**UNITED NATIONS STATISTICAL COMMISSION and
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CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS**

UNECE Work Session on Statistical Dissemination and Communication
(12-14 September 2006, Washington D.C., United States of America)

Topic (i) Communicating effectively on the Web

CHEZ INE
Our Statistical Restaurant: how to serve and present our 'dishes'

Invited Paper

Submitted by the Spanish National Statistical Office (INE)[1]

I.   INTRODUCTION

1.   Considering the title of the first topic of the meeting: "Communicating <u>effectively</u> on the Web," and the funny, but serious style some speakers use in this type of meetings, I decided to prepare this document, which I hope you will find amusing, to present our experience regarding the issue in question.

2.   Statistics, despite its 'hardness', the profusion of 'cold' figures, and the fact that they are apparently thought for 'brainy' specialists, can also have attractive applications (educational areas, population clocks,...), and in this respect I can provide my personal experience as on occasion I have played 'Trivial Pursuit' with my daughters using curious information from our publication 'Spain in Figures.'

3.   Bearing in mind another event I attended, in which I started a presentation with a 'statistical' poem that was welcomed warmly, also makes me assume that the reader of this document will be able to see beyond its seemingly 'frivolous' tone, which is far from my intention, to see that a good bunch of ideas are presented, in a style that –in my opinion– is easy to understand.

4.   Therefore, this document aims to use an informal tone to present our particular approach on how to make our site more popular, pleasant and, in summary, how to improve its efficiency. We have decided to compare it with a Restaurant, since A picture is worth a thousand words, in this sense referring to written images, or comparative metaphors. So our motto could be, like Simon & Garfunkel said: Keep the customer satisfied.

II.   HOW TO DESIGN OUR MENU AND PROVIDE OUR CUSTOMERS WITH AN EXCELLENT SERVICE

5.   My Boss once said, referring to me and to one of my colleagues, who is in charge of the website contents, that we were the perfect team. I don't know if this is true or if it is, in fact, the key that makes things work. However, the arguments he presented to support that statement are spot on: "On the one hand, she provides the perspective of a statistician, the rigour and the technical mentality; and on the other you (the person writing this document) provide the perspective of a non-statistician, of a computer scientist, a 'normal' user and a seasoned Internet user."

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[1] Prepared by Fernando Villa Benito, Spanish National Statistical Office (fvilla@ine.es).

6.	Moreover, I would also say that several enriching combinations converge at the INE, providing a vast wealth of perspectives, since the team that generates the contents of our website is made up by women and men, young and old people, statistical and non-statistical personnel, staff and external personnel… In all, a great variety of points of view, with different concerns and education that generate a plethora of ideas during our versatile and mixed 'brain storming' sessions.

7.	Consequently, the answer to this first question would be a variety of personalities that result in an excellent, vast and exquisite menu, or at least we hope they do.

## III.	HOW TO HELP OUR CUSTOMERS SELECT THEIR 'DISHES'

8.	At INE we always try to consider two types of customers: exquisite 'gourmets' (specialist statisticians), who know what they are looking for and even the technical names that tell them where the information they are looking for can be found, and 'normal' users, who do not have a 'gastronomic' (statistical) background. To help both customers with their selection, we have two ways of wording the sections where the same information can be found.

Example. First 'course': How to find the desired **CPI** Consumer Price Index ?

Links for 'normal' customers: Do you wish to update a rental income? How much has the CPI varied since..?
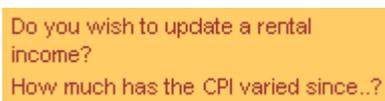
Link for 'gourmets': All the detailed results

2nd 'course': A very technical 'dish' with a very technical and almost unpronounceable name: 'Nomenclator'

For 'normal' customers: **How many people live in …** Write the name of the place [ ] OK ?

For 'gourmets':

Demography and Population

Municipal Register: statistical exploitation and List of place names

List of place names

Shortly, the idea is to provide different names for the same 'dish.'

