

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT
Geneva

E-COMMERCE AND DEVELOPMENT
REPORT, 2003

OVERVIEW



UNITED NATIONS
New York and Geneva, 2003

NOTE

Symbols of United Nations documents are composed of capital letters with figures. Mention of such a symbol indicates a reference to a United Nations document.

The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

Material in this publication may be freely quoted or reprinted, but full acknowledgement is requested, together with a reference to the document number. A copy of the publication containing the quotation or reprint should be sent to the UNCTAD secretariat at: Palais des Nations, CH-1211, Geneva 10, Switzerland.

The English version of the full report is currently available on the Internet at www.unctad.org/ecommerce. Versions in other languages will be posted as they become available. Its Overview section is available at the same address in English, French and Spanish.

UNCTAD/SDTE/ECB/2003/1 (Overview)

UNITED NATIONS PUBLICATION

Copyright © United Nations, 2003
All rights reserved

FOREWORD

Few manifestations of the power of human creativity have so extensively and so quickly transformed society as the rise of the Internet and other information and communication technologies (ICT) over the past decade. Dramatic as the changes may be, the process of assimilating and learning from them has only just begun.

ICT can improve education, health, governance and trade. They are dramatically changing social and economic relationships and interactions, giving people, businesses and governments the tools with which to devise more productive, more inclusive and more development-friendly societies and economies. For the moment, however, we are still grappling with the painful reality that those who stand to benefit most from the advances of the ICT revolution are also those who have the least access to the technology behind it.

The United Nations is strongly committed to doing its part to enhance the ability of developing countries to realize the full potential of ICT in stimulating and supporting development. We are working with Governments and partners in industry, civil society and academia to bring ICT applications to education, health, natural disaster management and many other key realms of human endeavour and well-being. E-commerce and e-business are among the most promising of those applications, capable of offering new ways to participate in global markets, new possibilities for diversifying national economies, and new and better jobs for young people.

This third edition of the *E-Commerce and Development Report*, published by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, identifies some of the implications that the growth of the digital economy may have for developing countries. It aims to provide practitioners and policy makers with a better understanding of the options available to them in leading sectors of developing-

country economies. It is also meant to contribute to the debates at the World Summit on the Information Society and efforts to create a truly inclusive information society that serves and empowers all people. Above all, if it helps developing countries to adopt and take advantage of new digital technologies, this report will have served its purpose.

[insert Kofi Annan's signature here]

Kofi A. Annan
Secretary-General of the United Nations

OVERVIEW

It is now widely accepted by policy makers, enterprises and society at large that information and communications technologies (ICT) are at the centre of an economic and social transformation that is affecting all countries. ICT and globalization have combined to create a new economic and social landscape. They have brought fundamental changes in the way enterprises and economies as a whole function.

The importance that society attaches to ICT is illustrated by the large number of initiatives, especially at the international level, aimed at enhancing the development and adoption of ICT. This is particularly noteworthy on the eve of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), the first UN summit ever devoted to ICT. This and other initiatives, such as the G8 DOT Force (Digital Opportunity Task Force), the UN ICT Task Force and a host of other regional and national ICT programmes, are evidence of the importance that society attaches to ICT. These initiatives are undoubtedly motivated by the important role of ICT in realizing the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), particularly in the area of poverty alleviation.

While there is general agreement that ICT affect all sectors of society and the economy, their role as an enabler for economic development and growth deserves particular attention. As UNCTAD's *E-Commerce and Development Report 2003* shows, there is now growing agreement about the positive contribution of ICT to productivity growth. Through the application of ICT firms will become more competitive, new markets will be accessed and new employment opportunities created. All of this will result in the generation of wealth and sustainable economic growth.

The impact of ICT on firms' and industries' performance and competitiveness is achieved through increased information flows, which result in knowledge transfer as well as improved organization. In particular, ICT have become important tools for improving productive capacity and increasing international competitiveness by reducing the transaction costs involved in the production and exchange of goods and services, increasing the efficiency of management functions, and enabling firms to exchange and access more information.

