Are you prepared for the UK's analogue telephone network switch-off?

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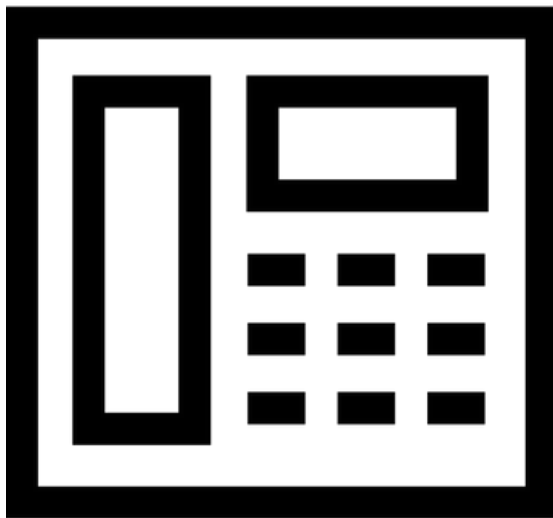
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The BIG switch-off

BT Openreach announced its intention to switch-off analogue telephone services (PSTN and ISDN) in November 2017. Since then, there has been a period of industry consultation and a basic road map published, which sets out the major milestones towards the 2025 deadline. As a business, you need to understand the likely impact of the analogue switch-off and what provisions you need to make.

Key dates and milestones:

- November 2017 BT Openreach announce intention to retire the Public Switched Telephone Networks (PSTN) and ISDN by 2025

- December 2020 BT Openreach start the process of retiring PSTN and ISDN

- May 2021 Salisbury and Mildenhall trial sites - STOP SELL notice of legacy services

- December 2022 Salisbury and Mildenhall trial sites - withdrawal of legacy services

- September 2023 STOP SELL notice of Wholesale Line Rental (WLR)

- December 2025 PSTN and ISDN switch-off.

Abbreviations

Before we get started, you might want to glance over our list of technical terms and abbreviations:

ADSL (Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line) broadband delivered over copper telephone lines

FTTC (Fibre to the Cabinet) broadband reliant on both fibre optic and copper telephone lines

ISDN (Integrated Services Digital Network) takes voice and data traffic over a single line

PBX (Private Branch Exchange) private telephone network used within an organisation

**PSTN** (Public Switched Telephone Network) collection of telephone networks used worldwide

SIP (Session Initiation Protocol) trunking is a collection of virtual telephone lines and numbers provided by an Internet Service Provider rather than copper lines

SoGEA (Single order Generic Ethernet Access) enables providers to order broadband without a phone line, which is cheaper and easier to manage

VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) voice and data services carried over the Internet

WLR (Wholesale Line Rental) telephone services using the copper network.

The end of analogue
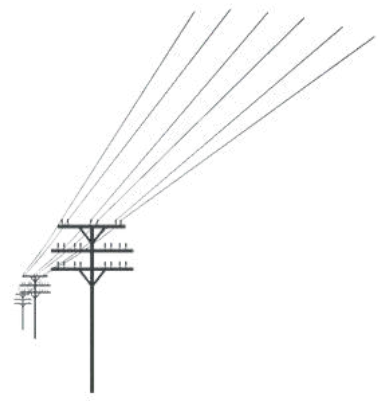
Some of the UK's copper telephone network is over 140-years old. Predictably, the old copper network is approaching the end of its useful life. However, many organisations still use analogue telephone services, which are reliant on copper cable. The telephone handsets and fax machines in your office are connected to your private branch exchange (PBX) via wall sockets. Copper cables run from your business premises to the local exchange, and from there calls are routed onto to their final destination using the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN).

The following wholesale line rental (WLR) telephone and broadband services will be withdrawn in 2025:

ANALOGUE VOICE SERVICES	IP REPLACEMENT SERVICES
Single lines, multiple lines, ISDN2, ISDN30, LLU, SLU MPF, narrowband line share and Classic product.	SIP trunk and hosted/Cloud telephony

ANALOGUE BROADBAND	BROADBAND REPLACEMENT
ADSL, FTTC, GFAST broadband	SOTAP, SOGEA and SOGFAST or Fibre broadband

SOTAP (ADSL Replacement if fibre is not available)
SOGEA (FTTC Replacement if fibre is not available)
SOGFAST (GFAST Replacement if fibre is not available)

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IP technology replacement services

Internet-based services known as IP technology or VoIP will replace the old copper network. IP technology turns the old system on its head. The current system provides voice services with connectivity layered over-the-top (OTT). However, PSTN requires a complex and costly network of physical lines to maintain. In contrast, IP services only need the Internet to function.

What happens to alarms and payment terminals?

Several special applications currently rely on the PSTN such as alarm lines, payment terminals and health-monitoring equipment. Manufacturers and service providers will need to ensure their products are compatible with the new IP technology standards. Many older telephone systems, fax machines, payment terminals and alarms that do not have SIM card capability will no longer work after the 2025 deadline.

Trials underway

BT Openreach has setup two trial exchanges to test the migration process. They plan to retire all copper services in the Salisbury, Wiltshire area by the end of 2022, moving all households and businesses to fibre broadband.

The second trial is in Mildenhall, Suffolk. For those areas of the UK where fibre broadband is not currently available, the Mildenhall trial will test moving customers from the copper network to a single order, data-only broadband service known as SoGEA. This service is likely to be about 30 percent cheaper than a standard telephone line and broadband package, faster to install, easier to maintain and support. All copper services will be switched off by December 2022 in the trial area.

STOP SELL 2023

After the trails, the next major milestone will be the official stop sell announcement planned for September 2023. After this date, no new orders for WLR services will be accepted.

SHUTDOWN 2025

Finally, on 31st December 2025 all WLR and PSTN services will be switched off.

SIP trunk or Cloud telephony

So, what does the retirement of the copper network actually mean for your business? If you already have your own on-premise IP PBX telephone system then you will need a SIP trunk to replace the ISDN services being withdrawn. However, maybe you should be thinking of moving to a hosted VoIP solution now. After all, you know ISDN and PSTN will be shut down soon. Changing to Cloud telephony now means you can dispense with hardware and maintenance costs, it's cheaper than ISDN, offers enormous flexibility and many more features.

Top 10 benefits of Cloud telephony

1. Cloud telephony provides better voice quality than analogue

2. Cloud telephony requires no hardware investment or maintenance costs

3. Cloud telephony is fast and easy to setup

4. Cloud telephony means calls between users within the same organisation are free

5. Cloud telephony makes remote working easy

6. Cloud telephony is simple to setup and manage yourself e.g. new extensions, call recording, hunt groups, call reporting, etc.

7. Cloud telephony is scalable, enabling you to add new users and adopt new features, as you require them

8. Cloud telephony offers a wide selection of advanced features previously only available to larger organisations such as auto-attendant, call centre features, call recording, call reporting, cost controls, etc.

9. Cloud telephony is extremely reliable with minimal downtime thanks to built-in redundancy and automated failover

10. Cloud telephony is its own insurance policy. If your office building catches fire or floods, you can simply move to a temporary location or have staff work from home with minimal impact to your organisation.

To prepare your business for the move to IP technology for broadband and telephone services, contact Modern Networks today.
Call 01462 426500 or email info@modern-networks.co.uk

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