NETWORKWORLD

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Worker tracking service coming to Nextel phones

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A service that lets enterprises track their employees to within a few feet using GPS has made the leap from embedded hardware in vehicles to mobile phones.

At Road has teamed up with Nextel to offer its Mobile Resource Management (MRM) system on mobile phones. Two Motorola handsets sold by Nextel, the i88s and i58sr, have GPS capability built in and can be used by the MRM service, said Linda Standen, At Road's vice president of marketing.

Enterprises can use At Road's service to manage mobile workers, with benefits such as billing validation and more efficient dispatching of skilled workers. The service can help organizations assess and improve the productivity of a mobile work force, Standen said. Until now it has used embedded GPS devices, generally in vehicles. With the new service, called Pocket Edition 1.0, managers will be able to track employees' movements even if they often work on their feet or park at a site and walk around.

As part of its service, At Road, in Fremont, Calif., collects location information from each device and saves it for about two weeks, Standen said. Customers can download the data and store it in their own files, print it or feed it into applications.

Three customers are already using Pocket Edition 1.0, according to Standen, who said she couldn't yet name them. One is a waste management company that wants to be able to prove its employees collected or delivered waste on time and in the right place, for billing purposes. Another is a school district that needs to keep track of bus drivers and teachers across many schools. In addition, a security company plans to give the phones to guards to aid in dispatching and to get location information in case of emergency calls, Standen said.

Nextel's phones, which work on an Integrated Digital Enhanced Network network, are the first to carry At Road's service. At Road also offers its service over Cellular Digital Packet Data and plans to launch services next month over CDMA2000 1x and General Packet Radio Service networks.

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The MRM service, available now, costs $39.95 per month, per device, on a three-year contract. The price goes up to $41.95 on a two-year contract and $45.95 on a one-year contract. Users also have to buy Nextel's Packetstream service, which starts at $12.99 per month for 256K bit/sec of data sent and received. Nextel sells the i88s handset for $139.99 and the i58sr for $149.99.

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