

I am writing in regards to the review of electricity retailers metering practices change as of 1<sup>st</sup> December 2017. If you make it through this mammoth letter, I commend you.

### **Background**

I have worked in administration in the electrical industry for 11 years. During this time, I have learned from and assisted with multiple “Level 2” scopes of work, including obtaining permission to connects ordering and dispatching meters, obtaining account details, arranging NMI’s and dealing with both Endeavour Energy and our customers in depth.

Never, in the 10.5 years leading up to the change made on December 1<sup>st</sup> 2017, has the above work caused any stress, aggravation or any other negative feelings.

Since the beginning of December 1<sup>st</sup> 2017, the lack of information, buck passing and general frustration has been immense and unnecessary.

## **ORIGIN ENERGY**

### **Lack of information**

Although an information booklet was issued, before the program went live, the process was constantly changing at every turn, with no help, guidance or explanations.

**EXAMPLE:** The forms issued to our company to be submitted were being superseded by new forms before we had a chance to fill them out.

### **Lack of communication**

Trying to get in contact with ANYONE from any department except sales was (is still) like getting blood from a stone.

Wait times just to speak to someone vary from 10-40 minutes on average, then you need to hope they care enough to help you, in most cases I am shuffled from person to person, who either had no knowledge of the product they were helping with or had no interest in doing anything but the bare minimum and hoping they can pass you onto somebody, anybody else.

If, on the rare occasion you spoke to someone who cared, followed through with your request or question – there was no way to get back onto them.

**EXAMPLE:** On one occasion a very helpful Origin team member gave me their extension so I could get back in touch regarding an update – great! When I used that number the next day, I was told that nobody by that name worked for the company.

### **Wait times**

Waiting on the phone for upwards of ½ and hour EVERYTIME is unacceptable. The advice is to email them, which is great, if it didn't take a week on average to receive a reply, and in several cases, tell you to call them at connect assist via phone.

### **Lack of continuity**

Our company pride ourselves on being able to give our customers personal service, the same person, or team follow through from the beginning to end, our customers know who they need to talk to and that they will be able to speak directly to us if there is a problem.

This is not a service we are provided with at Origin Energy. Every time there was an issue, question or concern you are shuffled through to a different person, time wasted going over every single detail again. If you are lucky, the last employee left notes on your file... in most cases this does not happen.

If there was a problem with an application, instead of one email outlining what needed to be rectified, we would receive a generic email with one issue I.E account name is wrong, we would fix the name and resubmit, another two days would pass and we would receive a second email saying there was a problem with the address and on and on.

### **Lack of training**

Being a new system, I understand that there are always going to be teething problems, we were all learning together and I would assume we could work together to figure things out.

The immense lack of even basic electrical/metering knowledge is profound. I am not sure what training they were provided, but it, in my opinion, was not enough.

I did, on occasion speak with a team member that had some knowledge on the subject, or at the very least, was willing to work to find a solution, however, the bulk of individuals I have dealt with do not have the knowledge they needed to have.

### **Loop Holes:**

Before any meters are installed and commissioned, Endeavour Energy must still issue a permission to connect – this has not changed... HOWEVER... as the process has changed there was a massive grey area which, to my knowledge, has still not been rectified.

**Example:** Our company, after several weeks of back and forth with Origin Energy, installed the cable and meter box on our customers property, well before the meter was due to be installed through Origin. Without any contact from Origin, or the installer, the meter was then installed at the property. No permission to connect had been applied for.

After phone calls to an auditor, Acumen and Origin to find out whose actual responsibility it was to apply for the permission to connect, I was informed that *"it is probably your responsibility because*

*you installed the cable*" – Our assumption would be whoever connected the power (meter) would be responsible.

The permission to connect was then applied for and issued, much to our relief.

We have continued to apply for the permission to connect (In the correct order) however, I believe that the individual installing the meter should, at the very least, have to confirm it has been issued BEFORE a meter is ever installed on a property.

**Example:** We are the main electrical contractors at a shopping centre which has recently expanded, meaning plenty of new shops which are in need to metering. One staff member has used our name on an application for a meter without our knowledge - we had no history with this customer.

