

This Week's Stories

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Verizon Will Switch to Usage-Based Smartphone Data Pricing in July

June 21, 2011

Verizon Wireless (NYSE:VZ) will begin offering usage-based data pricing for smartphones sometime in July, a company spokeswoman confirmed.

"Verizon Wireless will move to a usage-based data pricing model in July," Verizon spokeswoman Brenda Raney told FierceWireless. She said the company will share more details closer to the launch date of the new plans.

The confirmation of the switch, which Verizon executives have been hinting at for months, followed a post on the Android blog Droid Life that claimed to have details about Verizon's new data plans. Verizon currently offers unlimited smartphone data for \$30 per month for users on both its EV-DO and LTE networks.

According to the blog, starting July 7, Verizon will introduce three new usage-based options: 2 GB of data for \$30 per month; 5 GB for \$50 and 10 GB for \$80. Tethering will cost \$20 extra for an extra 2 GB of data. Overage charges will be \$10 per GB, the blog said. The upper data tiers are the same as what Verizon currently charges for its mobile broadband plans for tablets and USB modems. Raney declined to comment on the blog post.

Verizon's rumored pricing represents a slight premium over what rival AT&T Mobility (NYSE:T) charges for tiered data. AT&T charges \$15 per month for 200 MB and \$25 per month for 2 GB.

Verizon Communications CFO Fran Shammo said in May that when the new plans are in place, the carrier will not cap usage and then throttle speeds when users go over their allotted amounts (as T-Mobile USA does), but will instead charge for overages (as AT&T Mobility does). Shammo also said last month it is a "logical progression" to assume that Verizon will move to shared data plans for multiple devices once it introduces the usage-based pricing, though he did not give a timetable for doing so.

Sprint Nextel (NYSE:S) remains the only Tier 1 carrier that has not committed to a usage-based smartphone data pricing scheme. Sprint CEO Dan Hesse has repeatedly said that customers value the simplicity of its plans, though he has also said Sprint might consider changing its plans at some point.

New Bill Would Require Carriers to Clarify 4G Speeds

June 22, 2011

NEW YORK (CNMoney) -- The term "4G" is particularly confusing, because it means something different to every wireless company: Service, speed and technology vary wildly. A bill introduced to Congress on Wednesday would attempt to clear that up.

The Next Generation Wireless Disclosure Act would force carriers to shine more light on exactly what they are providing customers. At the point of sale, wireless providers would have to provide specific information about speed, reliability, coverage zones, pricing, and the technology used for the service. Consumers would also be provided with a side-by-side comparison of the top 10 competing networks' speeds and prices.

The bill was introduced by Rep. Anna Eshoo, a Democrat from Palo Alto, Calif., and the ranking member of the House Subcommittee on Communications and Technology.

Eshoo's office said the proposed new disclosure would work like a sticker on a new car, on which the government requires dealers to place fuel economy and safety information.

"Consumers deserve to know exactly what they're getting for their money when they sign-up for a 4G data plan," said Eshoo in a statement sent to the press. "We need to enhance transparency and ensure consumers are fully informed before they commit to a long-term service contract."

Much of the consumer confusion surrounding 4G stems from the vastly different 4G-branded offerings from wireless companies. To cut through the marketing hype, the bill would require the wireless companies to work with the FCC to set a minimum speed standard for 4G. The FCC would establish the speed range, which would be guaranteed by the carriers.

The current lack of a clear 4G definition has left many consumers in the dark about what they're really buying.

Sprint Nextel (S, Fortune 500) was the first to launch a network called 4G, going live with it in earlier 2010. It is based on a network standard called WiMAX, which is capable of speeds ranging from 3 Mbps to more than 10 Mbps.

T-Mobile soon followed suit, claiming at the time to be "America's largest 4G network." But T-Mobile's 4G network is actually an expansion of its existing 3G network, which operates on a standard known as HSPA+. Despite not being true "4G," T-Mobile's network can reach speeds of 5 Mbps to 12 Mbps -- faster than Sprint's.

Verizon (VZ, Fortune 500) launched its 4G network late last year, and it now claims to be the nation's largest and the fastest. The company's 4G network operates on the Long Term Evolution (LTE) standard, which will average 5 Mbps to 12 Mbps speeds.

