

When are POTS Lines Going Away?

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If you ask anyone selling VoIP products or services, you will likely hear that POTS (Plain Old Telephone Service) or PSTN (Public Switched Telephone Network) lines are either gone or will be gone by the end of the year. Their all-caps announcements appear to be fact filled and quote FCC orders to add to their credibility. Search “POTS Sunset” and you would think the sky is falling. Unfortunately, FCC docs are written for the telecom industry, not the general public, so the facts become easy to blur.

Before going any further, I must state that JK Audio is a US manufacturer of audio interface equipment for POTS, VoIP, and wireless communications, so we have vested interest in the success of ANY communications platform. We just want to set the record straight for POTS, at least here in the US.

You may have read VoIP provider’s claims that POTS carriers must transition to alternate services by August 2, 2022. While this date correctly references a three-year timetable granted by the FCC on August 2, 2019, the above claim is a misinterpretation of the facts.

FCC Order 19-72A1 grants forbearance to LECs (Local Exchange Carriers) from the mandate of providing UNE (Unbundled Network Element) Analog Loops to incumbent LECs. In layman’s terms, the original Telecom Act of 1996 required local phone companies to provide access to subscriber copper loops to their competitors at a fixed cost. This order releases local phone companies from the obligation to provide these loops to their competitors. This obligation ends August 2, 2022. Back in 2019 there were only 1.8M subscriptions using UNE Analog Loops.

This order does NOT require phone companies to shut off their own customers POTS lines this year, nor does it set a mandatory sunset date for POTS lines from local carriers. According to the FCC, there were still 36M POTS lines in 2021. Bottom line is that your local phone carrier will decide when it is time to end POTS service.

Our office currently has nine POTS lines as well as DSL and cable VoIP. A quick call to our local carrier, Frontier, promised no immediate plan to discontinue POTS service in Illinois. In fact, since they also sell DSL, they have a vested interest in maintaining copper loops.

POTS lines offer something that you simply cannot get from VoIP. The simplicity of plugging in a phone and making a call. In fact, the simplicity of POTS is so valuable that VoIP systems often include POTS jacks for accessories like a fax machine or cordless phone. They also sell a device known as an ATA (Analog Telephone Adapter) that assigns phone numbers to a number of RJ11 phone jacks. While VoIP is certainly more powerful and, in most cases, less expensive than POTS lines, VoIP can be a bit complicated and requires a reliable network. For these reasons POTS is often considered a base layer in communications redundancy for broadcast and critical communications networks.

Yes, there will eventually be a POTS/PSTN sunset, but that sunset is not yet on the horizon :-)

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