

Again, I'd be pretty much just on the internet looking for information for things. I get flyers from suppliers and stuff with information. That's emailed to me on a monthly basis with new products on the market et cetera, but if I need any advice on like repairs or things like that.

F: That's right.

F: So I rung them up and they'd put a nine instead of a six, so it really went up a lot and that's with somebody coming in and reading it, so there is errors all over the place.

It's a bit dyslexic.

And that's one job, write a number down.

F: It is a small cupboard and you do have to like put the torch right in there.

Yes.

Was it like looking at the other side of...[laughter]

F: But really did that, yes, it cost me a fortune.

How do you think your behaviour might change then if you had a smart meter in your business?

Watch it more.

So you would watch it more?

Yes.

F: Yes, I think I'd watch it.

Do you think you might be more aware of what you're using?

F: Yes.

In my business I don't think it would change for me much.

Do you think you would look at it though?

F: You'd definitely look at it. You've got to do.

F: Yes.

If what I'm doing in there is fixing things, like fixing machines or whatever, it's essential, I've got to do it so whether, you know, I don't think I'm going to look at the meter and say, 'Well, I just spent 20 minutes fixing that and it's cost so much', because it's got to be done.

F: I suppose you could price things better.

F: Yes.

F: So you know like when you charge a certain thing. That's the only thing I'm thinking. If I know I'm using, I don't know, like £1.50 to blow someone's hair and then you've got your cost of your product on top of it, plus you've coloured it, you've got that, you'd get your price structure better.

That's interesting.

Would you do that against what you're paying out monthly now anyway?

You have to do that on your books really. It's kind of the same thing, isn't it, but it's more micro-managed I guess day-to-day?

F: Yes.

If you have only got five customers in a day rather than ten near Christmas, or whatever, it's totally different.

F: Yes, I wish we only had five customers a day. It would be very nice.

They'd be no money though.

Nice and relaxed.

That's a good point, so you might be able to accurately price up your stuff. If you know that actually every butty also has 2p worth of electricity or whatever on top of it, yes, you'd be more aware of that?

F: Yes.

But you wouldn't charge £1.02 for it, would you?

I'd take £2.

Do you think anybody would, if you did have a smart meter, make more efficiencies because it would make you more aware of what you are using?

Marginally: a small margin.

What kinds of things? Is it bulbs or what is it?

For me it's a bit difficult, but yes, bulbs and heating costs maybe, maybe get it on a bit of a more strict timer, and I don't need to be in all the time so if I had to take something against my phone I could turn the heating off if I wasn't going to go in for whatever reason, and that would be a benefit, but apart from that.

What, in particular, about the smart meter, might encourage you to save? Is it seeing your usage in pounds and pence, or is it plotting it on a graph over graph, oh used more a month ago?

I think you'd gauge it over the year and maybe like, like I said, you are with the same energy company and having two smart meters, one for your residential and one for your business, then you could take [unclear words 0:03:37.4] and then, because you've got one at home you are going, like you say, you are going to kick in the little things where you think that will save a little bit of energy there, and then your company get a little bit OCD with it and that's when you might go into your business.

Do you think if you did have one you'd be more likely to switch your energy supplier if you had a smart meter?

F: I do it anyway so it wouldn't make any difference to me.

What would happen if you switch your energy supplier? Would they have to change the smart meter, or are there smart meters for any different energy company?

That is a very good question.

[Moderator explains smart meter concept]

F: I didn't know that.

[Moderator continues to explain smart meter concept]

It's like phones, isn't it? It's like phones for every...

Yes. [All agree]

It's very similar.

F: Right.

Yes.

These first ones that come out wait for the next ones to come out then.

Yes, wait for version two. In what ways might it be easier to switch if you have got a smart meter?

F: If it's universal.

If it's universal, yes.

F: Yes, but if it's not.

Oh well, they do like your readings and all that lot and it can be a bit of a dribble moving over, can't you? They are waiting for the charge to come through.

F: Well, they charge you.

Yes.

And this one is that.

F: I remember years ago...

If they have got a meter they can just do it straight away, can't they?

F: Yes.

