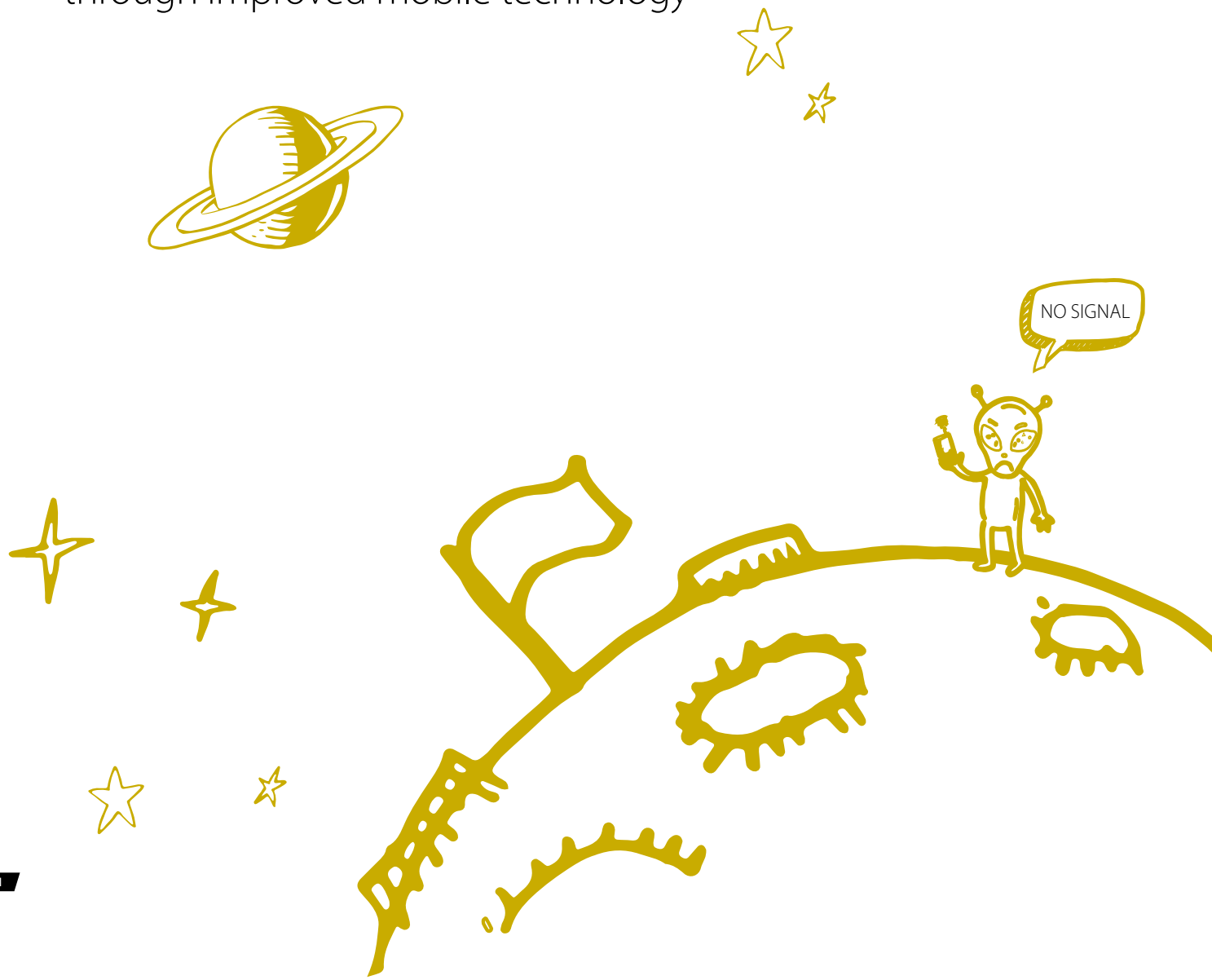


COUNTERING INCOMPLETE COVERAGE

How SMEs can drive business success through improved mobile technology



Countering Incomplete Coverage

Advances in cloud computing, internet availability and mobility have led to small and medium-sized businesses being more dispersed across regions and counties than ever before. Flexible working is no longer a growing trend, but a reasonable expectation, with **66% of SMEs** now supporting remote working practices. Travelling staff are getting used to being able to access crucial systems and apps wherever they are. And companies with multiple offices are using technology to mitigate distance.

