

## **UK defines numbering plan for new voice services**

On 6 September 2004, United Kingdom communications regulator Ofcom (the Office of Communications) issued a numbering plan and an interim guidance covering the overall regulation and level of consumer protection for new voice services such as voice over broadband (VOB). The announcement removes regulatory obstacles preventing the widespread introduction of VOB, also called Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP).

The numbering arrangement for new voice services distinguishes between geographical and non-geographical telephone numbers. Ofcom has reserved a number prefix (056) for customers with a broadband connection interested in using voice services anywhere in the UK. Customers wishing to switch from traditional telephone service to VOB will also be able to maintain their current telephone number by adding a number prefix (01 or 02).

Ofcom also published a consumer guide and started a public consultation about the level of consumer protection for new voice services. Ofcom believes that these services should not be required to offer the same standard features as traditional circuit-switched voice services as required by current regulations. These features include access to emergency calls (999), calls to operator assistance, directory enquiries and facilities for disabled users. Ofcom's main argument is that this requirement will make it more difficult for companies to create new products and offer more choices. The consultation will close on 15 November 2004.

In its public announcement, Ofcom recognizes the lower costs of entry associated with these services and the potential for customers to benefit from lower costs and greater choice. As a result, Ofcom intends to minimize the regulatory burden associated with these services and ensure fair and effective market competition. Last August the regulator proposed a wholesale price ceiling in an effort to promote a competitive broadband market.

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Adapted from:

News release: Ofcom to encourage the development of new voice services  
[http://www.ofcom.org.uk/media\\_office/latest\\_news/nr\\_20040906](http://www.ofcom.org.uk/media_office/latest_news/nr_20040906)

Numbering arrangements for new voice services  
[http://www.ofcom.org.uk/ind\\_groups/ind\\_groups/telecommunications/nvs\\_index/nvs\\_statement.pdf](http://www.ofcom.org.uk/ind_groups/ind_groups/telecommunications/nvs_index/nvs_statement.pdf)

New voice services: an overview  
[http://www.ofcom.org.uk/ind\\_groups/ind\\_groups/telecommunications/nvs\\_index/nvs\\_oview/](http://www.ofcom.org.uk/ind_groups/ind_groups/telecommunications/nvs_index/nvs_oview/)