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Digital Telecare: How ready are we for the digital switch?

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Housing LIN
Connecting people, ideas and resources

The current picture: what progress has been made so far?

- In 2017, the 'Fast Forward to Digital' report from Housing LIN and Appello looked at attitudes to digital telecare within the supported housing sector. More than half of the respondents (56%) were actively planning to move to digital and 84% saw digital technologies as critical for future success.

- In its industry factsheet, Openreach states that there are 176 Alarm Receiving Centres (ARCs) in the UK, serving 1.3m dispersed alarm customers in private homes and 500,000 people in group schemes. It is estimated that 110 of these ARCs still only have the capability to monitor analogue calls.

- Estimates also show that only 5% of the 1m+ dispersed alarms are already digital.

- In addition, there are c25,000 specialist housing developments with hardwired telecare systems, each containing 30 homes on average. It is estimated that approximately 1,000 of these have been upgraded to partial or full digital.

Special service suppliers and vendors have tested analogue devices connected to ATA* ports and native IP devices. Feedback from the testing has shown that devices that use 'Voiceband data' (e.g. Dual Tone Multi Frequency [DTMF], Sequential Tone Multi Frequency [STMF]) over an ATA port either do not work or do not work consistently connected to the various CPs' networks. These results are consistent with the observations and recommendations made by the NICC Standards body**.
In contrast, devices that run over IP have tested successfully. Accordingly, our recommendation is that IP devices are used in the premises and that ATA ports are only used for voice services (if required).

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> "We were looking for a system that would be responsive, so that we could **respond quickly** if customers had an unexpected event or **emergency**. Also, that it was **preventative** and would enable Guinness staff to catch early warning signs and allow **early intervention** to avoid hospital admissions. And then we wanted it to be **enabling,** and to support great **social inclusion** and **safety**. "

Wendy Wells, Head of Policy and Business Implementation at The Guinness Partnership
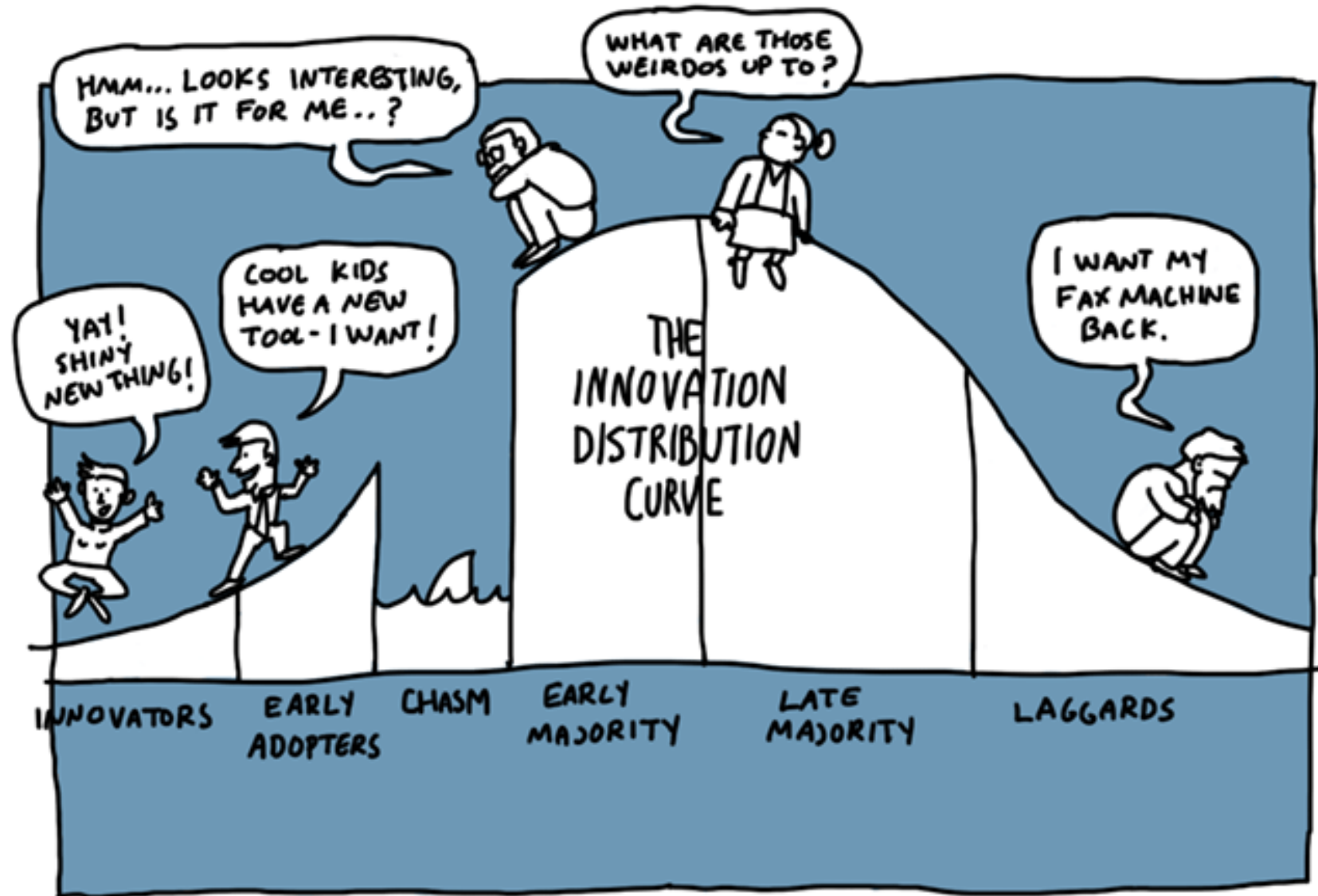
Are we on track for the transition to digital telecare?

