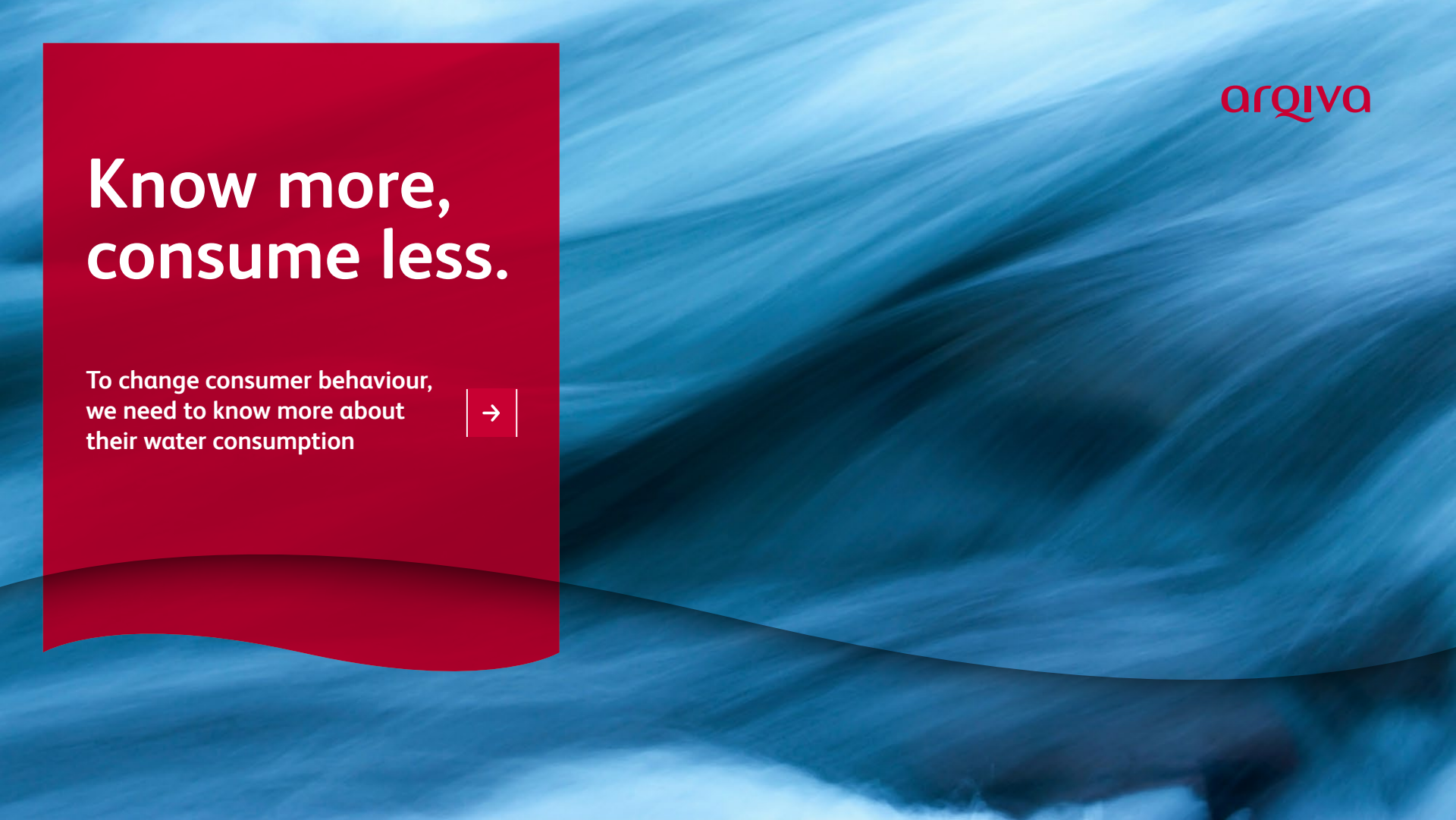
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Know more, consume less.
To change consumer behaviour, we need to know more about their water consumption

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"Knowledge is power", or so the old adage goes – and what is power if not control?

Be it electricity, gas, or water, when consumers know how much they use, they use less. While the exact figures may vary, numerous studies over the years have shown that the more residents know about their consumption habits, the more likely they are to curb their usage, particularly in terms of wastage. This, of course, is where smart meters have a critical role to play.

In the water industry, we don't need to rely on research or hypotheses to understand the impact that smart meters can have. As discussed in a recent webinar hosted by the Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management, Anglian Water has seen an average of a near 3% reduction in consumption as a result of its smart metering programme. Moreover, that decline is purely as a result of behavioural change, with plumbing loss and pipe leakage savings accounted for elsewhere. You can see the full case study here.

At a time when household consumption is continuing to grow at an exponential pace, this is an unquestionably positive result. It is also one that simply could not have been achieved without the presence of more than 330,000 smart meters across Anglian Water's network and, specifically, the use of Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI).

Information is absolutely crucial to behavioural change. Asking people to act differently first requires you to tell them how it is they're behaving already. Asking them to change based on information that's out of date or difficult to access, however, is a recipe for failure. Timeliness and accessibility are key.

One of the core benefits of always-on, connected AMI metering is that it meets both of those requirements with ease. Unlike Automated Meter Reading (AMR) systems which may only provide data once or twice a year, or smart meters that offer only weekly readings, AMI captures readings every hour of the day. Equipped with that information, Anglian Water has been able to build a dedicated customer portal, one that gives residents a truly up-to-date view of their consumption habits. Little wonder that its early results have been so impressive.

Not every household is alike, of course. As Thames Water discovered upon implementing its own AMI programme, a small proportion of high-use (>500 l/prop/day) households were actually skewing the company's Per Capita Consumption values, with some using as much as 7,000 litres per day.

While the company continues to operate a generalised water efficiency programme, this insight has enabled Thames Water to zero in on those high-use properties and prioritise them for an in-home visit from its Smarter Homes team. The result of this laser-focused education programme is a per household reduction of around 10%, with savings being both immediate and sustained.

Perhaps the most important thing about what these companies have achieved so far is that they are stepping up to public expectations about the benefits offered by smart meters.

In a recent study undertaken on Arqiva's behalf by Waterwise, 41% of respondents suggested that "tracking and control over usage" was one of the technology's primary appeals. The consumer appetite to modify their actions is already there; AMI simply makes it easier to meet that demand. By knowing more – and helping their customers to know more – water companies can effectively do less when it comes to behavioural change.

By investing now in Advanced Metering Infrastructure, water companies have the opportunity to make change simple. With more than 1.4m meters already installed and working, AMI's modernised data infrastructure provides a proven path to rapid behavioural change.