

Changing energy suppliers can save you up to €700 for one of the quickest jobs you can do

Save by switching, even if you can't be bothered



YOUR MONEY BILL TYSON

IMAGINE making €70 a minute... or €700 for 10 minutes' work. Who makes that kind of money? Top hospital consultants? Nope. At around €200 per visit, they get much less. The Taoiseach? No. He gets €208,000 a year, or around €113 per hour.

So Micheál Martin pockets a mere €19 for every 10 minutes work. Incredibly, most householders could make 40 times more than An Taoiseach at least once a year – yet most simply don't bother to do so.

All we have to do switch energy providers – or even just ring up and threaten to do so. Only 15% of us switch. And if we do nothing, we pay an average of €2,099 a year – when we could be paying less than €1,400.

The energy market, like many others, makes most of its money through customer inertia. It offers cracking discounts when you sign up.

Providers do so because they know most people don't switch. And when a year is up, you can be clobbered. If you do switch, you save a fortune – at the expense of the majority who don't bother.

We've been banging on about this for years but the number of people who do anything about it remains stubbornly small.

The reasons are many: time pressure, lack of awareness and a deep aversion to anything to do with numbers. It's also hard to remember exactly when to switch unless you put a note on the calendar or in your diary. Providers are supposed to write to you to let you know in advance when your contract is ending. Mine said that they did but I don't recall these letters and they are easily dismissed or forgotten about when they do arrive. This is why a new type of switching service has been set up to do all the work for you.

Now you don't even have to do 10 minutes work to make over €700.

All you have to do is sign up once to www.weswitch.ie – and be automatically switched every year to the best deals on the market.

"At the last count, over 1,500 switches have been processed with an average saving of €550 each," said Brendan Halpin who left a job in the energy sector to set up the new business.

He claims that the website gives an even better service than com-

IT'S SHOCKINGLY EASY TO REDUCE ELECTRICITY BILL

My own energy deals for gas and electricity have just expired with Flogas and Energia respectively. If I did nothing I would lose the discounts I was on and my energy bills would soar from less than €1,400 to over €2,000.

I rang both companies to see if they could give me a better deal. And lo and behold, they had fantastic offers just waiting for me to call. Flogas immediately offered a 34% discount,

while Energia said they could cut my prospective bill by 29%. You can be sure neither would have offered anything had I not taken action. The squeaky wheel gets the grease.

If I opted for these deals I would save €696 a year, based on average energy consumption. But could I do better with comparison sites Switcher.ie and Bonkers.ie? And what about Weswitchue? Would its ability to tailor an

energy package to my needs pay off. As you can see from the table, yes I could. All three comparison sites beat Flogas and Energia, offering to save me well over €700 on my bills. My inclination is to sign up to Weswitchue in order to save hassle and avoid missing out on any potential discounts. It's a nice feeling to earn 40 times more than the Taoiseach, even if it is just for only 10 minutes!

parison sites as it can tailor each deal to your individual profile.

Often, even savvy switchers base their choices on average energy usage, which can mean getting a slightly worse deal than if you choose a plan that suits how much energy you actually use.

"(We) can immediately tailor the best tariff to the energy con-

sumption profile of the customer," said Mr Halpin.

For example, people with little energy usage might do better opting for a deal that pays the biggest cashback lump sum. But those who burn through a lot of gas and electricity should just go for the biggest discount.

