



Switch on to the Switch-Off

Get prepared for the copper switch-off
with BT Ireland Wholesale

Summary

The Irish Copper Switch-off is fast approaching.

The European Commission has urged Ireland to speed up switching off our out-of-date “copper” telephone services, and some have already been withdrawn from sale.

The process has effectively started, so why have nearly half of Irish SME’s not migrated to all-IP solutions yet?

This white paper highlights how a lack of awareness of the copper switch-off poses a threat to Irish Communication Providers, and the challenges they face as the switch-off looms.

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What is the Copper-Switch Off?

The PSTN has been the backbone of Irelands Fixed line networks for decades

The Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) has been supporting voice and data services to Irish residential and business customers for over half a century. However, as technology has become more advanced and we have moved to all-IP technologies, analogue services have since become outdated.

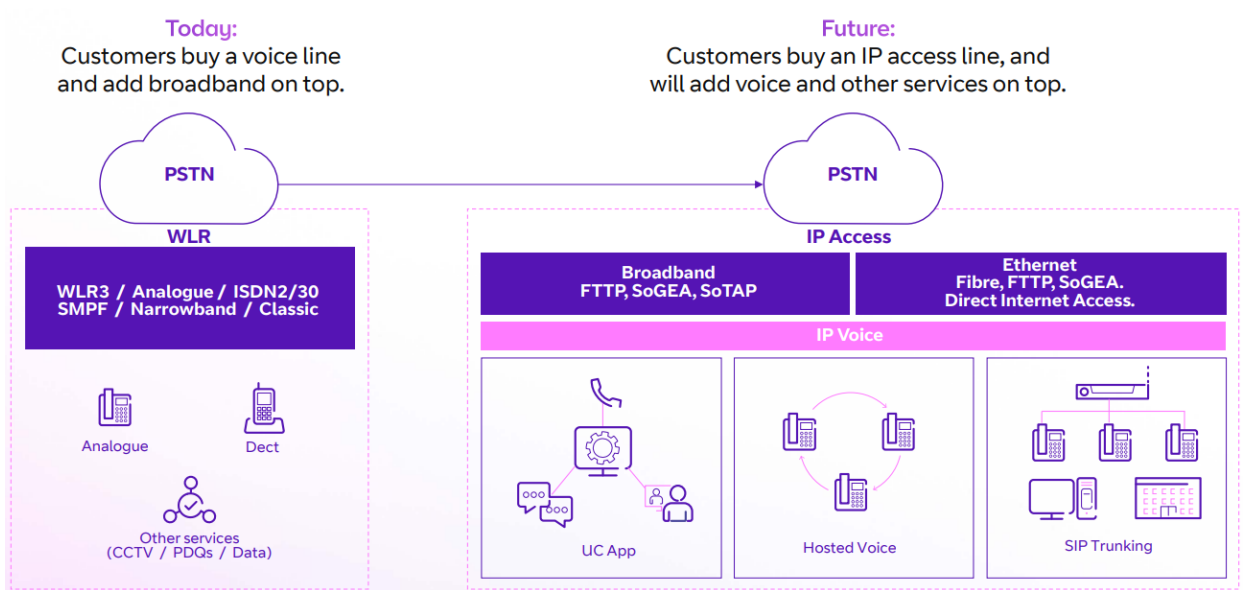
The retirement of PSTN is not unique to Ireland. Several countries including Norway, Spain, Portugal and the UK are currently transitioning, with BT leading the charge in the UK. Other countries such as the Netherlands and Estonia have already switched off their copper networks. The switch-off of Ireland's Copper PSTN network is supported by the Irish government and telecoms regulator ComReg.

Replacing the copper telephone network with fibre-based services requires substantial long-term funding. End users benefit greatly from moving to fibre services, but network providers and service providers also gain in a number of ways:

1. Retiring outdated and highly distributed POTS equipment reduces property and equipment maintenance costs
2. POTS consumes a lot of power. The energy saving arising from moving the network service to IP is substantial
3. Replacement fibre networks are inherently more stable and less susceptible to environmental factors (especially water) – so faults are less common.

