# ENERGY APP REPORT 2019

New research into engaging energy customers via mobile

brightec

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# Energy Overview

***Customer loyalty in the energy sector is effectively at an all-time low.***

The UK's energy market has undergone seismic changes in the last five years. Customers now have a wider choice of suppliers than ever, with over a million customers leaving the Big Six in favour of the new breed of challenger energy brands.

Government directives to help consumers reduce their energy bills, changes to switching rules and the growth of comparison and auto-switching websites mean that energy customers are harder to retain than ever.

With such fierce market competition and tight margins, energy companies understand that customer service is one of the best ways for them to differentiate themselves. Traditional methods of interacting with consumers once a month in a bill are no longer sufficient or cost-effective.

New digital channels (including social media and mobile apps) need to be utilised to help providers stand out from the energy crowd and add real customer value.

# Smart Meter Transistion

One of the biggest changes for energy suppliers has been the introduction of smart meters. By 2020, every home in the UK will be offered a smart meter to help customers receive more accurate bills and understand their energy usage, as well as hopefully stimulating greater tariff innovation in the market.

However, the transition to smart meters will mean that customers won't even need to send in their monthly meter readings, so customer engagement will become less than ever.

In addition, there remains a huge degree of customer inertia and low interest in the subject of energy provision, which means that smaller energy providers need to be smarter and more creative than ever to gain market traction.

***...customers won't even need to send in their monthly meter readings, so customer engagement will become less than ever.***

# Energy App Analysis

***Digitally engaged energy customers can unleash more business value for suppliers.***

This presents a wealth of opportunities and potential challenges for CTOs within energy companies.

Not only do they need to have a well designed, fully responsive website to help customers manage their accounts online, they increasingly need to develop and maintain mobile apps over iOS and Android platforms.

But which technologies are best? What features should they include?

And ultimately, what do customers actually want from an app?
In this report, Brightec has analysed the current energy mobile app landscape.

