

Motorola brings \$5-a-month satellite messaging to any phone with new hotspot

Enlarge / Motorola is shipping two big pieces of satellite connectivity hardware to the US.

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The launch of the iPhone 14 made satellite messaging the hot new feature in smartphones. You've been able to get big, bulky, ugly satellite phones for years with full satellite calling and messaging, but it turns out if you scope down the feature to only "emergency SOS," and heavily compress everything, you can connect to a satellite from a normal smartphone form factor. Since the iPhone announcement, everyone in Android land has been eager to copy this, and we've seen satellite connectivity announcements from Qualcomm, Samsung, MediaTek, and Huawei and news that some kind of satellite support will be built into Android 14. Mostly these are chip and software announcements—not many companies have been talking about satellite products end users will actually be able to *buy*—until now.

Bullitt—a British phone manufacturer best known for licensing the heavy machinery "Caterpillar" brand for ruggedized smartphones—is launching what sounds like a full end-to-end solution that will bring satellite messaging to non-iPhone users. It's launching the "Bullitt Satellite Connect" service,

an app to connect to it called the “Bullitt Satellite Messenger,” and a “Cat S75” smartphone with satellite connectivity. It’s teaming up with Motorola to introduce a second satellite messaging phone, the “Motorola Defy 2,” and a satellite messaging hotspot called the “Motorola Defy Satellite Link.” There’s a lot to go over.

The app and service

Enlarge / Satellite service pricing.

First up is the service. Unlike the iPhone, which can only contact emergency services over satellite one way, Bullitt Satellite Connect claims to be a two-way messaging service and “the most advanced mobile satellite messaging platform in the world.” Satellite service starts at \$4.99 per month, with

“other flexible and heavier usage plans” available if you want to be a serious satellite texter. “SOS Assist,” which offers “24/7 access to emergency response centers provided by FocusPoint International” is included in the price of every plan and free for the first year even if you just buy the hardware.

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Enlarge / The Bullitt Satellite Messenger app. Both the message sender and the message receiver will need to have this installed.

It does not sound like texting over Bullitt Satellite Connect will be entirely seamless. You’ll need to use the special Bullitt Satellite Messenger app to send a message over satellite, and the message is not SMS. Like some other

proprietary messaging services, Bullitt will forward your message over SMS to your recipient's phone number, so they'll receive it, but to respond, the person you text will need to download the Bullitt Satellite Messenger app. The company notes: "The time to initially connect to the satellite and send a message is around 10 seconds."

One question to ask of any satellite service is where its service is coming from, because there aren't that many satellites out there. Bullitt certainly doesn't have any satellites for its "Satellite Connect" service. The company says it's teaming up with another company called Skylo to get the service up and running, but Skylo is just running the network and doesn't have any satellites either. The press release says Skylo "manages connections to devices over existing licensed GEO satellite constellations, such as Inmarsat and others." There we go—Inmarsat is a real satellite company that has been around since the 1970s. Inmarsat currently has 14 satellites in geostationary orbit—that means they're way higher than the new wave of low-earth-orbit satellites—22,300 miles up. Inmarsat's most recent launch was last week with Space X, and the company currently provides Internet access to planes and boats.

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