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**PERSONAL TECHNOLOGY**

By WALTER S. MOSSBERG

## Verizon Devices Use High-Speed Network For Voice, Web, E-Mail

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The most important development this year in U.S. wireless communications wasn't the headline-grabbing mergers of various wireless carriers. It was the quiet, gradual rollout by Verizon Wireless of a technology called EV-DO, which for the first time is providing broadband-speed Internet access over the air from anywhere in the cities where it has been deployed.


This new Verizon network, which the company calls "BroadbandAccess," promises users in 18 cities so far that they can get on the Internet at typical speeds of between 300 and 500 kilobits a second. That's the equivalent of what many wired home DSL modems do, and much faster than prior American cellphone data networks. But in my first tests of the new network last spring I was able to do even better, averaging nearly 600 kilobits a second.

And, unlike Wi-Fi, another form of wireless broadband, the new Verizon network doesn't require the user to be near a "hot spot," usually found in coffee shops or hotels. Verizon hopes to have most major metro areas covered by EV-DO by the end of 2005, and Sprint is also planning to roll out an EV-DO network next year.

But so far, this capability has been available only via a special modem card inserted into a laptop computer, and it has carried a whopping monthly price tag of \$80. Now Verizon is introducing two hand-held devices, a combination PDA/phone and a standard flip phone, that can tap the EV-DO network. And it is charging lower monthly fees to use the network with these devices than it does for laptop use.

I've been testing these new EV-DO hand-helds over the past few weeks. Both achieved broadband speeds when

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**MOSSBERG'S MAILBOX**

Walter S. Mossberg [answers readers' questions](#)<sup>2</sup> about computers and technology.

**ABOUT WALT MOSSBERG**

Walt Mossberg is the author and creator of the weekly Personal Technology column in The Wall Street Journal, which has appeared every Thursday since 1991. The goal of the column is "to take the consumer's side in the struggle to master the machine, to deliver a weekly dose of useful information in plain English, but in a way that never condescends to our readers just because they can't tell one chip from another."

Mr. Mossberg also writes the Mossberg Solution, which premiered April 9, 2002, and Mossberg's Mailbox. He is also a contributing editor of Smart Money, the Journal's monthly magazine, where he writes the Mossberg Report column. On television, Mr. Mossberg appears frequently as a technology commentator for the CNBC network.

Mr. Mossberg has been a reporter and editor at the Journal since 1970. He is based in the Journal's Washington, D.C., office, where he spent 18 years covering national and international affairs before turning his attention to technology.



Audiovox XV6600

connected to the Internet, but only one can really make practical use of the higher speed. The first is the Audiovox XV6600, a PDA with a built-in phone that is based on Microsoft's Pocket PC operating system. This model is essentially identical to a Sprint Pocket PC I reviewed in October. But the Sprint version achieved only a fraction of the Internet speeds that the new Verizon model can.

Like its Sprint sibling, the Verizon PDA has a crucial new feature -- a slide-out keyboard that finally makes the Pocket PC a plausible competitor of the **palmOne** Treo and the **Research In Motion** BlackBerry for serious mobile e-mail users.

The XV6600 went on sale this week through Verizon's corporate sales channels and will be in Verizon stores next month. It costs \$549 with a two-year contract. The monthly fee for unlimited use of the high-speed EV-DO data network is \$44.99, on top of the cost of a voice calling plan.

Compared with the new Sprint Treo 650, the gold standard of such smart phones, the XV6600 is big, pricey and power hungry. It's heavier and bigger than the Treo and has less battery life -- just 2.5 hours of talk time, half of the Treo's. It also has a lower-resolution screen and costs \$100 more. But the Sprint Treo 650, as nice as it is, can only fetch e-mail and surf the Web at speeds of up to 70 kilobits a second. In my tests, Verizon's new Pocket PC was never slower than 349 kilobits a second, and it averaged between 450 and 550 kilobits.

Armed with those speeds, I was able to confidently set the e-mail program on the device to get the full text of messages and even attachments. It downloaded hundreds of e-mails daily, at speeds that, while not as fast as my office and home PCs, were close enough that I felt almost as if I was at the computer. On the Internet, Web pages rendered quickly, and I was able to play streaming audio and video, at good resolution, with no more stuttering than you'd get on a PC.

The new EV-DO phone, the LG VX8000, is a standard-looking camera-equipped flip phone that will go on sale in the first quarter of 2005 for less than \$300. The monthly fee for high-speed network use will be less than \$25, which includes unlimited access to Verizon's basic video news clips service, its "Mobile Web," and some other canned Internet services designed for cellphones.

Like many phones, this new LG model lacks a decent e-mail program and Web browser, and comes with only crippled versions mainly intended to access services selected by the carrier. For that reason, I couldn't use speed-testing Web sites to measure the phone's Internet speed. But downloading Web pages on the phone felt like a broadband experience, and I was easily able to view videos streamed from the Web, usually a painful experience on a phone.

Verizon says the VX8000 will have a better e-mail program when it ships next year. But unless it's a really good one, I doubt it will be worth buying this phone for its EV-DO capabilities. The high speed gets you only online video clips and faster downloading of games and ring tones, which hardly seem worth the monthly fee.

Bottom line: The new Verizon EV-DO network is a very good thing, and it's a great addition to a laptop or PDA. But until Verizon and other carriers allow regular phones to have more computerlike capabilities, wireless broadband won't matter much for average cellphone users.

**Write to** Walter S. Mossberg at [mossberg@wsj.com](mailto:mossberg@wsj.com)<sup>1</sup>

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