"In year two we use actual energy

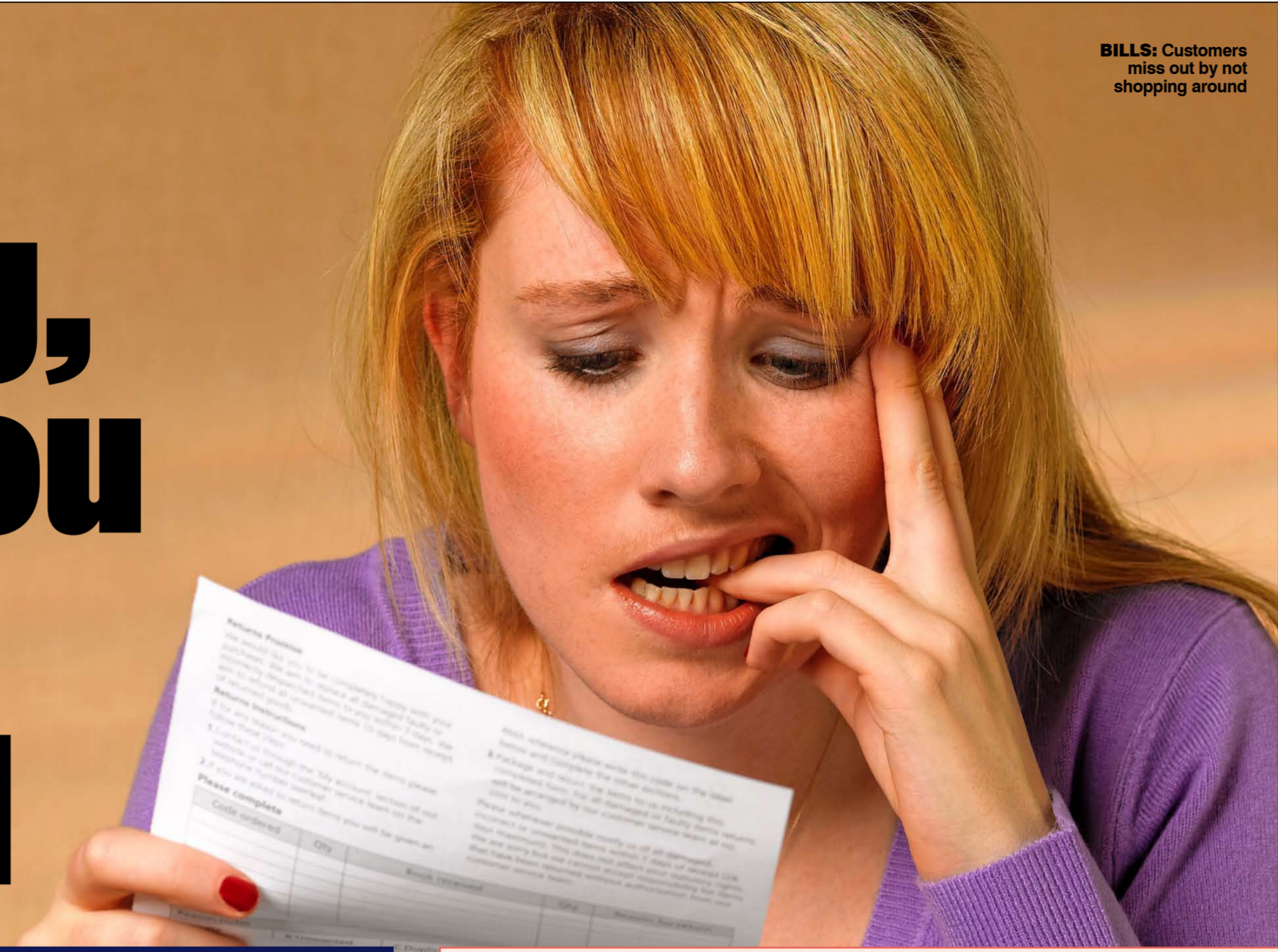
consumption as we track our customers' usage through a dedicated customer dashboard account," he said.

If you want to switch yourself, there's a handy guide on the Commission for Regulation of Utilities website (www.cru.ie).

It advises: "For electricity switches you'll need your Meter Point

Registration Number (MPRN) and for gas you'll need your Gas Point Registration Number (GPRN). These can be found on your current bill. It is also important to provide an up-to-date meter reading when switching, to ensure you are billed accurately."

I rang up both my suppliers to see if they offered a better deal. I



BILLS: Customers miss out by not shopping around

HOW I MADE MASSIVE SAVINGS ON UTILITIES

Option	Providers	Annually	Savings
Do nothing	Remain with Energia/Flogas	2,099	0
Contact provider*	New deals offered by Energia/Flogas	1,403	696
Switcher.ie	Iberdola dual	1,371	728
Bonkers	Flogas dual fuel cashback	1,351	748
Weswitchu	Bord Gais Best Dual Fuel - 29% Electricity & 38% Gas	1,324	775

*Existing customer offer made to Energia (electricity) and Flogas (gas). Based on average use of 11000 Kw/h (gas) and 1400 kw (electricity)

needn't have bothered. While, I did get a decent offer, it was less than the price comparison sites. This is par for the course. Providers know that they can offer slightly less than the switchers

can come up with as people will pay a little more to avoid hassle.

There is also no need to notify your old supplier. When you switch, your new supplier will do that for you.

"Once your account has been switched you will receive a welcome letter from your new supplier. You will also receive a final bill from your old supplier, the regulator advises.

A QUESTION OF MONEY

Hi-Di-Hi! star Linda wants just enough to buy 'hen-pecked' husband a pint

Actress Linda Regan describes her biggest money mistake as investing in sex shops and her financial priority as 'to be able to buy a pint of Guinness every day' for her husband George O'Brien, another comedy actor famous for his roles in *The Last of the Summer Wine* and as the hen-pecked husband in *George and Mildred*. She has starred in many TV series herself, including *The Bill* and *Holby City* but is best known for the 1980s holiday camp sitcom *Hi-de-Hi!* Linda then became a successful crime novelist after wanting to write about her experience of being kidnapped at knifepoint 15 years ago and she now relies on book sales for her pension. Her latest book *The Terror Within* is out now, on sale through Eason, Amazon and other major booksellers.



diamond company. I went out and bought all this worthless jewellery. My mother nearly killed me.

