

'Free' TV for your cell phone

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One of the first advertising-supported television stations capable of delivering programming to cell phones is set to debut soon.

An estimated 10 million cell phones with Windows' Media Player software inside will be able to receive and display programming from the Digital Music Video Network when it debuts in mid-June with Top 40 music videos, organizers said Tuesday. Rather than paying a monthly fee for the programming, all viewers need to do is wait through 15-second advertisements sandwiched between the music videos, and pay the data-service fee for downloading all those bits onto their cell phone.

Cell phone TV services such as Verizon Wireless's vCast and MobiTV, which is offered by Sprint and Cingular Wireless, all require monthly subscriptions costing between \$10 and \$20 a month.

"It's the closest thing in the mobile media arena to a traditional broadcast network" such as CBS, NBC or ABC, SmartVideo Chief Executive Richard Bennett said in a statement.

Handsets based on Symbian and Palm operating systems will be able to tune in at a later date, according to the station's creators, wireless video specialists SmartVideo Technologies and Digital Music Video Network, a Florida-based company that claims ownership of the world's second-largest music video library.

While cell TV service has generally been ignored so far by consumers, the wireless industry's view is that there's a sizable market for mobile-TV fare, including movies, news clips and standard programming typically found on living room televisions. If the market for the content is indeed robust, such a service could generate significant new revenue streams for wireless operators.

Console makers play for keeps at E3

Verizon Wireless in the United States, and other top-tier operators offering TV services, are finding them a hard sell, according to research group Informa. This year, Verizon expects to sell only about 130,000 video handsets, suggesting the worldwide market for them is commensurately small.

Sectors harboring high hopes for the mobile-TV market do so because of television's dominance as an entertainment form and the ubiquity of cell phones. Informa concluded in a recent study that 125 million people--about 5 percent of all cell phone owners--will be watching TV on their handsets by 2010.

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