

On iPads, Femtocells, and Infrastructure

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You probably spotted the news that Softbank is going to have iPad and iPhone exclusively in Japan, much to the anger of DoCoMo.

It's not enough to just have must have devices like iPad and iPhone (even on an exclusive basis) without thinking about the bigger picture and ensuring you have the necessary infrastructure to support these devices. Softbank is a great example of an operator doing just this.

The traffic from these devices is dramatically loading networks, and actually the impact of signaling is even more of a stress (I heard recently that one iPhone with a typical load of always on Apps is the same user of network resource as 1,000 conventional voice phones...)

As such, it is probably no coincidence that Softbank has launched its femtocell service.

http://mb.softbank.jp/mb/special/network/home_antenna_ft/ [1] (it is in Japanese, naturally enough - but Google translate is pretty impressive)

What is especially significant is that this is free. As in zero cost, nada, fully-subsidized.

It is the first time an operator has done such an aggressive offer as their standard offer. Most operators are somewhat subsidizing the femtocell, but consumers still have to pay - however in many cases if you phone to complain of poor coverage and threaten to leave they will give you a free device to keep you happy - but that is not the "list price" in the way that it is for Softbank.

Josh Adelson of Airvana has written a good blog on the subject of pricing, and concludes there is a lot of scope for interesting models.

<http://www.femtohub.com/articles/41768/a-radical-approach-to-femtocell-pricing/> [2]

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As operators appreciate the opportunities femtocells give to improve their network efficiency, I expect we will see a lot more of them following Softbank's lead and offering some very attractive pricing, and probably some attractive plans too (for example AT&T's unlimited calls & data from home which do not count against your plan minutes).

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<http://www.ecnmag.com/blogs/2010/05/ipads-femtocells-and-infrastructure>

Links:

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