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## Valley on wireless fast track

### Pac-West deal makes Stockton one of the first with broadband

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It's not often that Stockton residents get to test-drive new technology before customers in Silicon Valley.

A recent partnership between a Stockton-based telecommunications provider and a wireless-service company will launch wireless broadband service, a form of high-speed Internet access comparable to digital subscriber line (DSL) and broadband cable, to Stockton customers as a starting point for a nationwide wireless network.

Santa Rosa-based **BroadLink Communications** will offer wireless broadband service to Stockton's Pac-West Telecomm, which will begin selling the service this month to local business customers and Internet service providers (ISPs) that serve residential consumers.

Stockton is the second city, after **BroadLink's** hometown of Santa Rosa, to receive the service. That's because it's Pac-West's base and home to a telecommunications hub that serves at least half of the provider's ISP customers nationwide, BroadLink's president and CEO Bob Handell said.

"We're delighted to have this relationship with Pac-West, which is one of ... the most profitable competitive local (telecommunications providers) in the country."

Pac-West was an attractive partner because of its growing base of customers clamoring for high-speed Internet access, Handell said.

For Pac-West, the deal will offer their customers an alternative way to access the Internet that has advantages over DSL and broadband cable connections, said Wally Griffin, Pac-West's CEO.

"The introduction of wireless broadband services is consistent with our strategy to surround our customers with a full suite of broadband solutions."

Pac-West already resells DSL service from another business partner.

**BroadLink** has installed several transmission towers in Stockton that will receive signals from antennae and small radio modems installed at customers' businesses or homes. A tower is expected to go up in Lodi to serve customers there by the end of next month.

Stockton-based ISPs InReach Internet and Big Valley Internet, as well as Nevada-based CompuTech Internet Services, are rolling out wireless services to their customers. Pac-West expects many of its 100 ISP customers across the country to follow suit.

Resellers, such as ISPs, will each determine customer rates. InReach, for example, charges a monthly fee of \$49.95 and a one-time installation fee of \$198.

Connection speeds range from 128 kilobits per second to 1.5 megabits per second -- or from 25 to 50 times faster than the typical modem connection.

The price and speed is comparable to Pacific Bell's DSL, which delivers Internet connections over phone lines, and AT&T Broadband's broadband cable service, which connects to customers via fiber-optic cable lines.

**BroadLink** expects to roll out wireless services in other regions where Pac-West offers telecommunications services.

The wireless provider is building networks in other areas including Silicon Valley, San Francisco, Atlanta, Nashville, Kansas City, Chicago and Detroit.

"Wireless technology fills in the gaps left by other high-speed Internet services such as DSL and broadband cable", Handell said.

DSL suffers from more limited service areas than wireless technology, which can be installed in multiple locations more quickly, he said. Moreover, cable connections are piped through a single line, translating into potential slowdowns for customers sharing space with others in their immediate area.

All access methods have their limitations, said Bob Kasai, marketing director for high-speed Internet service at AT&T Broadband.

"No matter what high-speed connection you get ... at some point you're going to share bandwidth with other customers."

Slowdowns, which are few and far between, still can occur when transmissions are fed to a home office as well as from Internet traffic once customers are online, said Kasai, who oversees marketing in greater Los Angeles, Fresno and Stockton.

AT&T Broadband has been pleased by demand for its cable-access service, which is available to about 90 percent of cable customers in those three areas, he added.

Demand for DSL also is growing fairly rapidly, Pac Bell officials said.

Still, well-publicized installation delays last summer have dogged the company.

InReach officials said delays and service-area problems with Pac Bell's DSL prompted the company to adopt wireless services.

The delays, prompted by a requirement that Pac Bell launch a subsidiary to manage the installation process, have since been resolved, said Pac Bell spokeswoman Heather Alexander.

"There's a significant demand for DSL service and Pac Bell is moving quickly in neighborhoods to offer the service."

Also, Pac Bell aims to extend its reach beyond the 3.3-mile radius in which customers must live to be wired for DSL, Alexander said.

Pac Bell's parent company, SBC Communications, launched a three-year, \$6 billion dollar initiative in fall 1999 to expand its network with the goal that 80 percent of the company's telecommunications customers will be able to access DSL.

Pac-West isn't the only local company launching wireless Internet access. Gottschalk Internet and Delta Network Solutions have recently set up their own wireless networks and are charging similar fees for services.

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