

The UK phone network is on its way out: is your business ready?

The phone network as we know it's on its way out. In a move to embrace fully internet-based communications, Openreach (a division of BT) is phasing out the public switched telephone network (PSTN) at the end of 2025. A while away, you might think, but changes are happening as we speak.

In October 2021, hundreds of locations across the country went into "Stop-Sell", which essentially means both residents and businesses could not purchase new PSTN-based phone services, such as ISDN, nor renew their existing legacy services.

The alternative? Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), a technology that transfers voice and data over the internet, rather than copper wires.

What is VoIP?

Simply put, VoIP uses a company's existing internet connection to transmit voice calls.

When it was first introduced, this solution seemed like a dangerous choice, as it completely relies on the quality of the internet connection to

guarantee stable calls. Nowadays, the speed of most broadband connections is fast enough to negate any problems around call quality.

VoIP telephony is also a simpler option than it sounds, requiring a lot less hardware than legacy systems. It's delivered by Over-the-Top (OTT) applications (which just means they're provided over the internet) to which new features are added regularly.

For that reason, it gives businesses more flexibility and it can be used on a variety of devices – from desk phones to mobiles, tablets and computers.

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The micro business holy grail

We've all heard that with change come challenges, but the PSTN Switch Off might actually be a great opportunity for smaller businesses to improve their customer experience and efficiency – at least when it comes to their business communications.

For the micro market, the challenges are many and disparate: from the one-man band struggling to stay on top of customer calls, to the local hairdresser or restaurant that wants to improve customer experience (or more simply increase bookings) but don't quite know how.

In either scenario, the problem starts and ends with their phone system. Phone numbers are central to the correct functioning of our local economy, yet over 3 million still rely on obsolete phone systems to deal with their customers.

VoIP can solve all that and more, with minimal disruption to the business. Some VoIP solutions even come in the form of simple mobile phone apps, and update just like one – removing any need for technical expertise.

Embracing the future – before there's no other choice

Not to sound dramatic, but there is no other option than moving to a VoIP solution. The move to All IP (brought on by the end of the legacy phone network) is well underway, and as early as 2023, no one in the country will be able to purchase those old services anymore.

The only direction is forward – and frankly, it's much better than what we're leaving behind.

However, the longer businesses wait to make the move, the harder it's going to be to find the appropriate solutions for their needs. A little like knowing you want to go to a concert, but waiting to purchase the tickets until the very last minute – why would you want to watch anything from the gallery, when you could get front-row seats if you acted fast enough?

The move doesn't have to be a daunting task either, there are thousands of businesses that have already moved to a VoIP setup. Smaller businesses finally have a chance to compete with those bigger enterprises, without breaking the bank and with a solution that will scale and grow as they do.

The PSTN Switch Off – and the subsequent move to All IP – are a true opportunity for the micro market to take control of their customer interactions and negate any challenges they've been facing so far. Now it's time to embrace the future.

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