Well, say if you are changing from a pay as you go meter to you know...

...Contract side.

F: Well, a smart one, wouldn't it? They'd charge me for that, and I think if you changed over from one company to another company I think they charge you for that as well, yes, so they'd just charge you if you wanted to change companies under a smart meter, wouldn't they?

I would imagine so. If you knew that switching would mean that the smart meter would stop working?

Well, like you say, we're all going to be smart meters soon so we won't have much there, but yes, it would put me off.

It might put you off from it?

It would put me off, yes. I think they get enough money to be fair.

Are there any particular things about smart meters that might encourage you to switch your supplier?

Maybe if one was less like whatever units; if there was one that was cheaper.

Customer service afterwards if you do have any issues, like they say these smart boxes, they could be that smart they just give you a ring on that, save you phoning them on an 0845 number.

Yes.

What are the kinds of information or services do you think you might want, or need, in order to make the most of our smart meter, of having one?

If you want to have solar panels and that, how much electricity you're getting, that's making for you, you know using that hall meter, whatever you want to describe it as? Even if you get a wind turbine, how much money are you having back out if you are using that?

It would be telling you how much you would be generating from your solar panels?

Yes, stuff down and how it works.

Are you expecting it will do stuff like that already?

Yes, I would have thought so.

I don't think it does, but yes, it could do, so it tells you how much energy you might be generating if you've got something that does that.

Yes.

F: I like what Adam said about...

...Tariffs, yes.

F: Yes, when to use.

...Using energy at different times of day and all that kind of thing, yes.

F: Yes.

In terms of information really, so learning about how it works and you said...

F: I've got a leaflet, yes.

You got a leaflet, but what kinds of things would you expect or would you want? Is it a website that you can go on and it will tell you everything you need to know?

F: An app.

F: Yes.

F: I think you can have that.

F: Can you?

So if there was a simple app then, what kinds of things might it tell you? What would you want to know I suppose?

F: Like where your energy is being used. It can pinpoint things every day.

F: So you're at work...

F: And then it's averaging, you know like weekly, you know like you say if you're at work and you know what's going on at home.

F: Yes, exactly.

A simple app based thing?

F: Yes.

F: Yes.

What about a phone sensor or helpline, or something like that?

F: Do you mean like customer services?

Something like that.

F: I'm sure they have that anyway.

You know the Citizens Advice Service?

Yes. [All agree]

Does anybody associate them with energy?

No. [All agree]

What do you associate them with?

F: Benefits.

Yes, if you don't know.

Just help and advice.

Legal I would say.

Legal problems and stuff like that?

Yes.

Legal and council tax and stuff like that.

Basically they want to understand how small businesses like yourselves, what you know about smart meters and what the gaps in information might be. Obviously this is something that is happening. Everybody in the UK is going to have to have a smart meter, so how much do they need to know

basically about this and what kinds of information? Would you ever consider going to Citizens Advice to get information about energy?

F: I've never been to Citizens Advice.

I've been.

No.

F: No.

For your energy?

Oh not for my energy, no. I've always been quite spritely.

Right.

[Laughter]

No one has been to Citizens Advice about energy, which makes sense.

F: No, I've never been to Citizens Advice in my life.

The kinds of things you associate them with would be very different to energy and that kind of thing?

F: Definitely, yes. I would never have thought of energy for them.

Basically if they were going to offer information or services about smart meters, what kinds of things would you want to know and what kinds of platforms? Is it online or is it phone? Is it you can go in and talk to them? Firstly, what kinds of things might you want to know?

F: The benefits probably.

So what are the benefits of smart meters?

F: Yes.

The downsides to it.

F: Yes, they would tell you everything, wouldn't they?

Yes, so what might the downsides be and be transparent.

F: Yes.

Yes, so you can get some other things really.

They know where they've got it, you know in the boroughs as well. They are going to be giving you information that you need to know.

So they need to know about all that.

F: Yes.

F: And they need to know about the switch process as well, you know like if you were switching providers and all about what you've just been saying about the universal thing and stuff, and can you move straight away and is it a proper one? They need to know all that really.

Yes.

They find it all out in the internet though, don't they? Whatever they don't know, they just find it.

