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Topic (i): Reputation management for target audiences

## **REPUTATION MANAGEMENT FOR TARGET AUDIENCES – ROSSTAT’S EXPERIENCE**

### **Invited Paper**

Submitted by the Federal State Statistics Service of Russia (Rosstat)<sup>1</sup>

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. The increasing role of information, which actively influences the political, economic and social life, is a characteristic of modern society. One of the main information sources is statistical information. The message from the Secretary-General of the OECD to the World Forum on Key Indicators states: “Everyone agrees that reliable knowledge of the reality of markets, of economic and social developments, etc. is absolutely critical for the success of a government policy, a political strategy and even an individual enterprise...policy-makers require a great deal of knowledge, much of this being reliable statistics in order to make sound policy decisions”.<sup>2</sup> For forecasting and managing economic and social processes, taking scientifically and “knowledge-based” decisions on economic and social developments, it is very important to have high quality statistical information on a wide range of problems.

2. From our point of view, good reputation and trust in statistics are closely connected with its quality. In the global statistical practice, there is no generally accepted definition of the quality of statistical data. Nevertheless, at present the concept of quality is linked to the relevance of statistical data to the needs of users. The concept of quality may also be expressed in terms of integrity, accuracy and reliability, timeliness, accessibility, interpretation and comparability.

3. Taking into account these aspects of quality and reliability and increasing user demand for statistical information, the Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation (Rosstat) continues to work on improving the quality of statistical dissemination<sup>3</sup>, including finding out the users needs in statistical data.

4. What are the target audiences, what are the main categories of users? We would define them as follows:

- Government and other state power bodies;
- International organizations;
- Mass media;

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<sup>2</sup> Message from the Secretary-General of the OECD to World Forum on Key Indicators “Statistics, Knowledge and Policy”, Palermo, Italy, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> There are the following channels for statistical information dissemination: Rosstat, its territorial offices and the Information & Publishing Center “Statistics of Russia”.

- Libraries;
- R&D, universities and other higher education establishments;
- Business circles, including consulting and insurance companies, banks, etc.;
- General public.

## II. GOVERNMENT AND OTHER STATE POWER BODIES

5. It is not necessary to prove here the importance of statistical information for the federal and local government, ministries and other governmental bodies and that the decision-making requires comprehensive and trustworthy information. The Administration of the President, Prime Minister, Minister of Finance, Minister of Economic Development, the Central Bank of Russia, the State Duma of the Russian Federation and other legislative and executive authorities receive all necessary statistical information from Rosstat to make decisions, including the monthly reports, current and quarterly statistical data and the outcomes of all surveys.

6. In addition, Rosstat compiles summary references on the current economic and social situation in the country and in selected industries and regularly presents them to the Prime Minister to compare actual statistical figures with the forecasts made by respective ministries.

7. For this category of users, the reputation of the statistical service is managed and ensured by the Rosstat Methodological Council. The role of the Council in supporting the reputation of statistics cannot be overestimated. The Methodological Council is comprised of representatives of many ministries, famous scientists, economists and statisticians. Its main activity includes the determination of key directions of statistical studies with due regard for the available demand of information resources; development and improvement of the scientifically based methodology of state statistical observations and formation of statistical indicators according to the official statistical methodology of the Russian Federation related to international standards.

8. All methodological guidelines, programs of surveys and finally the Annual Program of Statistical Activities are discussed with and take into consideration the opinions of all representatives of the Methodological Council.

9. Almost all the reports and results of statistical surveys, which are sent to the Government, are uploaded practically simultaneously to Rosstat's website and are thus available for all governmental bodies. It would be reasonable to note here that the new portal is being developed now to combine all statistical resources of all federal ministries and agencies.

10. For one thing, the Government trusts Rosstat and then again Rosstat's position and estimates are independent of outside influence. For example, in December 2004 Rosstat reported that the inflation rate in November was 1.1%. As a result, many newspapers announced that annual inflation would reach at least 11.5%. In January 2005 Rosstat published the official figure of 11.7% despite the fact that the annual inflation planned by the Government for 2004 was 10%.

11. As another example, during the election to the State Duma some candidates speculated on the decrease of the fertility rate trying to state that the transition to market economy is the main reason for this phenomenon.

12. Despite the general position of Rosstat not to make any political comments, the authorities of Rosstat drew attention of these persons to the forecast made by statisticians even at the end of the 1960s that showed a reduction of the population in Russia in the long-term perspective.

### **III. INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

13. The cooperation with international organizations and national statistical offices in the field of information dissemination is considered by Rosstat as one of the priority directions of activities, which would allow monitoring world economic relations on the basis of reliable statistical data.

14. In fulfilling Russia's obligations for international information exchange, Rosstat implements measures to maintain its reputation, regularly presents respective statistical data, and replies to the questionnaires of more than twenty international organizations, including the UN Secretariat, OECD, Eurostat, UN/ECE, ILO, the World bank, IMF, etc.

15. Rosstat is on the verge of subscribing to the IMF Special Data Dissemination Standard. The main page of Rosstat's website contains the special SDDS section in Russian and English which presents the advance release calendar, metadata, data on the population and real sector, including nominal and real GDP and its changes, industrial production, price indices, average wages, labour market, etc. There are also hyperlinks to the websites of the Ministry of Finance and Central Bank of Russia.

16. Advance release dates are announced for the key monthly and quarterly statistical indicators and data are made available for all users simultaneously on the Rosstat website.

17. Statistical data compiled by Rosstat are used officially by these international organizations and that is the recognition of their correspondence to the adopted international standards, acknowledgement of their completeness and objectivity.

