

Wal-Mart to sell Verizon prepaid wireless

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Verizon Wireless further entrenched itself in the battle for prepaid wireless phone customers Thursday, announcing that their INpulse pay-as-you-go service is now available at all U.S. Wal-Mart stores.

Though INpulse is prepaid, it is designed to function like a standard contract offering, allowing customers unlimited mobile-to-mobile calling for \$0.99 per day.

Customers can now pay in advance for the INpulse service at any of Wal-Mart's 2,300 locations, as well as Best Buy and Circuit City stores, who have similar deals with Verizon.

"Now that INpulse is available in thousands of Wal-Mart locations," John Colaiuti, vice president of national distribution at Verizon Wireless, said in a news release, "customers will get the added convenience of one-stop shopping as well as the reliability and quality they expect from the company with the nation's most reliable wireless network."

Colaiuti said Wal-Mart's name value was one reason Verizon struck up this deal.

"Wal-Mart is a clear leader in the retail industry, and we are pleased to extend our distribution and the reach of our products to Wal-Mart's dedicated customer base," he said.

Laura Phillips, Wal-Mart's vice president of entertainment/wireless, said the deal with Verizon fits Wal-Mart's goal of offering customers quality

options at good prices.

"With the availability of Verizon Wireless's INpulse solution, our customers now also have access to a wireless prepay option for an incredible value," Phillips said in a news release.

Wal-Mart already sells prepaid options from Cingular Wireless, the nation's largest mobile-phone company, as well as T-Mobile and Sprint Nextel.

Julie Ask, senior wireless analyst for Jupiter Research, said that wireless service providers use prepaid service options as a way to reach out and offer more options to consumers.

"New customer acquisition is very hard," Ask said. "The market is already at between 60 and 70 percent penetration."

Ask said that customers using prepaid options tend to be those who are either under 18 years of age or financially unable to sign up for a regular calling plan, as well as those who need a phone for short amounts of time or irregularly.

"A lot of the customers are folks who are too young or can't make the monthly commitment," she said.

Ask said that prepaid wireless providers always hope that their customers will like the service enough to want to sign up to a standard deal.

"They'd rather have more people signing on to two-year deals," she said. "Prepaid is a way of introducing offers to a younger audience."

Ask said that the deal with Wal-Mart is a sign that Verizon Wireless is

committed to offering solid prepaid services.

"We'll see more marketing options through distribution points," she said.
"The more options they give customers, the more folks we will see signed up, and that's a good thing for Verizon."

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