



By surveying small business decision-makers throughout the United States and Canada, we've determined which billing and payment options are deemed most useful and which customers are most likely to participate.

E SOURCE Market Research Multi-Client Study Utility Billing and Payment Options for Small Businesses

For many small business customers, the monthly billing cycle represents the only ongoing interaction they have with their energy service provider (ESP). Therefore, it is very important for ESPs to understand how effective their bill content and communications are with these customers, as well as how familiar small business customers are with the billing offerings available to them. This *E SOURCE Market Research Multi-Client Study* provides ESPs with feedback on billing options, payment and delivery alternatives, and bill content. The study report also identifies best approaches for bill content and for delivery and payment channels.

Awareness of "Direct Deposit" Is Higher Than "Paying Online at Energy Provider's Web Site"

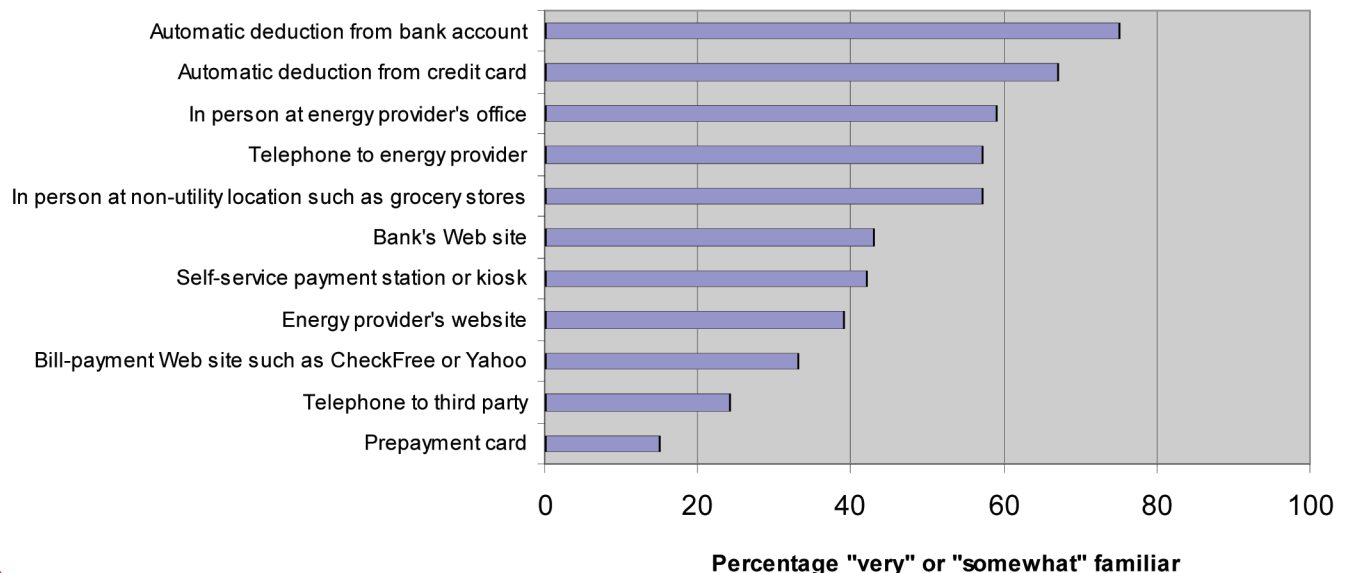
Nearly 80 percent of small business decision-makers pay their monthly energy bills through the mail, but that doesn't mean they aren't aware of other options. Of the payment options we tested in our survey, direct deposit was the one that small business customers were most familiar with. They were least familiar with self-service payment at a kiosk, paying online, and using a prepayment card.

When Would You Like to Pay Your Energy Bill?

Forty-five percent of small business decision-makers say they are familiar with customer-selected due dates, but this was second only to bundled billing for the lowest familiarity rating among the billing options we asked about. However, when asked which billing options they perceive to be most useful and which they would be most interested in participating in, customer-selected due dates topped the list.

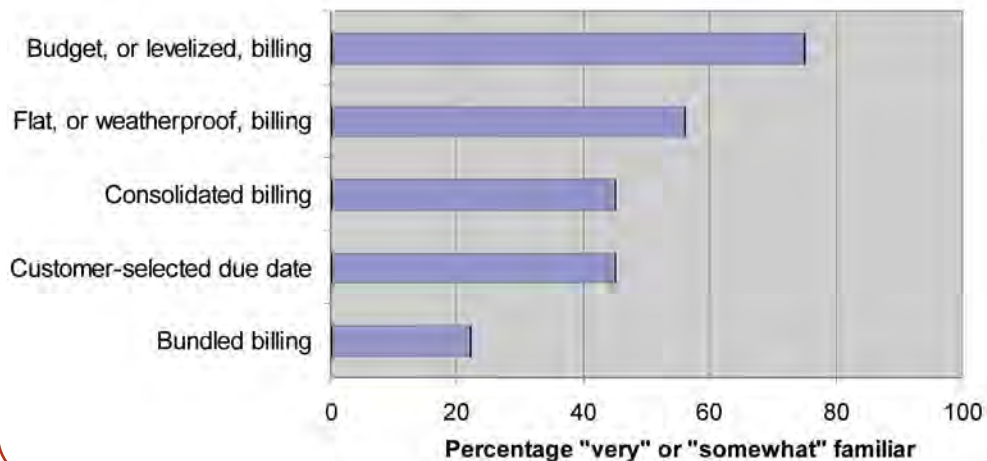
Familiarity with utility payment options

We didn't ask respondents about their familiarity with regular mail, as it was likely that 100 percent of them would be "very familiar" with that method.



Familiarity with utility billing options

Although only 45 percent of small business decision-makers are “very” or “somewhat” familiar with bills that offer customer-selected due dates, they perceive it to be the most useful option.



Presentation is everything

We tested 12 types of information that might be included on energy bills, including industry usage benchmarks, definitions and explanations of energy terms, and notification when monthly energy use was estimated rather than based on an actual meter reading. We ranked their relative interest in the tested types of information and asked small business customers who had contacted their utility in the past year what could be added to their bills that would reduce the need for them to call their utility.

Study Objective

This study will give ESPs an understanding of small business customers' awareness and preferences in the following areas:

- Delivery and payment methods
- Pricing options
- Content and presentation
- Attention given to bill inserts
- Reaction to convenience charges
- Need for paper bill along with online bill presentation

The study data profiles customers by firmographic information such as energy expenditure, Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) code, and geographical region.

Methodology and Deliverables

We analyzed results from a market research study of more than 900 small business customers in the U.S. and Canada. The survey was conducted in summer 2003 among business with between 5 and 50 employees at their sites in eight different business sectors: Grocery, Restaurants, Education, Lodging, Industrial, Retail, Office Buildings, and Healthcare.

Study subscribers receive a formal E SOURCE final report that covers the most important findings of the research in detail and a data notebook that contains an overview of the study objectives and sampling plan, the survey instrument, and a detailed PowerPoint presentation with topline results for each survey question. With the data notebook is a data CD containing the raw survey data in Excel, SPSS, and ASCII format as well as 2 sets of weighted and unweighted data tables that analyze data for each survey question in numerous ways.

Related E SOURCE Market Research Multi-Client Studies

We also surveyed residential customers in summer 2003 to assess their awareness and preferences for billing and payment options. Although there were some slight variations in the survey content, the objectives for the two studies were the same. Together, they provide a comprehensive view of the mass-market's position on billing and payment options.

Contact Us

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