

Dealers should prepare now for THE 3G SUNSET

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Editor's note:

How will the pending 3G network shutdown affect you and your installations? The following must-read article by Rick Sedivy provides answers and important steps dealers should take now to avoid complications down the road.

There are many questions about the future of the 3G network and how it will affect the door and access systems industry. What is happening to the 3G wireless network? What products will be affected? What are manufacturers doing to streamline the transition? What can dealers do to keep their customer's systems operating?

Say goodbye to 3G

Mobile network operators (carriers) are planning to shut off their 3G wireless networks to make room for the new 5G network. The process is commonly referred to as the "3G sunset." The 3G network is slower and less efficient than the newer 4G and 5G networks, which share the same spectrum and are based on Long Term Evolution (LTE) technology. Unlike 3G, these more advanced networks will be used in the industry for a long foreseeable future.

Advantages of new technologies

4G LTE data speeds are typically between 20 and 50 Mbps, which is up to 10 times faster than 3G. 4G LTE also offers lower latency (less of a delay between transmission and reception) than 3G, at an average of 53.1 milliseconds. 5G promises even faster data speeds. As a result, antiquated 3G technology is being phased out, and the transition is happening soon.

What devices are affected?

The 3G sunset will impact every device currently using the 3G network regardless of manufacturer. The long list of devices includes tablets, smartphones, security cameras, home security systems, burglar

alarms, fire alarms, medical devices, vehicle tracking devices, cellular entry systems, and more. Once the 3G network is shut down, these devices will lose much, if not all, of their functionality and will become obsolete.

Manufacturers offer solutions

Many manufacturers are building and optimizing connected devices for the newer networks and are no longer offering 3G devices. For older systems that continue to operate on the 3G network, you will need to contact the manufacturer directly and ask about their 3G transition plan. Some older systems may simply need to be replaced while others may have an upgrade option.

Cutoff dates

The cutoff date for 3G is tricky to pin down. Different service providers have various plans for the transition, and some have already announced that their originally scheduled date will change in the future.

For example, Verizon initially planned to stop providing support for 3G at the beginning of 2020. When they realized that many of their customers were not ready, they pushed the date back. It is now set for December 31, 2022. AT&T insists that they will shut down their 3G network on February 22, 2022.

Sprint and T-Mobile's fluctuating timelines

Currently, T-Mobile's cutoff date is July 1, 2022. Sprint, which is owned by T-Mobile, will reportedly shut down their network on March 31, 2022, while its 4G LTE network will cease to operate on June 30, 2022.

Plans to shut down its 4G is part of

T-Mobile's strategy to move everyone to a single T-Mobile network. Affected Sprint customers will only need to swap their Sprint SIM card for a T-Mobile one.

All the dates mentioned were gathered while conducting research for this article and were accurate as of November 2021. These dates are subject to change by the respective carriers without notice.

Push to delay shutdown

A Petition for Emergency Relief was filed with the FCC by the Alarm Industry Communications Committee (AICC) on May 10, 2021. Their petition argues that the current timetables for the shut-down of the 3G networks may not be in the public interest, particularly considering the ongoing resurgence of COVID-19 and its variants.

The petition seeks to delay the sunset of the 3G network until the end of 2022 and claims that it is unreasonable to assume that the alarm industry — or other relevant industries — can transition on timetables devised by the nation's largest carriers.

However, a Free State Foundation (FSF) scholar contends that the FCC has no legal power to alter the timeline.

Seth Cooper, director of policy studies at the FSF wrote that "When government holds back new generations of technologies, it significantly increases the costs on market providers that are compelled to operate obsolete technologies. It also deprives consumers of the benefits of superior service capabilities." Cooper argued that the FCC lacks statutory authority to forestall the sunset of older networks making the petition "an open-and-shut matter."

AT&T's opposition to the delay

AT&T's response to the petition was filed on September 14th. In comments from the GN Docket 21-304 (Petition for Emergency Relief in 3G Sunset Transition for Central Station Alarm Subscribers), AT&T said that they oppose the petition of the Alarm Industry Communications Committee (AICC) to

delay their plans to sunset its 3G network in February 2022.

AT&T argues that AICC's petition should be denied because their assertion is not credible. It claims that its members cannot meet AT&T's sunset date because of disruptions attributable to COVID-19 and chipset supply-chain issues, but CEOs of leading alarm companies report the opposite.

The COVID pandemic has not kept technicians out of people's homes. They said, "If anything, the pandemic accelerated the pace of new alarm system installations because customers were home for extended periods, valued home security more than before, and were satisfied with the alarm companies' health and safety protocols." The same CEOs have also reassured investors that global chip shortages will not slow subscriber growth.

Inform your customers now!

What can dealers do to help their customers and themselves?

Without knowing the result of the Petition for Emergency Relief, we suggest that you prepare for the worst. Don't wait until it's too late. Give yourself and your customers time to

prepare for the inevitable.

If you are unsure whether the cellular devices you have installed are operating on a 3G network, check with the manufacturer. If the device needs to be replaced or upgraded, contact your customers and tell them what is happening as well as what they can do to keep their system running.

Don't wait for your customers to contact you complaining that their system is nonfunctional after the cutoff date has passed. Doing so will most likely mean lengthy delays for replacements as manufacturers are anticipating large influxes of orders that may take days to get processed and shipped. ■

Sample of the many products that will be affected by the 3G sunset.



BFT announced that a 3G to 4G upgrade kit will be available for its Cellular Callbox Prime.



Security Brands' Ascent X1 cellular access is one of several Ascent models that will be affected by the phase-out of the 3G network.



DoorKing 1800 Series voice + data cellular adapters manufactured prior to February 2021 will be affected by the phase out of 3G.

Contact manufacturers to determine which devices need to be replaced or upgraded.

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