WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?

Your guide to upcoming UK telephony changes – and how you can make sure the switch from analogue to digital works for your organisation

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CUT TO THE *QUICK*

What's happening and why?

Since 2014, the UK telecoms industry has been reviewing the analogue phone services that organisations and consumers use across the UK.

And it has become clear that the old phone network is fast approaching the end of its useful life. Designed and installed decades ago, the aging infrastructure is no longer able to cope with current demands and is becoming ever harder to maintain.

And no wonder. The Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) and ISDN technology that we all still use rely on the same principle of copper wiring that Alexander Graham Bell patented back in 1881.

Over the years, the technology has become more and more difficult to maintain, and countries across Europe including Germany, Switzerland, Sweden and the Netherlands have already made the switch to purely digital services.

So to meet modern requirements and prevent increased disruption as the network deteriorates, communications providers are moving their customers onto newer voice over internet protocol (VoIP) telephone services. The aim is to bring telephone technology up to date and move everyone over to digital.

From Openreach to Virgin Media Business, some telecoms providers are already beginning to close analogue lines and are no longer taking orders for these services.

In other words, this is the end of the line for the UK analogue telephone network.

What are you waiting for?

In a way, the big analogue switch-off is already with us. The pandemic made sure of that.

In the last few years, we've all been moving over to digital tech. If you use Microsoft Teams, Zoom, 8×8 or other online meeting or chat platforms, you'll already know your way around 'new everyday' digital comms.

We've all been switching to mobile and internet communications in our day-to-day lives too. And we now demand much more than the traditional analogue technologies were ever designed to deliver.

Each of us wants the bandwidth to stream films, music and messages into our homes, instantly. Organisations also rely on it to do business and serve citizens. Only digital can meet that kind of demand.

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GO. GO. GO.

Why should the change matter to you?

The big analogue switch-off already has or will affect every organisation across the UK.

The existing analogue infrastructure that we're all familiar with will become obsolete. So if you don't take action to replace it, your existing communications infrastructure will no longer operate.

This doesn't just mean that your colleagues won't be able to make and receive calls on their office landlines. It could affect your digital infrastructure too, having an impact on your core business functions like internet access.

And this is already happening. Some telecommunications providers have already started switching off analogue technology and are going fully digital. If you leave dealing with the change until the very last minute, you might have a hard time.

Swapping technology under tight time pressures can lead to glitches and errors. If that hinders your day-to-day business operations, then you could have some unhappy customers.

Finally, the switch-off will affect much more than communications. That's because a lot of the services we all take for granted depend on old-fashioned phone lines.

Alarm systems, lifts, and monitoring systems all rely on analogue telephony. So facilities managers and suppliers need to be getting ready for the change, working with the entire organisation to shape a new system that can apply across the board.

The need is particularly acute in the public sector, where everything from the monitoring of traffic lights to panic alarms relies on analogue technology. By acting now, you can ensure that citizens' and patients' lives aren't affected by the switch.

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TICK TICK TICK TICK

Tick tick, there's no time like the present

The switchover is gathering momentum.

By February 2022, Openreach had already listed 555 telephone exchanges as 'stop sell', which means they were no longer selling analogue lines. This really is the ideal time to start preparing for the change and acting.

Rather than continuing to sweat on-premise assets, by switching to a Voice over IP (VoIP) system, you can unleash the benefits of digital across your organisation. That puts hybrid and dynamic working, video calling, instant messaging and more at everyone's fingertips.

But this isn't just about avoiding risks. By starting the transition now, your organisation can start to reap the rewards of IP telephony sooner.

Let's take a look at what those rewards could be...

> **By acting now, you can avoid any glitches or hiccups caused by leaving transition to the very last minute.**

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DON'T GET LEFT BEHIND

Don't get left behind: there are opportunities ahead

The impending switch to digital offers an excellent opportunity to take stock of your telephony assets and focus on the bigger picture.

Rather than fighting fires across your organisation, you have a rare chance to rethink the entire infrastructure. So you could resolve challenges right across your organisation and make the backbone of your operations fully futureproof.

Right now, you might not even know what all your telephone lines are being used for. From broadband data signalling to terminals and monitoring,

they can carry a wide range of functions that are essential to an organisation.

It's time to review and consolidate what you have, which means gaining a view of the technology at your sites. You can then streamline everything to make collaboration amongst teams and customers so much simpler.

The systems you put in place today can help your organisation save time and money in the long run.

Here are just four areas where you could use the coming change to great effect:

ACCELERATE TO THE CLOUD	**FULLY ENABLE HYBRID AND DYNAMIC WORKING**
ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE	**EMBED SUSTAINABILITY**

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ACCELERATE TO THE CLOUD

If older technology is hampering the service you can deliver, then moving your digital transformation up a gear could enable faster and more efficient ways of working. The switch from analogue gives you a great opportunity to seize the advantages of the cloud.

