

Business

SBC will offer Wi-Fi in coffee shop chain ; Surfers to have access from 300 Midwest and East Coast locations.

Sanford Nowlin

EXPRESS-NEWS BUSINESS WRITER

326 words

21 July 2004

San Antonio Express-News

Metro

3E

English

(c) Copyright 2004 San Antonio Express-News. All Rights Reserved.

San Antonio-based SBC Communications Inc. is briskly expanding Wi-Fi Internet access with several deals unveiled Tuesday.

The telecommunications giant will install wireless fidelity "hot spots" in 300 Caribou Coffee shops across the Midwest and East Coast by early next year. The spots use wireless networking to allow customers to surf the Internet via laptop or personal digital assistant.

San Antonio-based SBC Communications Inc. is briskly expanding Wi-Fi Internet access with several deals unveiled Tuesday.

The telecommunications giant will install wireless fidelity "hot spots" in 300 Caribou Coffee shops across the Midwest and East Coast by early next year. The spots use wireless networking to allow customers to surf the Internet via laptop or personal digital assistant.

SBC also signed roaming agreements with companies including Sprint PCS, **Concourse Communications**, Telmex and Wise Technologies that allow its customers to surf on those companies' hot spots at a discount.

It reached a similar agreement this year with wireless Internet provider Wayport.

SBC charges \$19.95 for its FreedomLink Wi-Fi service and allows non-customers to access its hot spots for \$7.95 a day. Under its roaming agreements, subscribers access other providers' spots for \$4 a day.

Telecom providers such as SBC are expanding their Wi-Fi offerings as business travelers armed with Wi-Fi-equipped laptops are demanding the service. Retailers such as Caribou want to install Wi-Fi to boost customer traffic and sales.

SBC has said it expects to have more than 20,000 hot spots by 2006. This spring, the company announced deals to install Wi-Fi spots in hundreds of McDonald's restaurants and UPS stores.

"You'll be hearing a lot more from us about Wi-Fi," spokeswoman Jessica Nunez said. "We'll keep it coming."