News

Pricey, with glitches, but everybody wants it

BY MATT ROCHELEAU FOR THE SUN CHRONICLE Saturday, July 12, 2008 1:11 AM EDT

Kimmy Bradsher sees her new iPhone at the Tempe Marketplace AT&T store Friday. (Associated Press)

New Apple iPhone draws big crowds to the local outlets

Between long lines, sellouts and activation problems, patience was key for local shoppers looking to purchase the coveted iPhone 3G released by Apple Inc. on Friday.

By early afternoon, the AT&T store at Emerald Square mall in North Attleboro had sold out, with no news on when more stock would arrive, shopper Desi Bellamy of Providence said after leaving the store.

"I would have bought it today if they had it," Bellamy said.

Employees at the store said they could not speak to the news media, but next door at J.B. Robinson Jewelers, employee Dennis Baker said there was a line of about 30 people snaking out of the AT&T store when he arrived for work at 9:30 a.m., though the store does not open until 10 a.m.

Baker said he spoke to the person at the front of the line, who said he had camped outside the store since 8 a.m. Lines at the Apple Store at Providence Place Mall were even longer, according to Bellamy, who went there earlier in the day.

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Bellamy estimated a line of 200 people waited there, stretching from the store's doorway to the mall escalators. Despite long lines, phones there were in stock as of 4 p.m. Friday, according to a store employee.

The iPhone 3G, released in 21 countries Friday, updates last year's model by speeding up Internet access and adding a navigation chip. Consumers paid $199 for the lower model or $299 for the top-of-the-line model, plus a two-year service contract through AT&T.

Though less expensive than the initial prices of $499 and $599 for the older models, some shoppers still said the high-tech gadget was too pricey.

"I would get it if I was rich enough," said John Roque Jr. of North Attleboro, who came with friends Jared Herrern and Alex Pereira just to check out the new phone.

"It's pretty cool, but the plan is too expensive," said another shopper who intended to stick with his current T-Mobile service.

The lucky few who waited out the lines long and got their hands on an iPhone before they sold out found they were not done waiting yet.

A spokesman for AT&T, the exclusive carrier for the iPhone in the U.S., said there was a global problem with Apple's iTunes servers that prevented the phones from being fully activated in-store, as had been planned.

Instead, employees were telling buyers to go home and perform the last step by connecting their phones to their own computers, spokesman Michael Coe said.

However, the iTunes servers were equally hard to reach from home, leaving the phones unusable except for emergency calls. Calls to AT&T started with an automated message telling customers they may have to wait until later in the day to "tether and sync" their devices.

The problem extended to owners of the previous iPhone model. A software update released for that phone on Friday morning required the phone to be reactivated through iTunes.

John Nason of Norton uses the previous model, and said he was unable to use his phone all day since he tried updating it at home Friday morning.

"I wish I never got it," Nason said of his current iPhone.

He said the newer model is better and less expensive, and visited the AT&T store in North Attleboro to upgrade, but the store was out of stock.

"The new one looks awesome - sounds like a good deal," Nason said.

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realist wrote on Jul 12, 2008 10:00 AM:
" The glitch is with the ATT system. It will be worked out in a few days. This is an amazing product that will put other phones to shame. "

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