

This Week's Stories

Is the iPhone Hurting AT&T's Brand?

October 2, 2009

The Apple iPhone has boosted AT&T's subscriber numbers, but network problems and a bevy of complaints from frustrated customers are likely hurting the company's reputation.

While a recent survey by the consulting firm CFI Group found that iPhone users are the most loyal smartphone users with 90 percent saying they'd recommend the device to a friend, half of all iPhone owners surveyed said they would like to jump ship to another provider if given the chance.

And for the first time, AT&T has scored worse than all four major U.S. wireless operators in terms of overall customer satisfaction for smartphones. According to the survey, AT&T scored 69 out of 100 among users, and 73 among non-iPhone owners. Verizon Wireless was the most satisfying carrier with a score of 79 out of 100 among smartphone users. Even Sprint Nextel, which has struggled to retain customers due to its poor reputation, scored better than AT&T among smartphone users. It got a 74 out of 100 in terms of customer satisfaction.

The figures are among the first to quantify growing dissatisfaction with AT&T's network.

"AT&T has never fared great in customer satisfaction surveys," said Doug Helmreich, program director with CFI Group. "But they've never been last. Now AT&T is coming up last among smartphone users. The iPhone has been a cash cow for AT&T, but that cash comes at a cost in terms of overall satisfaction."

Public relations and brand experts warn that if AT&T doesn't take steps now to correct its image that it could come back to haunt the company in the future. The main issue for customers is that many users, especially those in urban areas, report poor network coverage and service. Problems with AT&T's 3G wireless have been widely reported on blogs, Twitter feeds, and even in published reports from BusinessWeek and The New York Times.

Customers all over the country have complained about dropped calls and the inability to connect to the 3G network. CNET News writer Elinor Mills documented her frustrating experience with her iPhone in a blog post recently. The story hit a nerve among fellow iPhone users, and more than 400 comments were left on the story. Most of the comments corroborated the writer's plight. And the follow-up story on the same issue garnered at least another 300 comments from readers.

AT&T's company line

And yet, AT&T has not admitted any problem with its network. When questioned about potential problems with the AT&T network being overburdened by iPhone users, Mark Siegel, an AT&T spokesman, reiterated the company line: "We have a strong, high-quality mobile broadband network. It is the nation's fastest 3G network, now in 350 major metropolitan areas."

In fairness to AT&T, the company has acknowledged that it is upgrading its network to deal with increased demand from the iPhone. Siegel said the company plans to spend \$17 billion to \$18 billion on improving its wireless and wireline broadband networks in 2009. Of course, this is a few billion dollars less than what the company spent in 2008. During that year, AT&T's annual report indicates it spent \$20.1 billion on capital expenditures for its wireless and wireline networks. Still, \$17 billion is nothing to sneeze at.

"The iPhone has been a cash cow for AT&T, but that cash comes at a cost in terms of overall satisfaction."

--Doug Helmreich, program director, CFI Group

Some of these improvements include deploying 850 MHz technology across AT&T's 3G markets to improve in-building coverage, adding nearly 2,000 new cell sites to improve overall coverage, and increasing capacity in thousands of cell sites with more backhaul infrastructure. "We are the leader in smartphones in the U.S." Siegel said. "We carry more iPhones than any other carrier in the world and handle more wireless data traffic than other U.S. carrier. Because of smartphones like the iPhone, among many others, people have dramatically changed the way they use the wireless network with data usage exploding."

Indeed, Siegel is correct. iPhone users use the mobile Internet more than other mobile subscribers. So even though Verizon may rank high in terms of customer satisfaction, people are not using the network as much or in the same way as heavy iPhone users.

Still, Siegel said the company will look into the survey results from the CFI Group.

"We welcome and value all feedback from our customers," he said. "We view such feedback as an important opportunity to help us continuously improve our products and services. We will certainly look carefully at the CFI Group survey results to see what we can learn from it."

Of churn and confidence

For now, AT&T's potential image problems haven't been hurting the company. In July, it reported that it had reduced its churn rate, or the rate at which customers dump it service, yet again to 1.09 percent for subscribers on a contract. This is one of the lowest churn rates in the industry.

"The surest indication of customer satisfaction is churn," AT&T's Siegel said. "And ours is at record-low levels. Our own internal data suggests that our iPhone customers are very satisfied with AT&T."

