

T-Mobile Expands Wi-Fi Hot Spots

Company also discloses just how many people are surfing wirelessly.

Stephen Lawson, IDG News Service
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T-Mobile USA's Wi-Fi hot spot service will expand into France, the Philippines, Portugal, and Switzerland and reach more hotels and airports through roaming agreements the mobile operator announced this week.

The carrier unveiled a roaming agreement with iBahn, a major provider of high-speed Internet access [in hotels](#), as well as deals with [Concourse Communications Group](#) and Opti-Fi Networks that will establish or expand its presence in 39 airports in North America, says Mark Bolger, director of brand marketing for T-Mobile HotSpot. In all those locations, subscribers and pay-as-you-go customers will be able to use their T-Mobile HotSpot usernames and passwords to get on to a wireless LAN, Bolger says.

The iBahn networks can be found in more than 100,000 rooms in 525 hotels, including many Marriott, Hilton, Ritz-Carlton, Doubletree, and Renaissance hotels, according to T-Mobile. The roaming deals also will give T-Mobile customers Wi-Fi access at Chicago O'Hare and the New York area's John F. Kennedy, LaGuardia, and Newark airports, the company says. Additionally, they will be able to use hot spots operated by Orange in France, the Philippines' ePLDT, Portugal Telecom, and Swisscom Mobile, Bolger says.

The new agreements will bring more than 9800 new roaming locations to T-Mobile's network, which will have locations in 17 countries after the rollout is completed over the next two months, Bolger says.

T-Mobile, which launched the service in 2002, is well known for offering hot spot service at Starbucks coffee shops. It also provides coverage at Hyatt and Red Roof Inn hotels. It introduced international roaming last year.

Usage Figures

Also Monday, T-Mobile for the first time disclosed usage figures on the [hot spot network](#). More than 450,000 unique paying customers used T-Mobile hot spots in the last 90 days, the company says. More than 40 percent of users also subscribe to T-Mobile cellular service.

The average user visit is growing longer, to 64 minutes from about 45 minutes last year, and customers are using it for more data-intensive tasks, Bolger says. Monthly traffic grew from about 10TB of data in December 2004 to 1.75TB in May 2005, the company says. Bolger attributes that growth partly to consumer downloads of movies, music, and photos, while saying the company's core customer remains the business user.

T-Mobile has upgraded a majority of its own hot spots to IEEE 802.11g from the slower 802.11b, according to the company.