Because of this, SMEs are almost entirely reliant on good, efficient and consistent mobile communication technologies. However, the reality for many is that mobile is letting them down. Nationwide coverage in the UK is patchy and inconsistent. And many SMEs are trying to counter the problem by taking out multiple contracts with different telecoms service providers, where one alone should do. Meanwhile, interrupted and shortened mobile calls are leading to lost sales and poor inter-organisation communication. Combined, the mobile issues SMEs experience are causing big problems that hit every area of their business further down the line.

This eGuide takes a look at the present state of mobile coverage in the UK, how businesses currently deal with the effects of variable coverage, and how new solutions can revolutionise the way SMEs use mobile technology to drive business success.



Complete Coverage? No Guarantees

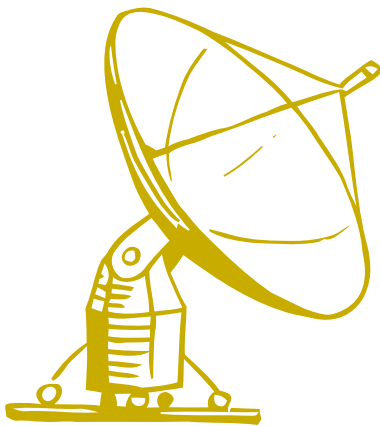
Of the four major mobile providers (O2, Three, Vodafone and EE) none are able to offer complete, UK-wide, coverage across voice, 3G and 4G. For users that means no single company can offer a guaranteed connection. And for businesses operating across multiple locations, it means it's unlikely their mobile provider will be able to give the same level of service to every branch.

To complicate the matter even further, some providers will be stronger in one area than they are in another.

For example, while O2 can offer nearly 99% population coverage for 3G, their 4G coverage is some way behind (**at approximately 78%**).

For SMEs, this mobile inconsistency represents a problem. Small companies need to be ready to take on new business, be reactive to their customers and able to grow quickly.

Being unable to use the phone when they need to negatively impacts all three of those core aims.



The root of the problem

Part of the reason that mobile providers will be strong in some areas and weak in others is the way the mobile network in the UK is managed and licensed.

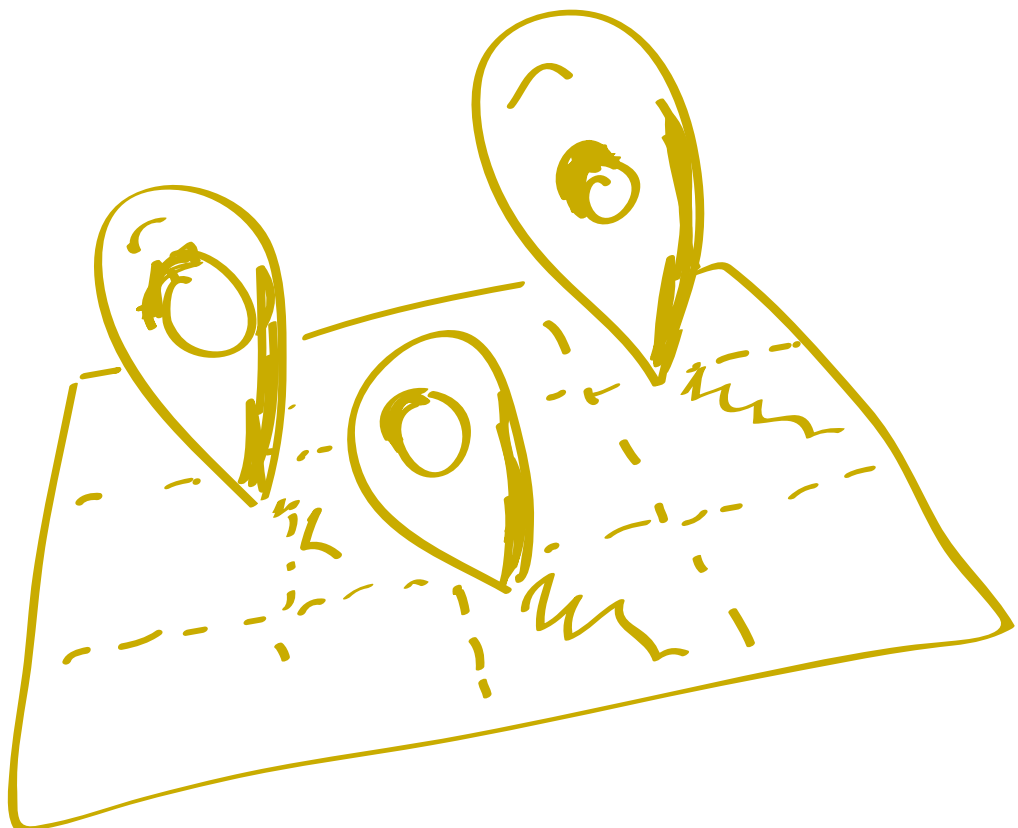
Mobile network operators own and maintain their own masts. And because some build where others don't (or haven't yet), the coverage map for Vodafone will look a little different to the EE, Three and O2 equivalent. The upshot for business mobile users is there is no one provider that can offer what they really need – complete coverage.