AT&T (T, Fortune 500), which is expected to unveil its 4G-LTE network in the coming months, decided not to be the lone major carrier without a 4G network. So earlier this year, the company also began calling its 3G-HSPA+ network "4G." That means AT&T will soon have two 4G-branded networks, each using different technologies -- and its current 4G offering could, in some instances, be faster than its soon-to-be-released, new 4G network.

Here's the kicker: None of the four major carriers' networks are even technically 4G.

The International Telecommunication Union, the global wireless standards-setting organization, determined last November that 4G is defined as a network capable of download speeds of 100 megabits per second (Mbps). That's fast enough to download an average high-definition movie in about three minutes. None of the new networks the carriers are rolling out could match even a fifth of that standard.

After much lobbying by the telecoms, the ITU in December relented and acknowledged that many wireless providers had already been labeling "evolved 3G technologies" as "4G." As a result, the organization muddied the waters further by declaring 4G "undefined."

Several consumer advocacy groups, including the Consumer Reports' publisher Consumers Union, announced their support of Rep. Eshoo's bill.

But the proposal faces a very steep uphill climb to garner enough votes to pass. The powerful telecom lobby group CTIA opposes it.

"We are concerned that the bill proposes to add a new layer of regulation to a new and exciting set of services, while ignoring the fact that wireless is an inherently complex and dynamic environment in which network speeds can vary depending on a wide variety of factors," the group said.

Eshoo's office said it reviewed the bill with the telecom companies and the FCC. When contacted for comment, several wireless providers said they did not have adequate time to review the bill and don't yet have a statement ready on it.

Verizon took the proposal as an opportunity to slam its rivals.

"When companies exaggerate their claims, and relegate technology advances into nothing more than marketing games, they shouldn't be surprised when elected officials insist that consumers receive truthful and accurate information," said Jeffrey Nelson, spokesman for Verizon Wireless. "4G LTE smartphones run twice as fast on the Verizon Wireless network, no matter how many 'Gs' the AT&T marketing department claims."

FCC commissioner Michael Copps called the bill "common sense" in a prepared statement. He said it "would arm consumers with exactly the kind of information they need to make smart choices for their mobile broadband service."

money.cnn.com

Products & Services

Social Addicts Rejoice! HTC ChaCha Facebook Phone Headed For AT&T

June 20, 2011

Have you ever excused yourself from a real-life interpersonal conversation to play Farmville? Do you update "what's on your mind" more often than you eat? Do you scour the social network religiously for signs your ex-girlfriend is "in a relationship?" If you answered yes to any of these questions, it's possible that you have a Facebook addiction. Luckily, HTC has created a way to keep you hooked on the 'book, instead of ween you off of it: the HTC ChaCha, photos of which have surfaced with an AT&T logo emblazoned across the front.

You might remember hearing about the ChaCha back in February, when it was announced alongside the Salsa at MWC. For those who don't, the perhaps poorly named HTC ChaCha boasts less-than-impressive specs but gets points for originality due to its dedicated Facebook button. Basically, anytime the user taps the Facebook button, the last thing he or she viewed is automatically incorporated into a status update, whether it be a song, a picture, or a link to a web site.

In terms of specs, the Android-powered ChaCha sports a 2.6-inch 480x320 display, runs a 800 MHz processor, and has a 5-megapixel rear-facing camera with LED flash and a VGA front-facing camera for video chat. It comes with support for a microSD card, Wi-Fi connectivity, Bluetooth 3.0, and will most likely run on AT&T's 3G network, if this leaked photo is meant to be any type of indicator.

We've yet to receive word from AT&T and HTC about official availability and pricing, with unconfirmed reports suggesting the phone will launch by the end of this quarter. If you're paying close attention, you'll notice that the date displayed on the phone in the leaked picture reads July 17, which could also be a clue about the ChaCha's release.

www.mobilecrunch.com

Report: iPhone 5 to Accelerate Data Download Speeds

June 22, 2011

When Apple's (NASDAQ:AAPL) iPhone 5 arrives this September, the updated device will boast a more powerful chip to accelerate data processing as well as a Citing two people familiar with Apple's plans, Bloomberg reports the iPhone 5 will incorporate the Apple A5 processor, introduced in the company's iPad 2 tablet earlier this year--the chip will improve data download speeds, with Apple touting a computer processing unit twice as powerful and a graphics processing unit up to nine times more powerful than the current Apple A4.

