

**DESIGN FOR  
PLANET**

**Design  
Council**



**OCTOPUS**

**“People are far more open to doing things differently after you’ve made the effort to fit in around their lives.”**

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Design for Planet is Design Council’s ambitious new approach to galvanise and support the UK’s 1.69 million-strong design community to address the climate crisis.

This strategic shift recognises the fundamental need to redesign our lives to save our planet, and champions the power and responsibility of designers to shape a better world.

Our Design for Planet case studies will showcase ten leaders in sustainable design from a diverse range of disciplines. They will explore the role of design as a powerful agent of change through sustainability and climate-action. We want these case studies to inspire and motivate the design community to prioritise the welfare of the planet in their own work and practises.

# OCTOPUS

Electricity suppliers aren't traditionally associated with fun and innovation, but clean energy supplier Octopus are changing all that. With their interactive and flexible way of operating – from giving customers discounted power when their local wind turbine is spinning, to tariffs that encourage people to consume energy off peak and save money in the process - they are at the forefront of a sustainable sea change in the industry.

Co-founder Pete Miller explains that a thirst for directly engaging with customers is at the heart of their design process.

## How did Octopus Energy start off?

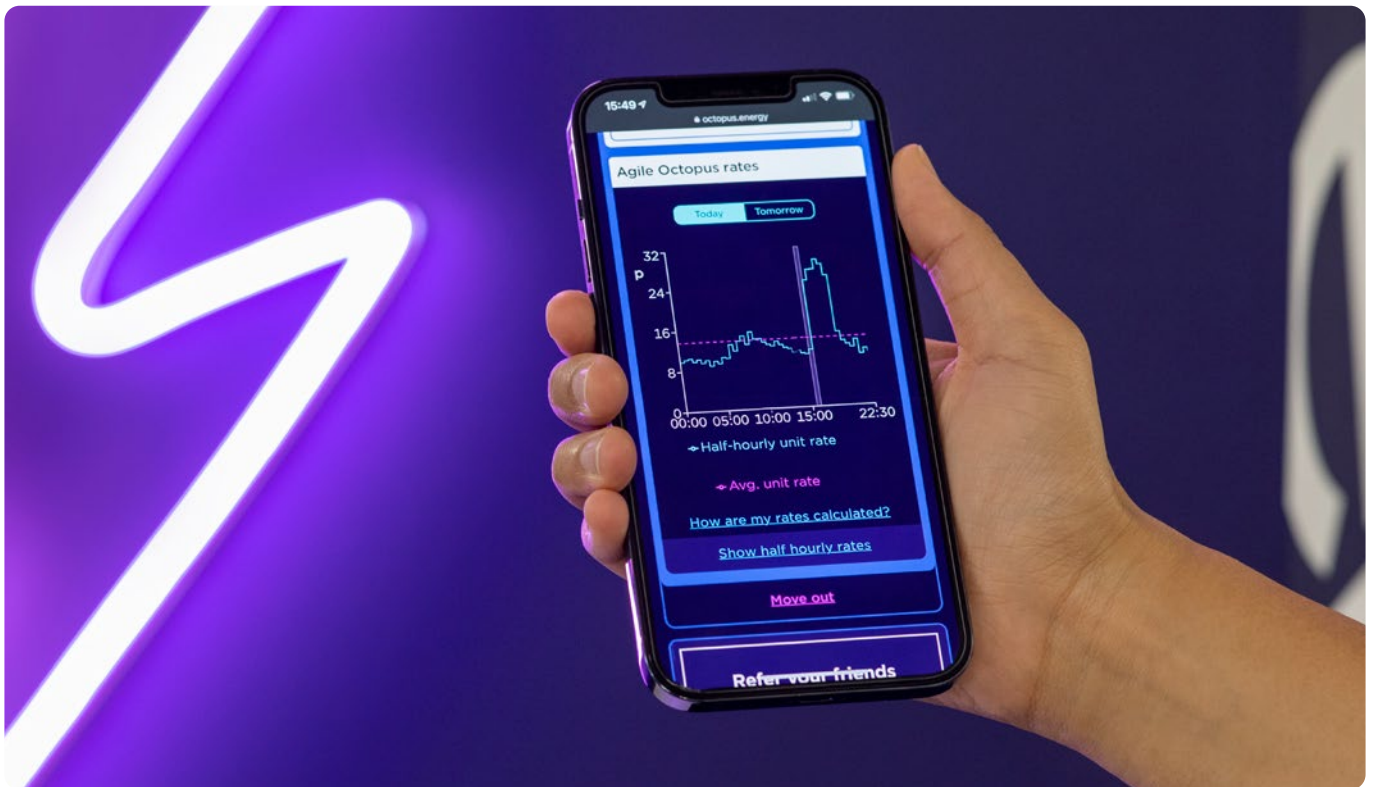
We began in 2015 with the goal of making energy cheaper and fairer for everyone. We saw a real opportunity to make green electrons cheap thanks to technology. And that's a really crucial part of making the change that we all need – running the planet entirely on green energy – work for real people. If it's cheaper for you, and it's better for the planet, why wouldn't you switch to renewable energy?

