

AT&T now says SlingPlayer for iPhone on 3G is OK

February 4 2010, By JESSICA MINTZ , AP Technology Writer

(AP) -- AT&T Inc. said Thursday it will now allow Sling Media Inc.'s television-viewing program for the iPhone to operate over its "3G" high-speed mobile network.

The reversal comes as the Federal Communications Commission is drafting rules to keep broadband providers - including wireless companies - from favoring or discriminating against Internet traffic flowing over their networks.

AT&T said last May it worried SlingPlayer Mobile, which sends a user's home cable or satellite programming to devices such as smart phones and laptops over the Internet, would clog its network.

Meantime, versions of the program that used the 3G network were available for use on other smart phones sold by AT&T. But distribution of programs for Windows Mobile and BlackBerry phones aren't as tightly controlled as those for Apple Inc.'s [iPhone](#), and AT&T said it had not approved those 3G apps, either.

The wireless carrier said Thursday that it has been testing the SlingPlayer Mobile program for the iPhone since December. Sling Media, which is based in Foster City, Calif., has further optimized the program, AT&T spokesman Mark Siegel said, and the improved version doesn't threaten the 3G network.

Sling Media, which had been selling a Wi-Fi-only iPhone app, has

submitted an updated version with 3G features for Apple's approval.

Sling Media spokesman John Santoro said the program as it was originally written wouldn't have taxed AT&T's network because it tests conditions before deciding whether to send out bandwidth-intensive, high-quality video or lighter-weight, lower-quality files.

This is the second time in recent months that AT&T has revised its policy on the kind of iPhone programs that can operate over its 3G network.

AT&T, which is based in San Antonio, Texas, changed its mind about Internet phone applications - Voice over Internet Protocol or VoIP - after the FCC began looking into Apple's decision to not approve a Google Inc. calling program last year. In written responses to FCC questions in August, it came out that Apple had agreed to seek AT&T's permission before approving VoIP programs that used AT&T's 3G network.

The FCC kicked off a wide-ranging inquiry into competition in the wireless industry. Then, in October, AT&T started allowing 3G VoIP programs.

The FCC is currently working on rules that would keep companies such as AT&T from deciding what kind of Internet traffic is allowed on its networks.

Supporters say such so-called "net neutrality" rules are needed to prevent high-speed Internet providers from abusing their control over broadband connections to block subscribers from using cheaper Internet calling services or accessing online video sites that compete with the providers' own core businesses.

"AT&T's announcement is a step in the right direction. Consumers benefit from mobile video choices," said FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski in a statement Thursday.

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