

## Adieu, Minitel: the French Proto-Internet

Written by Marco Attard  
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France Telecom pulls the plug on Minitel, the internet-before-the-internet that made France the most connected country in Europe (if not the world) in the early 80s.



Launched in 1982, the telephone line-based service connected France to a number of pre-internet online services while the rest of the world looked in awe. The French, as they tend to do, beamed in pride as back in 1997 President Jacques Chirac gloated "today a baker in Aubervilliers knows perfectly how to check his bank account on the Minitel. Can the same be said of the baker in New York?"

According to the BBC, Minitel serviced around 25 million users and 26000 services through the 9 million chunky beige terminals installed all over France at the peak of the service.

But now, exactly 30 years after it was launched, Minitel is no more.

Minitel services were varied-- from a telephone directory, to banking, stock prices, weather reports, travel reservations, exam results, university applications, state administration access and, yes, even porn... apparently around 400000 Minitel terminals were still active just before the service was killed, with users including farmers.

France Telecom attempted to sell Minitel to other countries, but only managed to do so in Belgium. But you might remember other, also dead, services similar to Minitel-- the British Prestel, Bildschirmtext from W. Germany, or the S. African Beltel.

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Adieu, "Little French Box!"

Go [Minitel: The Rise and Fall of the France-Wide Web \(BBC\)](#)