When it's bad, it's bad

It's natural to think that signal and connectivity might be bad on a mountain in Scotland. No operator will have a mast there, creating an overall mobile signal 'not-spot'. But what about in the centre of Liverpool?

Due to the limitations that face each and every mobile network, different users will experience different coverage issues. So low connectivity, or the loss of 3G, in a busy, urban location is far more likely to be a single provider 'blackspot' than it is a general mobile 'not-spot'. In other words, if the user is unlucky enough to be connected to O2 in an area that O2 does not have covered, their connection will drop. And it won't return until they are back in range.

For the general user, that's annoying. For businesses, however, it's a threat to productivity and the bottom line.



The Business Response

Keeping connected is crucial for every business. Consequently, many SMEs have had to acknowledge the limitations of the mobile options currently on the market, and put in place a series of workarounds to negate the coverage issues they experience. Some of which can have a big impact on their overall business.



One service, four providers?

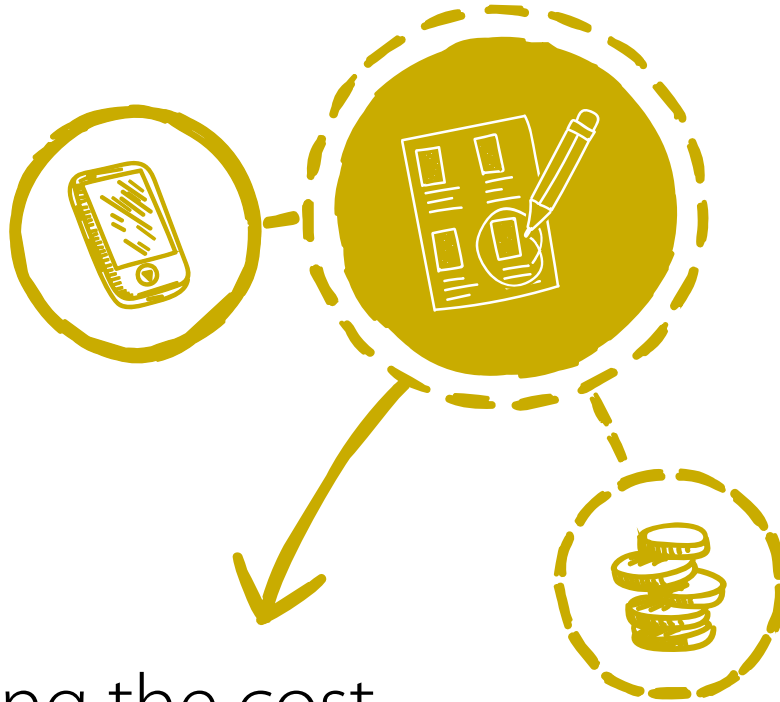
For most commodities, SMEs take one service from one supplier. Not with mobile, where one of the most popular coverage workarounds is to take multiple contracts for essentially the same thing.

For example, a business with four or five offices in different locations may well take three or four different contracts, according to who can offer the stronger service in a given area. It's complicated. Yet until recently it was the best way to ensure that every member of staff is able to access data, make calls and send emails exactly when they need to.

SMEs have enough to deal with, without having to buy (and manage) the same service up to four times over. However, it's better than having an office of staff unable to work as well as they might because of poor coverage. Or impacting the productivity of travelling staff because their sales area doesn't fall within reach of a provider's mast.

