

The PSTN switch off: it's not just about phones

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On January 31, 2027, the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) will be switched off. Awareness of the impact this will have on landlines is growing, but how the switch off affects other essential services — CCTV, alarms, lifts — has been widely overlooked. How can facility and building managers prepare for the PSTN switch-off to ensure all their digital devices stay connected? Here, Kristian Torode, Director and Co-Founder of PSTN switch off specialist, Crystaline, advises.

The PSTN is the underground web of copper wires that have traditionally powered landline telephones and carried broadband to residences and businesses across the UK. Since its introduction in the late 1800s, the PSTN has worked on the same principle of establishing a direct connection between telephones via an intermediary exchange. However, the old copper network will soon be switched off and replaced with modernised digital alternatives.

And switching over won't only impact telephones. Approximately nine out of ten businesses have essential services that rely on the PSTN, including CCTV, alarm systems and lift emergency lines. These systems are often taken for granted, with their essential role only becoming apparent when something goes wrong and disrupts the smooth functioning of a building.

The risk of inaction

When the PSTN switch-off happens, any CCTV, alarm system and lift emergency line still reliant on traditional analogue or ISDN connections will stop working unless it's migrated to a digital alternative.

Currently, the PSTN connects CCTV to a monitoring service or control room. In the event of a security issue, the network transmits video signals or alerts through phone lines to notify security personnel. In

alarm systems and lifts, it works to directly contact emergency services or security companies.

If these systems aren't working properly, building managers may face increased security risks, higher insurance premiums and, potentially, legal liability. Since 1997, lifts have been legally required to have a functioning two-way communication system. Furthermore, incidents not recorded by CCTV could lead to expensive and time-consuming investigations, draining company resources.

So, what steps can building managers follow to ensure a smooth transition when the PSTN is switched off?

Key steps

First, we suggest managers develop a clear timeline for the switch-off in their local area. Changing landlines may be as simple as switching mobile data points; however, essential services may prove more difficult to switch, possibly requiring a greater infrastructure update.

Having developed a switch-off timeline, facilities managers should complete an audit, identifying all systems that rely on the PSTN, locating where these lines are physically connected, and verifying which lines are active, dormant or backup.

Completing an audit will also identify how many systems will rely on broadband after the switch-off. Old fibre broadband can handle digital alternatives like Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), but only if there is sufficient bandwidth. A pending increase in VoIP-hosted systems could reduce bandwidth and lead to a slower connection.

To mitigate this potential issue, we suggest that while upgrading to VoIP facilities managers also consider full fibre broadband. A futureproofed choice, full fibre supports cloud adoption, promising ultrafast speeds and reliable quality, critical for alarms and emergency lines.

Once preparations are in place, it's time to upgrade. When upgrading essential systems, engaging and coordinating with accredited service providers is important. First and foremost, this will help optimise the system setup, ensure proper integration with

existing building infrastructure and maintain compliance with national and industry-specific safety, security and emergency communication standards, such as BS 5839 regulations for fire alarms.

It will also help monitor system performance, conducting regular performance audits of VoIP-based systems to identify areas for improvement and scheduling preventative maintenance.

Furthermore, facility managers should establish Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with their provider. An SLA ensures service providers promptly respond and resolve network or equipment issues. This is especially important to have given the unprecedented nature of the switch-off. Crystalline offers various PSTN replacements, as well as the expertise to help facility managers navigate the switchover and an SLA that ensures a strong and dependable service tailored to specific operational needs.

With two years until the deadline, facility managers have ample time to guarantee essential systems remain reliable and compliant. Crystalline can assist facilities managers by offering support in transitioning to digital solutions, including consultation and audit services, VoIP solutions and custom communication packages, helping to secure your building's connectivity and functionality.



To learn more about Crystalline's PSTN switch-off support services for SMEs, including those in the care sector, and to explore digital telephony alternatives, visit the website.