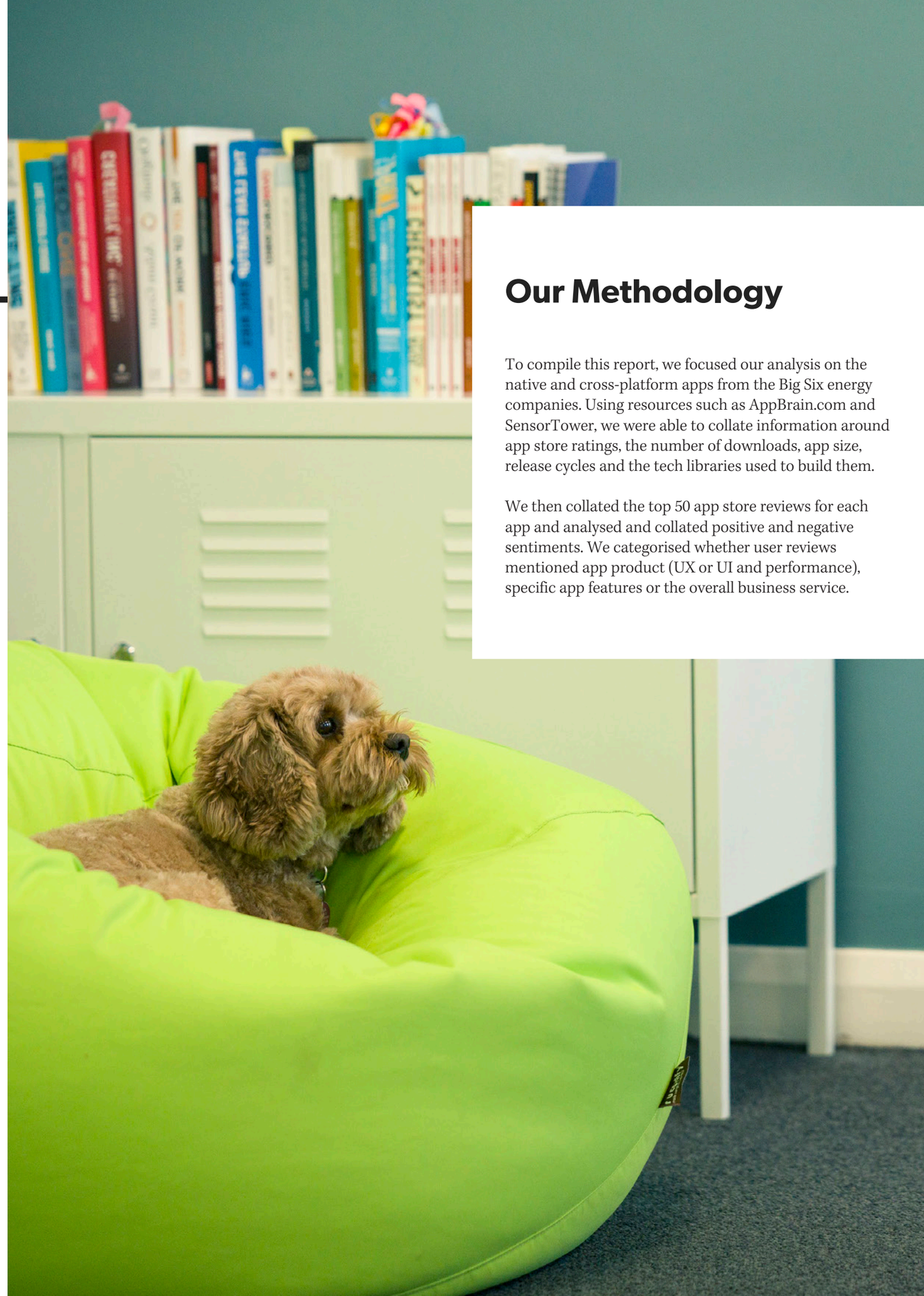
In particular, we've researched customer engagement via app reviews across the Big Six energy mobile apps, to help challenger energy suppliers understand:

- Which mobile app technologies are being used and which are delivering positive customer experiences
- Valuable insights into mobile release cycles, downloads, reviews and app sizes
- Which particular features customers are engaging with
- What common problems customers are reporting and why

Given that energy customer feedback is at such a premium, our report will help CTOs get a deeper understanding of the current mobile app market.

They'll be able to use our research to identify key mobile trends and technologies, customer interactions and problems, as well as recommendations about how to tackle these.

All of this will help shape and inform their overall mobile strategies.



## Our Methodology

To compile this report, we focused our analysis on the native and cross-platform apps from the Big Six energy companies. Using resources such as AppBrain.com and SensorTower, we were able to collate information around app store ratings, the number of downloads, app size, release cycles and the tech libraries used to build them.

We then collated the top 50 app store reviews for each app and analysed and collated positive and negative sentiments. We categorised whether user reviews mentioned app product (UX or UI and performance), specific app features or the overall business service.

# OUR KEY FINDINGS





# 1. CROSS-PLATFORM VERSUS NATIVE MOBILE APPS




Perhaps the most important question facing any CTO about to embark on building apps is which technology to opt for. There are a number of pros and cons to consider with cross-platform technologies, as well as their native counterparts.

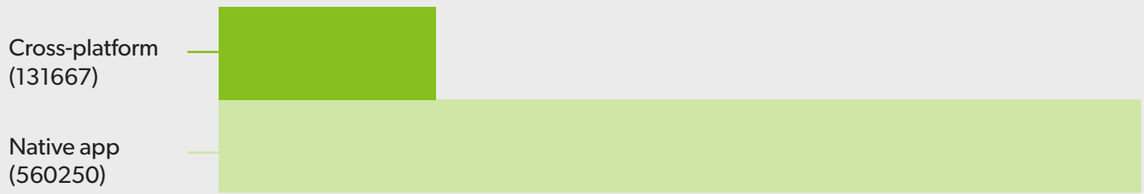
For example, frameworks like ReactNative and Xamarin offer benefits such as faster development times and, therefore, potential cost savings. However, adding an abstraction layer on top of the native operating system can mean a more difficult development cycle, less effective end product and less satisfying user-experience.

