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## What Verizon iPhone users can expect

by Marguerite Reardon

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Rumors that the iPhone is coming to Verizon have been buzzing around the Web over the last day or so. So what should Verizon iPhone users expect when the device finally comes to the nation's largest wireless network?

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First, rumors of the Verizon iPhone are just that. There has been no confirmation from Apple or Verizon about the launch of this device. That said, there was never a question that AT&T's exclusivity deal with Apple would end one day. The big question has simply been when. And considering that Verizon is the largest wireless operator in the U.S., it's reasonable to guess that they'd be first in line when AT&T's exclusivity with Apple ends.

On Monday, [The Wall Street Journal](#) reported that Apple was readying a CDMA version of the iPhone. The article cited sources and speculated that this version of the phone could be sold by U.S. carrier Verizon Wireless.

The current generations of iPhones are made for GSM networks. AT&T, the exclusive carrier for the iPhone, along with the vast majority of operators throughout the world, use GSM for their network technology. A handful of wireless carriers, including Verizon and Sprint Nextel in the U.S., along with some operators in China and South Korea, use CDMA.

Since the iPhone first launched in 2007, AT&T has had the exclusive contract to offer it in the U.S. Details of the agreement have never been made public. But AT&T has hinted in recent months that it is preparing for a day when it won't be the only U.S. cell phone carrier offering the iconic device. Since Verizon Wireless is the largest mobile operator in the U.S., experts have long anticipated a phone that would be compatible with its network.

Not much is known about the new CDMA iPhone or when exactly it will come to market. But here is a glimpse of what potential Verizon iPhone customers might expect, based on rumors gathered from around the Web as well as information known about Verizon's network and strategy.

When will it be available?

It could be at least five months to nearly a year before a Verizon version of the iPhone is available. The original Journal article reported that production of a CDMA version of the iPhone would not begin until September. This could mean devices on store shelves in September, or it could take longer before they're available for retail. Also, remember that Verizon is not the only CDMA carrier in the world.

A follow-up Journal story published Tuesday quoted analysts who said the new phone might first be distributed internationally. Maynard Um and Arun Sharma, analysts at UBS, believe a CDMA version of the phone could be launched by China Telecom and KDDI later this year. But they don't believe a Verizon version of the iPhone will come to market in 2010.

Other analysts agree.

"We wouldn't count on a Verizon iPhone for the holidays," Bill Shope, an analyst at Credit Suisse wrote in a research note cited by the Journal. He said the device is likely still in the planning stages.

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Will the new iPhone for Verizon work on Verizon's soon-to-be-launched 4G network? If the Verizon version of the iPhone is released in 2011, there is a very good chance that it will have LTE embedded. LTE or Long Term Evolution is the [technology Verizon is using to build its 4G wireless network](#). The network will be available in 25 to 30 markets by the end of 2010. And more markets will be available in 2011. Verizon has said that an LTE phone would be available in 2011. The technology is still new, so it's very unlikely a handset could come to market in 2010 with LTE embedded.

Are there any device details?

Specific details or pictures of the rumored new iPhone have not begun circulating. So it's difficult to say for certain what potential customers should expect. In addition to the CDMA version of the phone, the Journal also said that Apple will announce a new version of the iPhone for GSM networks this summer. [Engadget](#) pegs the date of the fourth-generation iPhone announcement for June 22.

Engadget also reports that the fourth-generation GSM iPhone will have an enhanced screen that will be made for HD video with double the resolution compared to the current iPhone. This makes sense given the high resolution screens on the Droid, [Nexus One](#), and Evo 4G.

It's also likely that the new version will have faster processors and a front-facing camera, according to [Daring Fireball's John Gruber](#).

Apple has released a new iPhone every year since 2007. Some experts speculate that many if not all of the upgrades speculated for the next-generation GSM version will also be in the CDMA version of the phone.

"The new iPhone will at a minimum have the same features offered on a GSM version of the iPhone," said David Wertheimer, CEO and executive director of the Entertainment Technology Center at USC, a nonprofit consortium funded by Hollywood studios and a variety technology companies. "Customers will expect it to be in parity with what is offered by AT&T and other GSM carriers."

That said, the Journal story said the upgraded GSM iPhone is being made by Taiwanese contract manufacturer Hon Hai Precision Industry, which produced Apple's previous iPhones. And the CDMA iPhone model is being made by Pegatron Technology. This means the different versions of the phone may look and feel different.

Will the new iPhone perform better on the Verizon network?

The problems and frustrations that many iPhone users have experienced over the years--especially those in cities such as New York and San Francisco--[have been well documented](#). Almost since the phone was launched, unhappy iPhone subscribers, mostly in densely populated urban areas, have complained about slow Net access and dropped calls.

AT&T has [acknowledged these problems](#), stating that it has seen data traffic on its network grow 5,000 percent over the past few years. Most of this growth is attributable to the iPhone. To fix these problems, AT&T has been upgrading its network with faster radio technology and more backhaul capacity. Some consumers say they've already noticed a difference in the quality of AT&T's network.

The big question is whether Verizon customers will experience the same problems. Given that other carriers offering the iPhone in other countries, such as the U.K., have also had issues, there's a chance that Verizon's network might also be overwhelmed.

Verizon says its network is prepared to handle a flood of traffic from the iPhone or any other data-hungry smartphone. Like its competitors it has been adding capacity to its backhaul network, which transmits traffic from the cell tower to the wired network.

In general, Verizon has a wider 3G footprint. (That's what [Verizon's advertisements](#) with the blue and red maps are all about.) But AT&T does in theory have a faster 3G network than Verizon. AT&T has upgraded its network to a new version of 3G technology called HSPA 7.2, which is faster than what is offered by Verizon's 3G technology called EV-DO.

But in all fairness, actual network speeds are dependent on many factors. So it will be interesting to see whether consumers notice a difference in performance between AT&T and Verizon. My guess is that, depending on where you are using your iPhone, one network provider might outperform the other. If you live and work where Verizon has better coverage, you could see better performance there. But if you are in a strong AT&T area, it might offer a better experience.

The bottom line is there is no guarantee that Verizon's network will perform any better than AT&T's network.

Is there anything the Verizon iPhone might not be able to do that the AT&T iPhone can do? Yes. The CDMA version of the iPhone will most likely not allow users to talk on the phone using a headset or a speaker, while surfing the Web at the same time. This is not a phone issue, but a limitation in network technology. GSM allows voice connections and data connections to occur on a device at the same time. CDMA technology does not. However, with Wi-Fi it is possible to surf the Web and talk on a CDMA phone, because the Wi-Fi uses a separate radio technology. This may not be a big deal for everyone, but it's something that Luke Wilson has been pointing out in AT&T's advertisements.

Marguerite Reardon has been a CNET News reporter since 2004, covering cell phone services, broadband, citywide Wi-Fi, the Net neutrality debate, as well as the ongoing consolidation of the phone companies. [E-mail Maggie](#).

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## About Signal Strength

Marguerite Reardon has been covering the telecom beat for more than a decade and knows more about wireless and IP networking than she cares to admit. She has been a senior writer for CNET News since 2003, covering all things wireless and broadband related from iPhone launches to major telephone company mergers to IPTV developments. She often appears as an expert on news networks, including CNBC, MSNBC, NPR, and the BBC. Maggie loves visiting CNET's headquarters in San Francisco, but she's an East Coaster at heart, living and working in Manhattan.

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