Introduction to Electronic Commerce on the French Riviera

While most of us are familiar with all the aspects of electronic commerce as it exists in North America (EDI, XML, ANSI, etc), we sometimes think the rest of the World is different and maybe not as sophisticated. I'm not going to try and cover the whole World (today anyway), but just my little niche: the French Riviera (where I happen to live).

The highlights are:

(1) Business start-ups and high technology: The huge center at Sophia-Antipolis (the "Silicon Valley" of France).

(2) Monaco: Shipping, banking and commerce.

(3) Tourism: Not only a lot of tourists, but the "back offices" are here and you have probably used them without knowing.

(4) Europe-wide, but local presence: A couple of the best Supply Chain Management (SCM) examples and I see them everyday.

Europe's leading technology park, Sophia-Antipolis and the whole French Riviera region each year attract many businesses from the high technology world: telecommunications, Internet, multimedia, life sciences, biotechnology, etc., a variety of expertise that confirms that the French Riviera is at the heart of technological advances. With its cutting-edge technological base, the French Riviera operates its industrial and commercial companies efficiently using all the state-of-the-art electronic commerce practices. The French Riviera is a European metropolis, built upon outstanding economic, human and natural resources, which has attracted a unique concentration of expertise from all over the world.

Sophia-Antipolis, Europe's leading technology park, is continuing to expand. Eventually, the available land of the park will be extended to 2,400 hectares (6,000 acres); with twice as much green area as developed land, it is a great place to work. In addition, a network of associated satellite sites will be set up throughout the area. Eventually, the technology park will provide more than 50,000 jobs.

The French Riviera is a real international nexus point , with 12% of residents coming from abroad (and holding more than 160 different passports). There are Britons, Germans, Italians, Canadians, Americans, Scandinavians: and they each make their contribution to the vibrant interconnective multicultural life of the French Riviera.

Riviera-based businesses are strongly oriented to international markets, producing quite a significant share of their sales abroad.

Some of the names you are familiar with include: Cisco, Hertz, Hewlett Packard, IBM, Microsoft, NCR, Philips, SAP, Texas Instruments, Toyota.

The concentration of telecommunications and information technologies industries based on the French Riviera make it one of the greatest strategic centers in Europe. Its major asset is that it brings together a broad spectrum of expertise present in the region. Telecommunications, networks, microelectronics, optics, software engineering, multimedia, internet, observation of the Earth, imaging, robotics, telecom operators, etc., a vast palette of expertise has developed.

The significance given to developments in the sphere of telecommunications technologies is indicated by the presence of ETSI (European Telecommunication Standards Institute) and of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) in Sophia Antipolis.

The French Riviera is at the forefront in data exchange infrastructure, with the gradual installation by several international operators of a large-scale broadband communications network, by terrestrial local loops, radio or by satellite. The result: the French Riviera is positioned as one of the most promising sites for advanced communications in Europe.

The French Riviera has a grid of fiber optic networks stretching more than 2,000 km, linking all cities and the large business centers (with speeds of up to 2.55 Gbits). The network is linked to the national network and the European backbone network. This infrastructure, which is constantly expanding, offers very high-speed transmission capacities (SDH, ATM, WDM).

Begun in 2001, an experiment with a "truly very high bandwidth" network - referred to by its French initials of "VTHD" (Vraiment Très Haut Débit) - was launched nationally at eight sites in France, including Sophia Antipolis Technology Park. This experiment, run by the RNRT (National Network for Telecommunications Research) in partnership with France Telecom R&D, INRIA and GET (the Group of Telecommunications Schools), boasts transmission capacities of up to 40 Gbits/second.

The French Riviera also has several Datacenters connected to the pan-European telecommunications networks, which provide international broadband access from the French Riviera.

The French Riviera is equipped with numerous exhibition halls and sites for events, meetings and exhibitions. They are within easy reach from huge Nice Côte d'Azur Airport and are supported by a dense, high-quality array of hotels. Some of the events: SAP Partner Congress - PeopleSoft Conference - 3GSM World Congress - VM World.

In conclusion, the French Riviera enjoys a superb environment in the midst of the Mediterranean. The quality and diversity of the countryside, between sea and mountains, the charm of the tiny authentic villages just a few kilometers away from the prestige of the large bustling towns like Nice, Cannes, Monaco, Antibes, give this part of the Mediterranean a special life style. For several centuries, the French Riviera has been the locus of intense cultural activity. A mecca for famous artists of the past and of the present, Matisse, Chagall, Picasso, Dufy, Arman, César and plenty of others, made the area's reputation as a haven for creativity.

I will cover Monaco, tourism and best Supply Chain Management (SCM) examples in the next few weeks.