

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)

What users want: experience of "Statistics of Russia".

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I. Introduction.

Complying with the requirements specified by the modern society to information sources and information services in general make rapid changes a an imperative. As the demand for statistical information increases not only statisticians but services providers as well face some challenges such as: users needs are varied and (deepen/widen) their interest in traditional topics is changing and this generates demands of a different kind and scope. However, users are more similar in their data demands: regardless of a subject they need it to be accurate, efficient, timeliness, accessible. So we are under obligation and in a position to cover all the demands to satisfy all types of users.

Since broad-based dissemination of information is a must for every organization producing statistics, for the last several years all international statistical services are working towards creating the best practices to meet constantly evolving user needs. On the one hand, this provides the opportunity to study a sample of the most successful foreign experiences and learn from other's experience, and on the other hand, there is a risk of walking down the "beaten track" and easily going into copy-ca mode. At this point we [organization rendering information services] are "of the same species", but are in different stages of "evolution".

II. "Statistics of Russia" – general information.

According to the Provisions on Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat) does not have the right to sell statistical information as long as it's financed from the state budget. Under these circumstances all queries sent to Rosstat by users who are not authorized to receive statistical information free of charge (there is the special list of authorized organizations reconciled with the government) are resent by Rosstat to the exclusive publisher and distributor of all official statistical publications of the Federal State Statistics Service - Information and Publishing center "Statistics of Russia".

Information and Publishing Center "Statistics of Russia" was founded by the State Committee of the Russian Federation for Statistics in 1994 as an editorial office of the journal

- "Statistical Studies". Despite our cooperation with the Federal State Statistics Service in dissemination of information, Rosstat is still quite independent from it. Now it is responsible for publishing and disseminating printed statistical publications and their electronic versions; translating Rosstat publications, originally published in Russian, in compliance with the Federal plan of statistical works; rendering a wide scope of paid information services. We work in close cooperation with 82 regional statistical offices to create a wide range of possibilities to compile data in accordance with enquiries or to conduct sample surveys and marketing research to meet users' needs. "Statistics of Russia" is given the right to publish, disseminate, render charged services and sell statistical publications and periodicals. We are a self-financed company and generate our growth capital from our own income. In mid 2008 Federal State Statistics Service made access to all statistical information published on official Rosstat site open, and for us the situation became more challenging.

For the above-mentioned purposes, "Statistics of Russia" operate two Bookshops – one in Moscow and one in St. Petersburg. Our customers can purchase publications in various formats through "Statistics of Russia" Internet-shop; it also gives an off-line access to clients to get familiar with statistical publications and their brief annotation, as well as prices.

The vast majority of our publications is available in electronic versions and can be presented on CD or sent to users by e-mail. Among those abstracts are: «Statistical Yearbook of Russia», «Regions of Russia», «Social Status and Living Standards of Population», «Russia in Figures», «Demographic Yearbook of Russia», «National Accounts of Russia», «Input-Output Tables of Russia», «Prices in Russia», «Construction in Russia», «Small Business in Russia », «Economic Activity of Population In Russia», «Tourism in Figures», «Agriculture, Hunting and Forestry in Russia», «Survey on Employment of Population », «Survey on Employment of Population », «Population Size in the Russian Federation by Sex and Age». Unfortunately most of publications are available in Russian only, however we optionally provide users with translated contents, methodological guidelines and tables from handbooks.

Our current organization structure includes the following divisions: Sales Division, Shop, Information and Marketing Division, Statistical Library, editorial office of the journal "Statistical Studies", International Relations Division and Publications Production Division.

In 1999 "Statistics of Russia" designed and put into operation its own website. Information resources of our website contain statistical publications issued in 1996-2013. Compared to 2002 the number of visitors increased almost three-fold. People became more experienced and advanced users required more data to be searched in more flexible ways. It was the main reason for redesigning our web and for undertaking efforts to improve our web site presentation, to ease communication with users and web site navigation.

The internet shop is a bookshop for those ordering one or several publications and makes it possible for customers to get the invoice automatically during the registration procedure and thus not waiting for our staff to print it out manually and send to them. All customers of our Internet shop who order hard copies, electronic versions to be sent by e-mail or having authorized access to our website are registered. The procedure of ordering the web access to one or several publications or even to all data is accompanied by a test, whereby users can also have free access to concise monthly report or "Russia" pocketbook.

We have to note that some progress has been reached during this year in the development of our Information and Publishing center when comparing <http://www.statbook.ru/> with the previous one and with recommendations of “Best practices in designing websites for dissemination of statistics” (UN ECE, 2001). It could be seen that many of these recommendations are met and these developments are useful both for our clients and for us (including registration and ordering facilities, feedback, better search and navigation, post-processing, links to other related sources, news, fixed tables with key figures, more information about the office structure, staff, contacts and services).

III. “Statistics of Russia” – performance.

“Statistics of Russia” periodically monitors voting of users for our website assessments. In 2010 on the question: “Estimate our new site” – 25% and 24% of users answered Good or Satisfied, and 37% - found that it could be better. In 2012, only 21% of users found our site comfortable to navigate and work with.

