

Study: Phone co customer satisfaction evens out

May 15 2012, By PETER SVENSSON , AP Technology Writer

(AP) -- Improvements in customer satisfaction at Sprint Nextel Corp. and AT&T Inc. have narrowed differences among the Big 4 wireless carriers to the point that they're basically even in terms of pleasing their subscribers, according to a study released Tuesday.

The American Customer Satisfaction Index puts Sprint, AT&T, T-Mobile USA and Verizon Wireless within two points of each other on a 100-point scale of [customer satisfaction](#).

That's the smallest spread since the survey started looking at all four companies in 2005. It's also within the margin of error at plus or minus three points.

Last year, AT&T clearly trailed the pack, while Sprint and Verizon led. That was a surprising development for Sprint, which was last as recently as four years ago. Sprint CEO Dan Hesse has made improvement in customer service central to his tenure.

AT&T recovered this year, with a three-point increase to 69. It shares that score with T-Mobile USA, the No. 4 carrier by size. Verizon and Sprint are at 70 and 71, respectively.

The survey was developed by the University of Michigan, but is now run by a private company, ACSI LLC. It surveyed about 6,000 households in the first quarter for the annual report.

For the phone companies, the satisfaction index has a limited relevance to actual customer loyalty, which the companies report quarterly. For instance, T-Mobile customers are far more likely to leave the carrier than AT&T's are, even though they have the same score.

T-Mobile is the only company among the Big 4 that doesn't sell the iPhone. That probably matters to customers. The ACSI for the first time published a score for Apple Inc. as a phone manufacturer. At 83 points, it handily outranks other manufacturers measured, including Samsung Electronics Co., HTC Corp. and Motorola Mobility Holdings Inc.

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