But AT&T's confidence may be misleading. Currently, AT&T is the only U.S. wireless operator offering the iPhone. Once the exclusivity deal ends, which many believe will happen within a couple of years, dissatisfied customers may flee from AT&T to another carrier.

"I think it's safe to say that the same percentage of people who switched to AT&T for the iPhone, would likely leave if they believed they could get the same experience on a better network," said Helmreich. "And that could cause huge problems for AT&T since nearly half of its iPhone users switched from another carrier."

Public relations and brand experts such as Rob Adler, vice president at Vantage Communications, a technology public relations firm in San Francisco, say that AT&T must fess up to the reality if it doesn't want customers to punish it in the long run. Adler, who is an iPhone subscriber living in San Francisco, says there is no question that AT&T's network has been overwhelmed. Like many people living in a city, he experiences frequent dropped calls and a sluggish wireless Internet connection.

Even though AT&T is trying to fix its network, he said that denying there is a problem won't win it any points with frustrated customers.

"AT&T can say that there is nothing wrong with their network all they want," he continued. "But when someone is experiencing dropped calls and no access to the 3G network every day, they take it very personally. And it is very frustrating."

Andrew Gilman, CEO of CommCore Consulting Group, which specializes in helping companies manage their brand image, agrees. He said the first thing AT&T needs to do is correct whatever problem it is experiencing. And then it needs to listen to its customers and prove to those customers that the problems have been resolved. He said that in today's highly connected online communities, companies that refuse to acknowledge their customers' complaints do so at their own peril.

"Even if the network is perfectly fine, if several people in a social network complains, they have immediate influence over a large group of people," he said. "So even if people aren't experiencing the same problem, the negative comments have planted a seed."

Gilman said that the power of social networks has changed the game for companies who find themselves the target of negative customer sentiment.

"The world has changed over the past couple of years," he said. "A few years ago you might have been able to ignore some customer complaints and get away with it. But not

anymore. With social media things spiral out of control very quickly. "

He cited the example of how Johnson & Johnson was forced last year to pull an online advertisement for its over-the-counter pain pill Motrin after it triggered protest on the Internet from consumers who thought an ad that depicted mothers with back pain carrying babies in a sling as being insensitive toward mothers. Angry consumers viewing the ads took to blogs, YouTube and Twitter to call for people to boycott Motrin, arguing the ad trivialized women's pain and the method of carrying babies.

Switchers as "satisfaction saboteurs"

Experts have said that AT&T's image problems likely go beyond its network troubles. Helmreich said that AT&T has invited trouble through its exclusive deal to carry the iPhone. About 40 percent of iPhone users dropped their carrier to get the iPhone. These customers weren't switching carriers because they wanted to be on AT&T's network; they wanted the iPhone. As a result, Helmreich argues that these customers are more likely to be dissatisfied with AT&T's service. And they are more likely to complain and to share their complaints with friends.

Helmreich points out that people with one of T-Mobile's exclusive Google Android phones or Sprint's Palm Pre are also more likely to be dissatisfied with their service if they switched providers for those phones.

"In effect, switchers can be satisfaction saboteurs if they were not already inclined to choose AT&T," he said.

"It seems crazy to me that AT&T hasn't done anything to throw customers a bone to say, 'We love you as a customer.'"

--Rob Adler, vice president, Vantage Communications

Adler also points out that AT&T's marketing and public relations strategy for the iPhone also helped create animosity toward the company. He said that from the start, Apple has established itself as the more valuable brand in the relationship with an iPhone customer. Even though AT&T is making the device more affordable by subsidizing each device by at least \$300 to \$400 a pop, it doesn't highlight this fact to consumers. But Apple is the company that has designed the device. It sells it for \$200. And it also offers the cool applications, which are either free or are relatively low cost.

"iPhone users love Apple," Adler said. "They are loyal to the brand and they love the device and all the great applications. All they associate AT&T with is dropped calls, a hard-to-access 3G network, and high network fees. They even make iPhone users pay extra for SMS. It seems crazy to me that AT&T hasn't done anything to throw customers a bone to say, 'We love you as a customer.'"

