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Topic (i): The impact of Internet on the statistical production and dissemination process

THE IMPACT OF THE INTERNET ON THE PRODUCTION AND DISSEMINATION OF STATISTICS

Submitted by Statistics Finland¹

SUMMARY

1. The extensive growth of the global information market calls for statistical offices to focus more on the general public and other customers in addition to public administration. These developments have made it necessary to change attitudes towards chargeable services and to focus more on transparency and customer orientation in data dissemination.

2. In statistical data production, the development of data networks facilitates the introduction of a digital production model. The production process, from data collection to delivering a completed product to a user's home computer, can be implemented wholly electronically. The introduction of the digital production model also forces statistical offices to reconsider the organizational models according to process orientation instead of independent subject-matter statistical units.

3. In many central statistical agencies, as at Statistics Finland, the

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service model still consists of standard or "off-the-shelf"- services for a narrow range of customers. The main disadvantages of the service model are the system-specific solutions, laborious data transfers from one system to another, production of half-completed products requiring manual finishing, several parallel vintages of ADP-technology, and hardware-dependent and system-specific development. In the changing circumstances, this service model is not sufficient for the service expected by clients.

4. The only way to cope with the growing information needs is to develop information services which operate increasingly on the principle of self-service. Besides storing of results, there must also be extensive self-service systems which contain selection and calculation facilities from the basic data. The Internet makes it possible to transform openness and self-service into key trends of development, permitting more information, independent data search and data processing services.

5. The collected statistical data is no longer isolated, therefore the ability to manage various types of data has become the main foundation of efficient services. Each item of data has to be identifiable through its metadata. Information about data, products and services is an integral part of customer services. The better our statistical metadata are, the smaller our needs for different types of data interpreters will be.

6. According to the latest customer satisfaction survey carried out for Statistics Finland, the majority of customers want to deal with Statistics Finland via the Internet. Two out of three of all customer groups already use the Internet in their daily work. One third of our customers reckon that they could satisfy 80 to 100 per cent of their communication needs with Statistics Finland via the Internet if the agency would exploit it fully. So, although we have had the database service since the early 1980s, our customers are still not satisfied today.

7. Producing comprehensible statistical data is a challenging task for statistical agencies. It requires networking with experts in different fields and observing the environment through the customer's eyes. Information about which new statistics are needed and which present ones could be discontinued is of vital importance. Therefore, continuing market surveys should be included in the annual programmes of all statistical agencies.