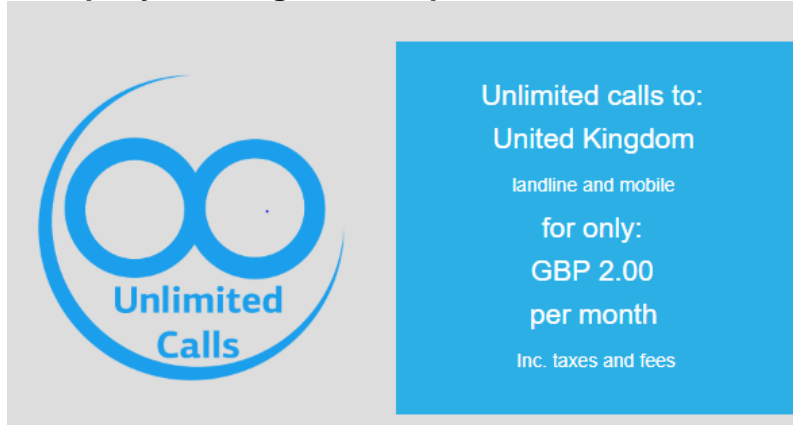


Abthorpe Broadband Association Ltd.

Bringing Broadband to the community since 2003.

VOIP telephone services over the internet (ditch your land-line!)

- **Cheap – you can get all-UK phone calls for £2/month**



- **Versatile – answerphone, third party, texts, recording – many services for free**
- **Use your existing phone or your mobile anywhere in the world via an App**
- **Pay-as-you-go with optional automatic top-up; monthly packages; etc.**
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Here is a very good explanation of what VOIP is and why you should change. We give acknowledgement to PCMagazine for the content.

When people mention voice over IP (VoIP), up to now, most think about a business phone service rather than home phone. After all, businesses run data networks and that's what VoIP needs for it to operate. But because the majority of homes in Tove Valley Broadband's catchment have a very good Internet connection, using VoIP for your domestic telephone service makes no-brainer sense. If you're careful about what you buy – some providers target the domestic market - you can take advantage of VoIP's key benefits, which include far more features and a much lower price tag than an old-fashioned landline from any provider.

There are several dedicated residential VoIP providers who offer nationwide service, usually with worldwide calling plans. With one of these you should be offered at least four core features. Those include caller ID, voicemail hosted by the provider (meaning you don't need an answering machine), call waiting (essentially a one-line hold), and three-way calling allowing you to reach out to a third participant in any phone conversation. There will likely be a slew of other features available, but they'll differ across providers while these four should always be available.

You will need an Analogue Telephone Adapter or ATA which converts your voice into digital signals and vice-versa. These can be a separate device or built into a special VoIP phone. A separate ATA (£20-£30) will allow old-style landline and DECT phones to continue to be used. Check whether the provider supplies an ATA or VoIP-phone. Either the VoIP phone or the ATA will be connected to your Internet router in some way and then configured to access the VoIP provider's service. It's also possible to have a mobile phone

App which, connected to your WiFi or anywhere with internet access, provides all the services you need – read on.

Whether it's a dedicated ATA bridge, a special VoIP phone or a mobile phone App you'll need to program access to your chosen VoIP provider. It's at this layer where VoIP's advanced communication and collaboration features are enabled. The best providers should be able to ship you pre-configured devices that shouldn't require much, if any, intervention on your part. With these, you simply plug them into your router or connect them to your Wi-Fi network and they'll go out and find the provider's network on their own. Just power them up, connect to your network, and wait for the light to turn green. Most providers will also have support information which will help you to program access to their services from any ATA/phone/App.

That covers VoIP basics, but what about the more advanced options, and why is VoIP able to offer more advanced features where a regular phone can't? Again, the secret is software. A VoIP system, whether home or business, can access a much richer software layer than a standard line from the plain old telephone service (POTS). On the business side, this flexibility has extended to integrating VoIP with other forms of communication to such a degree they all become a single platform, generally called Unified Communications as a Service (UCaaS). You won't need anything that sophisticated when you're shopping for residential service, however.

