

# Cellular telephones grow in popularity in Detroit

The word cellular no longer conjures images of high school biology class. In today's business world, it refers to a person's telephone away from home.

The popularity of cellular telephones has created nothing short of a revolution since the service was commercially introduced just five years ago. Growing faster than telephone, VCR or television usage, the industry attracts new customers at a rate of 75,000 per month nationwide.

By next year, nearly four million Americans will own cellular telephones. By 1998, that number is expected to double.

And the Detroit area is right in step, representing one of the nation's fastest-growing markets.

That's the word from Linda Eilan, marketing manager with Ameritech Mobile Communications eastern re-

gion in Southfield. Cellular One is the other carrier serving this area. The Federal Communications Commission limits the number of providers of cellular services to two per area.

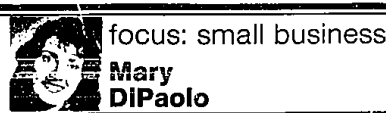
"Last year Detroit experienced tremendous growth in that usage was up 156 percent as compared to 87 percent in 1987. When you consider the nation's average growth rate of 35 percent, Detroit has proven itself to be a very viable user community," Eilan said.

**SO WHAT MAKES** cellular telephones so appealing?

"They save a lot of time and aggravation," said John Gargaro, owner of Gargaro Construction Co. in Livonia. "Rather than sitting in my office to return phone calls, I can contact the people I have to from the construction site or when I'm on the road."

She points out another feature: a sense of personal safety.

"If you're on the way to a meeting or appointment and something happens to the car, it's encouraging to know any crisis can be handled almost immediately."



## focus: small business

Mary DiPaolo

Gargaro said his service runs about \$400 per month but has been worth the cost. "It isn't a toy, so I don't treat it like one."

Judith Trepeck, partner in the Birmingham-based CPA firm of Grey & Trepeck, agrees.

"I've had my car phone for four years now and wouldn't be without it. If I need something done at the office, all I have to do is call rather than holding off until I get back."

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**IN TERMS OF** technology, cellular car phones are capable of receiving and transmitting information when hooked up to lap-top computers, on-line data bases, portable diagnostic equipment and facsimile machines. Soon, voice activation technology will be available so users can direct their cellular phones to "call home" or another phone automatically.

The problem of missing incoming calls has also been solved. Mobile message services will accept messages for users away from their cars.

In terms of cost, both Ameritech Mobile Communications and Cellular One have recently restructured their rates.

The Detroit area has always had the lowest monthly service charge when compared to the rest of the country, but as demand has grown in Detroit so has the need to build more cell sites, add more customer service personnel and enhance the overall system. We also found that more and more of our customers had varying usage needs, so now we offer three different plans: allowing users to pay a flat price for a set number of minutes per month," Eilan said.

For example, Cellular One, under its Productivity Plus 500 package, and Ameritech Mobile, under its Time Pack 500 plan, offer 500 minutes of usage per month for a flat rate of \$149-\$150.

"I know it's been said that owning a cellular telephone is a lot like buying a razor. You get the razor for free and spend all your money on the blades," Gargaro said. "But almost everyone needs a razor, and it won't be long before everyone needs and gets a cellular telephone."

**"IF YOU KNOW** how much time you spend on the phone and can accurately predict future usage, picking the right plan can save quite a bit of money," Eilan said. For those needing less than 100 minutes per

month, service is available for about \$7.50 per month and an additional 56 cents per minute during peak hours and 16 cents per minute during off-peak times.

A recent study by Technology Futures of Austin, Texas, showed that the average cost of owning and operating a cellular phone is about \$131 per month for the relatively active user (250 minutes). By 1997, it will cost about \$60 per month.

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Mary DiPaolo is the owner of MarkeTrends, a Farmington Hills-based business consulting firm. She is also producer and host of the cable television series, "Chamber Perspectives."

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