

# Entrepreneur behind energy brokerage creates jobs with expansion and new venture

An entrepreneur behind a Newcastle energy broker says he is looking for up to 100 new recruits, and plans to create more jobs through a separate new business.

Graham Ritchie, 36, managing director of Independent Utility Advice, which employs about 50 people, says demand caused by energy prices means he needs more call centre sales staff.

The company – which has operated since 2017 – is based in Newcastle's Hadrian House but the firm is poised to move into 8,500 sq. ft. of space in Stockbridge House on the city's Quayside, which has undergone a £200,000 refurbishment.

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Mr Ritchie, who began his career as a plasterer before moving into telesales, said: "We've completely filled out the current offices, and now we're planning to double the headcount. I didn't think we'd get to this point, but it's a good problem to have.

"At the moment, the demand for cheaper energy contracts is through the roof. It's what everyone wants at the moment. There's no better time to help out businesses."

Independent Utility Advice – which Mr Ritchie says works with about 5,000 customers across the UK – is looking for people with telesales experience.

At the same time, Mr Ritchie is planning to launch a separate brokerage business called Home Improvement Finance that aims to connect homeowners with finance for home improvement

projects. He says the idea also has the potential to create a significant number of telesales jobs.

He explained: "I've got friends who are tradesmen and they say this is a real need. The idea is to finance home improvements and there's a huge demand because of the rising costs of everything.

"Say for instance a roofer comes into your house and quotes you £7,000 for the roof – a lot people won't be able to afford that, so we can offer to spread the payments for up to 10 years and offer them 0% interest free credit.

"The customers will come directly to us via a marketing campaign and as well as that we'll take on tradesmen to offer our services to directly their customers as they're going into their properties."

Mr Ritchie says the business, which is now undergoing the final stages of FCA approval, will create another call centre operation in which advisors will call UK households, as well as back office staff and it will potentially employ tradesmen on its books.

Home Improvement Finance, which will also be based out of Stockbridge House, will broker deals for a panel of lenders who Mr Ritchie says have supported the idea.

He added: "The interest we've had in the offer has already been ridiculous. There's nobody else doing this."

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