



Free Meter Trial

A WaterTalk research report prepared for United Utilities
April 2021

Background, approach and summary

Research background and approach

Background and objectives

United Utilities has been trying to encourage customers to have a water meter installed at their home as this would enable better visibility of usage across the network and therefore better planning of water resources.

However, uptake has plateaued, so a **free meter trial** is being considered among customers aged 55+ who United Utilities believe would save money by switching to a meter:

Research was therefore require to:

- Explore whether offers, initiatives or rewards would encourage sign-ups for the trial
- Measure potential impact of a range of rewards on customers' propensity to sign up to the trail

What we did:



5-question online survey with 229 WaterTalk members aged 55+ without a water meter at their home



Fieldwork ran between 23rd to 28th April 2021

What we covered in the survey

1. What sort of offers, initiatives or rewards have persuaded customers to purchase products or services from companies in the past
2. What sort of offers, initiatives or rewards would encourage customers to sign up to the free meter trial if they were contacted to take part
3. Which of three incentive ideas would be most likely to encourage customers to sign up
4. Likelihood of a wider range of ideas to encourage customers to sign up to the trial
5. Anything else customers feel might help encourage them or others to sign up to the free meter trial

Summary of findings

Customers have previously been encouraged to purchase products or services from companies by the promise of loyalty programmes / points, discounts, and free gifts or vouchers.

Customers also spontaneously mentioned these sorts of incentives as potential ideas that would encourage them to sign up to the free meter trial.

However, some were less concerned about offers or rewards and suggested that the option to switch back to fixed charges if no savings were made would be enough to persuade them to take part. This could be a key element of the trial to communicate to customers.

When customers were presented with a wide range of incentives that United Utilities might offer to encourage them to sign up, the most appealing of the ideas was a free home leak check with free repair of any leaks.

Even for this most appealing idea though, less than half of customers felt it would be likely to persuade them to join the trial.

While free gifts may have encouraged purchase of consumer products or services in the past, it seems that customers would most want to see something that they expect from United Utilities, so free home leak checks may be the most appropriate incentive for the trial.

Detailed findings

Customers have previously been prompted to purchase products or services due to the offer of loyalty points, discounts and free gifts



Loyalty programmes / points

Credit card rewards like M&S because the rewards accumulation was automatic.

Male, Cheshire

Nectar card + app get good offers on certain items I regularly buy e.g. buy lasagna & get extra 120 points = 60p added to my Nectar card.

Male, Greater Manchester

Nectar points works for me. I buy from partners and in Sainsbury's link my card to Argos and eBay too.

Female, Greater Manchester



Discounts on products / services

British Gas offering several hundred pounds off the price they had quoted for a new boiler.

Male, Lancashire

Discounts, great service/products. BT recently offered me an upgrade on my broadband with a discounted price for half the contract.

Female, Greater Manchester

Shopping discount at large supermarkets, works both ways, we get the perks and supermarkets get more customers. I use Medicash for the extras. I get 3/4/5/6/7/10% discount in a lot of places I had not shopped at before.

Female, Merseyside



Free offers / gifts / vouchers

Amazon vouchers from Sun Life. £250 excess free cover from Money Supermarket.

Male, Cumbria

Free Samsung buds when buying a new Samsung phone.

Male, Greater Manchester

Gifts - flowers chocolates. Season specific vouchers - Family Days out - Easter & Summer / Christmas.

Female, Merseyside

Customers were then shown the following information about the free meter trial

United Utilities would like to encourage customers to take part in their free meter trial. This campaign would be targeted towards customers who United Utilities believe would save money by switching to a meter. If you do not save money during the trial, you would have the option to switch back and not be charged on a meter.

Customers spontaneously mentioned a range of ideas that could potentially encourage them to join the trial, from discounts / gifts to more pragmatic ideas they would expect from United Utilities



Discounted / cheaper water bills

May be a month free or 10% off.

Female, Lancashire



Guarantee that bills would not increase

Guarantee of no increase in bills for at least say a year.