The iPhone 5 is additionally expected to feature an 8-megapixel camera, replacing the 5-megapixel model shipping on the current iPhone 4. Bloomberg adds that Apple is currently testing a new version of the iPad with a higher-resolution, more responsive touchscreen similar to the iPhone 4's. Also in the works: A cheaper, scaled-down iPhone targeting emerging markets.

Apple formally unveiled its iOS 5 mobile operating system revamp earlier this month, promising more than 200 new user features alongside 1500 new APIs for developer partners. Chief among the new additions: iMessage, a service that lets consumers send free text messages, photos and videos between iOS devices and PC Free, which enables users to activate and set up iOS devices out of the box and receive software updates over the air, with no conventional computer connection.

Bloomberg states that Apple pushed back the release of the iPhone 5 to September to coincide with iOS 5's

autumn launch. Apple has not yet officially announced when the iPhone 5 will reach stores.

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Apple to Start Making TVs, Report Says

June 22, 2011

Apple might want to sell you your next TV. Technology blog DailyTech on Wednesday was quoting an unnamed "former Apple executive" who said Apple plans to enter the television display market by the end of the year.

Apple plans to "blow Netflix and all those other guys away" with a console that would have Apple TV and iTunes built into it, the source reportedly told DailyTech.

The report says Apple plans to team up with an existing manufacturer to provide televisions that would be branded under the Apple name. "You'll go into an Apple retail store and be able to walk out with a TV," said the former exec, who DailyTech said spoke under the condition of anonymity. "It's perfect."

Brian White, an analyst with Ticonderoga Securities, was bullish on the prospect of Apple entering what he described as the \$100 billion LCD television market. "In our view, the combination of Apple's powerful ecosystem, industrial design savvy, powerful brand and ability to reinvent product categories could make Apple a powerful force in the TV world in the coming years," White wrote in a report on the article. He wrote that during a trip to China last year, Ticonderoga was "the first to uncover data points" suggesting Apple planned to release a "smart TV" by the end of the year.

Apple already makes an Apple TV device which, amid a string of recent successes such as the iPhone and iPad, has floundered by the Cupertino, California tech giant's standards.

The system, first introduced in 2007, is a box-like gadget that lets users stream Web content, such as Netflix streaming video, on their TVs. But even Apple CEO Steve Jobs was forced to acknowledge that Apple TV has "never been a huge hit." In September, Apple slashed its price from \$299 to \$99, but even that hasn't made the service a household name.

A move into television would likely keep Apple neck-and-neck with one of its chief rivals: Google. Google TV is a similar product to the current Apple TV. And Google also is widely expected to expand its service by integrating with actual televisions.

Apple did not immediately respond to a request for comment on this story.

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Emerging Technology

Japan Gadget Charges Cellphone Over Campfire

June 20, 2011

TOKYO (AFP) – A Japanese company has come up with a new way to charge your mobile phone after a natural disaster or in the great outdoors -- by heating a pot of water over a campfire.

The Hatsuden-Nabe thermo-electric cookpot turns heat from boiling water into electricity that feeds via a USB port into digital devices such as smartphones, music players and global positioning systems.

TES NewEnergy, based in the western city of Osaka, started selling the gadget in Japan this month for 24,150 yen (\$299), and plans to market it later in developing countries with patchy power grids.

Chief executive Kazuhiro Fujita said the invention was inspired by Japan's March 11 earthquake and tsunami that left 23,000 people dead or missing, devastated the northeast region and left hundreds of thousands homeless.

"When I saw the TV footage of the quake victims making a fire to keep themselves warm, I came up with the idea of helping them to charge their mobile phones at the same time," Fujita said.

The pot features strips of ceramic thermoelectric material that generate electricity through temperature differentials between the 550 degrees Celsius at the bottom of the pot and the water boiling inside at 100 degrees.

The company says the device takes three to five hours to charge an iPhone and can heat up your lunch at the same time.

"Unlike a solar power generator, our pot can be used regardless of time of day and weather while its small size allows people to easily carry it in a bag in case of evacuation," said director and co-developer Ryoji Funahashi.

TES NewEnergy was set up in 2010 to promote products based on technology developed at the National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and

Technology, Japan's largest public research organisation.

It also makes and markets equipment to transform residual heat from industrial waste furnaces into electricity.

The company says the pot will be used mainly in emergency situations and for outdoor activities, but also has uses in developing countries.