What is your biggest money mistake?

Oh goodness, that was the fault of actress Liz Fraser. She was wacky and mad and sadly she died in 2018 – I miss her terribly. She always invested in stocks and shares, and shortly after I bought my bungalow she had this idea that we should invest £5,000 each in sex shops. Of course, the shares crashed and I lost all my money in a few months. I can't remember the company's name but I still wince at the financial loss. That was probably the most stupid thing I ever did. I decided never to invest in shares again.

Do you save into a pension?

No. I've never had the spare money – or thought or desire to start a pension. Now, because I've written nine crime novels and they've all been quite popular, I'm hoping they'll be my pension.

I turned to writing crime novels because I had a terrible incident in 2005 when I was kidnapped. Somebody crawled into my car, put a knife to my throat and drove me away. I don't think it was because he thought I was a celebrity, it was just a genuine carjack. But he wouldn't let me out of the car and he told me I was going to be raped. Those words lived with me for a long time. I was lucky. Eventually, I was able to unlock the door and jump from the car while it was still moving. I wasn't in the car that long. But afterwards, the fear in my head wouldn't go away. So I put it down on paper – it was my way of dealing with what happened – and that's how my first book got published.

Have you ever been paid silly money?

Yes, for TV commercials. In the 1980s, you got paid for repeats of an advert, so you could earn ridiculous amounts of money for a day of filming. I did loads, including one for a building society. I must have earned about €20,000 from that.

What is the most expensive thing you bought for fun?

Some €800 worth of junk jewellery from Topshop. I was a teenager and had just got a cheque for a commercial I'd done, ironically for a

Don't wait for green grants to start saving on heating your home

ECO-EUROS

ENERGY SAVER DIY DEVICE	ANNUAL SAVING
Window film	€100
Draught protector	€55
Radiator foil	€46
Chimney Balloon	€45
Energy saving bulbs	€27
TOTAL	€273

WHAT can I do to make my home more energy efficient?

Our new Green-infused Government will boost energy efficiency in our homes with a range of new incentives expected soon.

It aims to insulate over half a million homes to B1 standard, starting in the midlands, and install heat pumps in up to 600,000 homes by 2030.

Until the grants and incentives that will drive that programme become available, householders will be forgiven for putting any plans for major insulation work on their homes on hold.

However, there are plenty of cheap and easy DIY tricks we can use now

CONSUMER EYE

By Bill Tyson

to help our home become more energy efficient in the meantime. And with autumn looming and energy bills soaring in the lockdown, now is the time to start.

Here are five simple DIY tricks to get those heating bills down by over €200 a year.

■ Using energy-efficient LED light bulbs could save you €27 per medium-sized house per year, according to Irish environmental website www.thegreenmohawk.com which tested out the concept.

■ Transparent removable film is available for windows to help keep the heat in until you get around to replacing them when new grants become available. It costs €10 for nine square metres of the stuff at www.purchase.ie which also has a video guide to installing it (with a hair drier). The claimed savings are up to €18 per large window over the winter, or around €100 per home.

■ The simple trick of placing silver foil behind a radiator can bounce heat back into a room. It also might look better than the old wallpaper or paint that's often left behind when we can't

get in behind the rads to strip it off. Screwfix sells four-metre rolls for €7.75, claiming it can cut heat loss by up to 50%. Or you can just use ordinary kitchen foil, costing a few cents. Either can be stuck on with wallpaper paste. But Caitlin Bent from Energy Saving Trust, advises: "Reflective radiator panels are only effective behind radiators on external walls – you don't need to place them behind radiators on internal walls or on walls shared between two properties in a semi-detached or terraced residence."

Thegreenmohawk.com tested out foil radiator backing and reckons you can save €46 a year with this simple trick, which isn't bad for half an hour's work and a few cents' worth of kitchen foil. Over 25 years, the financial savings would add up to €1,070. And the environmental savings: 3.3 tonnes less of carbon emissions from this measure alone.

■ Seal gaps with draught protectors. A front door draught excluder costs €10 from Screwfix. For twice that you could get a 15m length for both doors and windows. The

savings if you draught-proof an entire home are up to €55 a year, according to Which? magazine.

■ Buy a chimney 'balloon' to seal up that pointless gaping hole in your living room through which 40% of heat escapes. The Electric Ireland store has one for €32 and there are a range of differing sizes on purchase.ie from €27.

The savings are €45 annually, so it will more than pay for itself in one year. Don't forget to take it down when you light the fire next winter though!