## IV.	HOW TO MAKE OUR RESTAURANT AVAILABLE TO CUSTOMERS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD?

9.	Providing the possibility of browsing our whole website in two languages, which users can switch to and from easily, and <u>not only</u> at the home page. Language / Language / English / Español

## V.	HOW TO MAKE IT EASIER FOR OUR CUSTOMERS TO 'TASTE AGAIN' THEIR 'FAVOURITE DISHES' WHEN THEY VISIT US AGAIN

10.	Making most of our pages 'bookmarkables', in consequence easily possible to be converted in a favourite link.

Dirección http://www.ine.es/inebase/cgi/um?M=%2Ft20%2Fp307%2Fa2004&O=pcaxis&N=&L=1
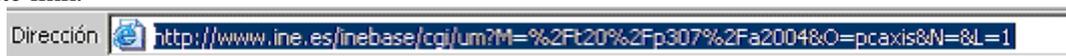
VI. HOW TO HELP OUR CUSTOMERS SELECT THEIR 'MENUS' (DISHES) AND HOW THEY WISH TO RECEIVE THEM

11.　　Always using well-known icons, taken from widespread products or 'inventing' icons whose meaning can be guessed easily.

Examples of icons: 'Clear all,' 'Select all,' 'Reverse order' are

12.　　We have implemented a user-friendly method to make it easier for our customers to 'season' (configure) how they receive their 'dishes' (data).
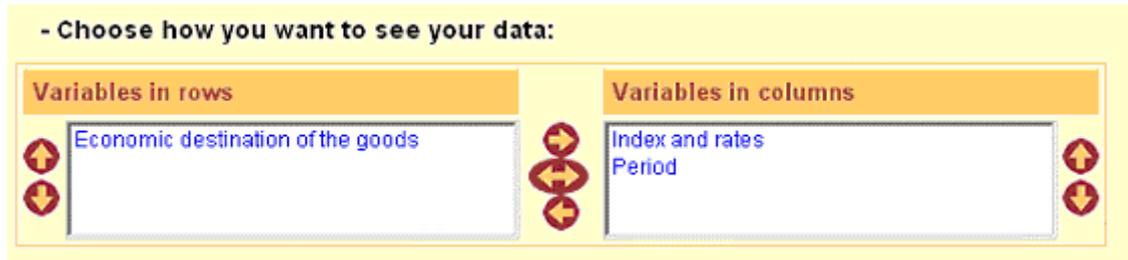
VII. HOW TO ENSURE OUR CUSTOMERS FIND QUICKLY WHAT THEY WANT

13.　　Our search engine functions in a similar way to Google's sponsored links, but in our case is by presenting recommended links, which could be seen as our 'special dishes.' This is based on our experiences and an analysis of our customers' 'tastes', which allow us to present what our users really want to find when they look for a 'dish' (concept) in our 'menu' (search engine).

14.　　We obviously focus constantly on our search engine and continuously research new elements in an attempt to improve the quality of the links we present (via implementation of weights), reducing search times, improving presentation of the results screen, adding new advanced searches... since we think it is essential for our customers to find what they are looking for, placing a great deal of attention on that tool, which is a fundamental aspect of our website, even though we are aware of the high cost of a top-quality search engine.
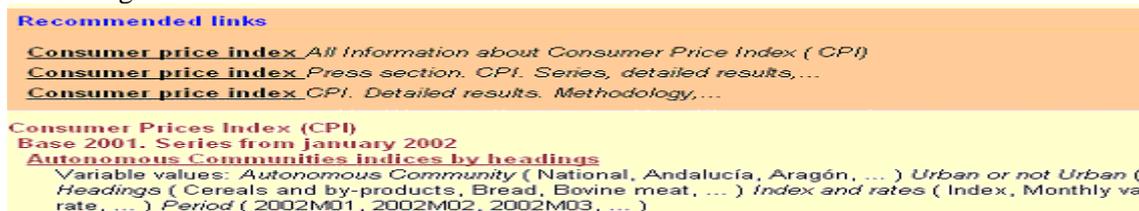
VIII. HOW TO GUARANTEE CUSTOMERS CAN CONTACT US EASILY, I.E. 'PRE-' AND 'POST-SALES' SERVICES

