



The State Journal-Register • Springfield, IL • The Oldest Newspaper In Illinois

[Back](#) [Home](#)

Share: [ShareThis](#) [Print](#) [Comment](#)

AT&T's U-Verse coming to Springfield

By **TIM LANDIS**

THE STATE JOURNAL-REGISTER

Posted Jun 29, 2009 @ 09:46 AM

Last update Jun 30, 2009 @ 06:21 AM

AT&T joined the competition for cable television customers in Springfield, Champaign, Danville and Decatur on Monday, although the video service is not yet available in every corner of every neighborhood.

The introduction of AT&T's U-verse system also represents the company's first major move outside the Chicago and metro St. Louis markets in Illinois since a state law was enacted two years ago to encourage more cable choices.

While the company does not disclose specific neighborhoods for competitive reasons, the manager of U-verse for Illinois and Wisconsin said expansion will continue through the rest of this year.

"We'll continue to push further into neighborhoods. We are by no means done with the Springfield, and the other markets," said Amanda Harris.

A basic U-verse video package begins at \$49. A combination of TV, high-speed Internet and telephone service begins at about \$94, not including taxes, fees and other charges.

AT&T is now in more than 90 markets nationwide with its video product.

Executive director Dave Kolata of the Citizens Utility Board, a Chicago consumer group that was among supporters of the 2007 law, said AT&T's progress has not been as fast as the group would like. But the company does appear to be on track to meet the requirements for adding markets, he said.

"From what we can tell, consumers like having the option, and when it's available, it's quite competitive," said Kolata.

"Certainly, the rollout has been slower than some consumers expected. There are places where it is available in one part of town and across the street it is not available," said Kolata.

He said the economy probably has played a role in the slower-than-expected expansion.

Springfield resident Josh Witkowski, who checked availability of U-verse as soon as he learned of Monday's announcement, said he finds himself in just such a neighborhood. Witkowski lives near Lawrence Avenue and Monroe Street just east of Veterans Parkway.

"It's not available to me yet. I have a U-verse pedestal not three blocks from my house, and a main fiber center three blocks in the other direction," said Witkowski.

He said he has had periodic problems with his high-speed Internet connection through Comcast, which he uses for online gaming and movie downloads. But he said his initial check found Comcast would be cheaper for him even if AT&T cable was available.

"I was hoping AT&T would have a competitive service. I've heard good things about U-Verse," said Witkowski.

Comcast spokeswoman Angelynn Amores said the company is ready for the competition from AT&T.

"AT&T's entry into the television market is actually a response to our success in taking their Internet and phone customers and their business and residential customers," said Amores.

AT&T said in a report to the Illinois Commerce Commission this spring that it has made "substantial progress" toward market expansion requirements created as part of the 2007 cable-competition law.

The Monday announcement also included statements from several legislators — including state Reps. Raymond Poe of Springfield and Rich Brauer of Petersburg, and state Sen. Larry Bomke of Springfield — praising the announcement as an example of competition encouraged by the 2007 reforms.

ICC spokeswoman Beth Bosch said the commission also fielded consumer calls when U-verse was first introduced in Chicago.

"We got a lot of calls about where they are going to offer the service ... and they wanted to know when," said Bosch.

Tim Landis can be reached at 788-1536.

The 2007 cable-competition law

* Former Gov. Rod Blagojevich signed legislation in June 2007 that created a statewide cable franchise, rather than requiring providers to get approval in individual communities. AT&T was awarded the first franchise in October 2007. It is the only company that has been approved to date.

* Video access must be available to 35 percent of households in the company's markets within three years of the franchise approval. In the case of AT&T, the date is Oct. 23, 2010.

* At least 30 percent of cable and video households served within three years of the franchise approval must be low-income households.

* AT&T reported to state regulators this spring that video is now available to 26 percent of households in its Illinois market.

Source: Illinois Commerce Commission

Rollout

Portions of the following communities were included in the initial rollout announced Monday by AT&T:

Springfield, Champaign, Urbana, Decatur, Danville, Leland Grove, Mt. Zion, Harristown, Savoy and Tilton.

Source: AT&T

Comparison

AT&T -- U200 Double Pack.

* Basic cost: \$94 a month for video, high-speed Internet and phone. No contract.

* Features: Up to 220 channels, including local channels, 48 music channels, digital video recorder, installation; up to 3MB per second of Internet download speed; phone (unlimited voice for an extra \$30 a month);

Comcast -- * HD Starter Triple Play

* Basic cost: \$99 a month for one-year contract (\$129.99 after a year), \$200 cash back (for new residential customers through July 12).

* Features: More than 80 digital channels, including HBO, free DVR for six months; download speeds up to 12MB; unlimited nationwide long-distance and local calling, including 12 calling features.

From companies' Web sites. Taxes, fees and other charges not included. (Consumers should read the fine print when considering cable, phone and Internet packages, because customized features, equipment purchases, installation charges and contract duration can make a significant difference in price.)

Copyright © 2009 GateHouse Media, Inc. Some Rights Reserved.

Original content available for non-commercial use under a Creative Commons license, except where noted.