

Distr.
GENERAL

ENGLISH ONLY

**UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION
FOR EUROPE (UNECE)
CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS**

Work Session on the Communication of Statistics
(Berlin, Germany, 27-29 May 2013)

Session 2: Changes in Communication

Launching a New Digital Transformation and Data Dissemination Strategy
Prepared by Stephen L. Buckner, U.S. Census Bureau, United States of America

I. Introduction

1. As part of the United States Open Government Initiative and Digital Government Strategy, public institutions must provide improved access to their data in an information-centric and customer-centric manner.

“Transparency promotes accountability and provides information for citizens about what their government is doing. Information maintained by the Federal Government is a national asset.” *President Obama (2009)*

2. In the Information Age, where Internet traffic from mobile devices exceeds that of desktop computers, the public expects to be able to interact with government anytime, anywhere, and on any device. This requires a new way of thinking about government data and how we disseminate information.
3. Statistical agencies must ensure they can deliver on these ever-increasing customer demands, needs and expectations with an information-centric approach.
4. Take for example search and computational engines that provide users with answers to their questions, either as links to information on various organizations’ websites or, more recently, to actual answers.
5. When users get type in “population of Germany” into a Google or Wolfram Alpha search, they get links to all sorts of websites relating to Germany’s population, but the first result listed is the actual answer (81.7 million) and a graphic depicting the growth of the population over time.

The screenshot shows a Google search for "germany population". The search results include a line graph titled "Population, Germany" showing population from 1960 to 2011, with a peak of 81,726,000 in 2011. Below the graph are several search results, including Wikipedia entries for "Demographics of Germany" and "Germany", and a news article from DW.DE titled "German population rises thanks to immigration". To the right of the search results is a detailed profile for Germany, including its flag, a map, and key facts: Capital: Berlin, Dialing code: 49, President: Joachim Gauck, Government: Federal republic, Democracy, Parliamentary republic, Multi-party system, Constitutional republic, Official language: German Language, and Population: 81,726,000 (2011) World Bank. There are also "Points of interest" shown with small images.

6. Like many other national statistical offices with similar population or economic data searches, neither Google nor Bing mentions Destatis Statistisches Bundesamt in their top results.
7. I make this point only to bring to surface the primary challenge all statistical agencies face in the era of big and open data. Many people think that data are just out there on the Internet and that Google, Bing and other search engines helped collect it. If national statistical agencies ignore the customer mandate of easily searching, exploring and finding answers to their routine questions on websites and search engines, then they may run the very real risk of becoming irrelevant.
8. The data dissemination model has changed dramatically over the last decade for statistical agencies. Publications no longer live on a shelf or in a library, but rather occupy space in a digital collection on a web page or mobile device. After more than 112 years, the Census Bureau is no longer collecting and publishing its compendia of statistics in the form of a *Statistical Abstract of the United States*. CD-ROMs became popular with dissemination efforts in the early 1990s, and quickly shifted to DVDs by 2000. Today, both of these digital formats are nearly obsolete as the Internet and organizational websites have become the primary vehicles and platforms for disseminating statistics.

II. Digital Transformation

1. The Census Bureau needed to take a more systematic and enterprise look at how we disseminate data to the American public and the new Digital Government Strategy, launched last summer by the White House, helped solidify the transformation we sought to build.

The strategy set out to accomplish three things:

- a. *Enable the American people and an increasingly mobile workforce to access high quality digital government information and services anywhere, anytime, on any device.*
- b. *Ensure that as the government adjusts to this new digital world, we seize the opportunity to procure and manage devices, applications, and data in smart, secure and affordable ways.*
- c. *Unlock the power of government data to spur innovation across our Nation and improve the quality of services for the American people.*

2. The strategy also outlined four overarching principles that would enable the Census Bureau to explain internally what we meant when we began discussing transforming census.gov and how we disseminate data. Many program areas concentrate more of their focus on the collection and accuracy of the data, and the actual dissemination ends up being less of a priority. In fact, some might argue that our requirements to disseminate data are satisfied by simply posting them on the Internet as a PDF or Excel file. The following principles help provide clarity for government agencies about the importance of providing the public with better access to public data and information:

