

Canadian companies setting up operations in Mexico will encounter stiff competition from established computer schools such as ICM, Herman Hollerith and *Instituto Fleming*. Advanced teaching methods and customized services can help to meet this competition. The fact that Canada is perceived as a technologically-advanced country is also a competitive advantage.

DISTANCE EDUCATION

THE SOLIDARIDAD SATELLITE SYSTEM

The *Solidaridad* Satellite System consists of two satellites, *Solidaridad 1* and 2. They were launched in November 1993 and October 1994 respectively. In 1998, an older satellite, *Morelos 2* will be terminated, leaving only two operational satellites. Both satellites have identical designs and offer services throughout Latin and South America. The *Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Transportes (SCT)*, Secretariat of Communications and Transportation, and the *Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP)*, Secretariat of Education, use the *Solidaridad* system to operate an educational service known as EDUSAT which has been operating since July 1994.

Through this project, basic education is given to students attending 9,000 schools throughout Mexico. This system uses *Solidaridad 1* and operates on the C band. It will continue to operate as long as the satellite continues to function, an estimated 14 years. The *Solidaridad* satellites were developed by Hughes Space and Communications Company and are the property of the SCT. *TELECOMM* is SCT's department responsible for the operation and commercializing of the satellites.

Many Mexican educators have experience with distance education. The *Solidaridad* Satellite System has been used for several years to deliver basic education, conferences, seminars and graduate courses throughout Mexico. Many believe that its use will expand, since it has proven to be a cost-effective alternative to travelling abroad.

In 1993, the Inter-American Distance Education Consortium (*CREAD*) was founded. Its purpose is to foster inter-institutional cooperation throughout the Americas and the Caribbean. It is dedicated to developing a single-satellite system for use throughout the hemisphere. The long-run objective is to offer degree programs as well as technical training via satellite.

The costs of installing distance education infrastructure are a major obstacle to the realization of these goals. Many Mexican universities and corporations cannot afford the US \$500,000 installation costs involved. Mexican funding for such projects has been sporadic. Education experts in Mexico say that Canadian universities proposing joint projects typically expect the Mexican government to provide the bulk of this funding.

Cultural barriers also stand in the way of expanding distance education systems. Mexicans tend to be skeptical about the quality of distance education. Students believe that a degree obtained this way will not be as valuable in the job market as a resident degree. They also fear that the Canadian and American teaching methods will conflict with their traditional formal lecture styles. Eventually, considerations of cost and efficiency are likely to overcome these obstacles.