

Cingular's bid for more Internet use

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The United States lags behind Europe and Japan when it comes to using cell phones, as U.S. users often are content simply to use their mobile handsets simply as phones on the go. Their European and Japanese counterparts, on the other hand, are much more likely to use their cell phones to text-message, go online, or even purchase goods, in addition to actually using them to talk.

Cingular Wireless, however, is hoping that that gap will shrink with the launch of its latest mobile*phone Internet browsing functions.

Even among those who have phones that have Internet access capability, only 25 percent actually use it, said Jim Ryan, Cingular's vice president of consumer data products.

"That means 75 percent don't use it at all," he added.

The company, however, hopes to take advantage of that situation by launching its new Internet capabilities called media net Thursday.

Since the company merged with AT&T over a year ago, the wireless carrier has been working to develop a system that will entice users to get online on their phones, Ryan said, adding that about 100 staff members have devoted their time solely to develop the Web link.

In conventional cell-phone Internet programs, all the information that people wanted to use was "four or five clicks away ... no one was doing a good job in wireless Internet," he said, adding that users wanted quick

access to personalized information as quickly and easily as possible.

People should be able to use their phones to get information particular to them and to their different needs throughout the day, so one user might want traffic information in the morning, general news during the day, stock-market updates in the evening and sports news at night, all on his or her phone.

As of Thursday, about 10 million Cingular subscribers should be opening up their phones and seeing a different start-up screen, which Ryan hopes will encourage them to use their phones for Internet access. The company will be offering the service for free to about 30 million of its 52 million subscribers, or to all users who have a phone that is capable of Internet access.

Initially, users will be waking up to information that has been customized for them by Cingular as the company will change their Internet front page by customizing it according to their billing ZIP code. That means the user will be prompted with their local weather and other local information on their phone, which can then be tailored to more specific needs.

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