Adler said that AT&T's exclusivity deal with Apple is a gift, which AT&T should be taking advantage of to create customer loyalty. He said that AT&T likely has plenty of time to redeem itself, but the company must take steps now.

He suggested it does three things: for one, he said that AT&T must admit its network has problems and then fix those problems. The challenge from a marketing standpoint is convincing its customers that the network has been fixed. And to do that, brand expert Gilman suggests that the company use specific examples.

"Once they fix whatever problems they have, they have to get testimonials to back up those claims," he said. "Maybe they could drive through neighborhoods and show people that calls aren't dropping and that the dead zones don't exist anymore."

The second thing AT&T needs to do is to more overtly market and explain its value to the consumer.

"AT&T needs to be more aggressive in promoting what they offer the customer," he said. "All they do is say they have the fastest 3G network, which everyone who owns an iPhone knows is absolutely not true in the real world. It may be true in a lab, but not on the street."

And the third thing AT&T must do is make goodwill gestures to its loyal iPhone customers. Gilman suggests the company give out coupons or anything that shows how AT&T values its customers. Adler thinks that AT&T needs to offer customers, who are already spending a lot of money on their service, more features and services for free. But he said that free Wi-Fi at AT&T hot spots is likely not enough of a perk, since it only highlights deficiencies in the 3G network. Instead, he thinks that AT&T could offer free SMS to iPhone users renewing their contracts.

"Customers remember small gestures like that," he said. "And they tell their friends."

<http://news.cnet.com>

Verizon Wireless Announces 4G Venture Forum, Designed To Encourage Innovation for Advanced Mobile Networks

October 5, 2009

Verizon Wireless, the nation's leading wireless provider, announced today the creation of the 4G Venture Forum (4GVF), a new initiative which uniquely brings together financial investment, product incubation and market validation for products and services that will harness fourth generation (4G) wireless networks. The 4GVF is a collaboration of Verizon Wireless; highly-regarded venture funds including Alcatel-Lucent Ventures, Charles River Partners, New Venture Partners, North Bridge Venture Partners, Norwest Venture Partners (NVP) and Redpoint

Ventures to facilitate the identification and commercialization of next-generation 4G related technologies; and both Alcatel-Lucent and Ericsson, the primary network infrastructure providers for Verizon Wireless' upcoming 4G Long Term Evolution (LTE) network.

This initiative further accelerates Verizon Wireless' open and innovative approach encompassed by the Verizon Developer Community (VDC), its open development program and the Verizon LTE Innovation Center.

From the wireless sector of the high-tech industry, Verizon Wireless, Alcatel-Lucent and Ericsson will contribute expertise in building advanced wireless networks and provide programmatic input critical to concept success. 4GVF participants have identified up to \$1.3 billion as available for 4GVF development; participating venture capital firms have more than \$9 billion under management today. Other business details are not being disclosed.

The 4GVF was formed to help generate new ideas related to advanced wireless networks and help innovative companies improve the odds for their success. The reach and breadth of 4GVF partners will help ideas get to market quickly with members working collaboratively to:

- fund new ideas;
- provide vital development assistance; and
- validate the market and test concepts through labs and communities from Verizon, such as the Verizon LTE Innovation Center, the Joint Innovation Lab (JIL) and the VDC, as well as similar resources from Alcatel-Lucent and Ericsson.

Verizon Wireless' philosophy driving its 4G focus includes a strong belief that the winners in the 4G world will be those companies that focus on their core competencies and facilitate and embrace collaboration and partnering. Roger Gurnani, senior vice president of product development at Verizon Wireless, said, "Our initial focus has been to design and build the best 4G wireless network in the nation. We also recognize a need to infuse developers with the funding that will drive advancements, and we are committed to doing this in a collaborative way. The 4GVF is focused on encouraging innovation and leveraging applications in this new 4G wireless future. The 4GVF will help ensure that we're not simply building the network and waiting for people to come, but that applications are ready to go when the infrastructure is ready."

