

Name: Friendly Bill - All about your electricity bill
Award category: Engagement
Organisation: DECO - Portuguese Association for Consumer Protection
Location: Lisbon, Portugal
Duration: 2018-2019
Website: <https://www.fatura-amiga.pt>

Factsheet:

Friendly Bill - Helping citizens understand their energy bills

Decoding electricity bills

Nowadays, in the EU's more liberalised energy markets, consumers have a wide range of different energy suppliers to choose from – and each has a different way of presenting an energy bill. With many different codes and tariff types, energy bills can be a maze of confusing information.

In Portugal, DECO, the Portuguese Association for Consumer Protection, launched the Friendly Bill project between 2018 and 2019. It was a national awareness raising campaign helping people read and understand their electricity bill. For each of the different energy supplying companies, the project also analysed every aspect of an energy bill, from the amounts of electricity consumed to carbon emissions produced.

Addressing consumer needs through interactive means

In order to better understand the different types of consumers and their needs, DECO carried out a national survey and organised a series of focus groups. Only half of those who participated checked their energy bills and 40% said they had difficulty in understanding their energy bills.

The project then launched a campaign to help empower consumers to know how much energy they use and to motivate them to reduce energy consumption at home.

“The electricity bill doesn't have to be a monster. We helped people understand it. We believe that if consumers have more information on the energy they consume in their homes, then they can change their behaviour to be more energy efficient,” says Fernanda Santos, Friendly Bill project coordinator.

The project produced informational leaflets, videos and online interactive energy bills with pop-up information explaining the different sections on a bill – these are still available on the project website. It also developed an online game with multiple choice questions to test consumers' understanding of their energy bill. Friendly Bill reached thousands of consumers through its television, radio and social media awareness raising campaign. “We also went on a road trip to markets, fairs and shopping malls across the country to inform energy consumers face-to-face, including those who do not have access to the internet,” says Valter Sousa, Friendly Bill Projects and Innovation Officer.

Friendly Bill also published information on its website on which appliances consume the most energy in a home, like washing machines and fridges, and how energy efficiency certificates work. It then advised consumers how and when they should use these appliances to reduce energy use. The project also informed consumers how different tariffs work and when electricity can be cheaper. For example, it helped people understand the difference between peak electricity rates during the day, and lower electricity rates at night.

Face to face explanations of energy bills

In order to widen their reach, Friendly Bill worked with energy agencies across Portugal. The project trained energy technicians in how to explain energy bills to the consumers they visit. Overall, 308 technicians were trained in how to use the informational material – all of which remains free to use online – and they continue to raise awareness about electricity bills.

The Friendly Bill project reached 100,000 consumers, resulting in a 20% increase in the number of people who always check their energy bills and a 32% increase in consumers who are aware of their CO₂ emissions. Moreover, the number of consumers who check their energy meters against the consumption quoted in the bill has increased by 15%, while the number of those who take energy efficiency labels into account when buying household appliances has increased by 10% as a result of the campaign. The project's easy-to-understand approach could be a blueprint for other consumer associations interested in improving consumer's understanding of their energy bills.