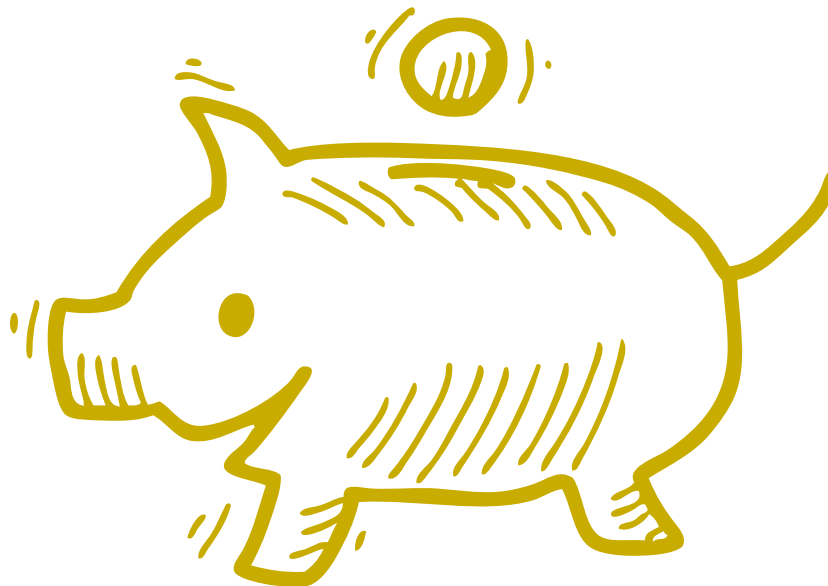
The ripple effect

Having multiple mobile contracts is a solution to counter a communications problem. Yet the negative ramifications of dealing with several companies for the same thing can reach across an entire business.



Counting the cost

It stands to reason that taking multiple contracts for a single business is far more expensive than dealing with a single provider. And while large organisations will be able to withstand that kind of unnecessary expenditure, SMEs tend to feel every penny spent.



Admin burden

Working with several companies at once can be highly resource intensive. But with this approach, IT and accounts departments are potentially doing four times as much work as they need to.

The effects of poor coverage are not limited to lost calls and interrupted downloads. The workarounds that SMEs feel it's essential to put in place to get the coverage they need cause a ripple that hits their budgets and admin.

And because SMEs are often so resource tight, more money pushed into communications means less money available for essential projects elsewhere in the business.

