Microsoft Adds App Access to Non-smart Phones

(AP) -- Microsoft Corp. is giving people with regular cell phones access to the same kinds of programs that smart phone owners have embraced.

Microsoft's OneApp software, announced Monday, is aimed at developing countries where so-called "feature phones" and prepaid systems are prevalent.

Microsoft's first partner is Blue Label Telecoms Group of South Africa, which sells prepaid cell phone minutes. In a few weeks, Blue Label customers will be able to download OneApp just as they would getting a new ringtone. OneApp will come with a preselected set of about a dozen programs - or "apps," in current slang - including Facebook, Twitter and the software maker's own Windows Live Messenger.

Because many phones have limited storage, OneApp stores some information on central servers rather than the device and sends it out only when necessary.

Future wireless partners will be able to pick different programs to distribute with OneApp, Microsoft said. In that sense, OneApp isn't quite an "app store," a central shop for mobile users to pick and choose which apps they download. Such stores have become popular since one for Apple Inc.'s iPhone became a big reason to buy the pricey gizmos.

Redmond, Wash.-based Microsoft did not disclose the financial arrangements with Blue Label and Amit Mital, a Microsoft corporate vice president, would not say how OneApp plans to make money.

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Mital said OneApp would give people a way to obtain new software, and makers of such programs might subsidize cellular network access needed to make them run.

Most feature phones already can run games and other programs, and many wireless carriers have marketplaces to sell them. Microsoft said OneApp will reduce the workload for software programmers who currently have to tweak and test applications on hundreds of feature phone models. The software maker said carriers, too, are interested in OneApp because it could boost data usage in emerging markets.

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