The 4GVF may support and fund 4G advancements regardless of underlying network technology; funded entities will not be contractually obligated to work with Verizon Wireless and are not precluded from working with other wireless service providers. The 4GVF will host regular meetings to review opportunities, evaluate ideas, get reactions from stakeholders, and build collective insight on where the market is heading. Verizon Wireless is focused on building the most reliable next-generation 4G LTE wireless network in the country -

and one of the first on the globe - and its ongoing commitment to building the best networks in the country is essential as the company rolls out its 4G LTE network. Verizon Wireless plans to launch its 4G LTE network in 25 to 30 markets in 2010 and cover virtually its entire current nationwide 3G footprint with the next-generation network by the end of 2013.

<http://www.fiercewireless.com>

AT&T Flip-Flops, Allows VoIP Apps on iPhone

October 6, 2009

AT&T Mobility has changed its stance, and is now going to allow VoIP applications for Apple's iPhone to run over its 3G network. The carrier said that it had informed both Apple and the FCC of its decision.

The change in policy means that users of VoIP applications on the iPhone, such as Skype, will no longer be relegated to using the device's WiFi connection for VoIP calling. It is also a significant turnaround for AT&T, which said earlier this year that allowing VoIP apps on the iPhone to run over its 3G network could cripple the network. Indeed, AT&T has openly discussed the strain iPhone usage in general has placed on its network.

Today's announcement involves only the iPhone. AT&T has long allowed VoIP apps to run on other devices.

AT&T's new stance adds yet another twist to a wireless market awash in network policy news. The FCC recently announced it will consider making net neutrality principles into stronger and more enforceable regulations. Further, the FCC recently investigated why Apple had reportedly blocked Google's Google Voice application from its App Store; Apple maintains that it has not rejected the application and that it continues to study it. "As we've said previously, AT&T had no role in any decision by Apple to not accept the Google Voice application for inclusion in the Apple App Store," AT&T spokesman Michael Coe told *FierceWireless*. "It's our understanding that Google Voice is not a VoIP service. We've also said that any AT&T customer may access and use Google Voice on any web-enabled device operating on our network, including the iPhone."

Skype President Josh Silverman lauded AT&T's decision in a blog post. "It's the right step for AT&T, Apple, millions of mobile Skype users and the Internet itself," he said. "Nonetheless, the positive actions of one company are no substitute for a government policy that protects openness and benefits consumers. We're all looking forward to further developments that will let people use Skype on any device, on any network."

Interestingly, the move was noteworthy enough to generate a response from the FCC's own chairman, Julius Genachowski.

"When AT&T indicated, in response to the FCC's inquiry, that it would take another look at permitting VoIP on its 3G network I was encouraged," Genachowski said in a statement. "I commend AT&T's decision to open its network to VoIP. Opening wireless services to greater consumer choice will drive investment and innovation in the mobile marketplace."

<http://www.fiercewireless.com>

AT&T Top Gun Again in JD Power TV Ratings

October 7, 2009

Telecom service providers and AT&T in particular were the big winners in JD Power and Associates' 2009 US Residential Television Service Satisfaction Study, released today. The big losers included Comcast and Time Warner Cable, which finished below the regional average rankings in each of the four regions.

AT&T's U-Verse service was ranked as the top service in the South and West regions, besting Verizon FiOS TV in those areas, and was second to WOW! (WideOpenWest) in the North Central region. Verizon FiOS TV finished on top in the East region.

While a direct comparison between AT&T and Verizon isn't possible, since they don't serve the same footprint, AT&T's top scores are an indication that U-Verse is pleasing its audience, said Frank Perazzini, director of telecommunications at JD Power and Associates.

"I think this shows they are doing a good job of servicing the customer behind what is a lengthy installation process," Perazzini said.

The JD Power TV rankings reversed the trend of the JD Power residential telephone customer satisfaction rankings, released in mid-September. In those surveys, consumers ranked the telephone service offered by cable companies Cox, BrightHouse Networks and WideOpenWest above that of AT&T, Verizon, Qwest, CenturyTel and other traditional telephone companies.

"I think this shows that what these companies have been able to do is be more innovative in an add-on product than they are in their core product," Perazzini said. "The technology is different and in some instances, more innovative. And they have been able to marry that technology with some pretty aggressive offers in order to try to build a customer base."

WideOpenWest/WOW!, which got its start as an independent cable provider, was the best overall performer in both surveys, topping the NorthCentral region in both the telephone and television rankings. WOW! serves communities in Illinois, Michigan, Ohio and Indiana.