We also ask our clients to rate their satisfaction with our organization's performance by posing relevant questions to find out which features are most important to our clients and define their expectations, however we have difficulties getting feedback.

Nevertheless, after careful consideration and analysis of our client's queries and orders we were able to identify basic "interest points" which allowed us to reduce the average amount of mail exchanged between us and clients, through the better topics' disclosure in the first response. For example, in 2006 we had 7-9 letters per client's query, in 2012 - 2-5. Our goal is to reduce the amount of duplicate, clarifying questions on a query and to reduce the average length of time necessary to process requests. Now it takes up to 2 days to fully process a query, on the periods when the number of queries suddenly spikes - even up to 3-4 days. When a client has a flexible deadline and data is not needed instantly this can work out, but often this situation is not the case. Our clients from business circles, consulting and insurance companies, banks need the information ASAP as a rule.

In practice this means that receiving a query on "production volume of cichorium for 2001-2011", keeping in mind that this information can not be found in official publications we suggest looking for in on official Rosstat web-site. We give links not only to the Central Statistical Database but note that due to implementation of the new Classification (OK 034-2007 in 2010) the content of the indicator could have undergone some changes. Our customers are convinced that data is worthless unless you know how it was collected and that without such information, one can't ascertain the accuracy of the data and therefore compare it to any other data sets. So we help with access to statistical methodologies, statistical terminology, statistical classifications and nomenclatures as well.

So, as for the demand for free and charged data products and services produced by “Statistics of Russia”, the breakdown is the following (illustrated with an example of two years: 2007 and 2012). In 2007 the number of hard copies of official Rosstat publications sold was 78,975,650 copies, in 2012 - 64'109. The amount of data queries in 2007 comprised - 973, in 2012 - 307. Number of electronic versions of Rosstat statistical publications purchased in 2007 was 4,500, in 2012 – 10,035. In 2007 our customers subscribed to 989,730 web-accesses, in 2012 - to 23. Through the years the number of customers' requests has decreased from 2006 to 2012 by more than 2 times.

Clients' distribution by country, for most part, stayed the same. Thus, in 2006 the top three comprised of United Kingdom (1), USA (2) and Germany (3); in 2012 it was Germany (1), USA (2), and United Kingdom (3). Among other countries, from which we are receiving inquiries and orders are Denmark, France, Finland, Spain, Italy, Austria, Australia, the Netherlands, Japan, South Korea, Canada, Bulgaria, Singapore, India, United Arab Emirates, Poland, Slovakia and Lithuania, etc.

Topics of specified user data requests and orders have slightly varied. Mostly due to the 2010 Russia Population Census. Other most popular topics are: 1) Agricultural and Industrial Production, 2) Exports/Imports statistics, 3) Construction, 4) Investments, 5) Prices and GDP, 6) Transport, 7) Tourism statistics.

Among buyers of **hard copies** of official statistical publications issued by the Federal State Statistics Service, most are provided to libraries, educational establishments, and major international vendors. They remain our permanent and stable clients. Although, after in mid 2008 Federal State Statistics Service made access to all statistical information published on official Rosstat site open, the circulation of Rosstat printed publications has drastically decreased by 52%-83% - depending on the publication: Statistical yearbook of Russia by 62%, Russia in figures (English edition) - by 83%, Demographic yearbook of Russia - by 57%, Social status and living standards of population of Russia - by 67%, Small and medium businesses in Russia - by 55%, National accounts - by 67%, Belarus' and Russia - by 60%, Regions of Russia - on average by 60%.

The same goes for **electronic versions** that till 2008 were charged and now can be accessed/downloaded free of charge from official Rosstat site. Due to a monitoring done by International Relations Department of the "Statistics of Russia", in 2012 of every 70 orders - 10 went to purchasing e-versions. This type of service was formerly quite popular among students, post graduates, professors, teachers, R&D institutes and scientific groups of universities and higher education establishments as well as general public.

Web-access - is a sensitive case. All rights to distribute this information protected by the legislation of the Russian Federation and belong to the Information & Publishing Center "Statistics of Russia". Full or partial reproduction, copying or distribution of this website information, in any manner, is to be authorized by the written permission of "Statistics of Russia" or a special agreement. For approximately 10 years Statistics of Russia provided web-access to:

- Selected Rosstat publications through our web-site which includes the information base of all FSSS statistical publications for 1990-2013;
- All available publications for the abovementioned period - web-access unlimited.

Both basic and advanced search engines are easy to use for both Russian and English speaking users - they are translated into English. This service is used by business circles, market research firms, consulting and insurance companies, banks and occasionally by research centers.