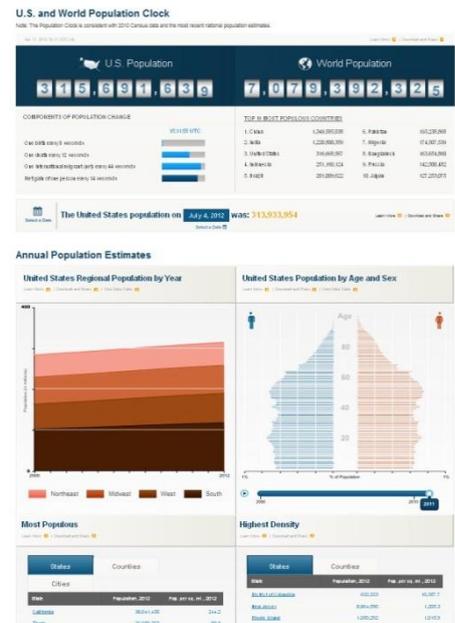
- a. *An “**Information-Centric**” approach—Moves us from managing “documents” to managing discrete pieces of open data and content which can be tagged, shared, secured, mashed up and presented in the way that is most useful for the consumer of that information.*
- b. *A “**Shared Platform**” approach—Helps us work together, both within and across agencies, to reduce costs, streamline development, apply consistent standards, and ensure consistency in how we create and deliver information.*
- c. *A “**Customer-Centric**” approach—Influences how we create, manage, and present data through websites, mobile applications, raw data sets, and other modes of delivery, and allows customers to shape, share and consume information, whenever and however they want it.*
- d. *A platform of “**Security and Privacy**”—Ensures this innovation happens in a way that ensures the safe and secure delivery and use of digital services to protect information and privacy.*

3. There are several best practices that the Census Bureau has identified through its web and digital transformation efforts over the last 18 months. One of the first that comes to mind is collaboration across the agency. Encouraging a team environment that fosters innovation is essential and can help better surface resources, exchange ideas, and establish common goals. This collaborative spirit led to the formation of teams across the agency to bring together demographic and economic subject matter experts to discuss and map out how their data might be able to live together on thematic pages on census.gov.

4. These “Practice Areas” are central to our web and digital transformation efforts because they represent how customers see our data, not how we see ourselves based on an organizational chart. By meeting weekly and planning out content that will live on thematic web pages, the subject matter experts are for the first time having conversations about how best to mash up their data on key topics like housing, education, transportation, etc. Helping steer the groups towards thinking differently about

dissemination are communications staff, who attempt to represent the outside customers’ and key stakeholders’ expectations. Functioning similarly to a news organization, each practice area is establishing a weekly editorial calendar for the year and planning out what topics may require more support in the form of tactics – news releases, visualizations, graphics, applications, briefs, webinars and events.

5. Another best practice is to listen to your customer and utilize feedback to drive decisions. As a statistical agency, we have the analytic ability unlike many organizations to take large amounts of data and decipher key findings to improve our process.
6. Two of the biggest metrics that we are tracking on the web are how satisfied users are with search and navigation. Our research revealed that these were the two biggest problems customers had on the Census Bureau’s site, and had a direct impact whether they would return to the site in the future.
7. Metrics helped prioritize the focus for the web transformation team, and led to a progressive improvement plan that included the addition of customer-friendly improvements, including a new primary navigation and introduction of mega-footer across all pages.
8. The Census Bureau is also in the process of rolling out successive improvements on branded and unbranded search, each leading to faster and better results for users. In addition to tracking satisfaction, agencies can also listen to their customers by mining different data based on web traffic to prioritize development efforts.
9. By adopting a customer-driven attitude, the Census Bureau is able to now create a single “Customer Engagement Management” dashboard that brings together feedback from web and social media analytics, telephone call centers, incoming email and partner interactions. Through a better understanding of the constant feedback coming from customers, it allows the agency to look at crowd sourcing solutions while progressively improving dissemination platforms, data tools and releases.
10. A great example of this is the recent launching of the Census Bureau’s new and improved “Population Clock.”



Typically one of the most accessed web pages on census.gov, it also had the highest bounce rate – that is once people clicked on it and got the current U.S. or world population estimate, they quickly would bounce off and leave the Census site all together. So working with the population estimates area, the web team came up with a new application design that engages users to explore the components of population change along with other interesting stats about the U.S.

As part of our new digital strategy, the agency is striving to create content that is shareable, printable, embeddable and downloadable – the new population clock application is all of the above. It has already, in its first week, increased the amount of

time users spend on the page. Through the embed feature, the application can also reside on other web sites, increasing traffic and additional users to your organization's Internet page.

