From AT&T to Leap: A look at how iPhone availability has expanded in the US

The Associated Press

Since Verizon Wireless broke AT&T's exclusive grip on the iPhone last year, several other phone carriers now offer Apple's popular smartphone. Here's a look at how iPhone availability has expanded in the U.S.:

- COMING TO NO. 1: AT&T Inc. was the only U.S. carrier offering the iPhone when the first model came out in 2007. It lost its exclusive status in February 2011 when Verizon Wireless, the nation's top wireless carrier, started selling the iPhone.

- ANOTHER NATIONAL CARRIER: Sprint Nextel Corp., the No. 3 carrier, also got the iPhone, starting in October with Apple Inc.'s introduction of the iPhone 4S. It also sells the iPhone 4 with AT&T and Verizon Wireless.

- REGIONAL OFFERING: C Spire Wireless, a small company that provides service in Mississippi and surrounding states, started selling the iPhone late last year. It bypassed larger carriers including T-Mobile USA and U.S. Cellular in getting the right to sell it. U.S. Cellular Corp. says it turned down the chance to sell the phone because it didn't want to spend a few hundred dollars per phone, as other carriers do, so customers can buy it at Apple's listed, subsidized price.

- CHEAPER IPHONES: Several small, regional cellphone companies began selling the iPhone at prices that undercut the big carriers. For instance, the cost for a basic 4S model through those carriers is $150, which is $49 less than what national carriers charge. Carriers making this cheaper offering include NTelos Wireless of Virginia; Appalachian Wireless of Kentucky; and Alaska Communications, Matanuska Telephone Association and GCI of Alaska.

- NO CONTRACTS: Leap Wireless International Inc., the parent of the Cricket cellphone service, said Thursday that it will be the first mainland U.S. phone company to sell the latest iPhone models on a prepaid, no-contract basis. Open Mobile, which serves Puerto Rico, started selling no-contract, prepaid iPhones on May 18.

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