If the meter had been installed without a permission to connect, our company would be responsible for that installation, even though we had NOTHING to do with it.

Thankfully, the applicant had filled out the details incorrectly, so it bounced back and we were able intercept and correct the process with this customer.

We have had multiple random people contact us and ask for our licence so we can be there contact; those people are told no.

### **Job Loss:**

We currently have 3 electricians who are Level 2 accredited, these individuals carry out all of our metering works, as well as, all other general and specific electrical work.

If we were reliant on metering as a source of income, I have no doubt, that we would have had to either let go of valued employees or close the doors all together.

The time taken to obtain the correct information, have meters approved and then actually arrive is outrages.

We, in several instances, have had meters we requested, for works that are for our existing, long term customers taken from us and allocated to other Acumen or Vector accredited installers through Origin.

We have been in contact with other Level 2 electricians who do solely rely on this type of work, who are stressed out of their minds. It sickens me that Origin can pick and choose who work is allocated to, especially when family businesses are the ones doing ALL the leg work and seeing no benefit.

## **Payment and Fees:**

We are a small family run business, we rely on our valued customers and our employees rely on us to be able to pay their mortgages and keep their families fed.

Although I am yet to have this confirmed by anyone – because, surprise, nobody knows 100% - several customers have told me that Origin advised them that there would be no cost to have the meter installed.

While I cannot believe this would be true, it is alarming to think that:-

- 1) Origin would give information like this and it then be not be true
- 2) If it is true, this immediately puts small companies out of business
- 3) If it is true, on the odd occasion we install a meter, our charges look astronomical.

NOTE: On Friday 29/6/2018 I spoke with Origin Energy New Connections and was told that a meter would be supplied to a new customer free of charge however, the “distributor” (Endeavour) or meter provider **\*\*MAY\*\*** have additional charges – he couldn’t comment on what those may be or in which situation those would be chargeable.

He recommended Origin over our local electrician because they “supply the meter for free”.

## **Case Study – a timeline of events**

**History** – A business customer on a large, rural parcel of land required a second metering position on their property for power to an electric gate. The customer already had an Origin Energy account on the property, but required a second account.

5<sup>th</sup> December 2017 – Customer approved quote, Origin Account and meter application were submitted to start the process.

## **RADIO SILENCE**

NOTE: Phone wait times were 50mins +

9<sup>th</sup> January 2018 – Called for update

10<sup>th</sup> January 2018– Email for update - Origin advised that the contact name needed to be adjusted. Resubmit.

12<sup>th</sup> January 2018– Email for update

16th January 2018– Email for update –Email received - Issue with the NMI supplied by customer and the address.

Contacted Origin and explained that the customer wanted to establish a second account and meter position on a large piece of land.

Added “electric gate” to application address to ensure there was a point of difference and resubmitted.

13th February 2018 – Waited on hold for approx. 35minutes to chase, was told the department (assist) could not help me and to email 'cahelp@originenergy.com.au' reply below:-

[REDACTED]

Called again and was kept on hold for another 40-50 minutes. Spoke with “Mark” and resubmitted the paper work as we were advised they had not received it.

15<sup>th</sup> February 2018 – Called and spent another 35 minutes on hold, spoke to “Vince” and was told they still had not received the application.

We had “read receipts” from the email being delivered.

16<sup>th</sup> February 2018 – [REDACTED] actually called me back and advised he still had not seen it, advised me to email again to [gasconnectionrequests@originenergy.com.au](mailto:gasconnectionrequests@originenergy.com.au), they confirmed receipt.

### RADIO SILENCE

1<sup>st</sup> March 2018 – Contacted them again (stressed and not impressed, looking like complete idiots with our customer and not being able to give them any information)  
Spent 2 hours and 40 minutes on the phone both on hold and getting shuffled from person to person. Asked to speak with a manager and was finally transferred to a Case manager [REDACTED] and given a case number and informed that we they were having trouble with the account name. I asked how this could be rectified that day and advised to “put the account into another name”

Resubmitted application in our company with a site address for the electric gate.

5<sup>th</sup> March 2018 – Spent 1 hour and 36 minutes on hold waiting to speak to someone – then the line was disconnected.

