

Business Services Industry

0 Comments

IBM's plans to ship Simon put on hold for time being

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The IBM Personal Computer Co. will ship Simon, a hand-held personal communicator it is manufacturing for BellSouth Cellular Corp., at a later date than initially anticipated. Technical issues, resulting from the integration of Simon's cellular faxing capability, were discovered early in the manufacturing and development cycle as IBM's quality assurance testing was being conducted. IBM will hold up shipments of the device until the bugs are worked out.

Simon's unique design continues to contribute to the postponement of the product's delivery to BellSouth. Simon demands new, previously unwritten test standards and procedures, which need to be developed and tested by IBM.

Simon, which looks and acts like a cellular phone, offers more than voice communications. Users can employ Simon as a wireless machine, a pager, an E-mail device, a calendar, an appointment scheduler, an address book, a calculator and a pen-based sketchpad.

IBM and BellSouth jointly began developing the product last year after IBM displayed a prototype of its personal communicator at the Comdex show, which sparked BellSouth executives' interest. The two companies based the final product on extensive market research (MPN, Nov. 8, 1993, pp. 1-3).

It is not uncommon for technical problems to surface during IBM's stringent quality assurance testing. IBM expects to begin production of a customer-shippable product to BellSouth when testing is completed.

"This recent development will only create a setback in timing," said BellSouth's Nicole Lipson. "There are people still eagerly awaiting the product."

"Our plans are to bring the Simon to BellSouth's national and regional markets...There is nothing that has happened to change those plans," Lipson said.

...Simon Includes Many User-Friendly Features

Weighing in at a little more than a pound, the new personal communicator boasts a liquid crystal display (LCD) that offers a telephone keypad as well as a computer keypad. When used as a cellular phone, Simon's standard cellular features, include a built-in (911) emergency call button, last-number redial, last 10-number redial, address book auto-dial and roaming preference.

Using the standard Simon, customers can create faxes and memos by using pen-touch screens or by writing directly on the screen, using a stylus.

When customers send faxes, their handwriting will be reflected exactly--not digitized to look like a printed word--using a technology called pen annotation.

As with any new product, consumer response to the new product and service cannot be gauged. "We are hoping to have a tremendous response to Simon, and with our 1-800-"Simon says" hotline, interest appears to still be high," Lipson said. "There are several different people interested in the product--including doctors, the media and real-estate agents. Simon has a broad appeal to a number of different individuals and industries."

Lipson said BellSouth could not provide information on the initial volume of products the company was expecting from IBM.

"We see a lot of different markets out there for Simon," Lipson said. "There is a big pie out there and Simon will have a slice of it."

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