The people at Citizens Advice?

Yes, the people who work there, yes.

You might as well just do it yourself.

Yes, right.

F: If you get a page where it was all on where they had done the background research, then that would be all right, wouldn't it?

It's for lazy people who...

It would be quite good if they were going to categorise everyone's, maybe not categorise your business, you know if you've got that central thing that has got all your data, if you gave them your permission they could track how much you use and what time and then they came up with a plan for you.

What, Citizens Advice did?

Well, maybe not come up with a plan, but maybe refer you to someone who – basically monitored all your usage and said, 'Right, for this type of business, for your usage you'd be best off doing this'.

That would be good.

Rather than just being like you could save money if you turned your kettle off, just giving you basic information that you probably already know, if they could have like a Go Compare type thing they could look at your usage from a central database and said, 'Right, well you are going to benefit more from this sort of tariff from this provider', or whatever.

If they did have something like that, would that all be online?

Yes, online, you could do it and give them your details and they could get your information and do it that way.

Would you pay for that kind of thing?

Possibly, if there was going to be enough of a saving.

If it's worth it, yes.

Like an insurance broker type thing, like a middle man.

What does everybody else think about that idea?

Yes, that sounds like a good idea.

F: Yes.

Yes, because the comparison websites and stuff they all, if you are with British Gas say they always tell you to move regardless of if British Gas were the cheapest. They always say to move, yes, because every time you move they are doing a referral, aren't they? Citizens Advice maybe won't do the same thing, not that I'm begrudging them making money, but Citizens Advice might tell you no, stay with who you are because you've got a good deal.

That's right.

Why might they tell you that whereas uSwitch or whoever might not?

Because they're not going to make any money by saying stay where you are.

So they are more impartial?

They're more impartial, so yes.

Actually then Citizens Advice might be a good source of information?

Yes, I think so.

F: Yes.

F: They are not making any money off it, are they?

Yes.

They're not in bed with anybody, or you know what I mean?

Would that be important then, you trust that information then?

Yes, I think I'd trust the information.

F: I think older people would as well, like your mum and dad and grandma and stuff. I think it's better for them. They'd trust Citizens Trust rather than people ringing them up or uSwitch or whatever.

How do you feel about being disconnected when properties are empty? What this means is if the property, if your business premises weren't in use then your supplier could turn, using the smart meter, could turn your supply on or off? That could theoretically save you money on standing charges.

Yes.

F: Yes, that's good.

F: Yes, but you can do that anyway, can't you?

What do you mean?

F: You can have it turned off anyway, because one of my friends she has a shop, because there is no gas in the thing she's had her meter just switched off.

Yes, but say, for example, when you go home at night – well, your business is in your home – but that part of wherever it is you do it, when you're not in there.

F: They can switch it off at night?

Yes, so you can't have anything on standby.

F: Oh that's good.

F: So that's a good idea, so you can just press a button and everything switches off?

Yes, you could set it up so they'd do it remotely for you.

What if you want to go there after hours so you can get some keys?

F: I don't think I'd like them doing it though. I think I'd prefer it if I could do it.

If you are running late or something, and you wanted to go in.

F: That would be great if you could do that yourself on the app.

Well, you should be able to, yes. Well, it would be all right if it was on your phone.

F: Because if you are running behind.

So you'd want to control that, like turn it all off?

F: Yes.

Set a timer when it comes on, when it goes off, that would be all right, but I'd want to do it.

[Unclear phrase 0:20:40.4]

F: Yes, because you can't judge as a hairdresser what time you are going to finish.

F: No, I know.

F: Can you imagine being mid-hair and all of a sudden the electric goes off? Sorry love, I know it's Christmas do tonight, but see you.

If you have a set supplier and different meters read that.

I can see an extra thing coming is when, because we're fitting carpets for customers, getting an extra bill when they are sat there with the smart meter saying you used a bit of electric there.

F: Yes.

Stop following our cars!

I suppose on the back of that is the idea that theoretically the supplier would have the ability to disconnect your energy remotely, so they could just turn it off.

If you haven't paid?

