

Your landline number has been with you for years. Maybe decades. It's on your business cards, your GP record, your bank account. You want to keep it, but you also want to switch broadband, move to full fibre, or get out of a contract that isn't working for you. Simple enough, right? Port the number to a VoIP provider, get the new broadband sorted, move on.

Here's what most people don't find out until it's too late: porting your landline number can automatically cancel your broadband. Without warning. Without a separate instruction from you. Just, gone.

□ <https://nextdoor.co.uk/pages/wifi-geek-chertsey-gb-eng/>

Why your phone number and broadband are more tangled than you think

When your broadband comes bundled with a Digital Voice landline, which is the case for most UK households on BT, Sky, EE, TalkTalk, Plusnet, and Vodafone, the phone number and the broadband service sit on the same Openreach line record. They're not two separate things. They're one package, recorded as one item in Openreach's system.

This matters enormously when you try to move just one of them. I covered Digital Voice and router lock-in back in post <https://nextdoor.co.uk/p/RstJmCHh428K>, how the phone service ties you to your ISP's router and limits your options. But there's a deeper trap that post didn't cover: what happens when you try to port that number to a VoIP provider while keeping the broadband.

The cease notice problem

When you initiate a number port, whether to a VoIP provider like Phonely or AAISP, or to another ISP, the Openreach system interprets that as a migration request on the whole line. The losing ISP receives a notification that their customer is leaving. And because the phone number and broadband are recorded as a single bundled service, the system treats the departure of the number as the departure of everything. The result: your broadband gets scheduled for cancellation on the same date the number port completes. You didn't ask for that. Nobody told you it would happen. But it does. This is confirmed by ISPs who operate at the infrastructure level. In plain terms: as soon as a bundled number is ported to VoIP, the PSTN landline service is taken out, which in turn cancels the broadband at the same time.

The contract trap

This is where it gets particularly nasty if you're still within your minimum contract term. If your number port triggers a cease, and you're still in contract, your ISP may treat that as an early termination and charge you accordingly. Early termination charges (ETCs) on broadband contracts can run to several hundred pounds depending on how far through the contract you are and what package you're on. You didn't cancel the contract. You tried to keep your phone number. But as far as the system is concerned, the line ceased and the consequences follow from that.

The sequencing problem

Even if you're out of contract, the timing creates a gap. The number port completes, the broadband ceases, and then you need to order a new broadband service. But new service provisioning takes time, typically one to two weeks on FTTP. During that window you have neither your old broadband nor your new one. If the cabinet in your street has a waiting list (and some do, particularly for FTTC), you may not get back on in the timeframe you expected.

The right order of operations

The safe way to handle this, confirmed by ISP engineers who've worked through these scenarios is to get the new broadband live first, on a completely separate order, before touching the phone number. Specifically: commission the new FTTP service as a separate order rather than a transfer. Get it installed and working. Then, once the new broadband is confirmed live, port the phone number to a VoIP provider. At that point the old bundled service ceases, but you already have new broadband running, so there's no gap. The overlap means paying for two broadband services briefly. That's unavoidable. But it protects you from the gap, the cease notice, and the potential ETC.

What this means in practice

If you're thinking about switching ISP, moving to full fibre, or simply trying to get out of a contract and you have a Digital Voice landline number you want to keep, the phone number is not the simple part of the move. It's the most complicated part.

Before you do anything:

- Find out whether your broadband and phone are bundled on the same Openreach line record (almost certainly yes if you're on BT, Sky, EE, TalkTalk, or Plusnet)
- Check whether you're still in your minimum contract term and what the ETCs would be if the line were to cease
- Plan the new broadband order as a separate commission, not a transfer
- Port the number only once the new service is live and confirmed

The landline number that's been yours for twenty years is worth keeping. Just know what moving it actually triggers before you trigger it.

Have you been caught out by this, or had a number port go smoothly? Drop a comment, it's one of those situations where other people's experience is genuinely useful ☐