In a sector like energy, where customer service is a key differentiator, the mobile app experience must be as smooth, efficient and as hassle-free as possible. So with that in mind, which technologies are most popular?

The Big Six energy companies (British Gas, E.ON, EDF, NPower, Scottish Power and SSE) sometimes have more than one mobile app, while SSE doesn't currently have a consumer app.

By analysing tech libraries, we've discovered that four of their apps (from British Gas, E.ON, NPower and Scottish Power) have been built using native technologies.
Meanwhile, EDF, EON and British Gas also have apps built using Cordova, React Native and Appcelerator cross-platform technologies.

## Downloads for Android




The native apps have, on average, more downloads: 131667 vs 560250

(using Android figure supplied by appbrain.com).

# 1. CROSS-PLATFORM VS NATIVE APPS


***Of the positive app reviews, 75% come from native apps.***

Native apps get a higher average store rating:  3.51 stars as opposed to 2.7 stars.

Finally, we reviewed the overall look and feel of the apps and created a star rating 1-5 based on our expertise in UX and UI design. We discovered that of the apps we studied in this instance, the cross-platform apps have a minor design advantage over their native counterparts.

These results are interesting as design is not linked to the platform. Usually, we'd expect native apps to have higher design standards due to the fact that they don't use a one-size-fits-all approach and generally require greater time and financial investment. We gave cross-platform energy apps a score of 3.8 stars as opposed 3.0 stars for native.

Given native apps receive higher customer ratings, we deduce that from a user perspective, the benefits of a native experience are more important than a beautiful looking app.

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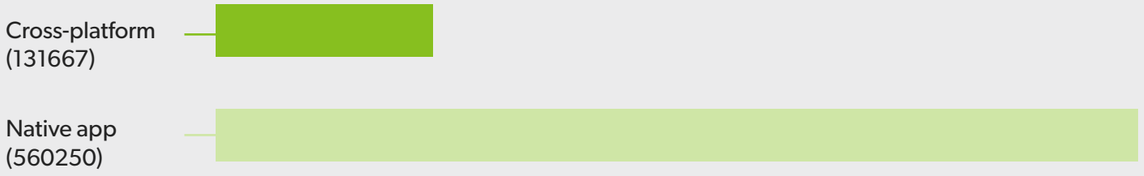
## App Size


In terms of app size, Native Android apps for the Big Six are slightly smaller, 23.45MB as opposed 38.9MB for cross-platform.

App size for iOS is: 85.1 MB for Native and 53.9MB for cross-platform respectively.

## Downloads for Android




The native apps have, on average, more downloads: 131667 vs 560250

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# 2. POSITIVE & NEGATIVE REVIEW OVERVIEW

We compared hundreds of positive and negative customer reviews from the Big Six energy apps, both Android and iOS, to try and understand what factors were important in creating successful customer feedback.

Of the positive reviews, 92% related to the app product itself i.e. its UX, UI, navigation and performance. Only 4% of positive reviews mentioned particular energy app features (such as bill paying or organising engineer visits). And even less, only 3% of positive reviews mentioned the energy company's overall business service.