While ICT improve productivity in existing productive activities, they also make possible the emergence of new activities such as online outsourcing of services and the production of different types of ICT goods. These activities enable countries, including developing ones, to diversify their economies, enhance their export competitiveness and produce high-value-added services that boost the local economy.

Despite the wide range of benefits that can be brought about by ICT, the development and adoption of ICT by developing countries have so far been limited. Reasons for this have been amply documented. They include lack of awareness of what ICT could offer, insufficient telecommunications infrastructure and Internet connectivity, expensive Internet access, absence of adequate legal and regulatory frameworks, shortage of requisite human capacity, failure to use local language and content, and lack of entrepreneurship and a business culture open to change, transparency and democracy.

The objective of the *E-Commerce and Development Report* is to provide information about developments in the area of e-commerce and ICT, particularly as they relate to developing countries. The report identifies areas where the application of ICT can make an impact on developing countries' enterprises and economies. By critically reviewing the latest developments in ICT and the knowledge economy and examining their implications for

developing countries, it provides an analytical and empirical basis for appropriate decision making by policy makers in the field of ICT and e-business. The report should also be seen as a contribution to the debate concerning economic development at the forthcoming WSIS.

As a premise, the report recognizes the positive role of ICT in the development process. Taking into account the constraints that developing countries face in adopting e-commerce and ICT, the report focuses on policies and strategies to address those constraints. The material presents the state of the art in e-commerce and ICT and discusses how it can be applied to developing countries. It also contains case studies of industries and other economic activities as well as regulatory issues. In all instances, specific recommendations are made to developing countries in order to enhance their understanding of the issues and their ability to adopt e-commerce and ICT.

The choice of subjects in the report is not intended as an indication of their importance relative to other issues concerning ICT and economic development. Also, the current issue should be considered in conjunction with the two previous issues (2001 and 2002). Together, the three issues as well as future ones are intended to contribute to an ongoing comprehensive study of ICT and economic development.

1. Recent Internet trends: access, usage and business applications

The report observes that revolutionary visions of the Internet's role in the economy, as well as the disappointment that followed their failure to become a reality, are giving way to a more nuanced but strongly positive assessment of the Internet's impact on business performance. Many of the promised economic benefits of the Internet seem to be materializing. Noting this, enterprises are

preparing for e-business: while overall investment in IT has decreased by 6.2 per cent since 2001, e-business budgets are estimated to have risen by as much as 11 per cent in 2002. In 2003 annual growth in e-business investment fell to 4 per cent, but this rate was twice as fast as the growth in overall IT investment

The report shows that the number of Internet users in the world reached 591 million in 2002, although the annual rate of growth slowed to 20 per cent. At the end of 2002, developing countries had 32 per cent of the world's Internet users, while North America and Europe accounted for as many as 89 per cent of the world's Internet hosts. The average African Internet user still enjoys about 20 times less bandwidth capacity than the average European user, and 8.4 times less than a North American one.

Even if e-readiness in developing countries is lower than in the high-income regions of the world, a number of relatively advanced ICT adopters have been identified in all regions of the world, and no developing country seems to have regressed in its integration into the digital economy. Public policies that support the extension of the information society are among the factors explaining the relative advantage enjoyed by early ICT adopters among the developing countries. Meanwhile, the majority of developing countries face limitations on the development of their e-economy stemming largely from low income levels, low literacy rates, lack of payment systems that can support online transactions, and cultural resistance to online trade.

The report notes that almost all official estimates of e-commerce activity refer to the high-income market economies. Quoting data from surveys compiled by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) concerning its member countries for 2000–2001, the report says that the share of Internet users buying online was highest in the Nordic countries, the United Kingdom and the United States, where 38 per cent of users had made

预览已结束，完整报告链接和二维码如下：

https://www.yunbaogao.cn/report/index/report?reportId=5_10588