Male, Greater Manchester



Free offers / gifts / vouchers

Tangible rewards e.g. gift cards, spin a wheel.

Female, Greater Manchester



Water saving devices

Free water saving gadgets / i.e. cistern inserts / water saving shower heads.

Male, Greater Manchester



Lead pipe replacement

Free replacement of lead main supply pipe into home.

Male, Merseyside



The ability to revert to fixed charges would be enough for some

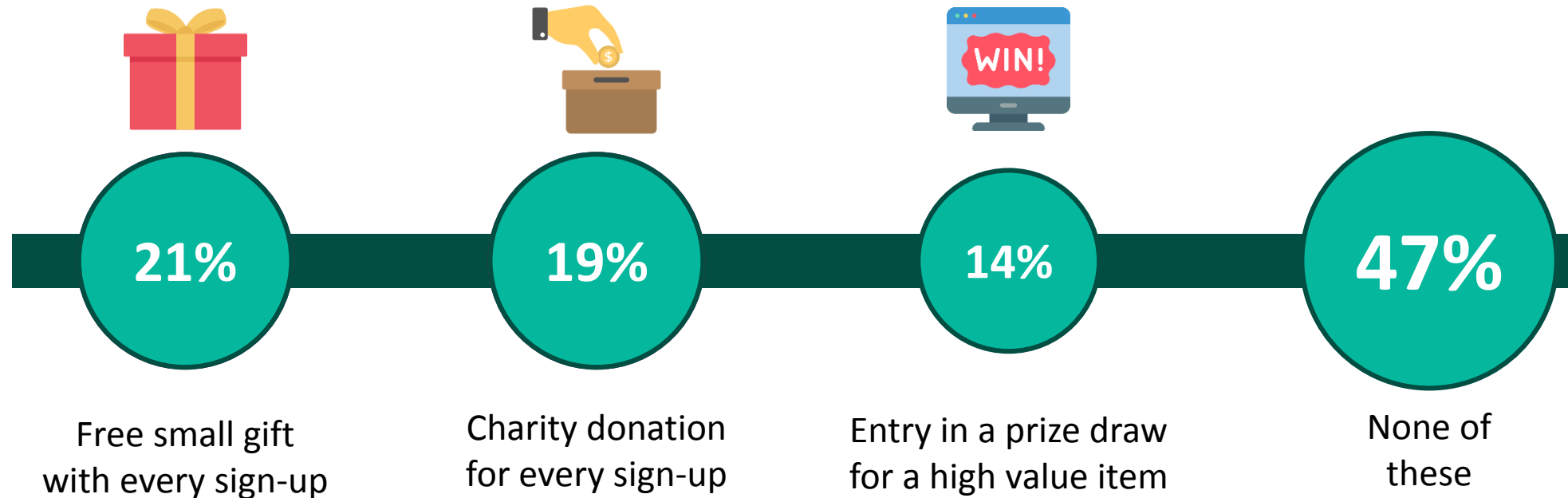
The ability to try and revert back if not happy.

