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AT&T tempts landline users to move to wireless phone services with contract-free offer

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(/author/Ian-Paul/) By Ian Paul (/author/Ian-Paul/)

Contributor, TechHive (<http://www.techhive.com>)

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Traditional copper wire telephone service is a dying business thanks to the growing popularity of wireless smartphones and tablets, and



at&t

AT&T knows it.

The company since at least 2009 has been trying to convince the Federal Communications Commission to roll back requirements (http://www.pcworld.com/article/185649/ATT_Tells_FCC_Its_Time_to_Cut_the_Cord.html) that AT&T and other companies offer public switched telephone networks.

Instead, AT&T would serve customers with its wireless and broadband networks for everything from Internet access to voice calls. The FCC in 2009 issued a public call for comment (http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DA-09-2517A1.pdf) (PDF) on the idea of moving America's phones from a circuit-switched network to an all-Internet Protocol network.

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While AT&T wrangles with the FCC over legacy technology, the company is moving ahead with new services to convince its phone customers to give up their legacy services.

AT&T Wednesday announced it now offers its Wireless Home Phone service (<http://www.att.com/shop/wireless/devices/att/wireless-home-phone-silver.html?WT.srch=1&wtPaidSearchTerm=at%26t+wireless+home+phone+service#fbid=VAe0Kmp7L2f>) contract-free for \$20 per month, which includes unlimited, nationwide calling.



(<http://images.techhive.com/images/article/2010029985-orig.jpg>)

How AT&T Wireless Home Phone works

If you already have AT&T wireless service, you can add your home phone to an existing Family Talk plan for an extra \$10 per month.

For another \$15 per month, you can also purchase 1,000 monthly minutes of international long-distance calling to wireless and POTS (plain old telephone service) numbers in Mexico and Canada, as well as another 49 countries.

Wireless Home Phone also includes free voicemail, caller ID, and call waiting.

AT&T isn't the only traditional phone operator offering wireless replacements for the home. Verizon has a similar service called [Wireless Home Phone Connect](http://www.verizonwireless.com/b2c/device/home-phone-connect) (<http://www.qksrv.net/links/8200811/type/am/sid/pcw/http://www.verizonwireless.com/b2c/device/home-phone-connect>).

How does AT&T Wireless Home Phone work?

Wireless Home Phone is exactly what it sounds like: instead of using a traditional land line, you hook up your legacy home phone to a base unit plugged into the wall that provides access to AT&T's wireless network—for voice services only. If you decide to go contract-free, you pay a one-time fee of \$100 for the wireless network box, or you get the box for free with a two-year contract.

Anyone who does give up their wired service for a wireless home phone from AT&T would still have access to the emergency 911 service, but using it would work similar to how it works with mobile phones. That means you could still call 911, but AT&T says you may have to provide your home address to emergency responders.



(<http://images.techhive.com/2012/09/29/100029986-orig.jpg>)

The AT&T Wireless Home Phone base unit

In the fine print for Wireless Home Phone, AT&T says it “recommends that you always have an alternative means of accessing 911 service from your home or business during a power or network outage.” Wireless Home Phone may not be a perfect replacement for some, as the service also doesn't work with other services relying on a traditional phone line. This includes home security systems, fax machines, and medical alert systems.

If all you're looking for is a service to make calls, \$35 per month for nationwide and international calling minutes is a pretty good deal; AT&T's standard home phone service starts around \$24 per month.

However, Wireless Home Phone won't get you out of paying all those annoying fees attached to telephone services. AT&T's fine print currently says Wireless Home Phone includes a \$36 activation fee per line, and you may have to pay a “Regulatory Cost Recovery Charge” of \$1.25 per month, in addition to other charges.

Potential problems

Nevertheless, Wireless Home Phone could convince some people to jettison their landlines—at least for anyone in areas where AT&T wireless service is available. One problem there is that traditional landlines are often the only viable communication service available to residents in remote, rural communities where cellular service can be spotty at best. So for a small portion of the U.S. public, POTS is an essential lifeline to the rest of the world.

But that may be changing; AT&T announced in late 2012 that it [plans to invest \\$14 billion](http://www.computerworld.com/s/article/9233748/AT_T_plans_to_spend_14B_over_three_years_on_wired_wireless_upgrades) ([http://www.computerworld.com/s/article/9233748/AT T plans to spend 14B over three years on wired wireless upgrades](http://www.computerworld.com/s/article/9233748/AT_T_plans_to_spend_14B_over_three_years_on_wired_wireless_upgrades)) to expand the company's 4G LTE network and wired broadband network to cover 300 million Americans by the end of 2014.

The investment means 99 percent of current wireline areas would have access to a modern wireless or wired network, making it much easier to cut or at least reduce traditional networks. What's not clear, however, is whether wireless networks can stand in for the reliability that basic telephone services have provided for decades.

This story, "AT&T tempts landline users to move to wireless phone services with contract-free offer" was originally published by [TechHive](http://www.techhive.com) (<http://www.techhive.com>).

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Ian is an independent writer based in Israel who has never met a tech subject he didn't like. He primarily covers Windows, PC and gaming hardware, video and music streaming services, social networks, and browsers. When he's not covering the news he's working on how-to tips for PC users, or tuning his eGPU setup.