

# Legacy phone lines are draining your profits.

## How do you stop the leak?



It's easy to look at your company's expenses for legacy phone service as just another cost of doing business. But you should know that the U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) lifted its oversight of the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) in a 2019 order effective August 2022. Decade after decade, the PSTN has connected not only analog telephones but also life safety devices such as fire alarm panels, elevator phones, building entry systems, blue light safety phones, pool phones, and more. Even with deregulation, these critical phone systems are mandated to stay operational. For example, fire alarm panels must adhere to the NFPA 72 code and elevator phones need to comply with the ASME A17.1 safety requirements.

Consequently, three things are happening in the industry simultaneously.

**1. Plain Old Telephone Service (POTS) is going away.** FCC data shows that the number of POTS lines in the United States plummeted from 122 million in

2010 to less than 40 million today. If copper wire lines continue to be shut down at the current rate, there will be few or none left by 2026.

- 2. POTS lines are becoming more expensive.** The FCC and state regulators have removed price caps on POTS lines, and carriers are taking advantage of this to significantly increase rates. As a result, many companies are paying millions of dollars in unnecessary overhead expenses for those POTS lines.
- 3. Quality of service for POTS lines is declining.** Free of regulation, some carriers are simply maximizing opportunity with a captive audience by providing less service on their POTS networks. The California Public Utilities Commission, in an April 2019 report, found multiple instances of neglect by AT&T, the state's primary provider of POTS lines.

The eventual demise of the copper line infrastructure impacts numerous industry segments where mandated critical systems are in place.

Businesses and building owners should take action to ensure that life safety systems such as fire alarms, elevator phones, and other safety systems remain operational and in compliance.

## The alternatives

Replacing existing devices is expensive and disruptive to a business, since many are embedded in buildings and require renovation work to replace. A quick calculation of replacing all fire alarm panels, elevator phones, security/door entry panels, burglar alarm systems, and public safety phones across all locations gives you an idea of the magnitude of the lift.

The alternative is a POTS replacement solution that enables you to easily migrate life safety devices that rely on analog phone lines to a wireless network. This protects existing device and infrastructure investments while limiting or eliminating downtime for installation and immediately reducing costs through a steep reduction in monthly service rates. The savings from a POTS replacement solution can be significant – potentially millions of dollars every year!

## The hunt for POTS lines that bleed cash

POTS replacement should begin with an audit to determine how many POTS lines an organization is paying for, versus how many lines are in use, where each line is located and what equipment is connected to those lines.

For example, there might be legacy lines that were once allocated for old fax machines that no longer exist. The larger the company, the greater the likelihood of orphaned phone lines. Companies can save thousands of dollars each month on overhead expenses just by identifying unused lines.



An organization's accounting or finance team can provide records that list how many POTS lines are billed and the facilities where the lines are located. An IT or telecom specialist should then visit each facility to identify actual wiring.

This exercise can be an eye-opener, especially for larger businesses when active POTS lines are discovered that aren't connected to any devices or — the reverse — when an audit uncovers devices that were believed to be active but aren't connected to live POTS lines. Sometimes these money-drains have been siphoning cash for years or even decades.

The final task in the audit process is making a list of the lines that will be replaced, noting the phone number and the device associated with each line as well as the location of each device.

## **What should you look for in a POTS replacement solution?**

The next step is selecting a POTS replacement solution. Here's a checklist to help your company select a POTS replacement vendor:

- **Look for a full-service provider.**

Find a provider that can perform a complete site assessment, do installation, and provide support in order to reduce complexity and offer a turnkey solution.

- **Check for regulatory compliance.**

Life safety systems are covered by regulations — such as NFPA 72 for fire alarms and ASME A17.1 for elevator phones — that have specific requirements for POTS replacement, such as mandating that a device use a private network rather than sending data over the public internet. Don't get stuck with POTS replacement solutions that aren't designed to achieve regulatory compliance.

- **Look for one unified bill.**

POTS replacement solutions typically involve multiple services — including wireless data and phone service — in one box. Some solutions are incomplete, leaving it to the customer to provision the hardware with services. Others require tracking and paying monthly bills from more than one provider. The best POTS replacement solutions deliver one comprehensive bill from one vendor.

■ **Insist on remote management.**

Look for a solution that offers remote management through a web portal to instantly check the status of all POTS replacement devices, along with automatic notification for key personnel when a line goes down.

■ **Insist on flexibility.**

POTS replacement solutions often need to be installed in cramped spaces, such as basements or crowded equipment closets. Choose hardware that can be wall-mounted or shelf-mounted and has an option for the antennae to be physically separated from the base station to help ensure optimum coverage.

■ **Consider reputation.**

Many small and minimally funded vendors are charging into POTS replacement. Look for a vendor with a solid track record of delivering telecommunications services over a span of years.

■ **Demand excellent support.**

The gold standard for tech support is 24/7, with a clear escalation path when issues can't be fixed on the first call. Selecting a single vendor eliminates finger-pointing when troubleshooting devices.

## **The final step: installing your new system**

Installation of POTS replacement units needs to be carefully coordinated, especially at the moment when numbers are ported from the old POTS lines to the POTS replacement solution, to avoid downtime.

Installation work should be assigned to a telecom specialist who understands your telephony environment. The specialist will need access to your wiring closets and a list of the phone numbers of the POTS lines that are being replaced. Prior to migration, test all devices to ensure that they are operational. In many cases, the lines will need to be traced both externally and internally to determine the correct lines to transition. Special testing will be needed for elevator phones and fire and burglar alarm panels as a precaution to make sure that they are connecting properly. Immediately after installation, all downstream systems should be tested to confirm that the new virtual POTS lines are active.

When all work is complete, you get two instant benefits: peace of mind from knowing that your facilities are no

longer at risk from the end of POTS, plus a significant drop in monthly overhead expenses.

## Summary

POTS line expenses have been skyrocketing since the FCC lifted its oversight of the PSTN and allowed carriers to raise rates and decommission service. POTS lines that support critical life safety devices could be costing your company millions of dollars in wasteful overhead expenses.

The good news is that a solution exists that can maintain existing infrastructure, improve reliability, and substantially lower cost. With new technology, previous company investments in physical infrastructure and life safety devices – such as fire alarm panels, elevator phones, and facility security systems – can be maintained even as the PSTN is bypassed. This type of POTS replacement solution can maintain

compliance with emergency phone and fire alarm regulations and significantly lower monthly overhead costs. Before you move forward with a POTS replacement solution, it is critical to enlist a partner that meets all the selection criteria.

Ooma AirDial® is the hassle-free, all-in-one solution POTS line replacement solution bringing together hardware, data, remote device management, and phone service at one low monthly rate. Built with regulatory compliance in mind, Ooma AirDial supports alarm and fire panels, safety phones, building entry systems, and more. Reduce complexity by addressing all your POTS replacement needs with one provider. Ooma has you covered from assessment to installation and support with one turnkey solution. Enjoy the confidence of being on a reliable platform trusted by more than two million users.

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