11. Another good practice is to “take small bets” along the way. Far too often, government agencies take on massive projects and launch them at a single point in time and all at once (also known as a big bang). This may have some advantages, but taking “small bets” that illustrate the direction of where we need to go can dramatically reduce organizational risks. Rather than rolling out a complex and difficult to understand digital strategy, the Census Bureau started with manageable projects to illustrate what the future could look like. From initial redesigns of our homepage, to visualizations of the week, to web and mobile applications, creating quick wins for your organization illustrating the vision for the future helps bring those resistant to change to the table.

III. Data Dissemination

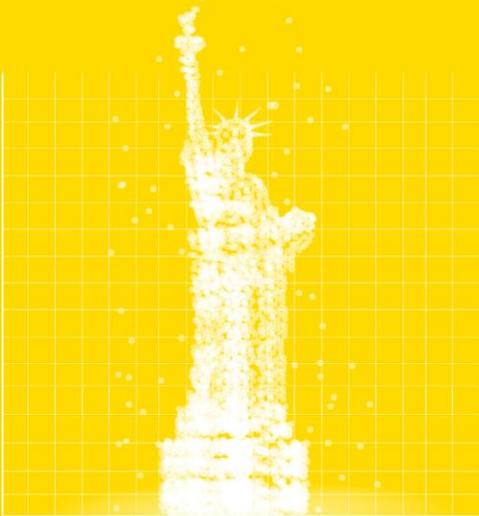
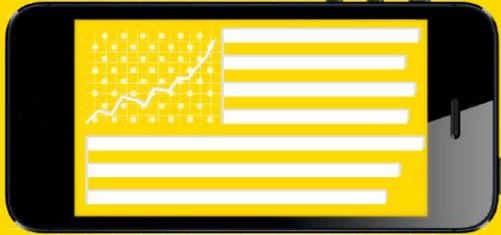
12. Embracing a digital strategy as an organization helps lay the foundation and roadmap for creating a new data dissemination model. Following the guidance and principles set forth in the Federal Digital Strategy, the Census Bureau is creating a new content strategy and data dissemination approach that is outlined in its strategic plan:
 - a. ***Use new technologies to improve services and products.*** As technological capabilities increase, customers will expect easier access, quicker turnaround, and greater comparability among different datasets.
 - b. ***Make information readily available to everyone,*** from the least to the most experienced data user. The challenge is to develop cost-effective strategies for the continued delivery of useful information to this diverse customer base.
13. Communicating a new strategy and approach across a large organization is a challenge. Open communications and constant collaboration are essential to operationalizing your new model. As a way to keep it fresh and bring the various concepts together for internal staff, the Census Bureau will soon be launching a new branded campaign.



14. Mission Data Clarity seeks to remind Census Bureau staff of the need to think about their data differently and to make our information easier than ever to use and understand.
15. Your customer can tell you a lot, but if your agency doesn't listen your efforts will fall short. This campaign is laser focused on changing the culture of the scientists, analysts and IT professionals at the Census Bureau. Its goal is to have staff think about dissemination as a key element of the survey life cycle and statistical process.
16. Through a series of internal posters and unique message delivery vehicles, the campaign will capture staff as they arrive and depart, while they walk the halls and even while they eat.

America's data resources are now more illuminating.

America's data resources are now more accessible.

Mission Data Clarity is making our information easier than ever to use and understand, illuminating the future of American innovation.

#MISSION DATA CLARITY | United States Census Bureau

More Sharable, Embeddable, Customizable and Downloadable. Secure as ever. [Census.gov/Clarity](https://www.census.gov/Clarity)

17. The tagline reminds staff about a new dissemination strategy, and that their content must be “More Shareable, Embeddable, Customizable and Downloadable. Secure as ever.”

Step 1



Step 2



We're making America's data resources this easy to crunch.

Mission Data Clarity is making our information easier than ever to use and understand, illuminating the future of American innovation.

#MISSION DATA CLARITY | United States Census Bureau

More Sharable, Embeddable, Customizable and Downloadable. Secure as ever. [Census.gov/Clarity](https://www.census.gov/Clarity)

18. As a branded campaign, Mission Data Clarity will help build a culture that values dissemination improvements as much as it values improvements to data collection, data tabulation, and data analysis.