

Northern Innovators



Not long ago, Bush telephones had a problem that scared companies from providing cell service: if a girl were to pick up her cellphone in a village and call a friend in the same village, her voice needed to travel 88,000 miles before it rang the cell down the street.

Her phone signal would have had to zip first up to a satellite and then back down to Anchorage, and then back up to the satellite before it was finally relayed down to the same village. The effect of all that travel—22,000 miles one-way to a satellite is a long way even at the speed of light—would be a ghostly delay from when someone spoke until when another heard her. It would make for an awkward conversation, with people talking over one another. It was a problem that could happen only one place in America.

“Alaska is the last place in the whole 50 states where satellites are used for lifeline communications,” says Gene Strid, vice president and chief engineer of network services at GCI Communication Corp. “Alaska is more like a developing third-world country. We had a lot more in common with Micronesia than the Lower 48.”

owwt vice hadthe L” -k pl ecen rp20to5.1 Bush phtha-del)0 (y)LWeesidentoblem, cé in c5orpeles Communis