

Section 7

Getting the best deal online

The average saving generated for services using price comparison websites is 21%

Research from USwitch, in 'Economic benefits of digital inclusion: building the evidence' UK Online Centres, 2008

Getting the best deal online

It is good to shop around for a better deal on your bills – often another supplier of energy, phone, broadband or financial products will be able to offer you a more competitive price. On the internet you can



find a number of sites that will compare the cost of insurance and utility bills with different providers for you. Here we will look at how you can get the best deal on your energy bill by going online.

First steps to saving money on your energy bills

Before you go online

- Check with your current supplier that you are getting the best deal. They might be able to offer you a cheaper tariff or a promise not to increase prices for a while
- Check if there is a better way to pay your bills. You can save around £100 just by paying your bills by direct debit
- Check you are getting all the benefits you are eligible for. You may be able to get extra financial help if you are of pensionable age, disabled or have severe health problems.
- Be aware that you may not be able to switch suppliers if you have an existing debt

The next step is to **shop around**.

The energy regulator, Ofgem, have approved a number of online comparison websites – listed below - that meet their Confidence Code. This means that you can trust the information to be accurate, independent and up-to-date.

Getting the best deal online

- energyhelpline.com
- Energylinx
- MoneySupermarket.com
- myutilitygenius.co.uk
- SimplySwitch
- switchgasandelectric.com
- TheEnergyShop.com
- UKPower.co.uk
- Unravelit
- uSwitch.com
- Which? Switch

Activity 1

Click on to the websites above and try to find the Ofgem Confidence Code logo on their home page. Some will be easier to find than others!



Activity 2

Looking at these same energy comparison sites, what information do they request from you to make a comparison? Tick the boxes below

Your name

Your address and/or postcode

Your date of birth

Your current energy supplier

How much you currently pay and/or amount of energy you use

The tariff you use with your current supplier

Your email address

Getting the best deal online

- ❖ Energy comparison websites shouldn't ask for your name or date of birth, but they will need to know where you live and the details of your current energy supplier and tariff including how much energy you consume or pay for. Often your email address is requested as it allows them to send you the deals they have found you by email, but this is optional.

Also worth knowing...

- ❖ There isn't one comparison website that can cover the whole market, so it is worth using more than one.
- ❖ Be aware that you are entering your personal data on these websites. Check the website's **privacy policy** and **terms and conditions** for information on how they use your data. You should be able to 'opt out' on the website so your details aren't passed to other companies. In the example from MoneySupermarket, all the boxes are ticked by default. Check that you have opted out before you submit the form.

I agree to let MoneySupermarket and their carefully chosen partners contact me with money saving tips and special offers via

email phone text

You can untick the boxes if you don't wish to be contacted.

More tips on using price comparison websites from **The Office of Fair Trading** can be found on page 48

Getting the best deal online

Here is an example of how results will look once you complete your details:

Supplier	Tariff Features	Tariff Details	Annual Price	Tariff Availability
 Online Saver 1	 	Payment by fixed monthly direct debit Bills and other correspondence by email Standard domestic credit meter Not available to customers connected via an Independent Gas Transporter	£276 annual cost <i>inc VAT</i> £84 Saving per year <i>inc VAT</i> How is this calculated?	Review Only
 Online Price Fix October 2014	 	Online Billing and Account Management is mandatory Prices Fixed Until 31st October 2014 No early termination fees	£309 annual cost <i>inc VAT</i> £51 Saving per year <i>inc VAT</i> How is this calculated?	Switch Now

From Myutilitygenius.co.uk

You should be able to see the details of the tariff, such as how your bills will be paid and the product term, as well as the annual cost and saving you will make. We recommend you use all the information provided to make the best decision – don't just go on cost.

Further resources

To compare prices on phone, broadband and digital TV deals:

<http://consumers.ofcom.org.uk/price-comparison/>

For information on how comparison sites make their money and tips on buying insurance from them:

<https://www.moneyadvice.service.org.uk/en/articles/how-to-buy-insurance-using-comparison-sites>

Top Tips

for using price comparison websites



Comparison sites can help you to compare products and prices quickly. Here are the OFT's top tips to help you get the most out of them:

1. Protect your data

Always read the information these sites provide (usually in a privacy policy but sometimes in the part of the terms and conditions dealing with data and privacy).

If you do not want your personal information to be passed to other companies, check to see if there is the ability to 'opt out' on the website, for example by ticking a box to say that you do not give your consent for your information to be shared.

2. Make the comparison which is most helpful to you

Check if your results are presented by relevance, price, or popularity and what the website says about how often it updates its information on prices and availability of goods.

3. Use a number of different sites

Expressions like 'We've found the best deal' or 'We've searched the market' don't guarantee you are seeing every available offer in the market, so always check out what is on offer on a number of different sites.

4. Know who you are doing business with

Check whether the site tells you the identity of the business (not just the name of the website) and their business address. By law they have to do so.

5. Do your homework

If you can, use an accredited site as part of your search as they have met certain standards for accreditation. Some websites comparing energy products are accredited by Consumer Focus, and some telecoms comparison websites are accredited by Ofcom. Some financial services are compared by the Government backed Money Advice Service.

6. Problem or complaint? Citizens Advice can help

Some sites may tell you that they are not liable if they make mistakes or mislead you; this may not in fact be the case. If you want to complain but aren't sure how, Citizens Advice can help you to direct your complaint to the relevant person.

Visit www.adviceguide.org.uk or call the Citizens Advice consumer helpline on **08454 04 05 06**.