

Telephone calls in the near future: the Digital Switchover

Following previous articles in the *Courier*, a little further information has become available about the changes being made to the telephony infrastructure by BT Openreach, which some service providers are calling 'Digital Voice' (DV). This change affects all landlines in the UK and affects specifically your telephone service. Any internet service you have should be unaffected, as the standard option that most people will be changed to is using the internet service you already have – Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP).

BT advertises better telephone features for users, including 3-way calls, blocking nuisance calls, Calling Line Identity service (to see who's calling you), being able to divert a call from your landline to another number, better call quality and the voice messaging service (1571). Some of these features may also be available from other service providers.

In the short term, when folk renew their contracts or switch suppliers, they will now be switched over to one of two options within the new service. However, despite informing them about it happening, the supplier's staff may not explain the full implications of the change to the customer.

After Ofcom intervened, BT staff should now be more sympathetic to those not wanting to change to the new service in the short term, especially if you register with them as being over 65 or otherwise 'vulnerable' in some way or have (for example) a Medicare alarm. In the longer term, your service provider will inform you with a few weeks' notice, that the change will be happening for you, at which point you will need to decide how to cope with it.

My key advice remains – for any supplier, not just BT – talk to them and ask what they plan to do to maintain your services with them regarding this BT Openreach changeover. Hopefully this and previous articles, will give you sufficient background to have a meaningful conversation with them. Additionally, we have collated both general and supplier-specific information about this topic on the KCC website (www.killlearncc.org.uk/kgb-killlearn.html#digvoice) to expand on this short article.

For BT customers in particular, the new information is:

- For customers who have only a telephone service, BT will still encourage you to take on an internet service, even if it's just to cover the telephone aspect. Your existing equipment should still be useable.
- If the customer doesn't want to do this, BT will convert their existing phone line to be a Dedicated Home Phone Service (DHPS), and there will be no changes within the premises. Be aware that this alternative option is only a temporary measure until 2030.
- BT may also accept a postponement of any change, but only until January 2027.

The alternative is to rely totally on a mobile and just give up the landline.

For customers who already use an internet service, the change may be fairly simple. BT, EE, Sky and Zen all appear to be taking a similar approach, although a new router may be required if your present one does not have the type of socket required. This should retain your existing landline number. Vodafone may also be taking this approach.

Plusnet's approach is to focus on a cheap internet service, since many customers do not feel the need for a home-based phone and have already changed to using only a mobile for telephone calls. If a home-based phone is still desired, then a separate VOIP contract can be started, and possibly the existing landline number retained.

TalkTalk/Tiscali appear unclear as to their approach to the changeover at present. Virgin has not been checked currently as they may not have any customers in this area.

For BT, EE, Sky and Zen customers who use the internet and have only one telephone or a set of cordless phones, the effect of the change will only be to plug the phone, or base unit of the cordless set, into the back of the hub using the socket marked UK phone. If you don't have this socket, BT will either provide a new router or they will offer you an adapter.

If you use your phone line for a Mex Alarm or Home Security, your service may already have changed you over to a mobile-supported connection. If not, talk to them.

Another key point is that the revised system is plugged into your own electrical supply. You will be providing the power to make the service work. Although BT have a power supply unit (PSU) available to provide temporary back-up power for their equipment in case of a power cut, make sure that you have a contracted, charged, mobile phone available as a backup. BT now has a hybrid phone set available, the Motorola FW500, which uses the landline, but automatically switches to the mobile network in the event of a power cut.

Complications should only arise in three broad instances: if you use extension wiring to enable multiple handsets, if the router is located away from the most frequently used handset, or if you have 'other equipment' connected to the landline. 'Other equipment' might include a self-contained answering machine or a stand-alone ringer unit. These will need an adapter. It is possible to connect extension wiring into the back of the hub, but BT won't guarantee that it will work as before. However, they will provide one free Analogue Telephone Adapter (ATA) that connects on to your internal WiFi. Up to five of these adapters can be supported.

Some people use BT Call Guardian to screen incoming calls. This should still work, but do check with the BT Helpline.

Don't want the complexity of a full smart phone? The OwnFone device is a mobile phone pre-programmed with up to 12 numbers of your choice, but without other functions. It will roam across networks to ensure the best coverage possible, and comes with a lanyard so it is always beside you when needed.

If you want fuller information, please look at the KCC website (see above) or contact us via KCC or KCFC.

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After further desired tweaks (no more lines, but more words) now 1009 words {Doug}