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### AT&T Puts WiFi BlackBerry on the Menu



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**With its latest offering, the 8820, RIM appears to have aimed directly at the business smartphone market with a WiFi-enabled phone. The device supports UMA, which lets users switch between a cell network and WiFi mid-call, though AT&T, the device's carrier, isn't offering that option. Also, the importance of WiFi capability may be cooling down with the rise of 3G networks.**

[AT&T](#) (NYSE: T) is now selling the first cellular and WiFi BlackBerry handset, the BlackBerry 8820, which is an upgrade of the already popular 8800 series model.

AT&T enterprise customers can use the BlackBerry 8820 with their corporate WiFi networks for additional data coverage, the device's manufacturer, [Research In Motion](#) (Nasdaq: RIMM) , said. Individual customers can use it in their homes. For an added monthly charge, customers can use the 8820 at thousands of WiFi locations throughout the U.S. and the world.


The 8820 supports 802.11 a/b/g WiFi standards, security protocols including WEP ([Wireless Equivalency Protocol](#)), WPA (WiFi Protected Access) and WPA2, as well as [Cisco](#) (Nasdaq: CSCO) Compatible Extensions for connecting with Cisco wireless solutions.

"We've seen considerable interest in the marketplace for a WiFi-enabled BlackBerry, particularly in industries that utilize campus WiFi networks such as healthcare , insurance and the like," John Kampfe, director of media and analyst relations for AT&T Mobility, told TechNewsWorld.

While the 8820 supports Unlicensed Mobile Access (UMA), which lets the 8820 seamlessly switch voice calls between a wireless carrier's cellular network and a WiFi network, AT&T isn't offering this service with the 8820, though the company may in the future.

#### WiFi Use Still Fuzzy


Outside of the enterprise, WiFi is less of a business need, and while it can be handy, it can also be a liability.


"Cellular 3G  is making hotspots less important [because of its speed], and cost and security issues with using WiFi at random coffee shops are driving IT types crazy, whereas cellular costs are predictable and 3G is pretty secure," Allyn Hall, an analyst and director of the wireless research group for In-Stat, told TechNewsWorld.

In addition, particularly for smaller businesses and consumers, "The cellular operators are conflicted about using WiFi for voice -- losing core business," Hall noted.


"It's probably not too important for most. ... AT&T is being short-sighted with this, but protecting their voice business is in their DNA," he added.

### Crossover Potential?

The 8820 is clearly a smartphone for enterprise use, but it also has features coveted by consumers -- a bright and large 320-by-240 pixel screen, the ability to surf the Web, a QWERTY keyboard and the ability play music and videos. Plus, it supports multiple [e-mail](#)  accounts, and while businesses can integrate the 8820 with corporate e-mail systems, consumers can use the functionality, too.

Oh yeah, one more thing: it has built-in GPS , with support for popular navigation solutions like TeleNav GPS Navigator and TeleNav Track.


"The 8800 with GPS has proven enormously successful with road warriors -- sales folks in particular have really adopted the Telenav and Blackberry GPS-based maps capabilities," Tony Rizzo, director of mobile software analysis for The 451 Group, told TechNewsWorld. "Telenav, of course, provides voice-based, real-time directions as well."


The BlackBerry 8820 also supports AT&T Mobile Music, an integrated application that delivers music by providing simple access to a collection of music content, including access to online subscription music content from eMusic and [XM Satellite Radio](#) (Nasdaq: XMSR) .

There are two other features that may make iPhone customers envious -- a removable battery and a microSD expandable memory slot for music, photo and video storage.

### Choices From AT&T

While AT&T is the exclusive carrier of the iPhone, the company isn't turning away from the more traditional business-focused smartphone market, and the 8820 is just one part of a bigger plan.

"It's all about providing choice to our customers. Customers have different preferences as to the type of wireless device they want to use, what operating system  they're most comfortable with, what form factor," Kampfe noted.

"Both [Apple](#) (Nasdaq: AAPL)  and BlackBerry have large and devoted followings, as do many of the other wireless smart devices that AT&T offers. So it's not about a competition between

iPhone and BlackBerry or BlackJack or some other device -- it's about providing our customers with a portfolio of devices that meet their individual needs," he explained.

### **Starts Low, Services Add Up**



The BlackBerry 8820 is available for US\$299.99 with a two-year contract from AT&T, and while the starting price is more competitive than the iPhone's \$399 price tag, monthly service fees for the 8820 can add up fast.

[Internet service](#) can cost \$29.99 with corporate e-mail access going for \$44.99 -- in addition to a qualified voice plan. The XM Satellite Radio and MusicID features that are part of AT&T Mobile Music require monthly subscription fees of \$8.99 and \$3.99, respectively. TeleNav GPS Navigator is available for additional monthly charges of \$5.99 for 10 trips and \$9.99 for unlimited trips. TeleNav Track service plans are \$12.99 to \$21.99 for each device.

### **The Future of RIM**

Of course, smartphones are currently a mixture of vision from the manufacturer and the needs of cellular service carriers.

"RIM anticipates this to be its first effort in terms of delivering a phone that can in fact replace your desktop phone in that it will allow VoIP connectivity," Rizzo said.

"RIM hasn't as yet announced its plans to deliver VoIP/PBX (private branch exchange) capabilities, but keep in mind that they acquired Ascendent Technologies -- which provides all of the dual mode VoIP services and PBX connectivity necessary to turn the 8820 into a desktop phone resource," he explained. "With WiFi support the 8820 will be able to take advantage of UMA, which provides access to GSM (Global System for Mobile communications) and GPRS (general packet radio service) mobile services over unlicensed spectrum technologies, including Bluetooth  and 802.11, to enable the dual mode voice capability." 

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