

The biggest change in the UK telephone network that (almost) no one is talking about

We're all familiar with the copper wire telephone network: in use since 1876, it's kept business communications going for years. Since its invention, the public switch telephone network (PSTN) has seen a lot of changes: it's gone from manual switching, which required a human operator, to electronic switching; from just simple copper wires to fibre cables and cellular networks.

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Its biggest change yet is approaching, but chances are you don't even know about it.

BT Openreach will switch off the PSTN and all the services related to the network, including ISDN and ADSL services in 2025. It may seem like a long way away, but a lot is happening way before then - some services disappearing as early as this year - and they will affect anyone (business and residential) using traditional services.

We know what you may be thinking, 'Why change something that isn't broken?' - but as confusing as it may sound, the move to All IP is a great one for the UK.

So, why is BT switching off the PSTN?

As with everything in technology, what worked a decade ago most definitely isn't the best option in this day and age - from the latest

smartphones to AI applications or the technology we use to work remotely. The PSTN is essentially just another example of that.

Just to give you an idea of how outdated traditional services are: ISDN's maximum speed is 128kbps - which isn't very much at all when you consider that a decent quality video call requires fifteen times that.

The way we communicate has changed drastically over the past decade, and so have our expectations for the speed and quality of our communications. The PSTN simply can't deliver what we need anymore - it's time to say goodbye and embrace the future.

What does it mean for UK businesses?

The impact of the switch off on businesses (or personal landline) very much depends on their current setup. Many bigger businesses have already made the move to IP telephony, and for those that have, the switch off won't change anything.

Yet, if you're one of the 3 million B2B PSTN and ISDN fixed lines that are yet to be migrated to an internet-based solution, you'll need to start thinking about upgrading to a new solution as soon as possible. The move will greatly affect those relying on their landline telephones to do business, so it's important to understand your options early on to avoid any disruption to your business.

It's not just your phone line that will need to be upgraded either - the migration will also impact services like security and fire alarms, telecare devices, retail payment terminals and equipment for monitoring and controlling networks.

2025 might seem like a long way away, but...

While the PSTN will be completely phased out in 2025, BT Openreach is gradually stopping to sell any PSTN-reliant services across the country.

The "Stop Sell" has already happened in over 100 locations across the country, and from 2023, no one will be able to purchase any legacy services - with almost 300 exchange areas undergoing stop sell as early as April 2022.

Alternative solutions, such as Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), are already available (and have been available for years), with thousands of businesses already relying on this new technology for their business communications and special line rental services.

VoIP allows businesses to transfer voice and images over the internet - removing the need for the copper line network. Those worried about call quality have no reason to: the speed of broadband is now genuinely fast enough to negate any problems around quality.

Waiting until 2025 for an inevitable change makes little to no sense. Moving to VoIP is generally a seamless process that won't leave businesses without a phone system for days. However, the closer we get to the switch off, the higher the demand and the more difficult it could be to transition.

Essentially, while this is a friendly nudge to start thinking to make the move, it will soon become imperative to do so. Might as well get ahead of the competition and embrace all the benefits that VoIP brings.

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