15.　　Our contact e-form (which appears in the footnote of all the pages)...

replaced successfully to direct e-mail as the way to request information from the INE or to send us complaints. On the one hand this removed all the unwanted mail we used to receive, and on the other, since the user has to select the subject for the query, thanks to the application used to manage the requests, it has allowed us to channel the e-mails, so that they are sent directly to the department that will answer them, thus reducing response times, and also improving the quality of the response. In all, this contributes to improving the service and responses received by our customers when faced with possible complaints or requests.
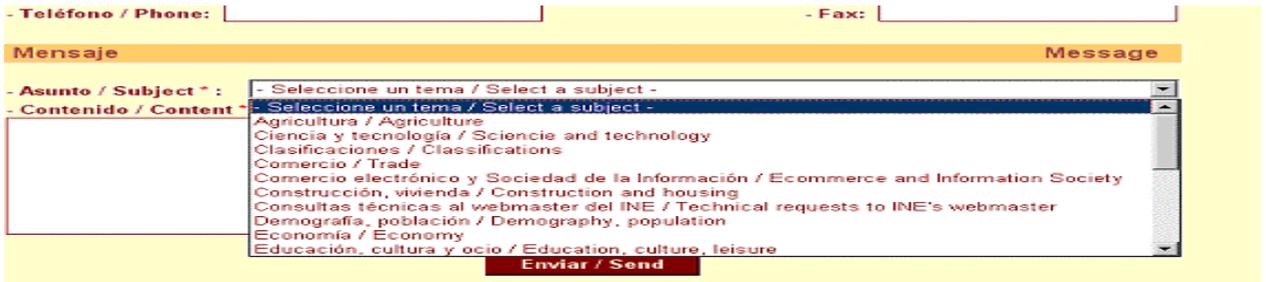
IX. HOW TO MAKE OUR USERS COMFORTABLE WHEN THEY VISIT OUR 'SUI GENERIS' RESTAURANT

16.   Using well-known images that are normally used in other Internet-based environments. For example, using widespread icons like the shopping basket (to create a 'basket of series')…
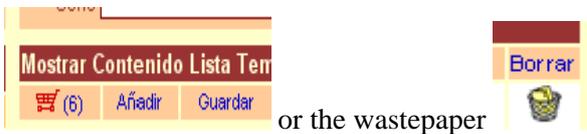
 or the wastepaper basket, to delete an item:

X. HOW TO LET OUR CUSTOMERS 'TASTE' OUR DISHES

17.   We always try to consider at least two different types of customers, and create two types of 'menus.' On the one hand, we have those that use the two most widespread search engines (according to our logs): Explorer and Firefox (testing the compatibility with both applications)…