The copper switch off brings benefits to both users and providers, but the process itself can be tricky.

The Transition journey to all-IP



Analogue to Digital services

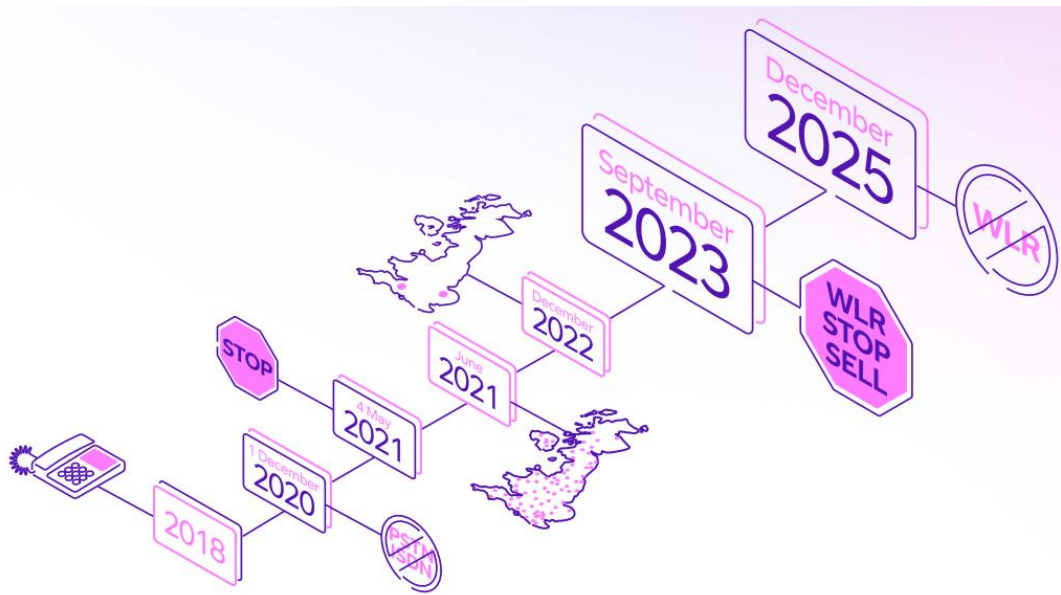
In today's Analogue environment, customers buy a voice line and add broadband on top. As we move to an all-IP digital environment customers will buy an IP access line and will add voice and other service on top. However, migration is not always straight forward.

Most Irish business customers still depend on traditional analogue and ISDN services. Many still rely on broadband services delivered over a telephone line. This can complicate the journey to IP Voice and modern Internet access.

Some complications include machine-to-machine links, where POTS lines support modem connections for alarms, lifts, faxes, card payment machines, CCTV, door entry systems.

Irish Communications Providers have a crucial role in helping business customers understand these obstacles, so they can manage them effectively.

The UK Experience



In the UK the copper Switch-Off is well underway, with stop-sell already in place and the switch-off scheduled for this year, December 2025.

The PSTN switch-off and associated migration presents unique challenges to both large and small Communication Providers (CPs). To understand the challenges of both types of providers, our UK colleagues spoke to both large and small resellers, with the help of thinktank Megabytes.

“Although the overwhelming majority of CPs are well-informed about the PSTN switch-off, it seems that end-customer awareness, even among larger CPs employing extensive marketing and sales campaigns, remains low”

Overall, Megabyte found that the larger UK CPs have been more proactive and prepared for the copper switch-off, than their smaller counterparts. This is generally due to the fact they have more resources to launch campaigns, educated salespeople and were able to halt the sales of analogue products ahead of the formal stop sell.

