure British Gas can achieve this goal and safeguard the quality of customer services, the Smart Energy Experts need to be equipped with the right tools. "The IT devices they use have a big impact on their productivity. We need them to be able to focus on their customers and the job in hand, without worrying about IT issues and downtime," says Alan.

The team was using tablet devices that were originally selected for their toughness, but the devices lacked the features and ease of use needed to maximise productivity.

IT solution:

New Windows 8 tablets for 1200 Smart Energy Experts

British Gas partnered with Computacenter to upgrade the tablet estate. "We have worked with Computacenter for a number of years," explains Alan. "Mass device change is not our core business, so when it comes to projects such as this, we need a partner with expertise and experience, such as Computacenter."

Following an internal exercise to evaluate the devices available on the market, British Gas turned to Computacenter to help procure and build the selected Dell Latitude 10 tablets, which run the Windows 8 operating system.

Computacenter helped British Gas negotiate pricing with Dell, and from June 2013 took responsibility for building and delivering the new devices over a four-month period. "Computacenter managed the logistics of the project, which included monitoring and tracking shipments to ensure they arrived on assigned dates so we could meet our tight deployment deadlines," comments Alan.

"With Computacenter's expertise and experience, we were able to successfully complete the project to deadline without having to invest in additional resources and space."

Alan Fairhurst
Technical Consulting Manager
British Gas Strategic Systems

Following delivery at Computacenter's Hatfield Configuration Centre, each device was BIOS-tested, pre-configured and asset tagged. They were then packed with accessories, including a ruggedised Griffin survivor case, and retained at Computacenter's buy and store facilities until British Gas required delivery.

Results:

Improved engineer satisfaction and customer experience

By partnering with Computacenter, British Gas was able to mitigate the risks associated with deploying such a large number of devices within a short timeframe. "It was quite an aggressive project where we had to get the new tablets out to our Smart Energy Experts quickly and get it right first time," confirms Alan. "With Computacenter's expertise and experience, we were able to successfully complete the project to deadline without having to invest in additional resources and space."

As a result of working with Computacenter, British Gas has been able to:

Reduce project risks: Computacenter's commitment to British Gas's tight deadlines, vendor relationships and best practices helped ensure the project was a success.

Simplify the installation of smart meters: The British Gas Smart Energy Experts use the new tablets every day when installing smart meters. They receive full details of each property and task, and track the progress of every job, via the tablets. The devices are also used to take photos of the meters in location for future records.

Improve engineer productivity: The enterprise-grade Windows 8 tablets bridge the gap between the corporate and consumer world, combining the reliability of a corporate device with the ease-of-use of a consumer interface. This not only simplified training, but also maximises productivity on a daily basis.

Increase employee satisfaction: Although corporately owned, the devices are personally enabled so Smart Energy Experts have an incentive to look after the tablets. They also enable them to take advantage of a growing range of helpful apps.

Enhance customer service: As Smart Energy Experts can access all the details they need about each customer and site quickly and easily, they can provide a better informed and more efficient service. They are also able to demonstrate a number of British Gas services and products whilst at the customer premises.

"With support from Computacenter, our Smart Energy Experts have the tools they need for the job. They are happier, more motivated and able to provide better customer service," concludes Alan. "This will help us achieve our goal of installing smart meters as standard to homes and businesses across the country by 2020."

"Our plan is to roll out smart meters as standard across Britain by 2020."

Alan Fairhurst
Technical Consulting Manager
British Gas Strategic Systems

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