

Broadband and telephone calls in the near future

Back in 2021 (*Courier* Summer issue number 50) I wrote a broadband article that attempted to bring readers' attention to the fact that BT were in the process of closing down the landline telephone system as we've known it for the last 100+ years and changing to an all-digital service delivered through an internet connection. The buzz-word for this type of service is *VOIP* (Voice Over Internet Protocol) or as BT have labelled it, *Digital Voice* (DV). The need for this change has a number of facets but I think it's primarily cost (to the provider – BT Openreach) and improved functionality (for the user). The change will be done gradually as alterations to the exchange are also required so a 4-week notice period will be provided. The timescale is that it should be complete by the end of 2025 but this seems ambitious.

BT held a series of roadshows over the summer and has also provided information on their website at [We're switching from analogue to digital landlines - BT explanation](#) or www.bt.com/digitalvoice

I attended one of these at Dobbie's in Bearsden which was informative and answered all my questions but did not seem very well attended. They told me only about 40 people had come the day before so I think BT still have some work to do to make everyone aware of the changes.

The better user features that BT advertises are:

- 3-way calls,
- Multiple simultaneous calls if multiple DV-compatible handsets are available,
- Blocking of Nuisance calls,
- Diversion of calls from landline to another number,
- Calling Line Identity (CLI) to see the phone number of an incoming call.

For those who just use their landline for phone calls, most will have to take up some kind of internet-based unit or rely totally on a mobile.

Everyone should be aware that having a useable mobile phone will become almost essential as a backup, or alternative, to the landline.

At least for BT, as folk renew their contracts now, they will be switched over to the new service automatically and the BT staff may not explain the full implications of the change to the customer despite informing them about it happening.

To try to categorise your use, at least for BT customers (for any supplier, talk to them and ask what they plan to do to maintain your services with them):

- 1) For people who already use an internet connection, this change should not be too difficult to manage, or be a large alteration to the way they make calls, and existing phone units should still be useable. Your existing phone can plug into the back of the BT router.
On renewing your contract you may even be offered an upgrade to a full-fibre (FTTP) service, for which my advice would be to take it, as it future-proofs your premises, though it does entail bringing in a new cable from the street;
- 2) For those who have only a telephone service, they will be encouraged to take on an internet service even if it's just for the telephony aspect, into which the existing phone can be plugged.
If the customer doesn't want to do this, for a transient period until 2030, BT will convert their existing phone line to be a Dedicated Home Phone Service (DHPS) where the VOIP transition takes place within the exchange. This is seen as only a temporary measure.
The alternative is to rely totally on a mobile.
In mitigation, if BT are made aware of a customer's unwillingness to change over, in the case of older, vulnerable customers BT may accept a postponement of any change but only until January 2027.
- 3) If you use extension wiring in the premises to enable multiple handsets, or where the router is located away from the most-frequently used handset, although it is possible to connect extension wiring into the back of the hub, BT won't guarantee that it will work as before. However, they will provide ONE free VOIP adapter that

connects onto your internal wifi. Upto 5 of these adapters can be supported. Alternatively many folk already have cordless handsets and the base-unit of these products can be plugged into the BT hub instead of directly into the wall. (I'm told a cordless extender unit, similar to a wifi extender, is being researched).

- 4) Although BT provides an exchange-hosted message function (1571), this is limited to 10 messages so some people use an answer machine. The number of rings may need to be adjusted either on the BT service (7 rings by default) or your answer machine to ensure that your answer machine kicks in the earlier of the two services. Again, if your answer machine is located away from the hub, you may need an adapter (see point 3 above).
- 5) Some people use BT Call Guardian to screen incoming calls. This should still work but it's worthwhile checking with the BT Helpline. Adjusting the number of 1571 rings (see point 4 above) will probably be necessary and different Call Guardian models may behave differently. Having a mix of DV phones and Call Guardian may also be problematic as the new service allows multiple calls and this feature may need to be disabled.
- 6) In the early days of this changeover, BT provided VOIP handsets. This is no longer the case and if desired, they will have to be bought. However, adapters to use your existing phones are available (see point 3 above).
- 7) The change will also affect Healthcare and Alarm equipment and EPOS units. The first action in the case of a Healthcare situation is to make BT aware of the customer vulnerability so that BT can prioritise any necessary responses. It may be possible to plug your existing unit into the BT hub and then use an adapter for the phone itself, but more likely, the units themselves will have to change to use a mobile connection rather than the landline, or change to DV-compatible equipment. Again, talk to the supplier of your existing equipment, and ask what they intend to do.

In some cases where a separate phone line is involved, BT may convert the line to be DHPS (see point 2 above).

EE is now also marketing its own home alarm product, EE-SECURITY, that works over the mobile phone network.

- 8) Some people have an additional, stand-alone, ringer to alert them to a phone call when away from the main phone. Existing ones may still work, plugged into an adapter (see point 3 above) but modern DV-compatible units should become available and the best advice is to contact the BT Helpline.
- 9) Older, rotary dial phones and early push-button phones, both of which use Loop Disconnect (LD) rather than tone-dialling to make outgoing calls, will not work with the new service.

Whatever you decide to do, you will be providing the power to make the service work. So what happens in the event of a power cut in your area? The landline phone will stop working!

BT are making back-up power supply units (PSU) available at extra cost, to provide temporary power or a battery-powered mobile-connected hub as part of a new contract. My advice is to make sure that you have a working, charged mobile phone available as an independent backup to your landline.

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I've looked up a series of websites, BT & others, to gather some initial background to possibly explain better than my overview articles, and current information as well (see below).

[Courier Summer 2021 Issue 50](#)

[We're switching from analogue to digital landlines - BT explanation](#)

[The PSTN and ISDN switch-off: what it means for your business](#)

[Business - The big PSTN switch-off: what's happening between now and 2027?](#)

[Residential & Business - The Great British Switch-Off: Are you ready to go digital?](#)

[Primarily Business but also Residential - What is the PSTN switch off?](#)

[April 2024 - Analogue UK Phone Switch Off Reportedly Facing 2 Year Delay](#)

[May 2024 - BT Group refines its digital switchover programme for the UK's full fibre future - BT Newsroom](#)

[Not with BT? First option – discuss with your current provider](#)

[Switching off the PSTN: Migrating from Analogue to Digital Landlines – Report for BT \(36 pages\)](#)