## Where do you get your ideas from?

In the early days, most of us were energy outsiders. We brought a naive view of how it all worked, which let us question things and ask "Why not?". One of our first ideas was to approach meter readings differently – they're a bit of a faff, but really important to knowing where you stand financially. So, after customers submit their reading, we offer them a spin of our "Wheel of Fortune" for the chance of winning up to £512 credit on their account. It started out as a bit of fun, but turned out to be genuinely transformational in how people engage with energy – we now get over a million spins of that little wheel every month. That was an eye opener for us: we knew there was huge opportunity for doing things differently.

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**“Doing everything from scratch is incredibly liberating. It means if an idea doesn't feel like it's going to work fairly early on, you simply don't finish it. You move on to the next thing.”**



### Can you explain your Darwinian approach to design?

We build our own technology and doing things from first principles is incredibly liberating. It means if an idea doesn't feel like it's going to work fairly early on, it simply doesn't make the cut. We move on to the next thing.

We get products live in the real world as quickly as possible: where real people are using real money, within the context of their daily lives, and we see what happens then. That's where the truly valuable feedback is.

We discover that ideas that sound good can turn out not to be practical when we test them out and they die very quickly.

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**“We discover that ideas that sounded good can turn out not to be practical when we test them out.”**

### **Can you explain how you incentivise sustainable energy consumption?**

Renewable generation is, by its nature, volatile: the wind doesn't always blow, the sun doesn't always shine. Looking ahead, we're going to have times when we have a massive surplus, and equally, there's going to be times when we need to cut back. We think price is the key mechanism to expose how that works for everyone.

For example, customers living near one of our turbines can sign up to Octopus Fan Club for one pound per week. They'll get a 20% discount on their electricity whenever the turbine is spinning – when the wind really picks up, that increases to a 50% discount. This is so different to the typical green tariff, where green electricity is matched with supply over the course of a whole year. With Octopus Fan Club it's all real time, we know there's cheap, green electrons being made locally, and local people benefit from that.

Our Agile tariff works in a similar way – rewarding customers for shifting their energy consumption away from peak times, when there's a real surplus of green electrons on the grid, customers can actually be paid for making use of them!





### **How have customers influenced you?**

I think some businesses setup intentionally to keep customers at arm's length. We're different: we work really hard to be a porous company where feedback from customers can reach anyone, anywhere – right across our business. So most of our time is spent working to make energy simple, straightforward, and less time consuming for everyone. For example, our customers can do most things online without ever needing to mess around with passwords – we simply send them a unique link to their email. Or, instead of trying to coax customers into opening every single email we send them, we'll add "FYI" to the subject line of an email when it's not super-important, so you can read it at your leisure. When we show respect for our customers time, I find they're far more generous with it – and that's why you'll find Octopus customers baking at 6am to make the most of green electricity, or braving spiders in the meter box to submit a meter reading. People are far more open to doing things differently after you've made the effort to fit around their lives.

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