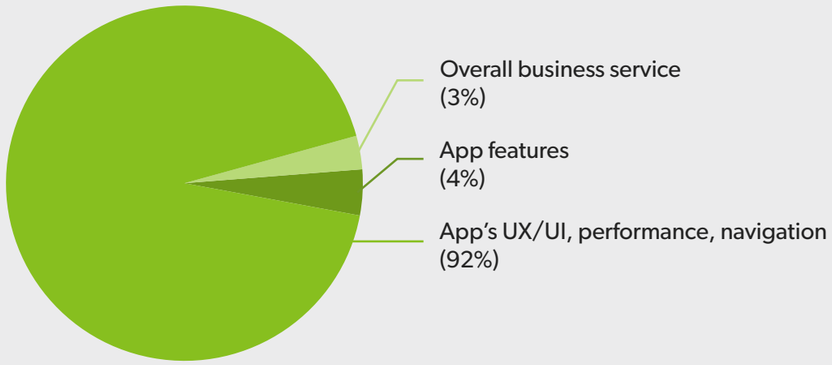
In addition, of the positive reviews, 51% related to customer satisfaction with an app's UX and UI, while 45% related to app performance. These are, therefore, clearly some of the biggest factors that Energy CTOs need to consider when developing a mobile app.

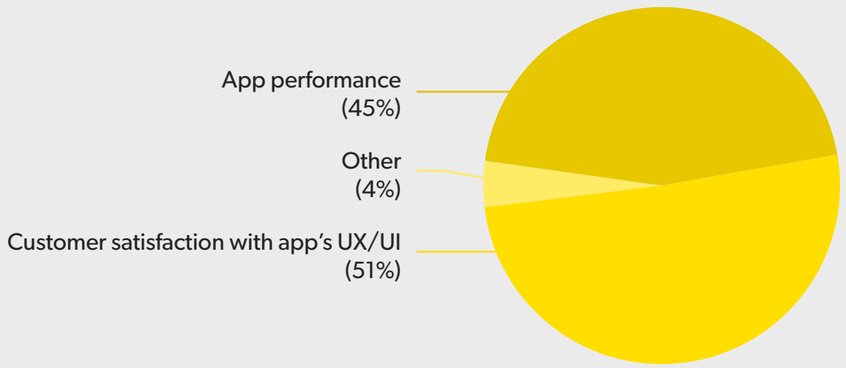
In our analysis of negative reviews, 53% were related to the app product itself (i.e. design and performance issues) and 48% were concerned about specific features not working - they couldn't pay their bills, slow log-in and poor smart meter experience etc.

This illustrates that an app's specific features are not as important for energy companies hoping to garner positive reviews, but really important if they want to avoid negative reviews.

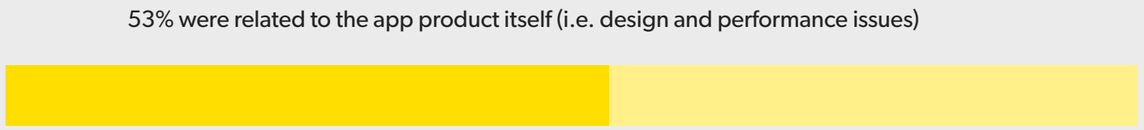
***...an app's specific features...are really important if they want to avoid negative reviews.***

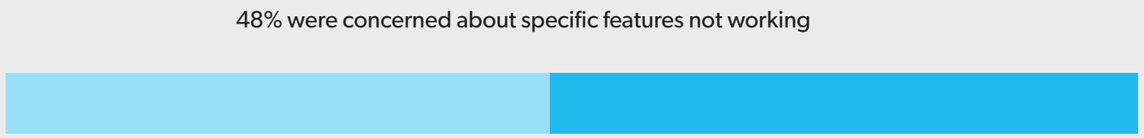
## Positive Reviews




## Negative Reviews



# 3. CUSTOMER REVIEWS IN DEPTH

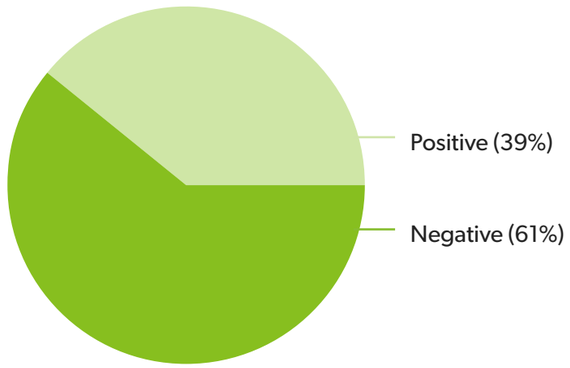
We've broken our findings down into three different categories:

**Energy App Product** refers to the app itself: performance, look and feel, UI and UX etc.

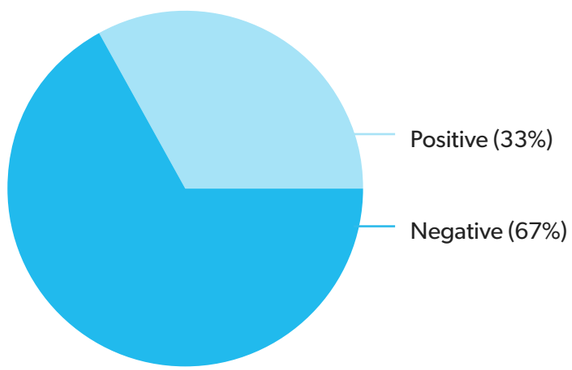
**Energy App Features** refers to any customer reviews that include feedback on features such as account management tools, top-up meters and bill paying etc.

**Energy Business Service** includes reviews relating to the overall service provided by that company rather than the app itself.

**App reviews relating to the overall app product**




**App reviews for UX/UI**




## Energy App Product

We delved deeper into what customers were saying about their experience of the energy apps themselves, collating reviews that mentioned UX, UI and performance.

We discovered that 61% of app reviews relating to the overall app product were negative, as opposed to 39% positive.

Breaking those statistics down a little further, we discovered that when it comes to UI and UX, in fact, the number of positive reviews for UX/UI outweighed the negative by 67% to 33%. This would indicate that customers review good UX and UI, so it's worth ensuring an app is up to a high standard in these areas.

In terms of performance, however, 73% of customer feedback was negative. Problems with the app being unreliable was the biggest recorded issue, alongside problems with app login and frequent app crashes also cited as the most common customer complaints.

Clearly, users expect a highly reliable app; one which loads quickly, works as expected and responds quickly to user interaction. One way for CTOs to combat issues around poor reliability is to carefully consider which platform is being used and if it's possible to achieve the standards users require.

It is also important to look at the whole app development process to ensure reliability. Developers need to make sure they are using industry best practice including code reviews, automated testing and user acceptance testing (UAT).

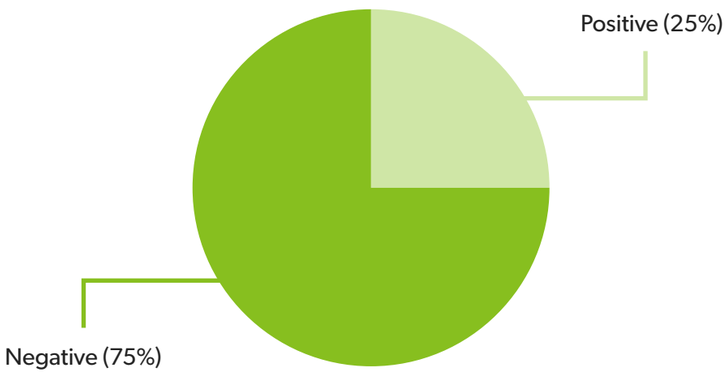
There are no shortcuts to achieving reliability but if these steps are implemented from the outset, the end product should help energy suppliers radically reduce poor user experience and negative reviews.

## Energy Business Service

Finally, Brightec analysed customer reviews from the Big Six energy apps around the overall quality of the business service they were providing. These reviews were a much smaller sample size because, as highlighted earlier, the vast majority of customer feedback concentrates on issues around app performance and UX. However, we did discover that 75% of the reviews for business service were negative. One of the top complaints was that customers were paying more than they were originally quoted.