Yes, so would that affect your willingness to pay your bills on time and all that kind of stuff if they could just turn you off like that?

We pay anyway so you don't.

F: It's not something you'd pay every month just go into the Post Office. You pay it direct debit anyway.

F: And I don't think they'd just turn it off. You'd get a reminder.

Yes, you'd probably get warnings, yes definitely.

F: Yes.

I don't think they'd just switch you off.

F: Switch off, yes.

We've already mentioned this. Adam, you spoke about it, so tariffs and different opportunities there might be with these smart meters. First of all, how do you feel about the current tariffs you've got available as small businesses? How do you feel about how much you pay a month in tariffs and that kind of thing?

Okay.

It's good.

F: Well, you've got to pay it, haven't you?

Then this question about, well the official term is 'load shifting' so this is the thing Adam was talking about where different parts of your business might be able to do different things at different times of day and save money.

F: Yes.

Who can do that kind of thing?

I think I can.

F: I can.

I think so. I think that's how I know about it.

F: Oh yes, if it was a case of using your washer at a certain time and things like that.

Yes.

But there are benefits and disadvantages to it.

F: You can't have a brew before ten.

F: Yes.

I think it's like if you use it in the day you get absolutely hammered for it, but if you use it at night then it's really cheap, so if you have to go home and put your washer on, or whatever, then you get absolutely hammered for it, so there are pros and cons really. If you are organised enough to think about, which I'm not, then yes it's good.

Is anybody not able to do that? I suppose with hairdressing it might be. For certain things you might be able to.

F: Yes, certain things.

F: Yes.

It's cheaper.

A cheaper haircut, but you have to come in at three o'clock in the morning.

F: Can you imagine that? I do have ladies who like want to come at the crack of dawn. If I told them to come at five, they'd be like, 'Okay'. It's like seriously, get a life, sleep in on a Saturday.

I'm still snoring at that time.

It's a theoretical thing, isn't it, that you could do? Could anyone not do that at all?

I couldn't.

It doesn't work?

No.

Tariffs then, are there any other types of tariffs you might want or expect, or think about with a smart meter?

F: Is there what, sorry?

Any other types of tariff that, well now if you have got a smart meter installed you might be able to have access to?

The cheaper ones.

Anything that will save you money, yes.

Yes, if you could pay your bill any time.

What's that?

Could you pay your bill at any one time: quarterly, monthly, but just say you have six weeks and you are going away for a month, whatever it be...

So you have hit the nail on the head there, so actually when you pay might change. At the moment, if they only know every six months how much you've used because a bloke has to come round and look, so

he knows how much you've used in that six months and how much you've used in that six months, but he doesn't have any detail week-to-week or day-to-day or whatever, so theoretically then there might be other tariffs where you pay every week.

F: Yes.

F: Yes, but like he said before, we've all sort of like worked it out so you are overpaying in summer.

F: In summer.

F: You know.

Yes, so it might not be that.

F: There are pros and cons like before.

What about seasonal tariffs then? Maybe it's cheaper in summer.

Obviously it's cheaper in summer than winter.

And more expensive in winter?

F: Well, there is always something that comes. Your smaller days are coming in summer obviously so then you need your money then and Christmas/winter. It's Christmas, isn't it?

Expensive.

There is no escape.

There is no way round it.

F: No.

What do we need to know in order to make the most out of a smart meter? What information? What do you need to know?

What appliance uses the most electricity?

F: If you are going to be stuck to one provider. That's a big one for me because I move.

Anything else?

F: The cheaper tariffs, if they could tell you.

Yes, if they could advise there are cheaper deals.

Let you know. Interesting, because you were talking about efficiency earlier, weren't you?

F: Yes.

There is an idea about the meter could tell you, 'Have you seen this energy saving bulb?' Because it's got a screen on it, it could even pop up with little adverts and things like that.

F: Well, this is it. It's like your iPhone. It gives you like your tips, doesn't it? If they could give you tips; if they were coming up.

F: Yes, they could make their money by little advertisements like you get on Facebook and things like that.

F: Yes.

Yes, but if it's just constantly bombarding you with advertisements would you look at them?

You'd stop looking at it.

