



By Rachel Metz

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## Camera Phones Help Fight Bulge

Chubby nerds, rejoice! The battle of the bulge now has a high-tech weapon: the camera phone.

Sprint cell-phone subscribers can sign up for MyFoodPhone, a service that gives diet advice when users e-mail cell-phone photographs of their meals and post details of their dietary habits online.

The \$10 monthly service (plus photo transfer fees) has been available on Sprint's website for a few months and officially launched in May. In about a month it should be available to all U.S. cell-phone customers.

If current statistics are any indication, MyFoodPhone has plenty of potential customers. According to the CDC's 1999-2002 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, more than two-thirds of U.S. adults over age 20 are overweight and a third of these are considered obese.

At 5 feet 10 inches and 230 pounds, Marc Onigman is a yo-yo dieter. Onigman, who is a patent holder for MyFoodPhone and its spokesman, has been using it for three months and although he hasn't lost much weight, he hasn't gained any either, and calls it a successful experiment. He said he became a vegetarian after noticing he was consuming too much fat and is considering giving up dairy as well.

It's a new service, so the folks behind MyFoodPhone don't know for sure how many other customers will like the service -- or whether they'll put in the effort required to use it. Along with asking users to send in meal photos, the service asks users to post detailed information, including blood pressure, weight and consumption of fats and carbohydrates on the MyFoodPhone website.

Every two weeks, users get a personalized 90-second video by e-mail from advisors trained by nutritionists letting them know how they're doing.

Despite the work involved, MyFoodPhone is not a diet, Onigman said. "The point of it is to get slow, gradual changes," he said.

Anna Maria Siega-Riz, an associate professor of nutrition at the University of North Carolina, thought MyFoodPhone could be a useful tool as long as customers can stay interested long enough to change their behaviors. But, she noted, it's hard to judge portion sizes from the photos. Siega-Riz recently conducted a caloric intake study where parents snapped shots of their children's meals and shared them with a nutritionist.

Onigman thinks photos are valuable -- it makes people face the stark reality of what they've been eating over, say, two weeks. "As you page through them and see the sum total of what you've been eating for two weeks, you look at it and say, 'Did I really need to be eating that much?'"

MyFoodPhone's chief competitor is Nutrax, which gives dietitian feedback and access for \$32 a month. Before Sprint got involved, MyFoodPhone's service cost \$100 a month, but the company was able to cut the price by using fewer nutritionists.

Sprint spokeswoman Emmy Anderson said the company believes customers want services that can help them improve their health. She wouldn't give numbers, but said customer adoption of MyFoodPhone is "on pace and exceeding what we'd hoped for."

Onigman said he hopes MyFoodPhone can teach people to eat less and exercise more on their own, even though doing so could be bad for his business.

"I say that we're sort of in business to lose customers, in a way," he said.