The Telecare Industry

Upgrading the UK to Digital Phone Lines

We all care about the health and wellbeing of our loved ones. Many of us will have relatives and friends who are elderly or infirm, but who fiercely value their independence and don't want to leave their own home. The service provided by the telecare industry – sometimes called a careline or a telehealth pendant - offers security, peace of mind, and, in many cases, saves lives.

Through devices called 'dispersed alarms', the Telecare industry allows elderly and vulnerable people to immediately contact someone for help in case of an emergency. The devices are bought directly from suppliers - either by the customer or by the Adult Social Care Department of a Local Authority - and installed in the home. They connect directly to the phone socket and the customer's phone is plugged into the device. A pendant, usually worn around the customer's neck or wrist, communicates with the device using radio frequency (RF) signals. This means that in an emergency, the customer can simply press the button on their pedant and the device automatically connects them to an Alarm Receiving Centre. Once connected, they can speak to the operator, who'll then alert either a carer or the emergency services, depending on the situation.

These 'dispersed alarms' are also used by over 500,000 care home residents, in what are called 'Schemes'. In these cases, each individual device in a facility is routed through a central communications room, which will in turn connect them to an Alarm Receiving Centre. These devices are invaluable to care home residents, especially during night-time, when there are fewer members of staff available.

Because the Telecare industry provides such a vital service, it's crucial that the migration to Digital Phone Lines is managed effectively, and all stakeholders understand the challenges involved.

Potential issues with moving to Digital Phone Lines

- The router will require a battery back up
- The provision of an Analogue Telephone Adapter (ATA) port on the router will be up to individual CPs
- Communication Providers may not be aware that the customer has a telecare product that this dependant on a traditional phone line
- Traditional phone line customers will need to migrate to a Digital Phone Line and will need to use a router and Voice Over IP technology (VoIP)
- Mobile phone signals can be hampered by the surrounding metal.

Supply Chain

There are some clients who independently source their devices, but it's largely done by Local Authorities or Housing Associations.

They buy devices directly from suppliers and their agents install them in clients' homes. The Local Authorities are also responsible for engaging the Alarm Receiving Centres.

Key Stakeholders

There are 176 Alarm Receiving Centres in the UK, serving 1.3million 'dispersed alarm' customers in private homes and 500,000 in care home 'Schemes'.

Hardware Providers

The largest hardware providers are:

- ChipTec
- Chubb
- Doro
- Essence
- LeGrand (Tynetec / Jontec)
- NCS
- TeleAlarm
- Tunstall

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