In terms of customers' negative app experience, we'd recommend that it's important to engage all stakeholders right at the start of an app development project. An organisation must involve teams from IT, customer service, marketing and design departments to offer insights into what business needs the app is addressing, and what customer value it's ultimately delivering.

***By including all stakeholders in this way, the end app product has a much higher chance of success and generating that all-important return on investment.***




**App reviews for business service**

## Energy App Features

Which features need to be included in an app is another critical decision for CTOs. All too often 'must-have' features (such as torches) are included by development teams, only to be largely ignored by customers.

We analysed customer reviews relating to an app's features and discovered that a massive 97% of reviews of app features were negative. And the list of features that customers weren't happy with was also large. Clearly, it's vital at the start of any app project to decide what features are actually useful and will add value to the customer journey.

It is often tempting to cram in too many features and the end user experience can be compromised.

Or sometimes features can be gimmicky and don't have a clear return on investment, or a user-tested reason for being included.

We recommend identifying core features and sticking with those. In our experience, apps work best when they do one or two repeated functions very well, rather than one app that tries to do too much or simply over-complicates the user experience.

In addition, user testing and feedback are an essential part of ensuring your app features are useful and effective. This should include contextual research: going out and seeing the environment within which the user will be using your product e.g. in the home or on the move.

User interviews, undertaken before any development starts, will help CTOs understand the user's habits and behaviour - vital for informing product design.

They provide invaluable insights into users' technical capabilities and the problems they are facing with a product or process e.g. changing their direct debit, logging-in to their account. Interviews conducted at the start will reduce the cost of building features that don't get used.

### Customer reviews relating to app features:

- Customers can't connect to smart meters via the app
- Account details were not up to date
- Cannot submit meter readings
- Cannot pay bill
- Cannot view account balance
- Can't top-up



Negative (97%)

# CONCLUSIONS

As interacting with energy suppliers isn't particularly fun for customers and will increasingly become less of a requirement, companies must provide the smoothest and most hassle-free experience possible to maintain customer happiness.

When developing an app, it's critical to understand your audience, keep the app as simple as possible and prioritise great UX, UI and performance.

Perhaps in the future, with the introduction of Smart Home technologies, energy companies will offer greater insights on consumption and this could be a way that they can engage more effectively with customers.

For now, it's clear that customers are after an experience that makes a necessary task like paying bills or managing their account as seamless and effortless as possible.

## Brightec's key findings

- Apps developed with native technologies are downloaded more and receive a much higher proportion of positive reviews - 75%.
- As you'd expect, good UX, UI and performance are top priorities for customers - in particular 73% feedback that they are experiencing poor performance/ reliability.
- App features are not critical for positive reviews but contribute to negative ones.
- Features must be carefully thought through, with a less-features-done-well approach helping to foster more positive customer reviews.

# ABOUT US

We're a multi award-winning mobile app development agency based in Brighton, UK. Our mission is very simple; to be a company that our customers love working with, and that our employees love working for.

We deliver the best digital products for both iOS (iPhone and iPad) and Android (phone and tablet). In fact, our clients are so happy with our service that they often collaborate with us on multiple native mobile app development projects over many years.

We recognise that in our digital age, technology is in a constant state of evolution. So we help businesses navigate this complex and ever-changing landscape so that they can plot a path to success.

Users are right at the very heart of everything we do. Our expert team of mobile app developers deliver smarter and friendlier ways for our clients and their customers to engage with technology, creating exceptional user experiences.

