

Sprint's WiMAX Future Is Open

A Sprint executive says the cellular provider will become an Internet provider as well.

Openness is the future for wireless carrier Sprint, a top executive said today at the CTIA trade show.

"We are building the mobile Internet, we are not building 'cellular Internet,'" said Atish Gude, the head of Sprint's move to the WiMAX standard.

Sprint will launch WiMAX, a high-speed, citywide wireless network in 19 cities by April 2008, Gude said. And WiMAX isn't just about cell phones and PCs. Sprint is looking at portable gaming systems, portable video players, digital cameras, and even cars to become Internet-enabled with the new network.

For instance, digital cameras could automatically upload photos to blogs. Portable DVD players could stream movie trailers from the Internet as well as playing movies from discs. Gaming systems could be multiplayer, everywhere. And cars could bring down entertainment and upload diagnostic data through the WiMAX network. This is all stuff that's done, to some extent, with Wi-Fi and cellular networks. But Wi-Fi requires you to find a hotspot - though that may change with the development of municipal Wi-Fi systems - and cellular systems are usually strictly controlled by wireless carriers.

Anyone who develops a device that fits the 802.16e WiMAX standard will be able to use Sprint's network, Gude said. And the service will be priced like DSL - with "a premium for mobility," but some sort of bundling for folks who want to use multiple devices on the same plan.

"The Internet is an open model, and we are following an open model," Gude said.

The need for new thinking - Internet thinking, not cellular thinking - is one of the reasons Sprint has made its WiMAX group a separate business unit from the main wireless carrier, Gude said.

Sprint has competitors in the WiMAX stakes, but that may actually be good for them. PC and consumer electronics manufacturers like to have a choice of service providers when they build in a wireless standard - think about it, there's no single source for Wi-Fi. In terms of WiMAX, Seattle-based ClearWire has been positioning its WiMAX service as an alternative to home broadband, but has also said the service will go mobile in the future.

Sprint turned down several other technologies to pursue WiMAX, including Flarion's Flash-OFDM and Qualcomm's Ultra Mobile Broadband. The intellectual property royalties for WiMAX are relatively cheap compared to other technologies, Gude said, which will help foster plenty of WiMAX development.

"WiMAX being a standards-based technology, we'll see a cost that will really drive the embedded ecosystem into these consumer electronic devices," he said.

WiMAX will be coming in early 2008 to Chicago, Detroit, Grand Rapids, Indianapolis, Kansas City, Minneapolis, Baltimore, Boston, Philadelphia, Providence, Washington DC, Austin, Dallas, Denver, Fort Worth, Portland, Salt Lake City, San Antonio, and Seattle.

Copyright 2007 by Ziff Davis Media, Distributed by United Press International

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.