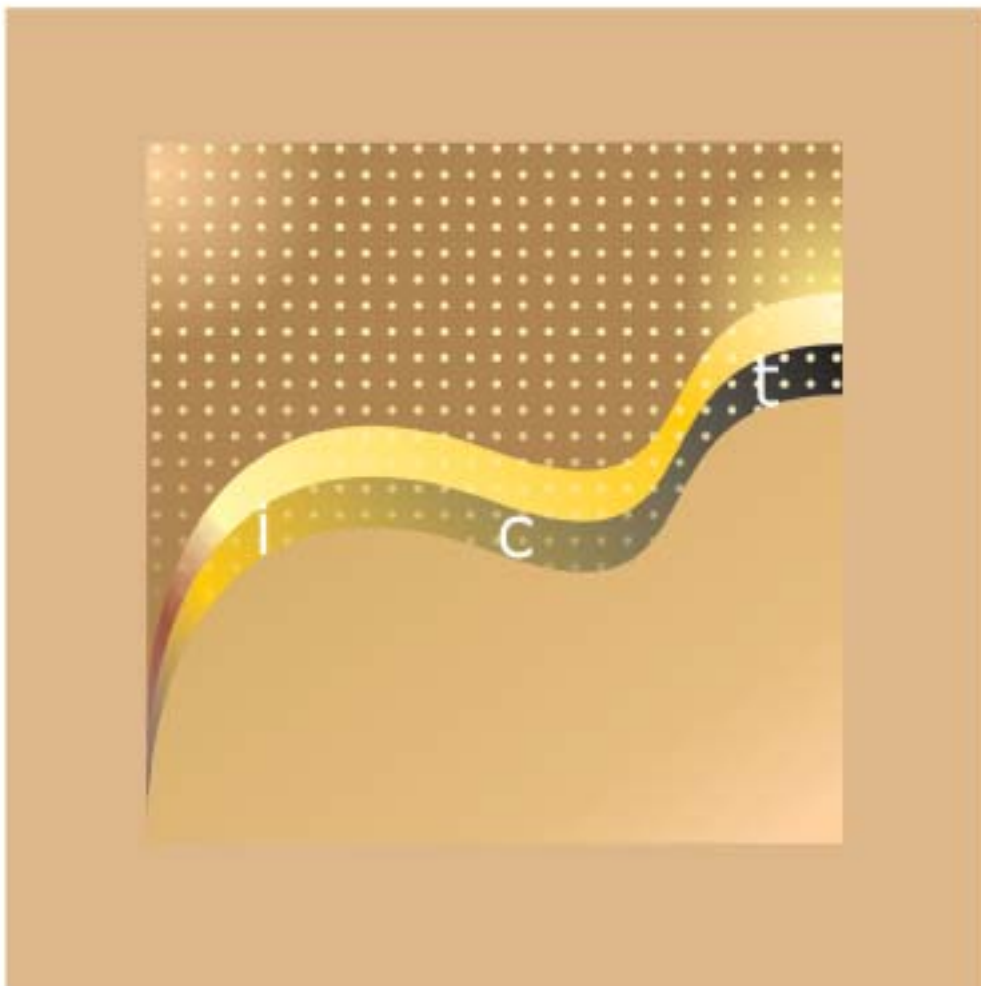


United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

E-COMMERCE AND DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2004

Internet edition
Prepared by the UNCTAD secretariat



UNITED NATIONS
New York and Geneva, 2004

Table 1.1
Internet users worldwide (thousands), 2000–2003

	2003	2002	2001	2000
Thousands	675 678	626 579	495 886	387 532
% change	7.84	26.36	27.96	..

Source: ITU (2004).

From the point of view of the relative positions of developed and developing countries, the situation has continued to move towards a growing presence of developing countries on the Internet, although this remains largely concentrated in a relatively small number of nations. Five countries (China, Republic of Korea, India, Brazil and Mexico) account for 61.52 per cent of all Internet users in the developing world. At the end of 2003, almost three out of four Internet users in developing countries lived in the developing countries of Asia, as did two thirds of all the new Internet users in the world. Table 1.2 shows the distribution of Internet users between the developed and the developing countries and the recent evolution of the number of Internet users by region.