Comcast and Time Warner Cable didn't do particularly well in either survey, finishing below the regional averages.

"If I were Comcast, I wouldn't necessarily be alarmed by this," Perazzini said. "I would be a little concerned. They have made slow and steady progress over the last few years across the board in video, phone and ISP. When you are that large, it takes a long time to get everybody on the same page. Plus they've had a lot of acquisitions over the past five years. Creating that corporate culture across all of those acquisitions so that you can move all of these three products as a bundle takes time."

The good news of this year's rankings is that overall consumer satisfaction with residential TV service is up while the bad news is that this improvement in satisfaction isn't being rewarded by greater customer loyalty. Overall satisfaction averaged 632 on a 1000-point scale, up 23 points from the 2008 score. But customer loyalty declined to 25% from 27% in 2008.

"Consumers love the fact that they have choices," Perazzini said. "They love the fact that competitors are pushing each other to deliver new and innovative products and better service. They love the fact that pricing is aggressive. So while they may be happy with their current provider, they are also willing to look elsewhere."

The study measures customer satisfaction with cable, satellite and IPTV providers in four regions (East, North Central, West and South) based on five factors: performance and reliability; customer service; cost of service; billing; and offerings and promotions.

The economy may have accounted for another trend – a 3% decline in the purchase of premium channels and a 2% decline in the use of video-on-demand and pay-per-view. The only advanced offering that saw increased usage was Digital Video Recorder service, which rose 22% to 40% overall.

"Consumers are cutting back across the board - they are eating out less, buying fewer things at the mall -- and premium TV services are no different," Perazzini said.

In the East, Verizon topped the list with a 714 (out of 1000), followed by DirecTV (684), DISH Networks (669), Cablevisions iO TV (649) and Cox Communications (644). The below-average players were Time-Warner Cable, RCN, Comcast and Charter.

In the South, AT&T was on top with 718, followed by Verizon (702), DirecTV (685), BrightHouse (674), Insight TV (658), DISH (654) and Cox (641). The under-average performers were CableOne, SuddenLink, Time Warner Cable, Comcast, Charter and Mediacom.

In the North Central region, WOW! was on top at 724, followed by AT&T (715), Verizon (712), DirecTV (674), Insight (672), Cox (652) and DISH (650). Those below

average were Bright House, Time Warner Cable, Comcast, Charter and Mediacom.

And in the West, AT&T was on top with 721, followed by Verizon (682), DirecTV and DISH (both at 664), Cox (646), CableOne (635). Below the regional average were Time Warner Cable, Comcast, MediaOne and Charter.

<http://supercommnews.com>

Product & Service News

T-Mobile USA Kicks Off Corporate Wi-Fi Push

October 5, 2009

Deutsche Telekom's T-Mobile USA plans on Monday to start offering a wireless service for office workers, hoping to increase its presence in the corporate market as it chases larger rivals like AT&T and Verizon.

T-Mobile USA, which focuses now on cost-conscious consumers, said its new service combines BlackBerry phones from Research In Motion with Wi-Fi -- a short-range radio technology -- and would help companies save money both on cellphone calls and calls from desktop phones.

Corporate BlackBerry users could get rid of their desktop phone as their BlackBerries will revert to the Wi-Fi network from cellular within the office -- or anywhere else they have access to a Wi-Fi network.

This means using up fewer cellular minutes and eliminating the need for wired phones, T-Mobile USA said.

Analysts said that, unlike companies such as AT&T, which has to protect its traditional telephone business, T-Mobile USA as a purely wireless operator would not have to worry about cannibalizing fixed-line revenue.

"From T-Mobile's perspective, this really launches them into the market," said Rob Arnold, enterprise communications analyst with Current Analysis.

"They don't have the disadvantage of trying to protect their revenue streams" from fixed-line networks, he said, adding that any sales through the new service would be entirely new revenue.

T-Mobile USA is the fourth-ranked player in a mature U.S. mobile market and is under-represented in the high-end corporate arena.

Analysts say it has to beef up spending considerably to catch up with markets leaders Verizon and AT&T.

The new corporate offering, similar to a residential service already in place, will charge a flat monthly fee on top of cellular rates. The fee, which depends on the number of users signed up, can include unlimited Wi-Fi calls.