- There is now a very good level of awareness within the housing sector that our analogue telecoms network will be turned off in 2025. Three years may seem a long time – but this deadline has been somewhat misleading.

- First time call failure rates are a clear example of this and are only likely to continue to increase.

- An estimated 125 housing developments are upgraded to digital every month.

- If the rate of upgrades continues at the same pace, 6,250 developments will have been upgraded by 2025 (this includes the number already completed).

- With approximately 25,000 developments in the UK, this is substantially below the target - and only 25% of the requirement to ensure all customers have a safe, reliable alarm system.

- There needs to be an approximate five-fold increase in the pace of upgrades to ensure a majority of customers have access to digital telecare.

Digital telecare, what are the challenges?

- The success of this mass migration to digital telecare is dependent on housing providers initiating projects to upgrade their systems, and telecare suppliers being able to support with the right solutions.

Monitoring	Equipment	Supply v Demand	Capacity
• The digital capabilities of current monitoring service. • The digital capabilities of platform providers. • At present approx. 20 platforms are upgraded annually, and these projects take approx. 6 months.	• The digital capabilities of manufactures. • Is an inability to have digital products monitored, suppressing adoption? • Once monitoring is no longer a barrier, is it reasonable to assume their will be adoption on mass?	• This is a delicate balance: supply will only increase if demand increases but a corresponding increase in supply won't happen overnight. • There is a finite resource for installation works in the UK, which will take time to expand.	• We know we can expect a swell in demand for digital telecare as we approach 2025 but are telecare suppliers – and the supply chain they depend on - able to meet this?

Digital telecare, what are the barriers?

"The technology will be better next year"

"The immediate cost is too high and it's difficult to build the business case"

"The analogue only capabilities of some suppliers and ARC's is reducing choice"

"Yes, but that will always be the case with technology, you can't wait forever"

"Are you considering the whole life cost and new financial models"

"True, but choice today is different and therefore broader"

What does this mean practically for housing/social care providers?

Safety	Capacity	Time	Cost	Choice
The immediate risk is that around 18,000 developments will have live safety equipment that may not be fit for purpose by 2025. This leaves approximately 750,000 people reliant on an emergency alarm system that potentially fails >10% of the time for first time calls.	The elephant in the room is that the telecare industry currently has a finite capacity to meet a growing (and increasingly urgent) demand for digital telecare. This is both in terms of factoring in the time required to work on projects as well as potential supply / resource issues.	Housing providers will find that there are longer than expected lead times to complete their digital telecare project.	A swell in demand puts pressure on the supply chain and there is likely to be an increase in costs if there are shortages in equipment / components / labour.	Any supply issues will also mean that housing providers further back in the queue may find they have less choice and will need to purchase whatever is available to make their service digitally ready.

NOTE: These figures do not take into account dispersed alarms that individuals outside of supported housing rely on.

What should housing providers do now?

- This isn't simply a commercial message: industry bodies, Openreach and the various telecoms providers, and local government bodies are united in urging housing providers to safeguard these critical services now.

- Given all the factors outlined, it seems unlikely that everyone will be able to move to digital ahead of the end of 2025.

- The stark reality is that this will put people at risk, the people who the industry has supported for many years.

- Experience shows that those who have already acted have had time to make conscious decisions and dovetail their move to digital with other organisational priorities.

- Talk to your service providers and other suppliers.

- Confirm a timeline and set out your priorities.

- Get started - the time is now!

Download Briefing Paper:

appello.co.uk/digital-telecare-briefing