The A to Z of digital transformation

All businesses need to move to digital phone lines in the next few years. And although the move isn't necessarily complicated for you, you might come across some confusing tech speak – not good when you're trying to make a decision for your business.

In this A to Z guide, we'll explain what some of these terms mean, so you can choose the digital solutions for you.

A

All-IP
This basically means all data is carried using internet technology. So in the case of all-IP phone networks, voice calls are converted into digital data before being transmitted over the internet. When people write about getting ready for all-IP, they're usually talking about moving to digital solutions before the old analogue phone network is switched off.
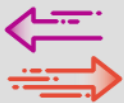
API
An application programme interface. This is a piece of software that sits between two other applications and basically acts like a translator. It allows two different programmes to talk and respond to each other.

Augmented reality
Put on an augmented reality headset, and you'll be able to see images and text overlaid on a view of the real world. This has many potential applications for a variety of industries, including medicine and engineering.

B

C

Bandwidth
This basically means how much data you can transfer over your internet connection in a given time. This is closely related to your internet speed, and both are usually written in terms of bits per second (for example, 100 megabits per second or 100Mbps).

Bits
The bit is a basic unit of information in computing. 1,000 bits make a kilobit; 1,000 kilobits make a megabit; 1,000 megabits make a gigabit, and so on. Bits are commonly used to express data speeds and bandwidth.

Bytes
Normally used when talking about data storage. In some circumstances, 1,000 bytes are said to make up a megabyte. In others, the number is 1,024. As with bits, this repeats, to make gigabytes, terabytes and so on.

Cloud
The cloud just refers to remote computers called servers, which you access over the internet. Whether you're using cloud storage, cloud apps or cloud telephony, you connect to one of these servers.

D

Desk phone

Quite simply a phone that sits on your desk and uses a traditional-style handset. This is a generic term, so it includes old-fashioned analogue desk phones and their digital alternatives.

Digital transformation

This can mean different things to different people, but essentially it's about changing the way businesses work, by bringing in modern, digital technologies.

Digital phone line

A phone line that uses the internet to transmit calls instead of sending them over analogue, copper wires. It's also referred to as VoIP and IP telephony.

Encryption

An important security feature in a lot of technologies, encryption is the process of encoding information so it can't be read without the appropriate key. A good digital phone line will use encryption so third parties can't intercept your calls and listen to them.

Exchange

A telephone exchange (also known as a telephone switch or central office) is a system that is used to connect calls. There are exchanges all over the UK, managed by Openreach. As we get closer to 2025, these are being upgraded to offer full fibre connections instead.

E

F

FTTC
Fibre to the cabinet refers to a type of internet connectivity. High-bandwidth optical cables run from local exchanges to street cabinets (those big, green boxes you sometimes see on pavements). From there, the cabinet connects to homes and businesses using the old copper wires.

FTTP
Fibre to the premises is what it sounds like. This is where every part of the journey, from exchange to cabinet to premises, uses optical fibre cables. That means you get the best possible speeds and bandwidth.

Full fibre
Quite simply, this is another way to say FTTP.

H

Hosted Centrex
This is a type of completely digital phone system. It's where a centrex (central exchange) is hosted in a cloud environment, and it can be used to fully replace an analogue system like a PBX box.

Hosted voice
Another way to say internet telephony. Basically, it means your phone system is virtual rather than physical and is hosted in the cloud.
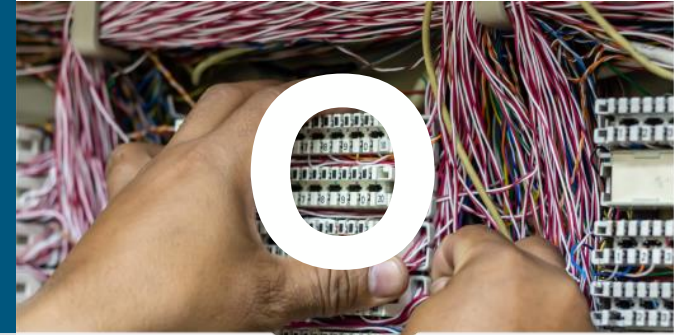
Hybrid working
Where people spend some of their time working in the office and some of it working remotely, usually at home. Digital phone lines make hybrid working easier by allowing people to take their normal phone numbers with them everywhere. And digital collaboration tools like video calling and instant messaging help to maintain productivity.