# We translate complex data into meaningful, accessible digital products

Morrisons
Since 1899

JAGUAR | LAND ROVER

Google

KitchenCraft

Legal & General

ziffit

Roche

Virgin

trainsplit

Willis Towers Watson

Kings
Education for Life

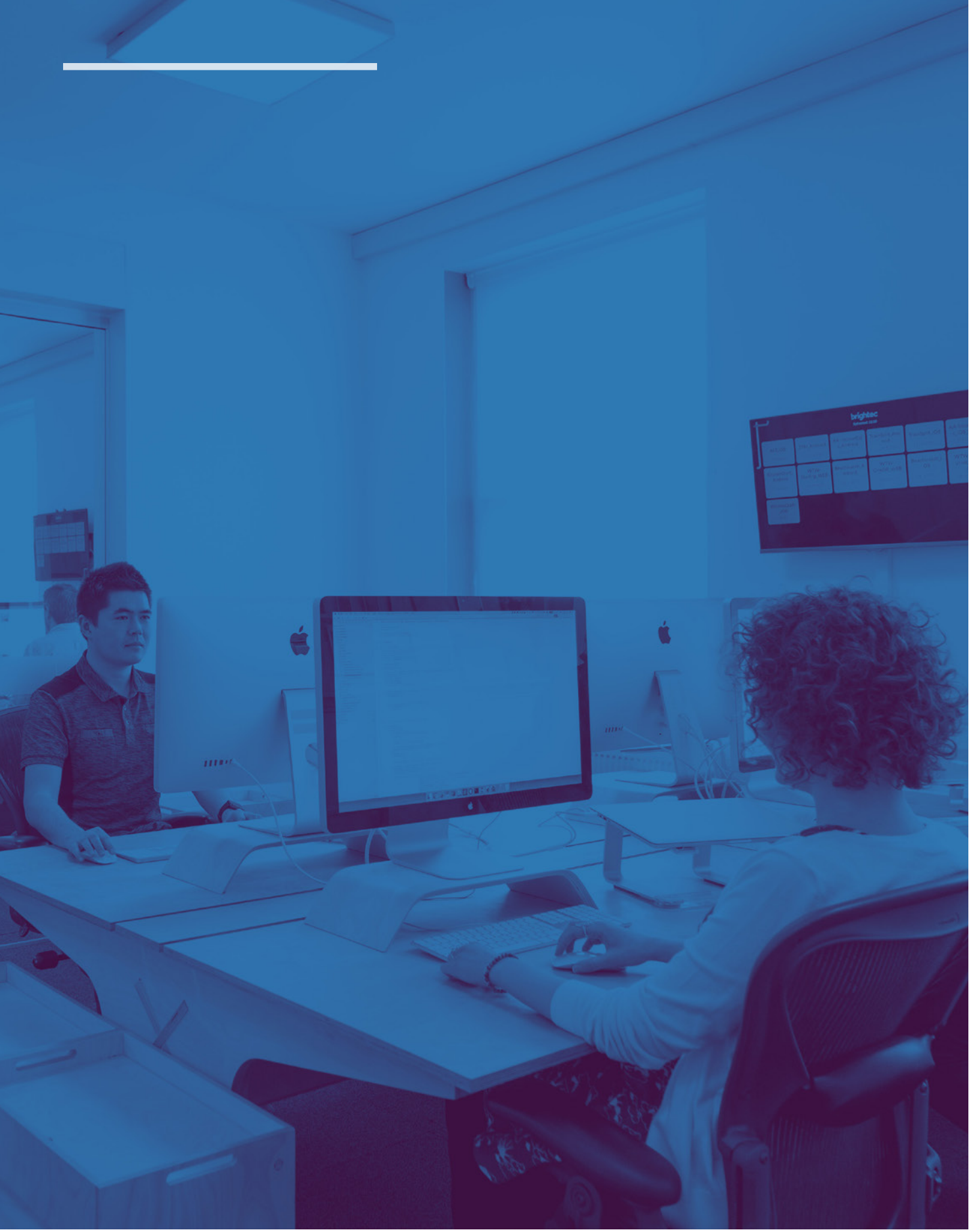
world of books

## Our mission is to be a company that our customers love working with, and our employees love working for.

"They know apps inside and out. Their excellent project management skills build trust and confidence, resulting in Brightec feeling like part of the team."

"I can't imagine that there is anything I could need that Brightec couldn't provide. There is little they can't do in terms of user experience. I've chosen the right company."

brightec



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