



Local Loop Unbundling

What is a 'Local Loop'?

The Local Loop in a telephone network (sometimes referred to as the "last mile" of the network) is the bit that connects your home to your local telephone exchange. It refers literally to the copper cables that run from your home to the telephone exchange.

So what does 'unbundling' it mean?

"Unbundling" means BT local telephone exchanges are made available to other companies such as TalkTalk & SKY. They say that this is to make sure any broadband services are running on the very latest technology, and to allow them to provide you with free broadband.

TalkTalk began to offer free broadband to new and existing customers in 2006, though broadband was only free for customers connected to a Local loop unbundling (LLU) exchange. Customers not on an unbundled exchange are charged a monthly fee for broadband access.

Why?

Local Loop Unbundling has been introduced in the UK by OfCom in order to promote competition between phone companies which will ultimately benefit consumers in terms of choice, range of services available and potentially, lower prices.

Most LLU operators only unbundle the broadband service leaving the traditional telephone service using BT's core equipment (with or without the provision of Carrier pre-select) but some companies also unbundled the traditional telephone service (full LLU).

How to tell if your line is unbundled

Unbundling means that your line will connect directly to the LLU providers' equipment.

Try to dial 1280 followed by a working telephone number; if you get an answer then you are NOT on an unbundled (LLU) service. If you get a recorded message saying that the number you have dialed has not been recognized then you are on a LLU service.

What to do next?

When a customer moves to a LLU provider, and are switched onto their own network equipment, there will be one of two scenarios:

The LLU provider will use an additional cable from the exchange to the customer under LLU and connect to their terminating equipment. BT will deactivate their service, but their cable still remains meaning that technically a switch back to BT is possible without extra cost.

Alternatively the LLU provider will re-use the line which the BT service was delivered on, and so the BT service is completely undone.

In this scenario your entire connection is switched over, including your line rental, and your phone line will have to be reactivated by BT, this currently costs £124.99.

Eg. If the Talk Talk line is LLU (Local Loop Unbundled), it is connected at the BT exchange to Talk Talk's own rack of equipment. As such, switching it back to BT will require an engineer to physically disconnect the pair of wires and reconnect them to the BT rack of equipment. That's why BT quotes a standard connection charge of £124.99 - because they are going to have to pay an engineer to do that work.