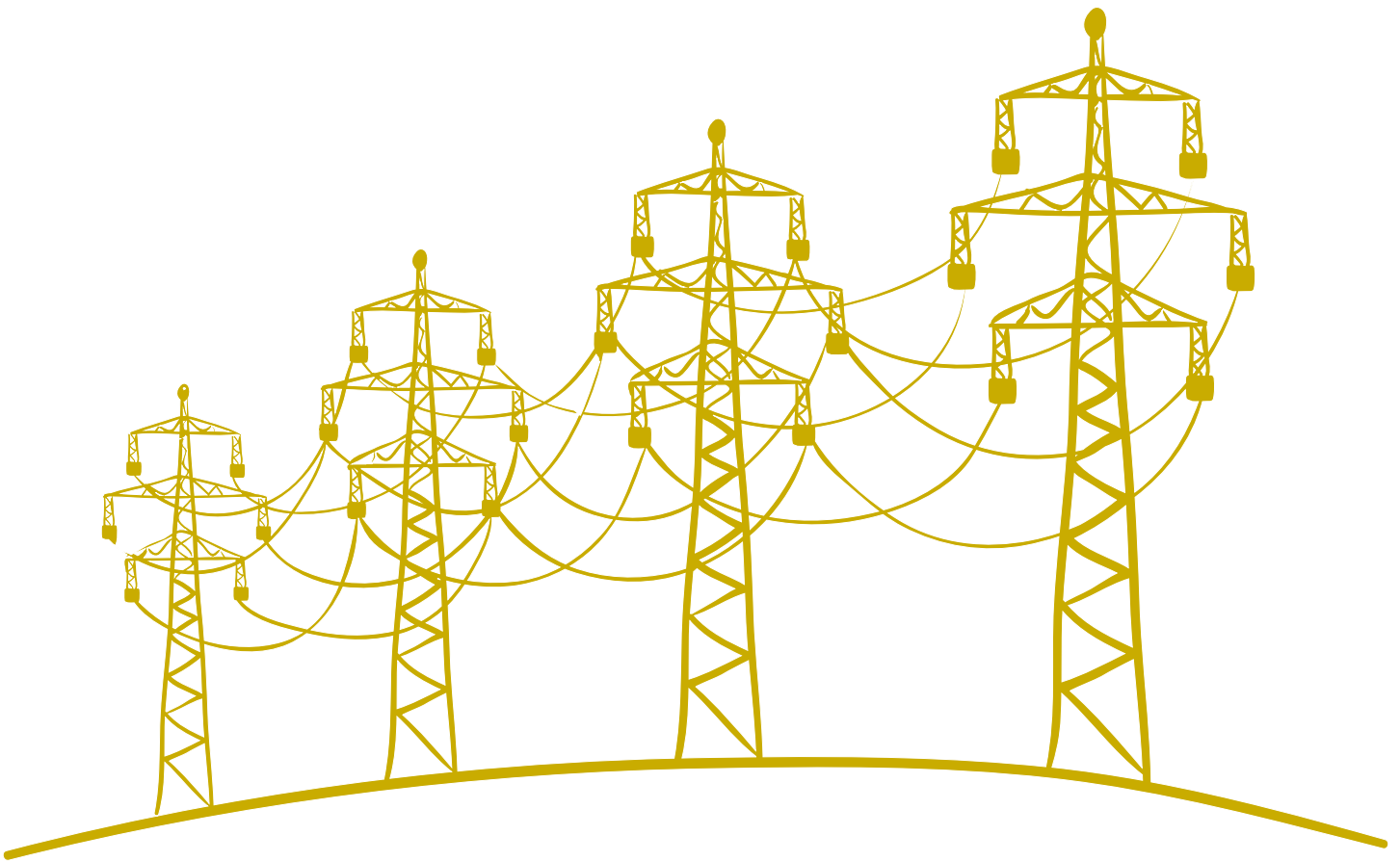


Consistent Connection

With mobile becoming arguably the most important communication tool a modern business will use, something has to change.

SMEs should no longer either have to accept that their chosen mobile provider will not be able to offer adequate coverage nationwide, or take on multiple contracts that compromise the rest of their operation.

New services on the mobile market are now catching up with what SMEs want from a communications service, and are pro-actively improving coverage and removing the need to contract with multiple providers instead of just one.



Provider priorities

The first thing a mobile-reliant SME should be looking for is a network provider that can stick to what is promised in its SLAs (Service Level Agreements). It is absolutely crucial to find a provider that can keep its promises around mobile service, as well as the availability of 3G and (more importantly) 4G.

Also, it's important to look for a provider who can offer multisite SMEs signal boosters in offices that need them for in-building coverage – making the mobile service work much harder for the businesses that rely on it.



Added extras

Even then the best providers still cannot absolutely guarantee total coverage. Because of the way masts are managed, there will always be areas in which one mobile provider excels and another struggles to provide good signal. And while signal boosters mitigate the problem to some extent, travelling or remote staff using a single network may still be impacted, should they work in areas where that network is unreliable.

Acknowledging that it shouldn't be the end-user business that suffers the consequences of variable mobile coverage, some providers are now offering additional solutions that give users the power of multiple networks in one SIM card.

This kind of premium service works by automatically switching the user to the next available network in their area, should the primary one fail. It's ideal for multi-site businesses, or those with travelling staff, making it much more likely that they will be able to make or receive a call. And it removes the heavy admin and unnecessary expenditure that comes with having

to deal with multiple providers at once. With recent research suggesting that **21%*** of the UK is affected by partial mobile network coverage, many businesses might find this revolutionises the way they use mobile.



*Ofcom 2014 research

Mobile for business

In today's fast-paced business environment, no SME should have to endure incomplete mobile coverage across their sites, or that affects travelling staff.

However, many do, and are suffering because of it with missed calls, lost sales, and unnecessary strain on billing and admin.

As a result, leading providers are developing new technologies, products and packages that minimise coverage concerns and get mobile working for business again. For SMEs, these new mobile solutions can reduce expenditure, drive productivity, and change the way they communicate for the better.



Five ways to spot the best mobile provider

1 **ACHIEVABLE SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS (SLAS)**
 Make sure your provider can keep the promises they make.

2 **SIGNAL BOOSTING**
 If your office is in a location with poor signal, your provider should be in a position to offer a signal booster, alleviating connectivity problems for in-building coverage.

3 **4G – AS STANDARD**
 Any modern mobile package should include full 4G capability, wherever it's available.

4 **INNOVATION EXCELLENCE**
 Choosing a provider that offers a multi-network solution could push your business's mobile telecommunications further than you could ever have imagined. Those that offer it stand apart from the crowd.

5 **SIMPLE SERVICE**
 No SME can afford to spend too much time dealing with mobile phone providers. The best in class will offer solutions that work for your business.

ARE YOU EXPERIENCING INCONSISTENT COVERAGE?

Visit us online to find out how to get mobile working for your business, wherever it is.



VOICE



DATA



MOBILE



CONSULTANCY

SERVICE EXCELLENCE

We believe that proactive, knowledgeable support from people who really care is at the heart of delivering performance improvement

THAT'S THE DIFFERENCE WITH DOUBLE EDGE

Tel: 020 3137 8460 | www.edge-edge.co.uk

DoubleEdge Professional Services Ltd | 30 Artillery Lane | London | E1 7LS