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GSM mobile network writes 20-year success story

It happened precisely 20 years ago, on 1 March 1993: Switzerland's first digital mobile network went live. Following the Natel A, B and C analogue networks, the new GSM network opened up entirely new opportunities and laid the foundation for rapid developments on the mobile communications market. For the first time ever, the GSM network made SMS and data communication possible and even enabled mobile phones to be used abroad. Swisscom currently has some 6.2 million mobile customers.

1 March 1993 was the day on which Swisscom activated the GSM network (2G) for its customers, a network that is still in operation today. By the end of 1993 some 140,000 customers were using this new network which was initially only available in densely populated areas and along major traffic routes. As the potential of the new network grew, so did customer interest in mobile communication. During the first year, Swisscom introduced the Combox, a mobile answering machine. Two years later came the launch of what is probably the most successful spin-off product in the world of telecommunications: the SMS. Originally developed as a way of sending short status messages from providers to customers, the SMS quickly gained in acceptance to become one of the most important means of communication via mobile phone. Today, 7.2 million SMS are still being sent everyday from mobile to mobile via the Swisscom network.

Prepaid offers, the widespread use of mobile communications while abroad (roaming) and access to the mobile Internet using WAP and EDGE technology only became possible through the internationally standardised GSM network. Swisscom's GSM network is currently available to more than 99.8 per cent of the Swiss population. Customers can use their mobile phones to place calls and access their data whenever and wherever they want.

Mobile phones are a part of our lives

Over the course of the past 20 years, mobile phones have evolved to become a major, indispensable part of our lives. "Mobile phones were initially a status symbol for rich people," says Petra Hutter, sociologist and Swisscom expert on the use of technology in everyday life, when explaining the



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significance of mobile phones at the time the GSM network was launched. Just a few years later, however, they had gained widespread acceptance on the mass market, not least due to decreasing phone prices and connection charges. "Today's smartphones can be adapted to suit users' specific needs. They have become a vital interface for customers to find information, stay in touch with friends and family and organise their lives," Hutter continues. Yet, in her role as sociologist, Hutter does not foresee a future trend toward constant availability: "The expectation that a caller should be available at any given time will not catch on. We're seeing people adopt a more conscious approach toward how they handle their free time, particularly in the professional sphere. The expectation that calls be answered even in the evening, for example, is becoming increasingly infrequent."

Berne, 1 March 2013