T-Mobile also promised uninterrupted service: if a user moves out of a Wi-Fi zone during a conversation, the call will automatically switch to T-Mobile USA's cellular network.

<http://www.reuters.com>

Microsoft Unveils New Windows Phones Worldwide

October 6, 2009

Microsoft Corp. today announced the availability of a new line of Windows phones around the world that are available in a broad range of styles and prices. With a Windows phone, people can navigate their phone easily with the touch of a finger and browse the Internet on a great mobile browser. People can also connect to two new services that allow them to back up and share data from their phone to the Web and buy a variety of useful applications from the Windows Marketplace for Mobile. Microsoft expects partners to deliver more than 30 new phones in more than 20 countries by the end of 2009.

"We all want to connect quickly to the people and information that's important to us from across our lives at work and at home," said Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer. "A Windows phone lets people take their entire world of digital information, communications, applications and entertainment with them wherever they go."

One Phone for Work and Play

With a Windows phone, people can rely on their phone to balance their lives, from work to home to play. Whether it's editing a document or sharing several vacation updates through a social networking application, Windows phones help people stay connected to the people and information they care about most. Because people's phones often match their personality and unique needs, Microsoft now offers the Windows phone Custom Theme Creator. People can create personalized themes for their Windows phone by choosing the color and design that suits their style at <http://www.windowsphone.com/theme>.

With a Windows phone, people will have familiar work and play experiences right from their Start button, including these:

- A new enhanced Windows Live experience with What's New feeds and improved Windows Live photo sharing across major social networking sites (such as Twitter, Facebook, MySpace and Flickr)
- A best-in-class e-mail experience and the ability to manage multiple accounts right from their phone with Outlook Mobile and Exchange Server synchronization
- The ability to use PowerPoint and open and edit Word

and Excel documents from their phone with Microsoft Office Mobile

- The power to sync files on the phone through Windows Live Media Manager and play media files seamlessly with Windows Media Player
- A redesigned Windows Internet Explorer mobile browser with Adobe Flash Lite that brings the mobile Web browsing experience closer to what people have come to expect from their PC

Powerful Mobile Services

With the launch of these new Windows phones, Microsoft debuts new services that bring added value to people.

My Phone is a free service that helps people manage and back up the invaluable information stored on their phone and provides peace of mind and an easy restore option in the event of a lost or damaged phone. My Phone automatically synchronizes the specific types of a phone's content the user chooses — from contacts and appointments to texts, photos and more — to a password-protected Web site. People can also publish their photos from the My Phone Web site or their phone directly to Windows Live, Facebook, MySpace and Flickr. As part of the free service, people can go online and map the last known location of their phone from when it was last synchronized. In addition, a set of more advanced "lost phone" features are being offered as a premium package that people can activate as needed. The My Phone Premium package includes the ability to immediately locate the phone's current location on a map (in the U.S. only); remotely lock a phone and post an "if found" message to its screen; loudly ring the phone even if it is set to vibrate or silent mode; and ultimately, if needed, completely erase the phone to protect personal data from falling into the wrong hands. People using My Phone on their phone running either Windows Mobile 6.0, 6.1 or 6.5 can access the premium package free of charge until Nov. 30, 2009. After that date, seven-day access to the premium package will be available for purchase for \$4.99 in the U.S.

Also launching today is Windows Marketplace for Mobile, which offers people an easy way to find and purchase high-quality mobile applications for both work and play, while creating a new opportunity for developers to reach millions of people using Windows phones worldwide. Microsoft is pleased today to introduce 246 quality mobile applications initially in Windows Marketplace for work and play, with more than 753 ISVs worldwide on board to continue building out the catalog. People will have access to not only important line-of-business applications for work, but also popular mobile applications for play such as Facebook, MySpace, Netflix, Twikini, WunderRadio and ZAGAT, as well as leading game titles including Sudoku, "Guitar Hero World Tour" and the "PAC-MAN" series, all of which can be easily purchased and installed directly on a Windows phone. All purchased applications are certified by Microsoft to run on Windows phones and are backed by a simple return policy. Over the next few months,

Microsoft will continue to evolve Windows Marketplace for Mobile to bring to market a fresh take on the app store that delivers strong value for developers and a great shopping experience for people.

