

Canada could enable France to progress quickly in this area.

The biggest winner of all in the French telecommunications industry has been mobile telephones (cell phones). Usage increased in 1998 by 119%, a growth rate that demonstrates the willingness of French consumers to embrace new products. The percentage of cell phone users has virtually doubled every year since 1997, rising from 4% that year to 8% in 1998 and 17% in early 1999. This trend should not change soon, since it was reported in July 1999 that 25% of French men and women had a cell phone. Canadian suppliers could look right away at the future generation of cell phones in France, UMTS. The uses of GSM are expanding every week, although large groups are working on the new standard.

Information Technology - France has accomplished a great deal since its late entry into the information society. Attitudes are changing, and just like the market for cell phones, France is becoming the most advanced market for PCs. Computer sales increased by 22 % in 1998, the second fastest growth rate in Europe behind England at 24%. This was the first time that more than a million PCs were sold in France. In the first quarter of 1999, sales of PCs increased by 30% over the same quarter in 1998. These increases should continue beyond the year 2000.

More than 33% of the French now own a computer, and 11% have the Internet. There have also been big increases in equipment for professional purposes. In 1997, only 13% of businesses had the Internet, while in 1999 more than 39% were connected. In 1998 alone, 500 000 new Internet sites were registered under the ".fr" domain name.

The statistics on Internet usage in France are affected by the previous existence of the Minitel system and the availability of virtually all the services offered here. About 17 million people have Minitel in France, in comparison with 5 million who have the Internet. Minitel has been widely accepted by the French, and it seems likely therefore that the use of on-line services will spread very quickly. France Telecom has already reached an agreement with IBM to develop a Minitel terminal that will provide access to the Internet by the end of 2000. French users are attracted by the wealth of contents on Canadian sites and their capabilities. Canadian suppliers of new services like e-commerce or on-line forms, for instance, would be most welcome.

Another interesting sector for experienced Canadians is call centres, which expanded in France by 25% in 1998. The rate in Canada was just 7% that year. [translator's note: "in Canada" is omitted in French in the last sentence, but this appears to be what is meant.] The market for call centres was worth 45 million euros in 1998 (1 euro = \$1.60 on 17/08/99). This sector should expand by 70% by 2002, for a total of 255 million euros. Canada has indisputable know-how in this area. There are very real opportunities here for Canadian suppliers, whether in the establishment of call centres or in related training.

Government priorities for ICT - The French government has been extremely active in adopting and using new technology, thereby creating great opportunities in educational and cultural multimedia. This can be seen in the Government Action Plan for the Information Society (PAGSI). This plan has identified six priorities: education, culture, modernization of the public service, professional services, innovation and regulation. The government intervention is intended to mobilize the general public, facilitate regulations to encourage business, and modernize the public service. To this end, 5.76 billion FF were invested under PAGSI in the first two years of the 1998-99 fiscal period. One of the crucial decisions is currently being made by Parliament, namely the recognition of electronic signatures. Like cryptology, this decision