

# Sprint deal to help Ford slice land lines

By SUZANNE KING

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**Ford Motor Co.** is cutting the cord for 8,000 of its product engineers.

**Sprint Corp.** on Monday said it had signed a deal to provide wireless phone service for the Ford employees. The service, which will include Sprint's walkie-talkie style service, Ready Link, will supplant the workers' land-line desk phones.

Sprint did not disclose the value of the deal, but a spokesman said it represented one of the most significant Ready Link deals that Sprint had signed since launching the product in 2003.

The deal is also a noteworthy example of a corporation replacing workers' desk phones with mobile phones, something Sprint hopes will become more common down the road.

Howard Janzen, president of Sprint's business unit, said Ford was breaking new ground by enabling employees to be completely mobile.

"These wirelessly empowered employees will be able to spend more productive time with the right people and in the right places, rather than behind a desk," Janzen said in a news release. "We are bringing new speed, spontaneity and interaction to the Ford workplace wherever it may be and eliminating tethers to the traditional office phone."

Valerie Rosnik, a Ford spokeswoman, said the change would give product engineers more flexibility to be at testing facilities, training sites and manufacturing plants as the company rolls out several new products.

Ready Link lets a caller contact one or more phones by pushing one button rather than dialing a phone number. It is modeled after a walkie-talkie service offered by **Nextel Communications**.

Sprint in December announced it would merge with Nextel, which has made its walkie-talkie service one of its primary selling points with large business

customers. The Sprint-Nextel merger is expected to be completed in the middle of the year, pending approval from regulators.

Rosnik declined to say whether Sprint's future with Nextel led the company to choose Sprint, saying the company had a policy of not commenting on vendor relationships. But she said sales talks between Sprint and Ford started before Sprint and Nextel announced their merger plans.

Winning large business accounts has been a recent focus for Sprint. The company's wireless service traditionally has appealed primarily to consumers.