Typically, price is one of the most important reasons people opt for residential VoIP. There are “packages” where you pay £x/month and get a combination of UK landline and mobile; specific Country landline and mobiles and all world services. We urge you to look at “pay-as-you-go” services as well. You should make an assessment of your phone use before doing research on the VoIP providers.

Another generally important issue is whether you can “port” your existing telephone number to the VoIP service. In most provider's case, this is possible *but you must let the provider do it for you*. They will notify your existing provider and make the arrangements. *Do not give notice to your existing provider yourself*. Some VoIP providers charge for this service but it is very well worth it.

In general, you will choose a telephone number from a vast range when you sign up. This may be a number in your local area or (almost) anywhere else. If you port your existing number, *this will be an additional number* on your account – you may use either!

The only area where a landline offers something VoIP phones can't is that they're more disaster resistant. Lost power to your house and your landline phone will keep on working but if the power drops to your home's supply, your VoIP service is lost, too. However, this limitation is less crippling these days as most people have a mobile phone of some kind backing up their home phone. Additionally, if you get a simple Uninterruptible Power Supply (UPS) you can power your internet connection and your ATA and phone, providing hours of power to mitigate any mains interruptions.

Overall, VoIP is simply the better option for the vast majority of customers. Dropping your landline means no more hidden fees or metered long distance calling charges. Everything is charged at one low rate by most providers and your ability to customize your phone service to exactly what you need is far greater. Unless you've got some highly unique circumstances that somehow mandate a landline, VoIP is simply the better choice.

How to switch to VoIP

If you want to port your existing land-line number to VoIP you **MUST** let the new service provider do this for you otherwise you may very well lose out on cost and time.

You will need to sign up for a VoIP service. This is done on-line with one of the many providers that are just a Google search away.

May we suggest the following:

Voipfone residential pay-as-you-go – you can order a VoIP telephone (£54 to £100) or an ATA where you can keep your current telephone equipment (£60) and you can transfer your existing phone number for £24. The best option would be to buy your own ATA and program it if you feel able to. If you are a light land-line telephone user this is for you – your costs are likely to be less than £50/year.

Vonage for home – no payg option so you will have to choose a plan to suit the kind of telephone calls you make. Vonage provide you with their own ATA for free and you can plug your existing phone system to it. Vonage costs £125/year for UK land-line dialling (all other calls are charged) and there is a £15 set-up charge. However, if you seek out the TVB link to Vonage, you will get a £30 cash-back offer.

Voipcheap – a good, basic, cheap VoIP provider.

You may get further help from

www.broadbandchoices.co.uk/guides/internet/internet-phone-voip-offers

Most VOIP providers have a “softphone” app that runs on your mobile phone. These allow you to make and receive calls on your “home” number from your mobile wherever you are. If you want to use an app like this you should also investigate independent suppliers (eg ZoiPer). These can sometimes be more cost effective, particularly if you have more than one VOIP provider. “softphone” Apps are generally free.

Before you change

1. do you have a BT or other “old” telephone service *in contract* and what is the end date?
2. do you have any alarm systems through the telephone?
3. do you rely on old wired extension phones?

The answers to these basic questions will dictate your process of change.

You should, if possible, sign up to a VOIP service 1 week before the end date of any contract you are under.

You should check on how your alarm works and whether it can be re-located within your house.

You should buy a DECT phone system and get used to it before the change.

If any of these are appropriate to you, seek further help.

Can TVB help?

Tove Valley Broadband only supplies your broadband service and cannot help with advice regarding telephone suppliers or with technical issues around installation.

However, over 75% of TVB members have moved over to a VoIP supplier – all with very few problems. Ask around your neighbours in the village and you will soon find someone who has switched. If there is no local help, then raise a ticket to TVB and we’ll see what we can do.

Warning *With VoIP you can dispense with your landline altogether. However, if there is a power failure, the broadband will fail and so, of course, will the VoIP telephone service. For this reason it is wise to ensure that you have a mobile phone and a good signal as an alternative in case of emergency. Also be aware that some mobile companies supply repeater boxes that connect to the internet to give service in poor mobile reception areas. These will also fail in a mains power / broadband outage. The ultimate situation to offset all concerns over loss of power and therefore*

telephone service is to invest in an Uninterruptible Power Supply or UPS which is used to power your broadband termination equipment, your ATA and your phones.