"There are many places around the world that lack the electric power supply for charging mobile phones," Fujita said.

"In some African countries, for example, it's a bother for people to walk to places where they can charge mobile phones. We would like to offer our invention to those people."

news.yahoo.com

Mergers & Acquisitions

NY Commission Warns FCC of AT&T, T-Mobile Deal

June 20, 2011

The New York State Public Service Commission has warned the FCC that AT&T's takeover of T-Mobile USA will have "significant anticompetitive impacts" in the state, but stopped short of asking the regulator to block the deal.

In a confidential document made public Friday, the commission stated that under the FCC's own screening process for mergers, AT&T's buyout of T-Mobile would significantly decrease competition in the wireless market, particularly in New York City and the surrounding metropolitan area.

"Applying the FCC's initial screens to this proposed merger indicates it will have significant anticompetitive impacts that will be felt, in particular, in New York State," Peter McGowan, general counsel of the New York State Public Service Commission, wrote in a petition to the FCC. "In view of this, the FCC should not approve this transaction without subjecting it to heightened scrutiny and performing a rigorous, market-specific review of its impacts on New York State's wireless voice and broadband markets."

The commission's petition to deny was first filed with the FCC on May 31, but its contents were not disclosed to the public. A redacted version of the petition was posted on Friday at the request of Kathy

Harris, the deputy chief at the mobility division of the FCC's Wireless Telecommunications Bureau.

The New York State Public Service Commission warned the FCC that AT&T's merger with T-Mobile "will lead to potentially anticompetitive spectrum aggregation in a number of markets in New York State."

The commission drew its conclusions after conducting an analysis that applied the FCC's own screening process to the deal. The FCC's spectrum screen provides a guide to how much bandwidth can be held by a single operator before the consolidation of spectrum becomes anticompetitive. The screen varies market by market, depending on how much spectrum is available to wireless operators.

In areas like New York state, where both AWS and broadband radio service spectrum are available, the FCC uses a screen of 145 MHz to determine whether a deal will be anticompetitive.

New York's Public Service Commission estimates that the combined spectrum holdings of AT&T and T-Mobile will exceed the 145 MHz threshold in 16 of the state's 62 counties. Nationwide, the merged company will meet or exceed the FCC's spectrum screen in 408 of 3,072 counties, according to the state commission's estimates.

"It is critically important that New York State consumers be protected against potential harm caused by further consolidation in wireless voice and broadband markets," McGowan wrote, saying the anticompetitive impact of the merger would be "felt disproportionately" in New York. "The New York State Public Service Commission is continuing its review of this proposed merger, and more work must be done to evaluate potential adverse impacts and, where necessary, eliminate or mitigate such impacts."

The state commission did not ask the FCC for an outright block of the deal and lacks the regulatory authority to stop AT&T's acquisition of T-Mobile from going through if the FCC approves the merger. However, the commission's input could be influential and may prompt the FCC to require AT&T to divest some of its New York spectrum assets.

California's public utility regulators are also investigating AT&T's takeover of T-Mobile, but have not yet made their findings public.

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Industry Reports

New Web Naming Rules to Change Internet Browsing

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Coming soon to a website near you: dot-anything. A group charged with overseeing the development of the Internet voted Monday to relax the rules on website naming conventions -- potentially triggering a virtual domain name gold rush to rival the dot-com boom of the late 1990s.

At a meeting in Singapore, the board of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers -- also known by its acronym ICANN -- approved the change to allow domain names using any combination of letters and numbers, including non-Latin characters.

"ICANN has opened the Internet's naming system to unleash the global human imagination," said Rod Beckstrom, president and CEO of ICANN. "We hope this allows the domain name system to better serve all of mankind."

In past years, there have been requests for new top level domains such as .kids, .shop, .nyc and -- for porn sites -- .xxx.

The group said "strong efforts were made to address the concerns of all interested parties, and to ensure that the security, stability and resiliency of the Internet are not compromised."

"Today's decision will usher in a new Internet age," said Peter Dengate Thrush, chairman of ICANN's board of directors. "We have provided a platform for the next generation of creativity and inspiration." The group said it will begin to accept applications for new domain endings in January 2012.

ICANN was established as a non-profit organization in 1998 in order to regulate the Internet. One of its key roles has been maintaining the integrity of the Web's domain name system.

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