In 1990 just 12 million people had subscriptions to cellular telephones; there were 2.4 cellular subscriptions per 1000 people. At this time cellular telephones were large, expensive and had limited network coverage.

The United States had the most cellular phone subscriptions, at 5 million; followed by the United Kingdom with 1 million; Japan with 800,000; then Canada and China with 600,000 subscriptions each. 138 territories in the world had less than 1000 cellular subscriptions in each.

Much of the Middle East, Southern Asia, and Central Africa are not visible on this map. Many territories had no cellular telephone network.

“When they were new, rich people flaunted them to show they were connected.” Anthony Zwane, 2004