

## Power to the people: Meridian customers switch on to personalized power management

Meridian has recast traditional customer touch-points as smart digital services. Working with Jade, the energy provider is leading the charge to highly personalized services.

### Service redefined

Meridian Energy is a powerhouse in New Zealand's highly competitive energy sector. The NZX-listed company is the country's largest electricity generator and provides power to more than 270,000 homes, businesses, and farms.

It's fair to say that Kiwis care about sustainability. Customers who join Meridian support a company that generates its energy from 100% renewable sources, but that isn't enough to convince everybody. For many people, price and the ease of dealing with providers are important as well.

Melanie Lynn heads up Meridian's digital strategy and says consumers prefer services that are personal and make things easy. "We are highly service orientated. Our approach demands innovation, but as a hidden factor. Service must be synonymous with ease of use."

This insight informed a digital strategy geared to solutions over data. Most electricity providers provide information like charges and bill cycles, but that's not enough, says Lynn.

"Providing data is a first step. But you're not really helping customers if they have to trawl through it and decide what to do. You've got to offer solutions."

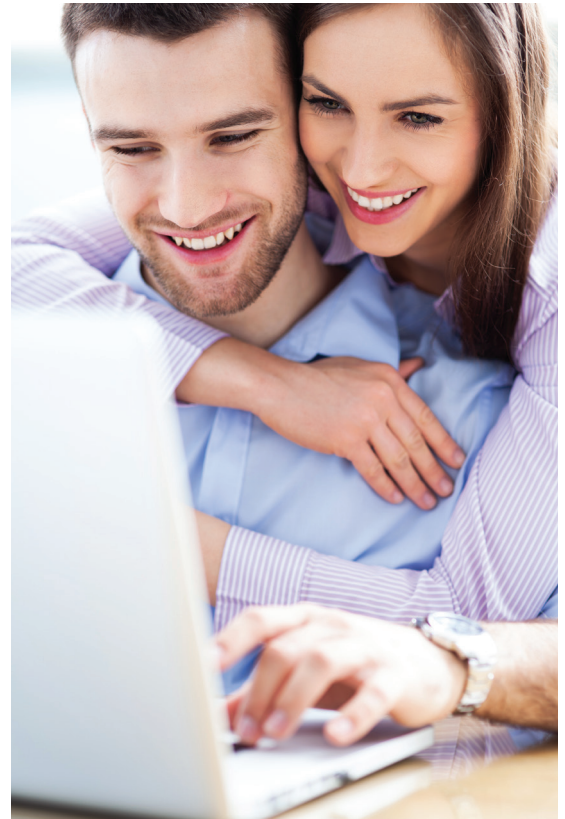
### Finding solutions in data

Meridian first gave customers access to usage information on a self-service platform in 2011. The idea was to foster greater customer engagement and loyalty through better access to data. But behaviour is tough to measure and attribute to specific touch-points in a multi-faceted relationship, and Lynn wasn't convinced that raw data was the way to go.

"Data-orientated customers subscribed to our service, but only so many people want graphs and spreadsheets."

This is where Jade came in, along with a web-based service called My Energy Use. It gives residential customers secure access to monthly bills, energy usage, a payment facility, and account details. Taking things further, a messaging feature alerts customers when their electricity consumption spikes above normal levels.

"Rather than ask customers to log in and look for answers, we alert them when their usage is very high and suggest they take action. It's less confusing and leads to a more engaging relationship," says Lynn.



### Jade Solutions and Meridian Energy

Easy-to-use interface for customers

Higher customer engagement, including reduction in bill defaults

Iterative design informed by customer research

Integration of back-end systems, middleware, and customer touch-points

Early analysis shows that customers who are registered for My Energy Use are less likely to fall behind with their payments, reducing overheads for Meridian.

Meridian's small-medium businesses and customers in the agriculture sector are next in line for My Energy Use. Solar customers and commercial customers who manage multiple properties and installation control points also feature in Meridian's plans.

### Working with Jade

Meridian's new residential offering was based on a platform that Jade had developed for Meridian's commercial customers. However, Lynn wanted a more consumer-friendly offering.

"We wanted something that looked less like spreadsheets, was friendlier and pointed to information and features residential customers wanted – like price and usage notifications," she says. "Eliminating features less useful to the majority of users was just as important."

With Meridian, Jade developers and user experience experts launched a core set of features to a small group of customers. Subsequent customer research and testing refined design and improved usability.

"The greatest strength of My Energy Use is usability," says Lynn. "The team researched customers at various levels. It was really interesting to see reactions to some features we thought were intuitive. They'd try them and say they had no idea what they meant," says Lynn. "The process shaped and really differentiated the residential offering from the earlier version. It's a unique tool."

### Making complex simple

Customer needs change and innovation drives new services. Delivering them must be quick and easy. Multi-tiered technology development, in which back-end systems data is aggregated in a middle layer and fed to front-end applications, keeps complex 'grunt work' a safe distance from customer touch-points. The lighter front-end 'load' makes ongoing application development faster and less costly.

Jade's digital platform – middleware built on the Microsoft .NET framework and SQL Server – sits between Meridian's back-end systems and web applications. It simplifies Meridian's program of service enhancements and add-ons.

"When you invest in a service platform you must be sure that it can be changed and improved without breaking the bank," says Lynn. "This is a big investment and we expect to make ongoing changes and improvements."

### Going further

Systems have made it easier for businesses to collect and analyze vast amounts of information. Data isn't the problem – businesses know what they need to know. To outdo their competitors, businesses must combine knowledge with smart technology to deliver highly personalized services. Meridian Energy is there and its customers have noticed.

"Jade was a great technical partner on this engagement. They didn't expect to be spoon-fed information. They took the time to engage in our processes and business, so they could recommend the best way to configure things. I was very impressed by the depth of their engagement."

Melanie Lynn, *Programme Director, Digital Strategy, Meridian Energy*

### About Jade

Since 1978, Jade has been working with leading companies around the world to solve complex business problems through the design and delivery of innovative software solutions. Our expert, passionate people develop high performance enterprise solutions, create engaging customer experiences through digital strategy and design, as well as develop advanced technology platforms used by thousands of companies globally.

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