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Australia's 3G Shutdown Aftermath: The Case Against Hardware

Australia retired 3G across 2024, and two years on the fallout still shapes how businesses buy technology. Here is what quietly broke, the lessons that stuck, and why the smartest operators moved to software no network generation can.

Across 2024, Australia's carriers retired their **3G networks**. TPG in January, Telstra and Optus later in the year, to free up spectrum for 4G and 5G. The upside was real, but the shutdown **stranded a huge amount of equipment** that had quietly depended on 3G: older **EFTPOS terminals, medical and security alarms, lift phones, GPS trackers and IoT devices**, plus 4G handsets without **VoLTE**, which could no longer make calls, including to Triple Zero. The enduring lesson is blunt: **anything welded to one generation of network hardware has an expiry date you don't control**. The businesses that sailed through moved to **software delivered over the internet**, chief among them the cloud phone system.

■ The short version

Aspect	Hardware-bound phone system	Cloud phone system (software)
Network dependence	✗ Tied to lines or a network generation	✓ Runs over any internet connection
When the network changes	✗ May be stranded or need replacing	✓ Benefits from the better connection
New features	✗ Need new hardware	✓ Added in software, automatically
Your number	~ Tied to a physical line	✓ Lives in the cloud, ports with you

■ Key points

● Is Your Phone System Tied to Hardware That Will Age Out?

The subtle point

Real reliability lives in the details, not the label on the box. The VoLTE trap showed that a device can tick the marketing box and still fail when it matters, especially when its limits are fixed in hardware you cannot change.

■ Questions the full guide answers

- ☐ When did Australia switch off its 3G networks?
- ☐ What is VoLTE and why did it cause problems during the 3G shutdown?
- ☐ What business equipment was affected by the 3G shutdown?
- ☐ What is the lasting lesson of the 3G shutdown for business?
- ☐ How does a cloud phone system avoid this kind of obsolescence?

This is the summary. The guide has the detail.

Every point above is worked through in full on our site, with the Australian context, the numbers and the exceptions. If you would rather talk it through, call **1300 663 222** or visit vocphone.com/about/contact-us.