5<sup>th</sup> March – Managing director spent 30 minutes on hold with no resolution

12<sup>th</sup> March 2018 – Spent a total of 1 hour and 38 minutes on the phone, spoke with a FABULOUS staff member – [REDACTED] who gave me her personal email address and asked me to email her with a list of what properties we had issues with. PERFECT – finally someone who cares!  
*(Amanda advised I was only to use the email address in this one instance as she would get in trouble if I continued to contact her through this avenue)*

13<sup>th</sup> March 2018 – a response was received from perfect [REDACTED] – YES! [REDACTED] advised that the application had “progressed to the next stage” (I had to email back a clarify what that meant)

The response is below:

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

#### RADIO SILENCE

During the 10-13 business days I had staff members drop by the site to see if the work had been carried out.

23<sup>rd</sup> March 2018 –HALLELUJAH, meter was installed and a CCEW was issued by a company based in QLD – so nice for locals to support locals. (we are based in south west Sydney NSW)

28<sup>th</sup> March 2018 – devastating news in the form of an email – Perfect [REDACTED] broke up with us.

*Good Morning ,  
I am glad that some of that was sorted out for you. Unfortunately I am now back in my old role and I cannot assist you with the rest of the process. Sorry but you will need to go back thru to the New Connection department so they can assist you.  
Kind Regards,  
[REDACTED]*

28<sup>th</sup> March 2018 – Contacted Origin to see what steps we needed to do to transfer the account into the actual account holders name. I was eventually told that the account had not been established so we were unable to change it today.

4<sup>th</sup> April 2018 – Tried to change the account name again, was told that the account was “processing” and we should receive some paper work in the next 2-4 weeks.

#### RADIO SILENCE

12<sup>th</sup> June 2018 – Spoke with accounts as we had not received any further contact or an invoice, and so, were still unable to change the account name.

Was shuffled back and forth between accounts and new connections and was finally advised the our account was “inactive” and for some reason was stuck there.

After sharing my concerns with the fact that this had been an ongoing issue, the staff member advised she would “push it through manually” for us and we would receive the account soon. When I enquired what soon meant, she told me approximately 30 days that this was a priority to them?

**Summary** (please keep in mind this was **one** of approx. 6 applications we had at the time)

10+ hours on the phone – mostly on hold

20+ emails

20+ hours of unnecessary stress (**and yes, many tears**)

6.5 months with the process still not resolved.

### **Suggested Solutions for improvement**

- One person or small team deal with one job from start to finish.
- Origin let you know from the beginning what (if any) problems there are in one go to eliminate time lags (not multiple emails) because they read the application line by line.
- Origin to issue the job initiated, by a licenced level 2 electrician who has gone through the accreditation process, to allow that electrician to follow through and finalise that customers work. **Allowing small business to succeed instead of fail.**
- Smaller wait times on phone and email.
- Clear information pack with a start to finish “how to”  
(This would eliminate so many phone calls because there would be clear information)
- Don’t change the goal posts, have one tried and fail safe system to ensure less confusion and frustration.
- Transparency with fees and charges.
- Fast and efficient process from start to finish.

## Acumen

We have found that submitting the meter application straight to Acumen (instead of Origin) is more likely to ensure we end up being allocated a meter.

Unfortunately the process is still not 100%.

The small team I have dealt with at Acumen are on the whole, very helpful; if you can get through to them. I would assume they have huge amounts of calls from ASP's trying to figure out the system Origin created as well.... We all seem to be in the same boat in this regard.

In the past, I have left messages on their voice mail which were not returned for 3-5 days. Their "contact us" email screen in our experience has the same experience.

Our metering auditor, [REDACTED], has been a godsend. He is so informative and very good with the electricians out onsite.

Overall, our Acumen experience has been much more positive than Origin, however, they were also lacking a lot of information. However, once you do get in contact with them, most staff are more than happy to work together to help find a solution to an issue.

If you would like to speak further about any of the issues noted above, please do not hesitate to contact me on [REDACTED]

Kind Regards

Lyndal Dutton  
[REDACTED]