Explorer:
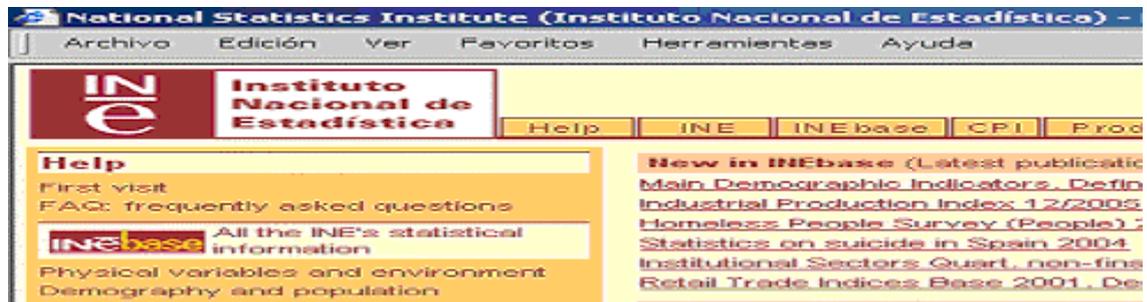
Firefox:
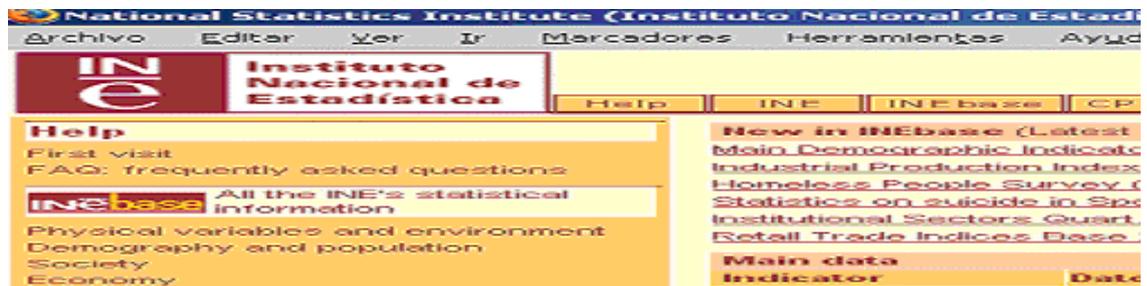
and on the other we also think some customers might use different types of products (Microsoft, Pc-Axis, or flat files, that are more or less structured).
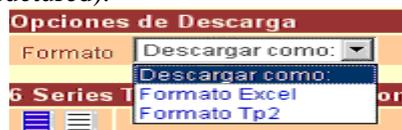
XI. HOW TO INCREASE OUR CUSTOMERS' LOYALTY

18. It is important to use a careful presentation. Arranging each of our 'dishes,' when possible, to create an exquisite and meticulous appearance, since sometimes products (dishes or data) are 'devoured with the eyes' as the Spanish saying goes. In other words, it is essential to ensure that the information has an impeccable final appearance.

Example: A menu with different 'dishes' (in this case the index of a list of series, or 'basket,' downloaded on an Excel book, with series of different divisions or subjects).

19. The subsequent spreadsheets of the Excel book downloaded present the data from the requested series:

XII. HOW TO MAKE OUR CUSTOMERS' VISITS MORE ENJOYABLE

20. Some parts of our site also include data that are less formal than the typical statistical information. For example, a list of the most common names given to newborns.
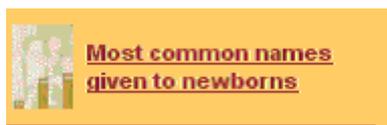

XIII. HOW TO PROVIDE OUR USERS WITH SUMMARISED INFORMATION FROM OTHER ORGANISMS

21. Our website also offers information from other 'Restaurants' that provide Spanish information with statistical purposes. For example the link http://www.ine.es/fmiFrontEnd/fmi.jsp shows this summary of national indicators:

XIV.   HOW TO PROVIDE INFORMATION ON THE 'EXPIRY DATE' OF OUR 'DISHES'

22.   Linked to topic four of this meeting (control of versions), we use the icon '?' to provide additional information on the moment when the tables, that can be downloaded from the website, were published:
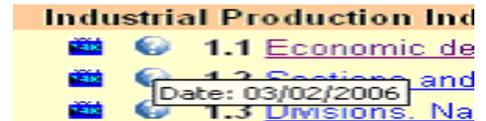
XV.   FINAL SUMMARY

23.   In summary, as I started out by saying, we use the creativity provided by a varied combination of persons and personalities, and very simple ideas that are sometimes very simple to implement, to improve our 'menu' and the attention provided at our 'Restaurant,' so that the data that are meticulously 'prepared' in our Computer department (not 'cooked,' mind!), reach our customers, as precisely as possible, hoping that they will return to visit us again at our special 'Restaurant' (website).

24.   Quite a few of the ideas mentioned in this paper obviously stem from our experience as Internet users and therefore many of you may already be aware of them. On the other hand, others have been 'cooked up' by our team. In any case, we hope to have provided simple 'recipes' to increase the satisfaction and efficiency of the 'menus' of your respective 'restaurants,' which in this case are clearly not our competitors, but colleagues working in our same line of 'business.'