Use of Open Standards for Utility Billing by Utilities

Key Benefits

- Reduces costs and improves efficiency by replacing paper billing
- Avoids manual data input and associated errors
- Standard is controlled by the independent organisation GS1 UK
- Provides an HM Revenue and Customs approved end to end process

The UK standard for electronic billing (or Electronic Data Interchange – EDI) is the TRADACOMS 26 version 3 format. The custodians of the standard are an organisation called GS1 UK (formerly the Article Number Association) who also are responsible for other electronic standards such as bar codes and radio frequency operations, and represent the UK on United Nations standards committees.

The standard was first used by utility companies in the early/mid 1990s as customers such as British Telecom worked with the main electricity companies to:

- Reduce costs and improve efficiency by replacing paper bill processing
- Avoid manual data input and associated errors
- Replace unworkable tape billing formats and the growing number of different ASCII formats
- Introduce a third party regulated, common open standard for all parties to use
- Provide HM Revenue & Customs approved end to end processes
- Bring the uniformity and professionalism to utility invoice processing that was enjoyed throughout other business sectors.

The electricity, gas and water companies that can provide electronic billing to the standards include:

Utility Company	Utility	Format
British Energy / EDF	Electricity	TRADACOMS v3
Centrica	Electricity	TRADACOMS v3
Centrica	Gas	TRADACOMS v3
Corona Energy	Gas	TRADACOMS v3
E.ON	Electricity	TRADACOMS v3
E.ON	Gas	TRADACOMS v3
GDF Suez	Gas	TRADACOMS v3
GDF Suez	Electricity	TRADACOMS v3
Haven Power	Electricity	TRADACOMS v3
Laser	Electricity	TRADACOMS v2
Laser	Gas	TRADACOMS v2
Mobil Gas	Gas	TRADACOMS v3
npower	Electricity	TRADACOMS v3
npower	Gas	TRADACOMS v3
Opus Energy	Electricity	TRADACOMS v3
Scottish and Southern	Electricity	TRADACOMS v3
Scottish and Southern	Gas	TRADACOMS v3
Scottish Power	Electricity	TRADACOMS v3
Shell Gas	Gas	TRADACOMS v3
Total	Gas	TRADACOMS v3
Yorkshire Water	Water	TRADACOMS v3

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ESTA
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Why use TEAM?

TEAM is the leading supplier of utility management software and services in the UK providing solutions to over 500 customers across a number of sectors.

Our expertise in Energy Management, software, bureau and consultancy services, makes us the perfect utility management partner. With over 20 years experience of supporting customers in all aspects of energy management TEAM are experts in e-billing.

Why use TRADACOMS standard protocol and not ASCII or CSV files?

TRADACOMS	ASCII/CSV
TRADACOMS 26 v3 is the only UK utility billing standard	Non-standard and different for every utility
Approximately 95% of processing software is common, thereby reducing costs of implementation and time to market	Non-standard ASCII or CSV files require bespoke software development for each supplier
Change control management can be implemented using a common "Message Interchange Agreement"	With ASCII files the utility company is in control of the format and can change the "bill" format without warning which can "break" consumer systems
An HM Revenue and Customs approved end to end process	ASCII or CSV files commonly do not include sufficient information to be approved and usually have to be supported by paper bills
Controlled and originated by the independent organisation GS1 UK	Not controlled or enforced
Supports the requirements of BS 8463: 2005 Specification for Customer Billing Practice	Does not support any standards
Supports various government e-billing initiatives to improve efficiency and reduce costs	Does not support any government initiatives to reduce cost
Supported by all major utilities, consumers and ESTA Metering and Monitoring Group	Not supported
Easier to move to a new supplier	Not easy to move to a new supplier

Benefits to the Utility

• The benefits to the utility are largely the same as those to the customer and described above. However there are some additional benefits:

• Cheaper and simpler to support as there is only one standard rather than what could be different format requests from each customer.

• Facilitates quicker payment from the customer.

• Improved customer satisfaction.

So how do we move to a common ebilling standard?

• Request that the utility company provide ebilling to the UK standard TRADACOMS 26v3 protocol.

• Sign up to the "Message Interchange Agreement" originated by GS1 UK and modified for use for utility billing. See M&T software supplier for assistance.