

Vindu's View: Verizon's catalyst to innovation

By Vindu Goel
Mercury News

Article Launched: 11/28/2007 01:46:41 AM PST

For years, the world has been urging U.S. wireless carriers to blow up the Berlin Wall surrounding their mobile-phone networks.

Verizon Wireless, the nation's second-largest mobile-phone company, has bravely taken out the dynamite and lit the fuse.

Responding to pressure from customers, regulators, phone makers and emerging rivals like Google, Verizon announced Tuesday that it will open up its network to outside devices and applications by the end of 2008.

In theory, you'll be able to fire up a Skype-enabled phone and make international calls over Verizon's data network. You'll be able to switch from Sprint Nextel to Verizon (which are built on similar technologies) and take your BlackBerry with you. Most likely, you'll even get to use some of the new phones based on Google's open software platform.

Ah, the sweet scent of freedom.

Of course, Verizon isn't doing this just to attract more customers. The company also is positioning itself for the upcoming wireless

spectrum auction, declaring its allegiance to the open network that regulators want.

Right now, all we have is Verizon's promise. We don't know how much the company will charge for a la carte wireless access, especially since its traditional plans will remain its core business. We don't know whether phone giants like Nokia and LG will make and market compatible phones. And we don't know whether Verizon will reject some outside devices and services on the grounds that they will endanger its network.

But so far, the Basking Ridge, N.J., company is saying all the right things.

"If somebody has the technical capability of building a device in their basement on a breadboard, and they want to bring it to us to be tested, the philosophy and structure of this program would say, 'Have at it,'" said Dick Lynch, Verizon's chief technical officer.

If other carriers follow Verizon's lead - and there are some signs they will - we could see an explosion of mobile innovation in the United States similar to the burst of creativity we're now seeing with Internet applications.

Software start-ups and handset makers could spend their time and money inventing instead of groveling for scarce spots in the carriers' lineups.

For customers, mobile-phone service could become a lot more like Internet service: pick your device and software, then find a provider to get connected.

"The industry is going to change," said Dave Oberholzer, a former Verizon executive who is now vice president of corporate development for Limbo, a Burlingame maker of mobile games. "It's a watershed moment."

Advertisement

MercuryNews.com

The Mercury News

(800) 870-NEWS

Subscribe today!

www.mercurynews.com



Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™