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ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT (OECD) STATISTICS DIRECTORATE

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Topic (iii): How to train and educate statisticians to tell the story behind the numbers

WEBSITE DESIGN

Supporting Paper

Submitted by Local Government Data Unit, Wales, United Kingdom[1]

1.   This summary of good and bad points of web design flows from the many reviews I have done of mainly National Statistical Institute web sites: these are undertaken for publication within the staff of the Government Statistical Service of the United Kingdom and are subsequently published each month on my web site (http://www.surfingwithed.org.uk). The fundamental points of design are, however, not dependent on technology and, in the main, were learnt in respect of paper publications. All too often the web presentation has not been developed by the paper publication team and has suffered from lost knowledge. As examples, I note the centre alignment of numbers in columns and the formatting of year column headings as numbers (with consequent comma separator and loss of digit, i.e. 1980 presented as 1,98)

2.   Linked with the fundamental points of statistical presentation are those concerned with the technology being employed, be that CD-Rom, Internet or WAP. One has to examine the purpose of the presentation and adapt the output to the medium; for example, the use of PDF format does not facilitate the onward use of tabular data. The technology, however, does now allow the linking of tabular parts of Acrobat files to a spreadsheet of data (but the practice is rarely followed by statistical offices).

3.   I have sorted the points of design into good and bad points under the relevant headings for Internet presentation. Users of this paper can use the points as a checklist against their own sites. Another area of concern in the later web sites is the accessibility to those with visual or hearing impairment: many statistical web sites do not take these problems into account in design.

Good points of Web Site Design

Structure

- appropriate naming and grouping of data
- logical, intuitive, well organised and clearly described file structure
- browser neutrality

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Navigation

- straightforward/ simple
- easily identified, well placed links
- fully operational links
- informative links, not too general
- content not buried too deep inside the site
- no dead ends - each page provides a link to go somewhere else

Page layout

- each page contains access to a help facility
- horizontal scrolling must never be required
- home page is concise, compact, relevant, informative yet not overcrowded
- effective use of graphics and frames - too many graphics will reduce loading speed
- effective presentation of data - break up long sections of text with subheadings, bullet lists and illustrations

Text

- consistent
- appropriate use of font, background colours and wallpaper
- avoid colour clashes
- ensure sufficient contrast between foreground and background
- avoid unnecessary jargon

Timeliness

- up-to-date information
- timetable indicating future updates and releases

Accessibility

- speedy/instant access
- access to all offered services/ servers
- data/information easy to download/copy or paste into different formats
- transition to different languages instantaneous (where appropriate)
- free access to main databank of organisation
- easy access for the visually impaired (colour and navigation)

Content

- what the users want
- allows for different types of user (novice through to expert)
- provides comparative analysis
- includes meta-data
- information about additional services and products
- references and links to additional sources of information
- contains an index
- contains a good search facility

- all pages quality assured for presentation / standards

Bad points of Web Site Design

Structure

- little organisation within site – poor structure
- illogical, not intuitive, poorly described file structure
- browser dependence

Navigation

- complex and poorly presented
- inconsistent placing of navigation
- some broken links
- poor description of links
- content buried too deep inside the site
- dead ends - some pages not providing a link to go somewhere else
- over use of additional window openings

Page layout

- each 'page' is too wide to fit on one screen (necessitating the use of horizontal scroll bars)
- home page is unstructured and cluttered
- too many graphics (including animated and 3D)
- poor presentation of data
- pages designed for paper not the net.
- poor colour choice

Text

- avoid italics, especially in large sections of text
- not readable (poor colours, contrast, font sizes)
- hyperlink text not distinguishable from rest
- poor font choice – san serif is easier to read on the web
- mixed languages

Timeliness

- out of date information
- information not available at publication time

Accessibility

- slow loading
- colour / navigation poor for the visually impaired

Content

- not what the users want
- too much in one file (for viewing or downloading)
- different figures for same variable (new or revised)

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- not much real content
- poor presentation (unacceptable on paper)
- hijacked by marketing
- not quality assured

Extracted from http://www.surfingwithed.org.uk
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