The delayed introduction of third generation mobile phones has been justified in different ways by the players in the sector. While the operators argued that the delay was due to the lack of terminals, the makers defended themselves by saying that they were not developing 3G compatible devices because the service was not there. To this the operators replied that they put the delay down to the lack of terminals, the huge investment in networks and the doubts about the effective demand for these services. Finally, an end seems to have been put to this vicious circle and in May the main mobile telephone operators in Spain and the rest of Europe launched their 3G telephones.

In spite of its launching, the UMTS technology continues to arouse suspicion, at least in the short term. To start with, the terminals are very expensive (the cheapest models start at 500 euros) and the cover is limited; there will only be a complete service in Madrid and Barcelona and the enlargement of this service is not so easy due to stiff opposition to the installation of antennas. On the content side, there is still no adequate offer to tempt the consumer. As things stand, the likelihood of this launch creating frustration among users is quite high.

However, there is a generalised belief in the sector that UMTS will radically change the world of telecommunications, both at home and in the company. What is all this renewed enthusiasm about? What really lies behind those initials?

With data transfer speeds of up to 2 mbps, UMTS stands for mobility plus broadband and it is the first time that society has had a technology that enables it to enjoy both benefits at the same time. If we keep in mind the previous experiences in each of these concepts, it seems that the synergy between them should have a positive impact on consumers.
Voice and short message services have undergone a continuous progression since the launching of GSM. For its part, broadband, either through cable or ADSL, has had unprecedented growth in Spain over the past two years. It now has a 7% penetration over the population, which makes it one of the most important in Europe. From a technological point of view, UMTS is the only wireless technology that guarantees access to data with absolute mobility. Other technologies, like Wi-Fi for example, enable larger degrees of data transfer but they are always restricted to a certain radius.

Third generation telephony, just like any new technology, is beginning its curve of adoption at the launching stage. After a long, painful birth the aim of the operators is to make the creature grow quickly, that is, make it reach the public as soon as possible in order to obtain returns on investments made in infrastructure and licences. But that means creating demand for mobile services that need broadband. In this sense, the operators are relying on videotelephony, online treatment of data and the mobile office as the main applications users require. These users will be the ones who decide whether some of those applications become killer applications, as happened with SMS. For now UMTS is here. All that has to be done is to convince the demand.