Bearing in mind the fact that the data for 2003 are still incomplete, it should be noted that much

(74.8 per cent) of the recorded growth in the number of Internet users in the world occurred in the developing world, and that the rate of growth of its Internet population (17.5 per cent) is eight and a half times higher than that of developed countries. Thus, according to ITU estimates, at the end of 2003 developing countries accounted for more than 36 per cent of all the Internet users in the world, and the share of developing countries in the Internet population of the world grew by nearly 50 per cent between 2000 and 2003 (see chart 1.1).

More detailed information is provided for a number of individual countries in table 1.3. The countries listed there have been selected on the basis of either their demographic and economic weight in their respective regions or of their above-average performance.

Table 1.2
Internet users by region, 2000–2003 (thousands)

	2003	%Growth	2002	%Growth	2001	% Growth	2000
Africa	12 123	21.38	9 988	63	6 119	34	4 559
Asia	243 406	15.25	211 202	40	150 535	38	109 257
Europe	188 997	7.24	176 232	23	143 584	30	110 824
Latin America and Caribbean	44 217	4.19	42 439	45	29 224	65	17 673
North America (2002)	175 110	0.00	175 110	12	156 823	14	136 971
Oceania	11 825	1.88	11 607	21	9 601	16	8 248
Developed countries	396 754	2.06	388 746	15	339 427	19	285 480
Developing countries	246 290	17.53	209 556	50	139 317	48	94 352
Others	32 634	15.41	28 277	65	17 142	123	7 700
Total	675 678	7.84	626 579	26.36	495 886	27.96	387 532

Source: ITU (2004) data and UNCTAD calculations.

Foreword

Information and communications technologies have considerable potential to promote development and economic growth. They can foster innovation and improve productivity. They can reduce transaction costs and make available, in mere seconds, the rich store of global knowledge. In the hands of developing countries, and especially small- and medium-sized enterprises, the use of ICTs can bring impressive gains in employment, gender equality and standards of living.

In recent years, international trade in ICT-related goods and services has grown faster than total trade. Some developing countries are making good use of ICT-generated opportunities to broaden their customer bases and increase their participation in international supply chains. But if all countries are to benefit, and if ICTs are to make a real impact on a country's economic prospects, more needs to be done to build capacities and create an enabling environment, nationally and internationally.

That effort will have to address broad, global issues such as Internet governance and the protection of intellectual property, as well as narrower, specific tasks such as ensuring that SMEs have access to ICTs. It is also likely to involve profound transformations on the part of individual workers and companies, and across economies as well. To accomplish such change with a minimum of disruption, policies need to be conceived and applied through a participatory approach. Such policies should also be firmly rooted in our overall struggle to defeat poverty and achieve other social goals.

This fourth E-commerce and Development Report discusses the effects of ICTs on the economies of developing countries and their enterprises, the costs and benefits of investing in ICTs and how societies can achieve higher rates of return on those investments. Its data and analysis are meant to provide a solid underpinning for the global debate on how best to implement the Plan of Action agreed to at the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (Geneva, December 2003). As we continue our efforts to spread the benefits of ICTs more widely and equitably, I am pleased to commend this report to a wide global audience.



Kofi A. Annan
Secretary-General of the United Nations

Acknowledgments

The *E-Commerce and Development Report 2004* was prepared under the overall direction of John Burley, Director of UNCTAD's Division for Services Infrastructure for Development and Trade Efficiency (SITE). It was drafted by a team coordinated by Angel González Sanz and consisting of the following UNCTAD staff members: Dimo Calovski, Hannah Davies, Scarlett Fondeur Gil, Carlos Moreno, Marta Pérez Cusó, Susan Teltscher and Chiara Vitucci.

Pilar Borque Fernández and Marie Kamara provided administrative support.

Diego Oyarzun designed the cover and formatted the charts, the text was edited by Graham Grayston.

The UNCTAD team acknowledges the contribution of the following consultants, experts and researchers who provided inputs for various chapters: Alan Levin, Alf Neumann, Lucinda Ramos and Ian Walden.

The assistance and contributions provided by the following private and public sector entities are also gratefully acknowledged: the Ministry for Technologies, Communications and Transport of Tunisia, Fundación para el Desarrollo Sostenible en América Latina (FUNDES), the Arab Institute of Business Leadership (Tunisia) and Bedoui & Company Consulting (Tunisia).

The team also wishes to thank the following individuals for the information, comments and feedback they provided regarding various aspects of the Report: Luís Abugattas, Cécile Barayre, Mongi Hamdi, Rouben Indjikian, Keri Facer and Professor Angela McFarlane.

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