In response to a Notice of Inquiry released by the FCC (http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DA-09-2517A1.pdf) to explore how to transition to a purely IP-based communications network, AT&T has declared that it's time to cut the cord. AT&T told the FCC that the death of landlines is a matter of when (http://www.pcworld.com/businesscenter/article/184425/fcc_gets_mixed_messages_on_wireless_oversight.html), not if, and asked that a firm deadline be set for pulling the plug.

AT&T said in its response to the FCC (http://fjallfoss.fcc.gov/ecfs/document/view?id=7020354032) that "with each passing day, more and more communications services migrate to broadband and IP-based services, leaving the public switched telephone network ("PSTN") and plain-old telephone service ("POTS") as relics of a by-gone era."

It also stated "It makes no sense to require service providers to operate and maintain two distinct networks when technology and consumer preferences have made one of them increasingly obsolete."
Providers like Vonage (/tags/Vonage+Holdings+Corp..html) have been delivering VoIP (Voice over IP) for consumers over broadband Internet connections for years. I should know, I was one of the charter members. I haven't had an actual POTS landline for at least five years.

While my local telephone providers wanted to nickel and dime me for “features” like caller ID and voicemail, Vonage has reliably provided all-inclusive service for $24.95 for as long as I can remember.

While Vonage is still a major player in the consumer VoIP market, just about every communications entity has joined in the game now. VoIP phone services are offered as a bundled service along with broadband Internet service, and digital cable TV by major players like Comcast, Verizon, and AT&T itself.

**Transition to Mobile**

The way wireless phone plans are set up now (http://www.pcworld.com/businesscenter/article/185552/gsm_encryption_cracked_showing_its_age.html), it is hard to argue in favor of keeping both a mobile phone and a home phone--even a VoIP line. You can get unlimited minutes of talk time with all of the bells and whistles you can imagine--caller ID, call forwarding, etc. Many plans come with unlimited data, unlimited text messaging, and more. With all of that service in your hip pocket, do you really need a phone attached to your wall?

The number of U.S. households that have ditched the landline entirely (http://www.pcworld.com/article/185637/landlinePhones.html) in favor of relying solely on mobile phones doubled between 2006 and 2009. A quarter of U.S. households no longer have a landline of any kind, and that number will continue to grow.

**No Dial Tone**

One of the last remaining reasons for maintaining a standard POTS landline is the fact that in most cases the POTS line maintains a dial tone and the ability to make and receive calls during catastrophes and emergencies.

When Hurricane Ike hit here in the Houston area, there was no power for days, or even weeks in some areas. No power means no broadband Internet, which means VoIP phone services like Vonage don't work. No power to cell towers means no bars on your cell signal and no wireless service.

Some broadband VoIP providers have solutions to address at least short-term power outages. AT&T provides its UVerse customers with a UPS (uninterruptable power supply) battery back-up that maintains power to the broadband router at least for a while.

Emergency services, and the ability to place 911 calls have also been an issue. With a POTS landline it is easy to match a phone number with a physical address, but with broadband VoIP you could be calling from around the corner or around the world and the 911 operators can’t tell. There are solutions in place for 911 calls via broadband VoIP, but users who drop landlines entirely in favor of wireless phones may have issues getting timely emergency service.

Those are issues that will have to be worked out, though. The future marches on, and it is fair for AT&T and other traditional POTS providers to want to drop the obsolete, unprofitable technology and focus their resources on the universal broadband and IP communications of tomorrow.

*Tony Bradley tweets as [@PCSecurityNews](http://www.twitter.com/pcsecuritynews), and can be contacted at his Facebook page [http://www.facebook.com/pages/Houston-TX/Tony-Bradley/135927749871].*  

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