



End of the line for 0500 numbers

From next Monday (5 June 2017), all 0500 numbers will cease to exist. Calls will not connect.

This marks the end of the three year transition period announced by **Ofcom** on 3 June 2014 following earlier consultations.

The 0500 “freephone” number range was introduced in 1982 and allocated to **Cable and Wireless**, in competition with **BT**. Calls to 0500 numbers have been free from landlines, but they have been charged at up to 55p per minute from mobiles, causing confusion and consumer harm.

While very popular in the 1980s and 1990s, no new 0500 numbers have been allocated since 2001, as ranges of 080 numbers were taken up by other providers. With sharply declining usage of 0500 numbers, **Ofcom** decided to simplify things so that, from 5 June 2017, all “free-to-caller” phone numbers will start with 080 (either 0800 or 0808).

This reflects the **Ofcom** decision, which came into effect on 1 July 2015, prohibiting charges for calls to 0800 and 0808 numbers in all cases.

Making the transition

To ease the transition, **Ofcom** has offered all users of 0500 XXX XXX numbers the opportunity to change to the matching 0808 5 XXX XXX number. Many organisations have already made this change, some have changed to a different number and others have yet to take any action.

- **Sainsbury's Bank** made the change from 0500 40 50 60 to 0808 5 40 50 60 last year.
- **National Savings and Investments (NS&I)** also changed from 0500 007 007 to 0808 5 007 007.
- **BBC 5 Live** left it until April 2017 to change from 0500 909 693 to 0808 5 909 693.
- The **Australian High Commission in London** repeatedly mentions its 0500 890 165 number on its website. The new 0808 5 890 165 number is already working but is not yet being promoted.
- **Homepride**, the maker of various cooking sauces, has used 0500 622 700 for many years. Although the new 0808 5 622 700 number is working, various supermarkets are currently stacked out with products showing “best before January 2019” expiry dates, but which still have 0500 622 700 on the label. *This number will have ceased to exist more than 18 months before the “best before date” printed on products currently on sale!*

The fair telecoms campaign comments...

- “ We welcome this necessary simplification, most notably the clarity given by the fact that all 080 (i.e. 0800 and 0808) numbers are genuinely free-to-caller in all cases.
- “ After users have had three years in which to change and communicate new numbers, it will be very disappointing to hear of people calling numbers that have ceased to exist.
- “ The only advice to callers is to try replacing the 0500 with 0808 5. (This would be a free call and that number can only be used by the former user of the 0500 equivalent.)

If searching the web for a different new number, be careful not to be misguided into calling a premium rate 084, 087 or 09 number by the many scam entries that are found in web searches.

