

How the next big change in UK telecoms will benefit sole traders

You might have heard – the UK traditional phone network is about to become a thing of the past. Essentially BT Openreach is aiming to transfer more than 14 million legacy phones from the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) to internet-based, digital services by the end of 2025.

Temps de lecture : minute

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Sounds ambitious, but the plan is already well underway. From October 2021, customers and businesses in over 150 locations have been unable to renew or purchase legacy copper services – moving into what the industry calls “Stop Sell”. From as early as 2023, the rest of the country will follow suit.

With the changes brought on by the pandemic, and the switch off around the corner, there was never a better time for the micro market to review their current setup – a small step that could lead to substantial competitive advantage.

Navigating a sea of uncertainty

Regardless of size, in the past 18 months all businesses have had to adapt to a new way of working. Smaller businesses in particular, often lagging behind in the adoption of new technologies, were forced to fully embrace remote working (where possible) – a change that wasn’t without its challenges.

Allowing employees to work from home efficiently was just the tip of the

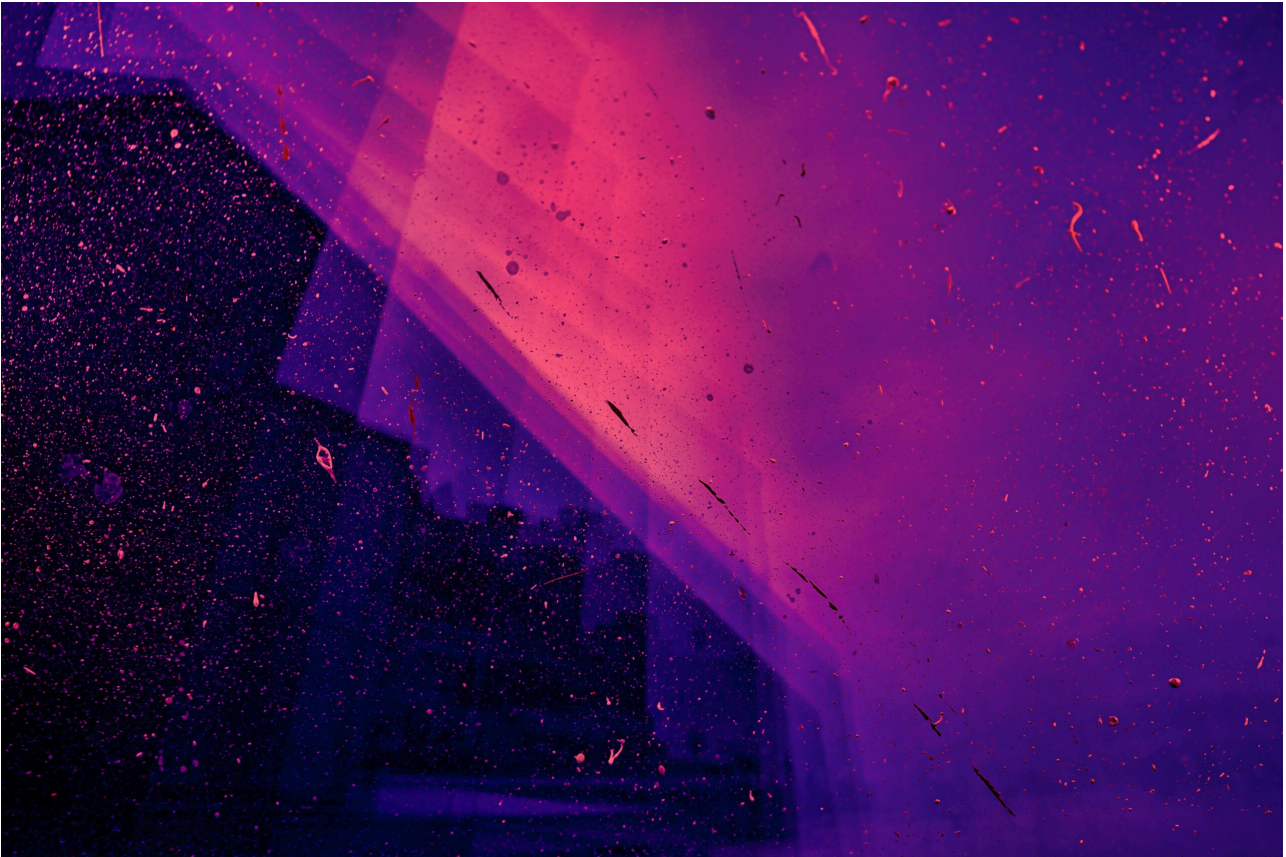
iceberg: from ensuring seamless customer communications, to redirecting calls from the office setup to a mobile or home office, small businesses have had their hands full.

For sole traders, the gap between work and personal life has been reduced even further. Even before the pandemic, 66% used personal mobile mobiles for business transactions - and filtering calls to distinguish between different callers (personal and professional) proved to be a challenge.

With the pandemic and traditional handset (tied to a fixed line in a fixed location) no longer viable due to lockdowns, personal mobile devices became an even more popular option for smaller businesses to stay in touch with customers - at the expense of work-life boundaries.

On top of that, with a spike in inbound calls from customers, many small businesses struggled to deal with so many interactions coming in at the same time, further hindered by a lack of appropriate tools to deal with missed calls and growing customer requests.

It sure hasn't been easy, but as the country approaches the end of legacy services and the economy begins to restart, now could be the best time for small businesses and sole traders to make the move to a brighter, and more lucrative, future.



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

The cloud is the answer

While the traditional phone network switch off could come across as an upheaval for small businesses, it can also prove to be beneficial to increase productivity and deliver a better customer experience.

Take a small solicitor firm: with a legacy phone line, their main point of communications – their phone number – is tied to a physical location. Not only that makes it tricky when employees are busy, but it also means that calls are often missed if no one is near that desk phone.

With Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) solutions (the alternative to legacy copper-based phone lines), that same small firm can take calls on whichever device they prefer, regardless of whether they're in the office

or in a client meeting. Sure, it can be a desk phone, but it can also extend to mobile phones, tablets, and computers – reducing the number of missed calls and ensuring that all calls are dealt appropriately. With internet-based telephony, voice and data are transferred over the internet, so that the service isn't tied to a fixed location, but it can work anywhere that there's a connection.

VoIP solutions also allow those businesses that use personal mobile devices to differentiate between personal and business calls, as it enables them to have more than a number on the same device – also great for those sole traders that run more than one business and have separate numbers for each one.

Moreover, as the way we communicate continues to change, VoIP opens up new opportunities as it updates and adapts automatically over the internet, and it's easy to scale up or down depending on business needs – great for those startups that are growing fast and will require more lines as the business evolves.

Endless opportunities

Ultimately the changes brought on by the pandemic has only exacerbated some of the challenges that small businesses and sole traders were already facing. The PSTN switch off can prove to be the opportunity that those businesses were waiting for to make the move to better, and often cheaper, technology. Now it's the best time to learn more about it and consider alternative options – the opportunities are endless for those that are ready to take them.

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