Moving to cloud can increase collaboration across your organisation, as everyone can access and edit files in real time, wherever and whenever they need them. It's more secure than an on-premise system, which can be brought down by computer glitches or natural disasters. And it's easy to run, as someone else takes care of the tech support for you, while keeping you up to speed with all the latest software and security updates.

Moving to the cloud could actually save you money too. You can scale it up or down as you need, only paying for what you use, and you don't need to have an in-house tech team. And of course, it's good for the planet, cutting back on printing and all that on-site hardware.

FULLY ENABLE HYBRID AND DYNAMIC WORKING

The pandemic forced us all to discover new ways of doing business and providing services. But it's clear that industries and organisations across the UK still have a lot to learn about hybrid working and technology.

Amid all the hype around flexible jobs, you'll know that just simply providing laptops and initiating four-day weeks is not enough.

You need to think strategically about your organisation's long-term future: consider the technologies you'll adopt, how you'll implement them and how you can make sure they all work together.

It's not just about solving today's hybrid working challenges – it's also about making sure you're set up to overcome any more changes in years to come.

The answer lies in ensuring your organisation is always connected and ready to adapt, quickly and painlessly, no matter what happens today or in the future. The switch-off gives you the perfect opportunity to take strategic action and set up your organisation for future ways of working.

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ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE

Customers, citizens and patients are all living in a digital world. They expect to be able to order goods online, from anywhere and at any time, using any device.

Whether you're selling goods and services to customers or providing healthcare to patients, you have to be able to offer the same flexibility and convenience. Otherwise your market will choose to go elsewhere, or the citizens or patients you serve could receive a less than ideal service.

The analogue switch-off gives you the perfect excuse to review your service delivery to introduce efficiencies and ensure that people can interact and engage with your organisation easily. So they receive an excellent service every time they get in touch with you.

EMBED SUSTAINABILITY

Going digital can help to reduce your carbon footprint. Acting in an environmentally responsible way is no longer a nice-to-have, it's a must. Customers judge businesses by the actions they take, and citizens expect public sector organisations to be acting sustainably too.

By getting ahead in the digital race, you can demonstrate to your target market that you're serious about Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) issues. That makes you more attractive as a brand. And for public sector organisations, it helps you meet your objectives and demonstrate your ESG credentials.

In short, the time has come to develop and embed a fully integrated infrastructure across all your connectivity, security and voice channels. By looking at everything together in the round, you can make sure every piece of the jigsaw fully supports everything else.

From facilities management to communications and collaboration, make sure everything helps not hinders, and is totally secure.

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SCOOOOOOT

So where to go to from here?

Firstly, evaluate the existing state of things and understand the critical areas for your organisation.

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Secondly, pinpoint your organisational and technical objectives – from the critical necessities to the nice-to-haves.

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Thirdly, create a plan of action and execute it.

But before anything else… find the right partner that can support you from any stage of the journey, whether that simply be the execution or giving strategic input as well.

You're an expert in your own particular field, rather than in telephony and communications. So rather than sweating over the nuts and bolts, it makes sense to choose a partner who is already very familiar with the technology.

And for an added bonus…

It's also important to start sharing the news with your suppliers and partners. If they use phone lines to interact with your organisation, they need to be aware of – and to be preparing for – the change.

Imagine if a key supplier doesn't make the switch. If you can't communicate with them, you can't do business with them. It's as simple as that.

And you also need to ensure that your key suppliers of equipment to your organisation (e.g. EPOS, alarms and monitoring equipment) are aware of and ready for your (and the industry's) change, and any end user equipment is compatible.

In a perfect world, every single one of your suppliers, clients and customers will all be switched over in the near future, so it can be business as usual.

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LOOK LIVELY!

How much transformation do you want?

Are you going to take a 'one fire at a time' approach, moving in a switch-by-switch way? Or are you going to see the bigger opportunity and transform how you do business?

Be confident about moving to the cloud, at your own pace

The old telephony lines are being phased out. The good news is that we've all realised the power and the benefits of the cloud, thanks to the pandemic.

The task now is to ensure that the technology and the infrastructure can not only cope with the increased demands of hybrid working, but can actually work in the face of change.

Some organisations have held back from fully moving to the cloud and need support on their journey. Others have blazed a trail into the cloud, and are offering new services for customers, citizens or patients. Yet there are still challenges, as the infrastructures they're putting

in place are increasingly complex… and some of the application or facilities remain on the old telephony lines.

What it all boils down to is that each organisation has embarked on its own, unique journey to move to the cloud. Whatever point you've reached, you need to choose a trusted partner who can help with procurement, management and support to deliver tailored connectivity for your organisation.

