

npower call answering speed mystery shopping



Technical details

Figures show that npower's average response time was faster than the total average response time of five key energy suppliers combined. This difference was found to be significant at a level of 5%.

	Average response time (in seconds)
npower	58.96
Competitors combined (five key providers)	82.37

Methodological details

Telephone calls were made to npower, E.ON, EDF, Scottish Power, Southern Electric and British Gas over the period 19 to 25 May 2010 inclusive.

600 calls were made in total; 100 calls to each supplier.

In order to account for the possibility that different regions may be routed to different contact centres, calls were made from, or nearby to, each of the following towns in the table below – one for each Government Office Regions plus Scotland and Wales.

Region	Town
South West	Bristol
East	Norwich
South East	Brighton
London	London
West Midlands	Birmingham
North East	Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Yorkshire and the Humber	Leeds
North West	Liverpool
East Midlands	Lincoln
Wales	Cardiff
Scotland	Edinburgh

The number of calls was evenly split between the towns: 54 were made in each region, except London, where 60 were made to bring the total number of calls to 600.

Calls were made at different times of the day and days of the week (Monday to Saturday) to each supplier to investigate the impact of different shifts of contact centre agents as well as 'busier' or 'quieter' times of day on response times. The times of day were categorised as follows:

Time of day	Definition
Morning	8.00 – 11.30
Lunch	11.30 – 14.00
Afternoon	14.00 – 18.00
Evening	18.00 – 20.00



Evaluators followed a calling plan to ensure that calls were made at every time of day and day of the week to three different departments. Each 'time/day slot' was called from at least one town.

The opening hours for each contact centre are broadly similar, but the following differences were taken into account when making the calling plan: Scottish Power closed at 19.00 Monday to Friday and at 13.00 on a Saturday; no supplier was open in the evening on a Saturday, and EDF and Southern Electric were also closed in the afternoon on Saturday. These timings were excluded from the calling plan.

Evaluators called three different departments per supplier, in order to thoroughly test call centre response times. These departments were: 'other queries', 'moving home' and 'prepayment meter' queries. From each town 34 calls were made to 'other queries', 33 to 'moving home' and 33 to 'prepayment meter' queries.

The departments were chosen on the basis that they were the options which matched most closely between the six suppliers.

Where a different number or IVR route was needed for different fuel types (e.g. gas or electricity) or different payment types (direct debit, quarterly payment etc) within calls to each department for a specific supplier, the calls were split evenly between the different numbers or IVR routes.

Evaluators followed fixed pathways through the IVR options for each supplier (these pathways are detailed below) and were all given the phone numbers to call.

Supplier	Pathway 1 – Other Queries
EDF	** - 9 – hold
npower	Direct Debit: 4 – hold
	Regular payments: 4 – hold
	Quarterly: 5 – hold
E.ON	Hold
Scottish Power	Quarterly: ## - 4 - 1 – hold
	Monthly: ## - 4 - 2 – hold
	Weekly: ## - 4 - 3 – hold
Southern Electric	Electricity: ** - hold - 4 - 4 – hold
	Gas: ** - hold - 4 - 4 – hold
British Gas	4 - hold - * - hold

Supplier	Pathway 2 – Moving Home
EDF	Prepay: ** - 3 - 1 - hold
	Quarterly: ** -3 - 2 - hold
npower	1 - hold
E.ON	Prepay: 1 – hold
	Rental property: 2 – hold
	Own property: hold
Scottish Power	## - 1 - hold
Southern Electric	Hold
British Gas	1 - hold - * - hold

Supplier	Pathway 3 – Prepayment Meter Queries
EDF	Hold
npower	Prepay electricity: 2 – 1 – hold
	Prepay gas: 2 – 2 - hold
E.ON	Electricity: 2 – hold
	Gas: hold
Scottish Power	## - 3 - hold
Southern Electric	Electricity: ** - 2 - hold
	Gas: Hold
British Gas	Hold

The numbers used were taken from each of the supplier websites, and were selected for their appropriateness for the department needed. These are detailed in the table below:

Supplier	Call type	Phone number
E.on	Moving home	0845 303 3020
	Prepayment meters/ pay as you go	Electricity: 0845 303 3040 Gas: 0845 300 8144
	Other enquiries	0845 059 9905
British Gas	Moving home	0800 048 0202
	Prepayment meters/ pay as you go	0800 048 0303
	Other enquiries	0800 048 0202
EDF	Moving home	0800 096 9000
	Prepayment meters/ pay as you go	0800 015 1733
	Other enquiries	0800 096 9000
Southern Electric	Moving home	0800 107 3203
	Prepayment meters/ pay as you go	Electricity: 0800 980 0414 Gas: 0800 980 0427
	Other enquiries	Electricity: 0845 7444 555 Gas: 0845 758 5401
Scottish Power	Moving home	0845 270 0700
	Prepayment meters/ pay as you go	0845 270 0700
	Other enquiries	0845 270 0700
npower	Moving home	0845 166 3166
	Prepayment meters/ pay as you go	0845 070 4853
	Other enquiries	Direct Debit: 0845 070 4851 Regular payments: 0845 070 4852 Quarterly: 0845 070 4850

Evaluators were requested to note the start time of the call to the nearest second, and the time the contact centre agent picked up, also to the nearest second. They were instructed to listen to the call options as they would do as a real customer (rather pressing the next step outlined in the IVR route immediately), and to hang up at the point an agent picked up, and not speak with him or her.