

Nomad (French for a mobile life!)

Nomads, as you all know, get their name from the fact that they never settle down, and spend most of their time moving around. The same can be said for some of you in terms of your IT, where you are regularly in different locations, but still wish to get on the internet, send emails, do a bit of online banking as well as possibly connect to the server back in the office. There are a variety of ways of doing this, and for some of you that means paying all year round for an ADSL connection in France that you only use a few weeks during the year, as well as a FT phone line. Here's a quick guide to being an IT Nomad in France.

First and foremost you need a laptop computer, and if you really are the travelling type, then you want a highly portable one. As computers continue to become more and more affordable there is a wide spread of options available:

- An Eee PC (originally manufactured by Asus) or mini pc. These are now quite common on the market and typically have a 7-8 inch screen, very small solid state hard drive of 6-8 Gigs, no DVD tray, a Linux operating system, Wi-Fi, under sized keyboard and can be found in Carrefour or Darty for a few hundred Euros. You can even get them free with certain mobile phone and 3G contracts. However they are limited in usage and storage compared to a normal laptop and run an operating system different from Mac OS or Windows XP and Vista that you are used to. If you just want to get on the internet, they are fine, send a few emails or use webmail, fine again, but installing a variety software, importing Music from CDs, watching a DVD or using it to work and you are likely to be disappointed pretty quickly. There are certain models that have Windows XP installed (€400 odd) and a 60 Gig hard drive, and these are fine, but at the same price as a budget laptop, slower and with less features they are only of limited appeal. If ultimate portability is what you want then fine, otherwise I suggest you buy a "normal" laptop.
- There is a huge selection of 17 inch and 15 inch laptops on the market, ranging from €399 upwards
- There are now 19 inch and 21 inch models available, though these hardly seen as portable anymore
- Alternatively there is also a good selection of 12-13 inch laptops available, that remain "proper" computers with decent battery life, useable keyboards and are loaded with features. From around €700 the price increases the smaller they get and the longer battery lasts. Dell's latest offering boasts 18 hour odd battery life, but you end up paying around €2000 for the privilege.

Ok, so you now have your laptop and all you need to do is get an internet connection; 3G+ is the answer today. 3G+ is the natural development of the mobile phone network allowing high speed data transfer and internet access by using a Sim card (as in you mobile phone) and a 3G adapter for your laptop. You can then connect to the internet from anywhere (as long as there is coverage) and obtain broadband speeds via the mobile network.

If you are really after the "Nomad" concept, you do away with your ADSL connection, chuck in the FT phone line and equip yourself with a mobile phone (which you undoubtedly already have) and a laptop with a 3G connection, and depending on your usage this combination could even save you a few Euros. I won't go into mobile phone contracts here, as no one understands these contracts as there are so many options and tariffs!! Fortunately 3G contracts are simpler, and to give you an idea I have looked at the market leaders Orange and SFR:

Orange Contract

2 Hours/month 10€

Evening and weekend 30€/month (limited to 500 Meg of data/month)

Unlimited 50€/month (limited to 1 Gig of data/month)

Orange Pay as You Go

1 hour 8€ (valid 15 days)

2 hour 14€ (valid 15 days)

6 hour 25€ (valid 15 days)

SFR Contract

Up to 50 Meg 19€/month

50-250 Meg 29€/month

250-500 Meg 39€/month

500-1000 Meg 49€/month

Up to 3 Gigs 69€/month

SFR Pay as you Go

€10 per day (limited to 75 Meg)

Connection speeds:

3G+ = 7.2 Meg. - 71% of population covered.

3G = 0.4 Meg (384 Kbits/sec) - 60% of population covered.

GPRS = 0.2 Meg (200 Kbits/sec) - 99% of population covered.

Any 3G contract will use 3G+ where available, and in areas outside coverage will use 3G then GPRS. Be aware that the coverage figures refer to population and not geographical coverage. If you have a modern mobile phone with 3G, then look at the screen where the signal indicator is, and if 3G is available in your area, then you should see a 3G symbol next to the signal indicator.

Hardware

There are many 3G USB adapters on the market for around €50, though you will get one free with any contract. Alternatively if you are buying a laptop, then you can get 3G built in, with which you are just required to enter the Sim card in the appropriate slot. The Sim card is provided by the operator such as Orange or SFR.

Roaming with 3G

This is where 3G is quite expensive, for instance, Orange offers you a month long Europe and USA pass that allows you up to 100 Megs download for an additional €50. Alternatively just get a pay as you 3G Sim card in the country you are visiting.

If you currently have a France Telecom phone line and an ADSL contract, then your minimum yearly spend is going to be €180 for the FTat (12 months @ €15) and €300 for the ADSL (12 months @ €25 minimum). Thus with a budget of almost €500 for your 3G spending, you could, depending on your usage make quite a saving. However, and this is the big however, can you get 3G coverage where you want it. If you go to this page: <http://couverture-reseau.orange.fr/france/netenmap.php> you should be able to find out with your address, postcode, or just zoom around. Incidentally if you were considering using your 3G connection to make a Skype call, forget it as mobile operators thought that would be unfair, and would rather you used your mobile phone instead.....

For computer problems and advice, please contact: Edward on 06 26 98 03 12 or by email on ed@emarshall.fr All previous VVV Computer articles can be found at www.emarshall.fr