

Comcast plans to launch wireless service next year

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In this Nov. 12, 2014, file photo, Comcast Corporation chairman & CEO Brian Roberts speaks at a Comcast presentation at the Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco. On Tuesday, Sept. 20, 2016, Comcast CEO Roberts confirmed that the company plans to launch a cellphone service roughly in the middle of 2017 and appears to be aiming it at areas of the country where it's the cable provider. That could potentially make the cable giant a competitor to Verizon and AT&T for a subset of the country. Comcast has just over 28 million customers. (AP Photo/Jeff Chiu, File)

Comcast plans to launch a cellphone service roughly in the middle of next year, although it would be limited to areas of the country where it's a cable provider.

That could potentially offer real competition to carriers like Verizon and AT&T for a subset of the country. Comcast has just over 28 million customers.

The cable giant plans to create a service that would run on its 15 million Wi-Fi hotspots and use Verizon's wireless network, which it has a deal to resell.

Comcast CEO Brian Roberts confirmed the company's plans at an investment conference Tuesday in New York.

He suggested that Comcast was looking at the mobile service as an add-on to customer bundles, and combining wireless service with Comcast cable or internet would likely make customers stick with Comcast longer.

The company has long looked at mobile service as another potential way to grow its business. Consumers are increasingly watching video on their phones.

Adding wireless service on to a cable bill could also mean some savings for Comcast customers.

"If Comcast is to make this a compelling offer, especially given their lack of history in wireless, they're going to have to offer some steep discounts in their bundles," telecom analyst Jan Dawson of Jackdaw Research said in an email.

Comcast spokeswoman Jenn Khoury declined to answer questions about

the mobile service's pricing and whether people who didn't subscribe to Comcast cable or internet could sign up for it.

Several attempts by big cable companies to offer wireless service have foundered, like the Wi-Fi-only phone launched by New York-area cable company Cablevision in early 2015 (Cablevision is now owned by European telecom Altice). Cox Communications, one of the biggest cable companies, pulled the plug on its short-lived mobile phone service in 2011, saying it didn't have the heft necessary to compete, including the ability to sell certain popular smartphones.

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