But to fully move to the cloud, you need to take three key factors into account…

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CONNECT | PROTECT | EMPOWER

Three little words to live by in a digital world.

If you're going to aim for the bigger opportunity, how do you do that in a way that works for you, your customers and your employees – not just now but in years to come?

We believe the answer lies in three simple words: **Connect, Protect, Empower.**

CONNECT

With the switch from analogue to digital, make sure you keep your staff connected to the people and tools they need at all times, with a fast, reliable network that has strong foundations in place.

PROTECT

The switch gives you the opportunity to embed security across your organisation. Treat connectivity and security as one and the same.

EMPOWER

Now is the time to build on what you've already achieved, empowering your colleagues to do their job in a way that works for you and the people they serve.

GET YOUR *SKATES ON*

If you can achieve all three of these through smart new ways of working, your organisation has the best chance of success in this new everyday.

Read on to find how you can make that happen.

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EMBRACING THE SWITCH: CONNECTED

New ways of working have shown how important it is for your people to be connected. But analogue technology doesn't really cut it. Only digital networks can truly unleash connectivity across your organisation.

From moving away from legacy infrastructure to adopting new ways of working, keeping up with demand for new digital services and making better use of data, the pandemic has seen a massive shift in the way organisations work and serve their customers. Connectivity plays a huge role in enabling all this change.

That means having enough bandwidth to let people do what they need to do, along with a good, sturdy network, optimised with solutions like SD-WAN technology.

SD-WAN is a wide area network – or WAN – architecture that works through a centralised platform, detaching the management of the network from the hardware itself.

Unlike the networks of old, SD-WAN was created with the cloud in mind. Whereas you previously had to bolt on extra services just to allow your cloud-based apps to function, an SD-WAN solution connects you directly to the cloud from any location without having to pass through all that traditional infrastructure.

By prioritising traffic to and across cloud service providers, SD-WAN brings your end users closer to the apps and data that they need, and the experience they have will dramatically improve as a result.

> **To create a fully connected workplace, firstly you have to ensure that the foundations are in place.**

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EMBRACING THE SWITCH: **PROTECTED**

As you switch from analogue to digital, it's the ideal time to tighten up your security to keep your data and your people safe.

Endpoints are a particular concern when you're thinking about security. Every PC, laptop and device is a potential endpoint. They give your teams vital access to your network, but they can also be exploited by cyber-criminals.

Even in the years before the pandemic, the way we work was dramatically changing. The days of working on the same device, in one location are now long gone.

Endpoint security has evolved to cater for that change, protecting your data when people are working in lots of different places, on lots of different devices.

But you just can't have that security on the old analogue technology.

With the switch to digital comes the chance to introduce more security for your colleagues.

A recent report by the Centre for Economics and Business Research (Cebr) found that since the pandemic, large organisations have increased their spend on cybersecurity by a whopping 11.9%. Even micro organisations have upped spend by 3.9%.

But it's important to make sure that it's money well spent.

> **Connectivity and security are like wings: if they don't come as a pair, you might as well have neither.**

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ON THE DOUBLE

Zero-trust could be the way forward

Many organisations are trying to secure their whole network at once, rather than looking at individual end points and users. But this is an impossible task, particularly as the network now stretches way beyond the traditional working premises. Networks are ageing too, and any weak points will become all too apparent when the analogue switch-off happens.

Zero-trust security makes it easier to spot vulnerabilities as you're suddenly looking at the risks on a case-by-case basis. Rather than taking a blanket approach, you can drill down to each sign-in and end user. It also brings you more flexibility too, as you can remove the one-size-fits-all security barrier and make sure that certain employees have access to vital data.

More and more organisations are turning to Secure Access Service Edge – SASE for short – a cloud-based security model that allows you to control and configure all your security services from a single software platform.

With the information they need at their fingertips, employees can be more productive. That will enhance customer satisfaction too.
Just think of the call centre employee, who can now look back through a customer's interactions to give them a fully tailored response.

Finally, zero trust also helps to get rid of human error. If an end user does click on a link that they shouldn't and lets in a cybercriminal, the fraudster will only have access to that one single application.

The rest of your applications, data and organisation as a whole will still be out of bounds.

> **The only way to keep data safe without slowing anyone down is by taking a zero-trust approach. That's when you protect every entry point to the network, rather than the network as a whole.**

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EMBRACING THE SWITCH: EMPOWERED

The pandemic showed just what's possible when people have the right tools to do their job. As the big analogue switch-off approaches, now is the time to build on what you've already achieved, empowering people to do their job in a way that works for you, your teams and the customers or citizens they serve.

The big analogue switch-off gives you the chance to consolidate the cloud communications and platforms you already have in place, like Teams or 8×8, to make sure they all work together seamlessly.