F: No, but if it had like, you know like say on the app, if it clicked into tips, for example, like you would on your phone and it is just giving you ideas. It doesn't have to pop up all the time.

F: It would be better on the app.

F: Yes, I mean it's like I can't believe who hadn't heard that kettle one before.

I'd never heard of that.

F: It's using more. That has been one of the all time ones.

How much though? I want to know, how much is that saving me? If it said like don't fill your kettle up.

F: But it's like it's every little bit helps. This is what they're trying to say.

I want to see it in a financial sense.

F: Yes, but like you're saying if it's only 80p, but then if you are doing like another 15 of the tips at 80p. Do you know what I mean?

F: Yes.

Sometimes it's financial sense.

F: Yes.

So there is almost a threshold as to how much it might save you before it starts to get interesting really.

F: Even that put your washer on...

F ...On at night time.

F: ...Before you go to bed.

F: ...But I've always done that.

But then get little bonuses for it as well.

F: What, do they charge more for washing?

F: Yes, of course you do, even like your dishwasher, everything. Your electric is cheaper through the night.

F: Is it?

F: Yes.

Yes.

F: Yes, mine is cheaper.

You see I'm not the only one who doesn't know.

Then you've got a two year old you can't have a washing machine going round and round.

That is without a smart meter it is still the case.

F: Yes.

F: Oh I never knew that.

I always put my dryer on at night, but I mean I didn't know that, but that's just what I do.

Weekends it's a bit cheaper because everyone is out the house.

It helps you sleep.

It does; the rotating!

The last kind of question is: what's the single most important thing we've discussed this evening, and what is one thing that you will take away with you?

Don't fill your kettle up.

I'm going to go round and then we're done, so what's the single most important thing we've been discussing this evening, and what's the kind of thing you will take away with you and remember? It could be the same thing.

Come back to me.

F: I think I'll be googling when to put my washer on and the dryer.

F: Yes, I like that, but I think I'd be looking more into the smart meters more I must admit.

That's another good question actually. Would anyone consider getting one now?

F: I would.

F: Yes.

F: Well, if you are going to get it after three years you might as well get it free now.

Because you are going to have to have one eventually anyway?

F: Yes.

Really, is that the law or something?

F: It's going to be, yes.

The law.

They are going to force you to do it.

After three years they will forcibly come in your home?

I don't think they are going to kick your door down.

That's what I mean, so...

There may be some sort of punitive measures.

F: Smart meters are the way forward.

Just to get their agenda through.

Smart meters are the way forward?

F: Yes.

Sorry, that's the most important thing. What about you?

F: Pretty much what they've just said.

It can be the same thing.

F: Yes, that's it, the same really.

Plenty of time to think now.

Yes, I know. I've just lost myself in the work. I was just thinking more towards the app. I'm just trying to get away from the actual, the smart box. Like you say they are going to wait two/three years to give you this box?

Yes.

I don't see in this day and age why you don't just have it on your phone and you don't need this box.

Yes, so you could have that app on your phone.

Yes.

And you know how to use your phone.

Any other things, like final thoughts or big things?

Just the Citizens Advice getting involved with giving you advice about all this kind of stuff, that's interesting.

Your idea Adam was almost Citizens Advice to offer information, to have information about you and your business usage of energy and tell you what your best tariff might be, and give you that impartial advice...

Yes, well if they had it on their website or something like that as well so you didn't have to.

You had your own log in.

F: So you could put everything on...

That's a point, yes.

Exactly that, that kind of thing.

F: Yes.

I suppose is there any other information about smart meters, or additional information that the Citizens Advice Bureau could offer?

Just to monitor it.

F: Yes, if you've got any problems with it then you can go and see them.

Would you go and see them in person? Would you call them up? What should they do? Should they have a website?

No, it would be good for them to have a website.

F: A website, yes.

Online chat.

F: Live chat, yes.

F: Yes, it's easier, isn't it?

No, not a fan of live chat?

No.

F: Oh I am, rather than sitting and waiting for someone.

I think they should have...

So maybe they should do all of them.

F: Yes.

Right guys, that's it.

F: Thank you.

Thank you very much.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]