

Good Afternoon, Jessica

Thank you for the invitation to provide feedback on our recent experiences with digital meter upgrades since the new practices came into affect on 1 December 2017.

The scope of our work requires solar meter upgrades for our customers. Our ASP is accredited with Acumen to do metering installations for Origin customers and so we have comments to make in relation to our experience in obtaining meters from Acumen and then doing the upgrades, as well as arranging for upgrades for those customers who have retailers other than Origin. Our comments are as follows:

### **The time it has taken for customers to receive their new meter**

Acumen stipulate a 15 business day wait time before the intended meter installation can take place. We have NEVER received a meter on time and when we have contacted Acumen to find out the reason for the delay, we are told that Origin is slowing down the process since a work order has yet to be raised. When finally we do receive the meters, customers have been left waiting usually 6-8 weeks, all the while receiving no feed-in-credits for their exported solar. We had one customer waiting 3 months and eventually took the matter to the Energy Ombudsman who prompted Origin for an explanation. The meter was then swiftly dispatched by Acumen and the customer granted compensation from Origin for the loss of benefit.

The 4-6 week wait with the other retailers is also excessive as the customers cannot receive any credits for the excess solar their newly installed system is generating, until the meter is installed. Many customers don't understand this and are disappointed when the credits they expect are not evident on their next bill.

### **How many times providers have has to visit a property to complete an installation, and the reasons why**

Sites that have poor or patchy phone service, we have had to attend multiple times. This is at great cost to us as installers, as they are usually remote and require hours of travel which can't be recouped. Acumen either can't or won't provide Type A metering for those sites and so after multiple trips, the customer can't receive any feed in credit and we are also left out of pocket for the travel and wasted time. Acumen requires photographic evidence of signal strength at the switchboard however we have found this to be unreliable and problematic.

### **Any costs incurred by customers**

In our experience with Red Energy, Alinta, Dodo and Energy Australia we have been unable to provide the customer with an exact cost for the meter since the retailers have only provided an approximate figure which is added to the customer's next electricity bill. Depending on which retailer the customer has chosen, the cost varies, sometimes it's free other times up to \$250.00

### **Communication and service provided**

Acumen have been very difficult to communicate with. Emails go mostly unanswered and their phone lines are usually so choked that a recording tells you to call back later. When we have managed to talk to them, they have cast blame on Origin and so nothing ever gets resolved. Both Red Energy and Alinta also have been difficult. Sometimes matters arise, for example there may

be a problem with something on a switchboard, and instead of notifying us that the upgrade hasn't been completed, they just leave and we are left assuming that the work has been done when it hasn't. This is what one customer had to say about Red Energy's contractor...."

Contractor arrived around 7.30 on Friday 1<sup>st</sup> June.

The contractor asked me to remove the MDF cover off the meter as he didn't want to do it – I was happy to do this. He advised at 7.45 he was going to do a job at Gunning or Gundaroo and might be back and would give me a call. He advised the meter takes 3-4 hours to install.

I told him to rebook another day.

Customers need our help in providing the required documentation to their retailer and usually submitting the application and yet the retailers don't communicate with us as installers when there is a problem or delay. Red Energy have been particularly uncooperative in this way.

### **Whether any unexpected issues arose**

Red Energy have been defecting existing switchboard installations and refusing to do the meter upgrades as their contractors deem the switchboard to be non-compliant. The problem that we are experiencing is that these switchboards DO indeed comply with the DNSP's code (Essential Energy in this case) as we have had their inspector out to have a look, yet the Red Energy contractors see it differently. We have had 3 cases in our area like this, all with Red Energy, so far this year and so it turns into a finger pointing blame game at the customer's expense.

### **Measures being put in place to reduce delays and any barriers to overcoming these delays**

We have begun submitting metering application to retailers prior to job commencement to minimise wait time on meter upgrades. This works with Origin and Actew customers but all the other retailers require a Certificate of Compliance which isn't issued until job completion so they are forced to endure the 4-6 week wait.

Customers experience confusion when they have recently changed retailers. Many don't realise that until their next meter read, the previous retailer still has responsibility for their metering. Requiring the customer to produce their last electricity bill is becoming necessary in order to avoid sending the metering application to the wrong retailer which extends the process even further.

We have also stopped doing metering for Origin via Acumen (even though we specifically did the Acumen training in order to provide the service to our customers) as their service is so poor and it was negatively impacting our customer relations. Now we tell all our customers, regardless of who their retailer is, that the metering is between them and the retailer. We will provide the required documents and fill in the forms but it's up to them to chase the retailer and make it happen.

Thank you for the opportunity to share these issues- I hope it makes a difference and we can clean up this mess that has been created.

Kind Regards

Lyn Davaris