If the collaboration tools aren't joined up, then employees are having to flick between different applications depending on their tasks at hand. It's inconvenient and ineffective, leading to a lot of wasted productivity over the course of a working day.

By integrating all those different communication tools in one easy place, ensuring clear communications and consolidating your systems, you can build on the successes of hybrid working, enabling and empowering employees wherever they happen to be.

Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) brings you much more flexibility than the old analogue lines. At the risk of getting technical, VoIP is basically the transmission of voice data packets from one internet IP address to another.

With VoIP, people can collaborate and integrate applications, wherever they're working. It lets you share voice, data and video all over the same network. You can connect with anyone wherever they are. With analogue, if you didn't get someone you got their voicemail. Now, you can connect at the click of the button.

All those video calls and collaboration with people outside the office that we've become used to? That's all thanks to VoIP. It's the enabler underpinning all the Unified Communications we know and love.

So with the big analogue switch-off approaching, it's time to make the most of VoIP. By consolidating all the communications platforms you started using during the pandemic, you can empower your teams with the platforms and flexibility they need to work together better than ever before.

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NEXT STEPS

Three key actions that will help you seize the opportunity when making the switch to digital.

GET A SHAKE ON

Step 1: Evaluate your current situation

Take a look around your organisation, including any branch sites. What telephone lines do you have, and what are you using them for? Are any of your lines used for facilities like alarm systems or lifts? What about your digital estate? Are you using Microsoft Teams, Zoom, 8×8 and other online or meeting chat platforms?

To move forward, you have to understand exactly where you are right now. It's time to review and consolidate what you've got, especially if key facilities are relying on analogue lines. By getting a clear view of your existing technology, you can streamline what you have and make collaboration amongst teams and customers or citizens so much simpler.

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Step 2: Set your objectives and put a plan in place

Many organisations are using the big analogue switch-off as an opportunity to rethink their whole connectivity estate. Whatever you're hoping for, it's time to plan your next steps.

Work out your key objectives and then plan a path to make them happen. Do you want to streamline your operations to make work more efficient? Or move fully to the cloud to empower all your people? Or do you just want to focus on introducing a quick fix to help you through the big analogue switch-off? From saving money to future-proofing your organisation, now is the time to set your priorities and then work towards them.

Step 3: Make it happen

The key point to note here is you don't have to do it on your own. You're an expert in your own field, rather than telephony and communications. So rather than sweating the nuts and bolts, it makes sense to choose a partner who is already an expert in.

The partner you choose should be able to help you plan and execute the change. You need to find someone who can support you on any stage of the journey, from implementing a solution through to offering strategic support to help you carve out a path ahead.

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Evaluate your current position with our checklist

Do you have the budget to support your voice transition?

What are your timescales? Have you factored in the fact that switch closures are already happening?

How is your business moving forward after the pandemic? Are you looking to go back to the office, continuing with flexible working or taking a hybrid approach?

Is your current telephony on-premise, hosted or in the cloud? Are you aiming to take this opportunity to move to the cloud?

What technology does your voice telephony rely on at the moment, and what are your voice service requirements moving forward?

Is your telephony estate back office or contact centre, or a mixture of both?

Are you looking to make the switch with a phased approach, site by site or switch by switch? Or are you aiming to move the full estate all at once?

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Helping you grasp a once-in-a-generation opportunity

Right now, the UK doesn't need more of the same. It needs a bold, fresh, exciting approach that can turn the fallout of Covid-19 and the analogue switch-off into permanent, positive change – not just for organisations like yours but for every person who works in the UK or calls it home.

The time to get ahead is now. And we're here to help you make that happen. The right way.

We don't just sell technology. We use the power of our networks, people and partnerships to help you get from where you are today to where you want to be tomorrow.

Virgin Media Business and O2 Business have joined forces around one simple shared belief: it's time for something different.

STEP ON IT!

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What we can offer

We can bring your organisation a wide choice of tailored solutions across the complete voice and communications portfolio, delivering the right solution for your individual needs.

With over 1,000 experts and engineers on call across the country, we have the presence and the know-how to simplify the complex and future-proof your organisation. All with tools that can help to optimise your existing infrastructure and the applications you're already using like Microsoft Teams.

We'll act as your one-stop shop, working with market-leading partners like Microsoft, Cisco and 8×8 on your behalf. And we'll make sure everything meets the very latest security and compliance standards. Across data, devices, network and applications.

Wherever you are on the journey, we'll help you make the most of the changes ahead. From auditing your existing technology, then consulting and advising on the best solution for you, through to managing implementation of the end solution, we'll be on hand every step of the way.

It's time to seize the advantage of the changes in UK telecommunications.
By acting now, you can connect, secure and empower your teams everywhere.

Get in touch

Are you ready to find out more about the switch to digital?
Talk to one of our experts now

Call 0800 953 0180 or visit virginmediabusiness.co.uk

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