



4G upgrades to speed up pace of doing business

Major carriers' plans here to help "anyone who deals with customers"

By [CHUCK SODER](#)

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Some of the newest smart phones are about to become fast phones, relatively speaking.

Most of the major wireless phone service providers are in the midst of launching faster, "4G" data service in Northeast Ohio and across the country.

Sprint Nextel Corp. has committed to launching its 4G service in Greater Cleveland by the end of 2010, and Verizon Communications Inc. may do the same. Meanwhile, AT&T Inc. expects to launch 4G service in the Cleveland and Akron markets sometime during 2011. The smallest of the four major U.S. carriers, T-Mobile USA Inc., in June finished an upgrade of its network in Cleveland, which provides "4G speeds," according to the company based in Bellevue, Wash.

The launch of 4G, which stands for "fourth generation," should be noticeable to anyone who uses a wireless phone equipped to access the upgraded network, according to representatives from the major carriers. That includes typical business users, who with the added speed will be able to download attachments and join video conferences more easily while on the go.

The network's improved ability to stream video could prove particularly useful to, say, a security company or a business that wants to keep an eye on shipments coming in and out of its warehouses, said Larry Evans, vice president and general manager for Dallas-based AT&T.

"It's really up to the imaginations of the people making the applications," said Mr. Evans, who oversees sales of wireless accounts and U-verse television subscriptions in Ohio and nearby areas.

Bigger and faster

The networks promise to be about three times faster than the "3G" networks that cover most metropolitan areas today. For instance, New York-based Verizon, the country's largest wireless carrier, expects devices accessing its 4G network to be able to download between five and 12 megabits of information per second, up from about two megabits per second now, said Don Carretta, executive director for Verizon's network

in Ohio, western Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

Verizon plans to launch 4G service in 25 to 30 metropolitan areas in the United States before the end of 2010. Mr. Carretta would not say whether Northeast Ohio would be among that group, but he did say the region, including Akron, is the type of large market Verizon is targeting this year.

"They're going to be very large markets. Cleveland is a large market," Mr. Carretta said.

To make the upgrades, Verizon needs to add new antennas, base stations and other equipment at its existing towers, allowing the company to send signals in the 700 megahertz range, which should improve coverage and reception inside buildings. It also needs to upgrade the gear that connects the towers to the traditional landline telephone network.

Mr. Carretta said Verizon likely won't need to hire many people in Northeast Ohio to implement the upgrades. AT&T, however, expects to hire extra employees and contractors as it upgrades equipment in the region, Mr. Evans said. Another company official, however, declined to say how many people AT&T might hire.

Mr. Evans only would say that AT&T would upgrade equipment in Northeast Ohio at some point next year. He added, though, that the company has near-term plans to double the speed of its 3G network, which already is the fastest in the nation.

Cost/benefit analysis

Businesses should get a lot of use out of faster 4G speeds, said John Adams, communications manager at Overland Park, Kan.-based Sprint, which already offers 4G in a few dozen cities scattered across the United States. Improved access to online videos could help sales people, retail employees and just about "anyone who deals with customers," he said.

More devices, such as radios, video game consoles and even cars are expected to be designed to tap into 4G networks.

For now, however, companies will be faced with the decision of whether to upgrade to 4G phones to take advantage of the higher speeds. Mike Snyder, public relations director for the Telecommunications Industry Association of Arlington, Va., thinks many businesses will upgrade their mobile phones as 4G service becomes available, especially considering that they may have been putting off upgrades because of the recession.

However, many businesses have delayed other, higher-priority projects, too, said Laura Pettit Rusick, who owns technology consulting firm OPT Solutions Inc. of Sagamore Hills. Though high-speed Internet and streaming video is nice, Ms. Rusick said she isn't sure whether the benefits of an upgrade outweigh the costs for many businesses.

"It all comes back to, are people going to see the business value in it?" Ms. Rusick said.

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