I

Internet of Things
Also known as IoT, the Internet of Things is about putting internet connectivity into physical objects to make them more useful. This can include things like smart fridges and smart speakers, as well as discrete sensors, which can be used to gather and send data.

IP telephony
An alternative way of referring to digital phone lines. 'IP' stands for Internet Protocol, and it's what also gives rise to the term 'IP address'.
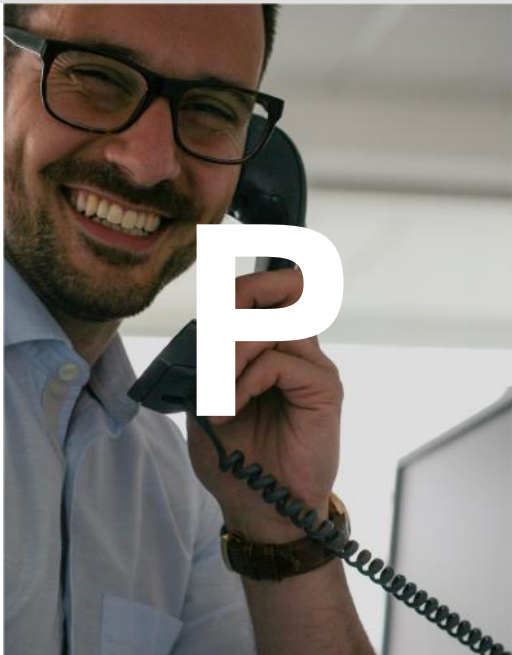
ISDN
Short for Integrated Services Digital Network, ISDN is a type of telephone network that can transmit both voice and data. Basically, it sends digital data over an old-fashioned copper line. It's now reaching the end of its usefulness, and Openreach will be switching the UK's ISDN network off in 2025.
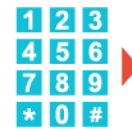
O

Openreach
A subsidiary of the BT Group, Openreach runs the UK's digital network. Its work is essential in moving the country from analogue phone lines to a digital, full fibre network.

P

PBX
Standing for Private Branch Exchange, PBX is a type of private telephone network used by businesses. Common in larger businesses with many users, PBX boxes connect and route calls to the right places. Businesses can replace their PBX with a fully digital system like Hosted Centrex. Or they can keep their PBX and connect it to the internet using a system called SIP trunking.

Porting
This refers to number porting. Quite simply, it means the process of moving a phone number to a different provider.

PSTN
The Public Switched Telephone Network is the old, copper-based, analogue telephone network, which stretches to practically every corner of the UK. It's served the country well for many decades, but it's no longer able to keep up with the demands of modern life. That's why it's being replaced with a digital alternative.

S

SaaS

This is short for software as a service. With SaaS, instead of downloading an application, you access software over the internet, usually through a web browser. And instead of paying for it outright, you sign up for a subscription instead. Popular examples include Salesforce, Dropbox and Mailchimp.

Server

A server is just a computer that other computers can connect to. Servers deliver a variety of web services, including websites, cloud storage, cloud backup and web apps.

SIP trunking

Based on a technology called Session Internet Protocol, SIP trunking lets you connect an analogue PBX phone system to the internet. This can enable you to stagger your transition digital solutions.

Softphone

An app on a computer or mobile phone that allows you to make phone calls over the internet.

T

U

Teams

A unified communications tool from Microsoft.

Unified communications

This refers to the integration of a few different communication methods. Typically, that might include voice calling, video conferencing and instant messaging, all in a single platform.

UCaaS

Short for 'unified communications as a service', this is the same as unified communications, but everything is hosted remotely in the cloud.

V

Virtual reality
With virtual reality (VR), you can view and interact with a three-dimensional, computer-generated environment, using a VR headset. These are particularly popular among consumers, but they have business uses too, including for training and virtual meetings.

Video call
Quite simply, a call made using a webcam. You can make a video call on a desktop computer, a laptop or even a phone. Also, many digital desk phones now include a camera too, so you can make video calls.

Video conferencing
Another way of describing video calls, but with one big difference. A video conference can include more than two people, who can connect from multiple different locations.

VoIP
If you've used software like Webex, Skype or Teams, you might have heard of VoIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol) already. It basically just means phone calls that are carried over the internet.

W

Webex
A unified communications tool created by software company Cisco.

Z

Zoom
A popular video conferencing tool.

We're here to help

If you're unsure about how to get your business ready for the digital future, get in touch with us at sales@flrs.co.uk. We can help you find the right solutions for your business and your budget, whether you need digital phone lines, future-proof broadband or both.

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