

Accessible services for energy customers

Ireland's Standard SWiFT 9 has been the first standard adopted in the energy sector worldwide that obliges energy suppliers to make all their communications accessible. It includes all written, face-to-face, telephone and video communication, and all electronic and web-based communication.

SWIFT 9:2012 UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR ENERGY SUPPLIERS

Year of existence:	2012
Country/region of origin:	Ireland
Beneficiaries targeted:	All households
Responsible body:	Commission for Energy Regulation
Stakeholders:	Public and private sector (energy suppliers)

FACTS & FIGURES

- The first standard worldwide which provides clear guidance for energy suppliers.
- The standard provides advice and instruction on the best way to communicate with 1.6 million Irish energy customers.
- The standard is implemented by all seven energy suppliers.
- The standard served as baseline for a standard in the tourism sector subsequently introduced in 2013.

IN BRIEF

Specifically designed to be practical and easy to use and apply, the Standard SWiFT 9:2012 Universal Design for Energy Suppliers and its respective toolkit provides service managers, developers, providers and procurers with guidance, based on the principles and guidelines of Universal Design. The Standard and accompanying toolkit guide them to accommodate all their customers, and improve customer satisfaction, communication and online reviews.

INNOVATIVE ASPECTS

The right to access and understand vital commodities
Eliminating the barriers between energy suppliers and their customers will have a long lasting impact on universal service delivery. SWiFT 9 recognises the customer's right to be at the centre of quality services.

Multi-stakeholder approach
All stakeholders, including government, industry and end user groups, have been brought to the table so that the standard is comprehensive, inclusive, effectively embraced and implemented.

Business case
When services are universally designed, customer services are better, cost less, and both customers and employees are more satisfied.

HISTORY

On the basis of the Irish European Communities (Internal Market in Electricity and Gas) (Consumer Protection) Regulations of 2011, the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) required all energy suppliers to apply the principles of Universal Design in the development of products, services and communications to customers. Subsequently, the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI), the National Disability Authority's Centre for Excellence in Universal Design (CEUD), CER, end users and energy suppliers developed the Standard SWiFT 9:2012 Universal Design for Energy Suppliers, which became part of the Code of Practice of the Irish Commission for Energy Regulation. SWiFT 9 guides energy providers to meet their legal obligations under the 2011 regulations. In order to help energy suppliers to apply the guidance provided in SWiFT 9, the Universal Design Toolkit for customer engagement has been developed which requires little training and can easily be implemented within companies.

«The process in developing the standard was inclusive, iterative and consensus-based and enabled all key stakeholders to embrace universal design and moreover embrace the final outcome.»
(Gerald Craddock, Centre for Excellence in Universal Design/National Disability Authority, Ireland)

KEY FEATURES

SWiFT 9 provides the energy service industry with a reference to good practice on requirements for the application of universal design. Its key focus is on Energy Communication Design, which is based on four steps: perceiving, discovering, understanding and using. These steps are based on four of the seven principles of Universal Design which were modified and trialed as part of the design process in developing the standard. By providing comprehensive support on achieving better customer communication, the standard and its respective toolkit cover:

- Business objectives and overview
- Written communication
- Face-to-face, telephone & video communication
- Electronic & web-based communication

Topics touched upon for written communication are document and signage design. It includes rules for face-to-face communication, such as speaking simply. For non-verbal and telephone communication, it lays down rules for easier engagement with diverse customers, including providing surroundings that are comfortable for the customers. It also suggests a content quality control process, comprising a designated manager, a content review process, training and a house style guide. It also deals with website design, mobile apps and social media guidance.

IMPLEMENTATION

Since 2012, all of the seven energy suppliers in Ireland need to implement SWiFT 9 and to report annually to the Commission for Energy Regulation on their conformity. The Commission, which is responsible for monitoring the implementation of

SWiFT 9, has developed a statutory Code of Practice, which all energy suppliers need to adhere to. In addition, Irish legislation and regulations set out that Universal Design must be complied with. All suppliers have engaged in implementing SWiFT 9; in particular Electric Ireland took the lead and incorporated, amongst others, the standard into its corporate style guide, thereby establishing a Universal Design check for all its IT projects.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Recently, the Standard for best practice in customer engagement in the energy sector served as a basis for a new similar standard in the tourism sector, IS 373:2013 Universal Design for Customer Engagement in Tourism Services. Following on from this work, CEUD completed the development of a set of Universal Design Technical Guidelines for In Home Displays for the energy sector in 2013.

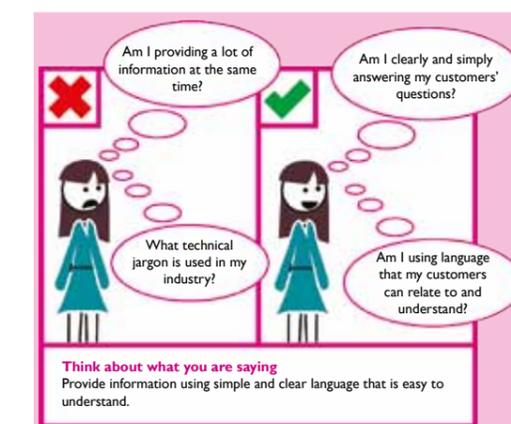


Image from the toolkit for SWiFT 9:2012 Universal Design for Energy Suppliers © CEUD/NDA

CONTACT Gerald CRADDOCK
Centre for Excellence in Universal Design/National Disability Authority, 25 Clyde Road, Dublin 4, Ireland
GMCraddock@nda.ie
+353 1 608 0461
www.universaldesign.ie

SOURCES www.universaldesign.ie/energy
www.nsai.ie
www.cer.ie

Nominated by: Gerald CRADDOCK, Centre for Excellence in Universal Design/National Disability Authority