However, despite launching promotional campaigns, some of which were launched as far back as 24 months ago, migration, as well as new acquisition, has been slow mainly due to lack of end-customer awareness and understanding. This same knowledge gap is also prevalent in the Irish market.

The SME Challenge

To understand the challenge UK CPs face migrating customers, Megabyte captured an understanding of how both large and small business end-customers have been approaching the Switch-off.

They found that;

‘Larger end-customers in the UK are generally more aware, thanks to the presence of dedicated communications and IT managers responsible for staying current with product technology and advancements. However, in the case of most smaller end-customers, a communications oversight seems to be present by staff holding primary roles in other functions (e.g. Office Managers, Finance Directors, or Business Owners)’.

Another key finding highlighted by Megabyte, was that several UK CPs admitted that a non-insignificant proportion of their end-customers regard PSTN switch-off campaign as a ploy to get them to change/upgrade services. This distrust in the Switch-off programme is not helped by the wide variety of lexicon used across the industry to describe the same programme, such as PSTN switch-off, fibre switch-over, all-IP and digital.





The Irish Challenge

In March 2024 Siro published research conducted into 270 small to large Irish Businesses. The survey, which focused on broadband usage found that **over half of Irish Businesses (53%) are still not on a fibre broadband connection**, with Micro lagging behind the most.

The survey highlighted that the key barriers for customers to upgrade their broadband were:

- Cost (26%)
- Lack of fibre in my area (22%)
- We have other priorities (12%)
- Unsure of the benefits (12%)

Siro's research findings accentuate the need for resellers to educate customers about the benefits of fibre broadband vs old copper based broadband. They also must dispel fears around cost and proactively prepare business for the switch off.

Like the UK, the lack of understanding and awareness of the copper switch off is a key barrier to proactive migration. To understand this, BT Ireland commissioned Spark Market Research to survey 350 Irish SMEs.

BT Ireland found that only 45% of SMEs were aware of the switch-off.

This lack of public awareness surrounding the switch-off, compounded with the slow rate of fibre adoption, presents significant future challenges to Irish CPs. The longer customers wait to migrate the more likely they are to contract directly with fibre network providers, who are actively targeting CP customers.

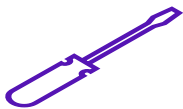
Additional Challenges

Once Irish SMEs can be won over by the benefits of switching and are willing to migrate, there are still additional challenges that need to be addressed, which include:



The limitation of current reach

FTTP is not universally available and even if it is 'available' at an exchange, it may not be available to all customers in the exchange areas, because roll out is on a phased basis



Operational Challenges

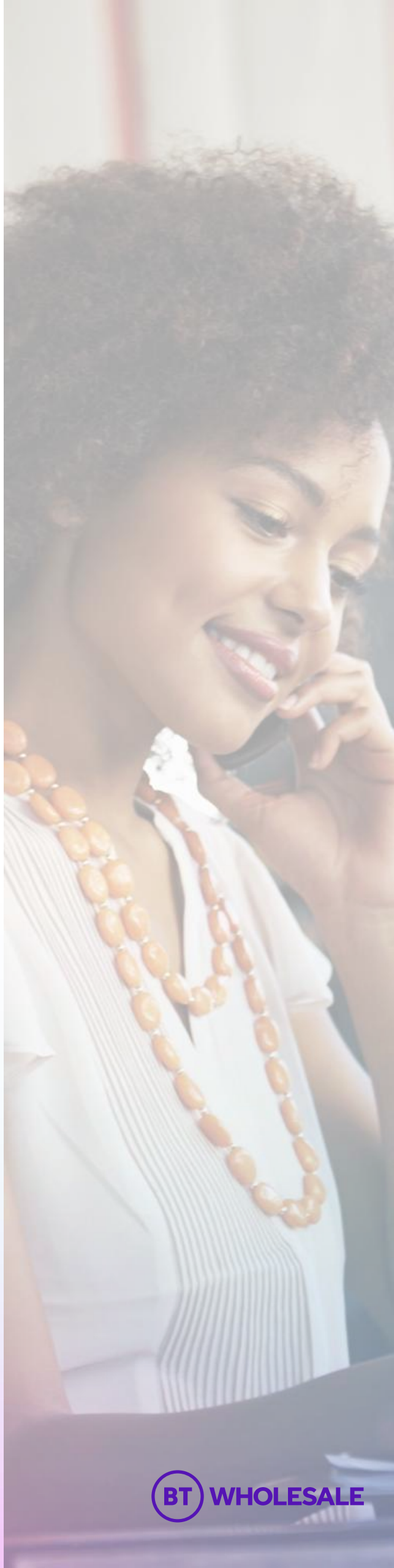
Switching may require cable installation into a premises, which potentially could be inconsistent with location of existing equipment (e.g., a payments terminal on a counter)