<http://www.microsoft.com>

Powermat Wireless Chargers Unleashed Into the Atmosphere, For Real

October 6, 2009



Oh, Powermat wireless chargers. We thought you were vaporware -- and then, like an undreamed dream -- you appeared to us in the flesh (and on video!) at CES. We didn't really hear much about it after that, and we'll be honest: we had nearly forgotten all about it! Well, it turns out these bad boys are now available. If you don't recall the details, the Powermat is a one pad, one plug system designed to charge all your gadgets in one place -- refreshing! Your phone or DS or whatever you want to charge will need a Powermat Receiver sleeve, enabling it to lock onto the mat and charge in the amount of time it takes to charge up traditionally. At \$99.99 (plus around \$40 per receiver), it's not the cheapest charging method we can think of, but it's sure to be a conversation piece at your next rager. Powermat's lineup is now available at Best Buy and Target stores.

<http://www.engadget.com>

AT&T Debuts Unlimited Talk and Text for \$60 per Month

October 9, 2009

AT&T Mobility just threw its hat into the prepaid, unlimited ring. The company announced a \$60 per month unlimited prepaid voice and text package through its GoPhone prepaid service. The plan, which will debut Monday, offers unlimited nationwide calling and unlimited texting, IM picture and video messaging to anyone in the U.S., Mexico, Canada and more than 100 other countries. AT&T's new plan appears to be a response to the rising popularity of unlimited prepaid players such as Sprint Nextel's Boost Mobile unit, MetroPCS and Leap Wireless. However, most rival unlimited prepaid plans cost \$50 per

month or less, so it will be interesting to see if AT&T's GoPhone plan will gain traction at the higher price point. Boost Mobile, which offers a \$50 per month plan for unlimited voice, text and mobile Internet access, has helped mitigate some of Sprint's postpaid customer losses and improve the company's revenues. In second quarter, Sprint said that growth from Boost Monthly Unlimited subscribers helped offset the company's revenue declines from postpaid subscribers.

"The GoPhone rate plan is priced above the existing unlimited players, but it is a product that will be marketed throughout AT&T's large distribution channels," wrote Pali analyst Walter Piecyk in a detailed research note. "Currently, Leap Wireless' Cricket, MetroPCS, and Boost all offer unlimited plans ranging from \$45-\$50, but these plans also include unlimited web, which is a feature that could cost an additional \$20/100MB based on current GoPhone pick your plan pricing. Boost, which is Sprint's prepaid product, is the only one of these competitors that has a distribution channel that comes close to that of AT&T."

Shares of Leap, MetroPCS and Sprint all declined following the news.

<http://www.fiercewireless.com>

Mergers/Acquisitions/Partnerships

Groundbreaking Agreement Between Verizon Wireless and Google

October 6, 2009

Verizon Wireless and Google today announced a strategic partnership that will leverage the Verizon Wireless network and the best of the Android open platform to deliver leading-edge mobile applications, services and devices. Both companies view this agreement as an opportunity to offer consumers an array of products that combine the speed of the nation's largest and most reliable 3G network with the flexibility of the Android mobile platform.

Integral to this agreement is a commitment by the companies to devote substantial resources to accelerate delivery of leading-edge innovation that will put unique applications in the hands of consumers quickly. The two industry leaders will create, market and distribute products and services, with Verizon Wireless also contributing the breadth of its nationwide distribution channels. Consumers will be able to purchase products resulting from the collaboration in Verizon Wireless retail and online stores. Verizon Wireless and Google plan to co-develop several Android-based devices that will be pre-loaded with innovative applications from both parties as well as third-party developers. The family of Android phones on the

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Verizon Wireless network will come from leading handset manufacturers.

"The nation's best wireless broadband network is a perfect complement to the innovation of Android-powered services and devices," said Lowell McAdam, chief executive officer of Verizon Wireless. "Together, we'll work to deliver a compelling new experience to our customers."

"The Android platform allows Verizon Wireless customers to experience faster and easier access to the web from any location," said Eric Schmidt, chairman and chief executive officer for Google. "Through this partnership, we hope to deliver greater innovation in the mobile space to consumers across the U.S."

The agreement will come to fruition within the next few weeks as Verizon Wireless introduces Android-based handsets.

<http://www.fiercewireless.com>



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