Female, Lancashire

However, 36% said 'nothing' would encourage them to sign up for the trial

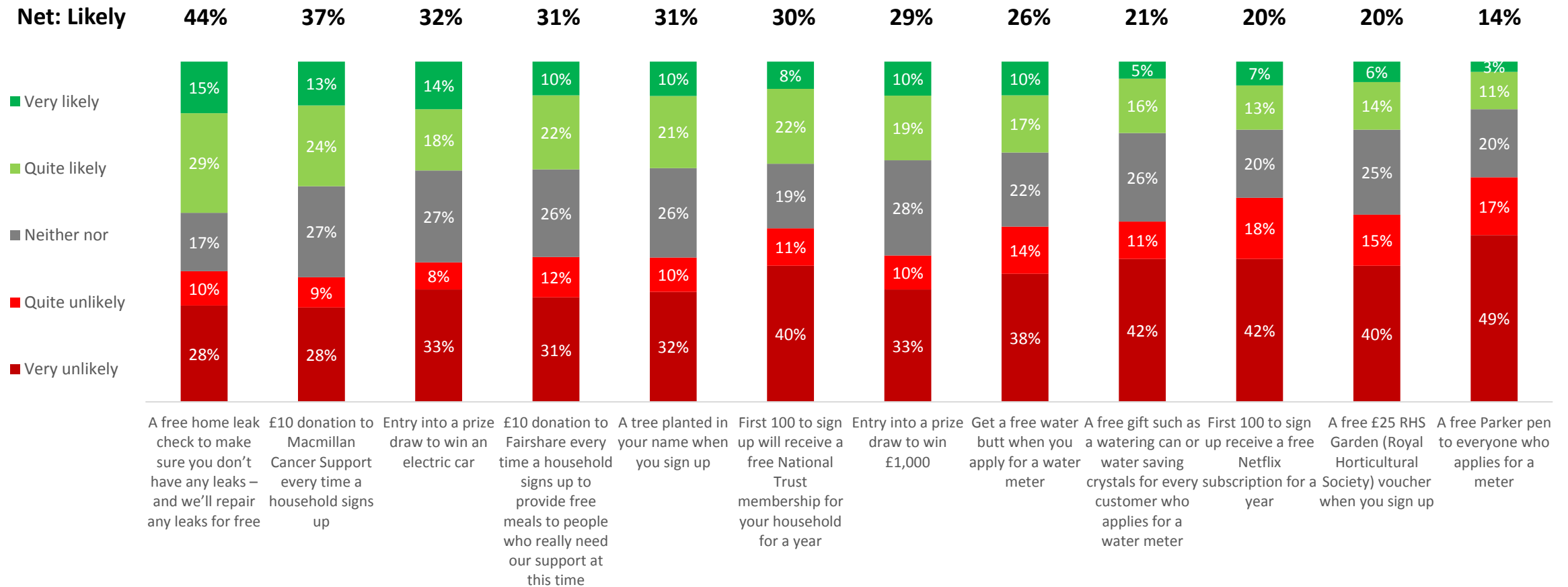
From a narrow range of incentives, customers felt a small gift or charity donation would be most likely to encourage sign-ups

However, approaching half felt none of these incentives would encourage them



Customers rated free home leak checks with free repairs as the most enticing of a wider range of ideas

This may be because it's the option that they would most expect to see from United Utilities



When asked for any final ideas to encourage sign-up to the trial, most customers felt there was nothing else that would persuade them

72%

Said there was 'nothing else' that would help encourage them to sign up for the trial

The suggestions that *were* made generally mirrored those already offered previously

Cashback or Amazon vouchers.

Male, Greater Manchester

Charity incentive - Water Aid makes more sense than cancer care.

Female, Cumbria

£50-£100 shopping voucher at a leading supermarket.

Male, Greater Manchester

Guaranteeing in writing (not just email) that this will be hassle free for both trial and removal if find that they don't want one.

Female, Greater Manchester

Half price water rates for as long as the customer is in the property.

Male, Derbyshire

Just the ability to pay which ever is cheaper.

Male, Cheshire

Appendix

Sample profile

Total

(n = 229)

Gender			
Male	66%	150	
Female	34%	78	
Unknown	0%	1	
Region			
Greater Manchester	41%	95	
Lancashire	23%	52	
Merseyside	17%	40	
Cheshire	8%	18	
Cumbria	10%	24	

The WaterTalk panel

- Water Talk is an online community designed to reflect the views of those in the North West who have access to the internet (circa 90% of the population)
- Customer panels typically provide a deeper level of engagement with customers than ad-hoc pieces of research
- It provides rapid research access to UU customers
 - This can provide fast and cost effective feedback on a wide range of issues
- Where appropriate, work is supported with other methodologies and samples to represent those not present on WaterTalk
- Nearly 8,000 UU customers are on the panel:
 - 3,600 have taken part in a research activity in the last 6 months

To find out more about using the WaterTalk panel to meet your business needs, please contact **Shy Sharma**:



Shy Sharma

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