Edge Use Cases

Many CPs have no solution for edge use cases, such as lift telephones, alarm systems and fax machines.

New IP solutions are also not powered by the exchange, so are impacted by power outages – a fact which may have a greater impact on certain customers





Who should you be talking to?

There are two key groups of customers, on whom resellers should be focusing their communication efforts, around the copper switch-off.

Customers who are currently solely using WLR, PSTN and ISDN services are the most at risk, and should be targeted in communications. These customers need to be informed of their options, so they don't lose control over their migration process.

However, customers who already have VOIP should also be included, as many have retained POTS/ISDN services as a notional “back up”.

4 in 10 VOIP users say reliability is its main weakness

3 in 10 users say call quality is its main weakness

Our research has identified that many business on VOIP solutions are not satisfied and lack trust in their service. Many retain expensive legacy lines as a (false) comfort. They often keep it as a 'back up'.

The switch-off presents an opportunity to build genuine resilience into customer IP services, protecting them through the switch-off and beyond.

Risks to Irish CPs for not getting ahead of the challenge

It's clear that the Copper Switch-off poses a threat to Irish communication providers. The lack of end-user awareness surrounding the programme, along with unclear switch-off timelines, present challenges for resellers to communicate the advantages of early migration to their customers.

Eircom has yet to publish meaningful timelines of the phased switch-off. This uncertainty makes conversations with end users more difficult, especially since the switch-off has already started.

BT Ireland's research shows that Irish SMES are generally satisfied with their analogue services. They understand how to use them and feel they are reliable and fit for purpose. Many customers fear the unknown and if their business relies on mission-critical comms they are acutely concerned about potential disruption from this change. There is also concerns from both large and small SMES around additional costs which may be incurred in migration. Without a clear switch-off date SMEs, who are often time poor, cannot see the benefit in migrating.

It is therefore imperative that resellers tackle this challenge head on and proactively educate and support their customers in early migration. If the reseller does not have a clear communication strategy and migration plan for their end-user, they are likely to lose that customer. However, if they get ahead of the challenge, they have an opportunity to build a deep and long-term relationship with that customer

Don't put your head in the sand!

Stay ahead with BT Ireland



Tips to help your customers copper migration



Start Communicating

- There is low awareness of the Copper Switch-off in the market
- Customers are unsure what it means to them and are unaware that the Switch-off has already started!
- Start communication early, to ensure customers have the time to pick the right solution for their business

Make it real

- When it comes to telecommunication, there is a customer knowledge gap
- Customers need help understanding the value the Switch-off can bring to their business, through tangible and understandable messages
- They also lack knowledge around new technology and are looking for Providers to help them understand it

Think Products

- Check if your customer strategy has the right product set for your current business customer base and the segments you want to grow
- What will serve your customers the best? Identify if cloud-based products, or on-prem UC/IPT solutions are the best fit and ensure you have that in your product offering
- Fibre broadband services may not be sufficient – your customer may benefit from moving to dedicated Ethernet services. Ensure you give your customers time to understand their options

