

Views on the Information Highway and the Francophonie

The term information highway, or electronic highway, signifies a concept that encompasses an array of information techniques, services, access and interchange. The information highway is characterized by the convergence of support technologies, multi-directional interchange and universal access to information. It is this concept that guides the development of the information and communications technologies and industries which are felt to be the keystone of the new world economy.

The convergence of communications and data processing has transformed the lives of people in all fields, including education, health, work, business and pleasure. Since it eliminates distance and isolation, travellers on the information highway see it as an instrument of development. This is why, at the February 1995 summit on the information society, the ministers of the seven most industrialized countries stressed the need to promote cultural enrichment among their peoples by way of the information highway, encouraging universality, affordability, equity and free access to a wide variety of communications content.

Within the Francophonie, mention has often been made of the need for a means of exchanging and transferring information and knowledge in French. Francophones see an urgent need to establish French as a language of technology, work, training, and professional, scientific and technical information on the electronic networks.

Several principles underlie the establishment of a francophone opening to the world, including generating respect for the plurality of human experience and the diversity of its expression; promoting the democratization of access to information that will enable societies and their citizens to become active participants rather than mere consumers of information products; accelerating development by providing access to such generators as higher education, trade and cultural products.

Given the high stakes involved in the development of information highways for the Francophonie, Canada has decided that it is important to intervene on several fronts by:

- firmly establishing the francophone presence on the information highway;
- providing a world window that displays the Francophonie;
- strengthening the ties between francophones and between their institutions; consolidating the existing francophone networks while allowing them to retain their identity and their own mission; increasing