Due to the fact that statistical data was made available to all users on a free-of-charge basis the amount of **data queries** decreased by more than 2 times. The volume of available data and information is growing constantly and the number of users who are well acquainted with Rosstat web site is increasing as well. However, we still provide tailor-made queries for special user needs. For the last two years the focus of interest has slightly changed. Now the

majority of customers need a very detailed breakdown of indicators. This goes for (*) administrative and territorial breakdown in the context of industrial production, agriculture, fishing and forestry, construction, retail trade, investments. (**) register data services, for example, data from the Register of Enterprises, (***) exports/imports data according to HS Nomenclature and customs codes (we work closely with the Federal Customs Service).

Survey services. "Statistics of Russia" conducts surveys for private and public, internal and external customers in line with international methodology and following international standards. Our Information Department consults on survey designs, sample planning, formulate the questionnaires, conducts statistically reliable estimations. Since its' founding "Statistics of Russia" participated in more than 50 different research projects, including:

- Organizing and carrying out research on "Youth school-to-work transition in the Russian Federation" (under ILO contract).
- Developing the system of indicators for the database on "Children in Russia"(under UNICEF contract).
- Scientific research on "Technological level of medium and large enterprises and implementation of new technologies broken down by priority directions of modernization and technological developments of economy of the Russian Federation".
- Developing analytical report on ethno-demographic processes and ethno social stratification of the population in the Yamalo-Nenetsky autonomous area.
- Rendered services on gathering and analysis of information and carrying out an expert study on "Assessment of business community of the state of investment and entrepreneurial climate in Russia along with its development potential for the short-term and long-term perspective".
- Rendering services on collecting data about key directions and issues of innovation activity of Russian industry enterprises.
- Gathering data on "Monitoring business environment of the real and services sector organizations for the 1 half of 2011".
- Survey of heads of industrial organizations on training of labor force in vocational education system.
- Developing and carrying out the pilot survey of heads of industrial enterprises regarding the "Survey of business activity of enterprises".
- Carrying out a pilot survey on science organizations and industrial enterprises aimed at estimating science, technological and production potential of nanotechnologies.
- Participation in research project on "Preparation, primary processing and structuring of raw data, characterizing technical and economic performance indicators of the fuel and energy complex, level and dynamics of prices and tariffs for energy resources in the Russian Federation "

- Carrying out a sample survey on "Family and birth rate".
- Developing an informatization system for Bodies of the Tax Police.
- Participation in TACIS project on "Developing computation methodology for the volume indices".

Especially "Statistics of Russia" prides itself on being chosen for organizing and implementation of the following surveys:

- "Model population survey on the use of psychoactive substances among population of three regions of the Russian Federation". It included anonymous researcher assisted interviews among 1200 household members aged 15-64. Carrying out of this survey was made possible due to financial support of the Delegation of the European Union to Russia and technical assistance of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in Russian Federation.
- "Survey on Reproductive health of women" that was conducted for the first time in our country in 2011 by Rosstat in partnership with the Ministry of Healthcare of the Russian Federation, the United Nations Population Fund and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Impact of "Statistics of Russia" was instrumental - the survey was held in 60 region of the Russian Federation where were interviewed more that 10000 women.
- GATS - The Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS) Russian Federation 2009 was a nationally representative household survey of men and women aged 15 and older, designed to produce internationally comparable data on tobacco use and tobacco control measures by using a standardized questionnaire, sample design, and data collection and management procedures. NGO Information and Publishing Center "Statistics of Russia" was recommended for organizing and implementing field work in GATS survey on the territory of the Russian Federation. It was appointed as the main implementing agency responsible for the entire GATS process, including conducting the pretest, selection and training of interviewers, full survey implementation, and production of tables and progress reports.

Navigation services through statistical data intended for general use as a self-service on the official Rosstat site, including guidance service tasks - has become a valid part of our free services (which is usually provided to "casual" users/enquires who were directed to us by the Internet browser).

IV. Conclusions.

Activities of the Information and Publishing Center "Statistics of Russia" are directed towards providing high-quality services to various user groups. The data we disseminate is diverse, so are the groups of users to which this data is disseminated. After the access to statistical data has been opened our organization (as well as others rendering similar services) has suffered a very tangible loss, most notably we've faced some funding limitations amidst the somewhat increasing demand for services. In this context we aim to more actively engage in national and international surveys and observations.

The future of statistical system is, without doubt, an era of open data - data that can be freely used, re-used and redistributed by anyone. It must be available as a whole and preferably downloadable over the Internet in a convenient and modifiable form. Another must, is that

this data must be provided under terms that permit intermixing it with other datasets. Only this way we can ensure the ability of various systems and organizations to work together (inter-operate).

At the present time we are working on a survey (possibly self-administered questionnaire) that would fully allow us to analyze our clients' service expectations and satisfaction levels, and this way achieve the balance between the conflicting factors. It will include evaluation of support staff helpfulness, cost of services, relevance of services to customers' needs, time spent per query. The ultimate objective of our client satisfaction survey is to identify "service gaps" between client's expectations or needs and the level of service they actually receive. At this point we are working towards narrowing those gaps not only by managing clients' expectations where they exceed our limitations but actually improving our service delivery. Our final goal is to improve the way our public services are delivered and to build a more "client-oriented environment".