

# FOCUS

## ICT: the surest way to attaining the Holy Grail of efficiency

Efficiency is the goal of governments and businesses under pressure to find routes through today's economic crisis. There are doubtless many ways to achieve efficiency, but none is more certain to guarantee a successful goal than the application of ICT. More than that, governments and companies have no choice but to invest heavily in ICT. For it is not only going to help reduce costs, it is also going to advance customer satisfaction. That in the end makes it a tool for competitiveness, the Holy Grail of business.

But the application of ICT has its own costs and risks. For example, it is an area of rapid and dramatic change, whether it is cloud computing, the internet, more powerful mobile telephony, or social media. Keeping up with change is costly and intellectually demanding. It is also stressful for employees, who have to be adaptable.

Some basic statistics illustrate the power of the change in the sector. For example, over the last five years, the percentage of the world's population using the internet has almost doubled, from 18 percent to 35 percent. So 1.17 billion people used the Internet in 2006, while 2.4 billion had access to it in 2011, according to the ITU World Telecommunications/ICT indicators database.

The drama of the internet opportunity is compounded by the profile of users; they are much more likely to be young, and they are increasingly likely to come from emerging markets. So 45 percent of the world's internet users are below the age of 25.

Even more remarkably, perhaps, some 62 percent of them come from developing countries; Chinese users represent 25 percent of that number.

The expansion in mobile phone usage is even more extraordinary with growth over the last five years doubling from 3 billion subscriptions to 6 billion.

The Focus that follows highlights the numerous ways in which these users can become consumers of technology and of products. National differences are critical to understanding the benefits of technology. So we see from the ground-breaking report by the Cercle d'outre-Manche (which we discuss on page 34), as well as from our interview with Pierre-Yves Cros, Global CEO of capgemini consulting on page 42, that France leads the UK in the development of infrastructure while the UK has a larger part of the population that is switched on to the benefits of technology, even if they have to make do with slower internet speeds than their neighbours across the Channel.

The company or government that is alert to the latest technology has a competitive edge. This takes many forms. Those that have adopted cloud computing will benefit from efficiencies and cost savings; those that have adopted their sales and marketing profiles to the growth in social networks will raise their scope for attracting and satisfying potential and actual purchasers.

Change carries risk as well as rewards, and issues of privacy, data protection and accreditation need to be considered when adopting or moving the barriers of technology. The future holds hazards as well as hope. ■