### **IV. MASS MEDIA**

18. Relations with the mass media are based on the same principles mentioned in the introduction. Understanding the importance and necessity to support its reputation, Rosstat takes measures to expand its cooperation with the mass media.

19. What is the first priority interest of the mass media? We can say quite definitely that it depends mainly on the current economic situation and the market conjuncture (no wonder that rather often the interest of the mass media coincides with the interest of the general public).

20. Nowadays more than 50 representatives of leading national and foreign mass media are accredited with Rosstat (including such information agencies as INTERFAX, ITAR-TASS, RIA "Novosty", "Reuter", "Bloomberg" and newspapers "Rossiskaya gazeta", "Izvestia", "Kommersant", "Financial Times, etc.).

21. How does Rosstat try to meet the needs of the mass media and how does the mass media help us to improve our reputation? As mentioned above the advance release calendar (annual plan) of all statistical reports and publications is available for everyone on the website.

22. Accredited information agencies receive the most important statistics mainly by e-mail. Naturally all journalists also may use Rosstat's website where the information on actual questions is available free-of-charge.

23. Regional offices of Rosstat regularly publish the main results of social and economic developments in local newspapers. Many of them established close relations with local mass media and some heads of regional statistical offices are members of the editorial board of local newspapers.

24. One of the most effective means to manage the reputation are press-conferences which are held before the issue of main statistical publications or releases of the key economic indicators and the results of these press-conferences are then published in many newspapers and other media.

25. Last year a new method was used – an Internet conference of the Head of the Federal State Statistics Service. During this conference (which lasted for two hours) a wide range of questions was touched upon – methodological, organizational, relations with governmental and international agencies, etc. There was a positive reaction of the media and general public.

26. Special attention was paid to the contacts with the mass media during the period of preparation and conduct of the All-Russia Population Census-2002<sup>4</sup>. The accumulated experience is being used now in conducting the pilot agricultural census.

27. A popular magazine for a broad audience, «ITOGI» continues its monthly publication in the framework of a joint project with Rosstat highlighting the main outcomes of social and economic developments in the country followed by brief comments<sup>5</sup>.

28. In relations with the mass media, there are definite problems connected with the methodology and regulations to calculate selected statistical indicators. Sometimes journalists who do not know these normative documents give unexpected negative comments. For example, GDP estimates are revised four times (each quarter) during a year and its final annual value is compiled later based on Input-Output Tables. Journalists should understand that these intermediate estimates are needed to make socio-economic forecasts and to form the state budget.

29. Another example, concerns the change of the base year for calculation of some indicators, in particular, the industrial production index. As a result of changing the base year 1995 to 1999, the growth rate was increased. But this fact was criticized by the media and considered as the desire of statisticians to please the Government. Rosstat gave clear explanations in newspapers showing how the accelerated growth rate of selected industries development influenced the growth of total industrial production index.

30. These facts again convince us of the necessity to improve contacts of our communicators with the mass media and allow journalists to understand statistics better.

## V. LIBRARIES

31. Rosstat and its regional offices ensure reputation management for the above-mentioned categories of target audiences. For the following three categories, reputation management is the responsibility of the Information & Publishing Center “Statistics of Russia” (which is responsible for the printing and dissemination of all official statistical publications, as well as for rendering information service on a commercial basis).

32. The specific requirements of libraries are rather well-known. To support reputation one has to ensure:

- A regular supply of publications in accordance with a published schedule (especially those issued monthly and quarterly);
- Statistical subject-matter handbooks, when possible, should be issued with definite intervals, well-known by libraries (that the users are used to; most of these publications in Russia are issued every other year – “Finances in Russia”, “Agriculture in Russia”, “Labour and Employment in Russia”, “Prices in Russia”, “Industry of Russia”, etc.) and we have to inform users when this order is changed (for example, the “Demographic Yearbook” was not published because of the Population census);
- Quality of printing and image of publications;
- Design of the cover and use of the logo to ensure a publication is easily recognized.

It seems that, to a great extent, we satisfy all these requirements.

<sup>4</sup> see Working Paper no. 21, Work Session on dissemination of statistical output to information media, October, 2002, <http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2002.10.infmedia.htm>

<sup>5</sup> See CRP. No.3, Work Session on dissemination of statistical commentary and stories, December 2003, <http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2003.12.commentary.htm>

33. There are more than 450 libraries among the subscribers of the Information & Publishing Center “Statistics of Russia”. The International Conference of Libraries is held annually in Crimea and our representatives participate in this conference to expand the number of subscribers and undertake steps to improve our service. Several libraries have started to order not only hard copies but electronic versions as well and among them are the IMF Joint Fund and some libraries of national and foreign universities. So we can say that this target audience does not bring us additional problems.

## **VI. RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTES, UNIVERSITIES AND OTHER EDUCATION ESTABLISHMENTS**

34. We cannot comment on our relations with this category because a part of these clients could be considered like users of libraries (i.e. teachers, students, post graduates, etc.) or like economic agents in the case of R&D institutes and scientific groups of universities that carry out mainly the same kind of research as enterprises, businesses or consulting companies.

## **VII. BUSINESS CIRCLES**

35. Development of the non-state sector of the economy, activity of private companies, commercial banks, insurance, marketing research and consulting companies increased the demand for statistical information and the respective growth of numbers of users.

36. This target audience has its specific requirements, for example:

- usually data are needed almost tomorrow;
- as a rule data should be presented by sub-sectors and in detailed nomenclature;
- time series are to be for a long period;
- data are usually required by regions or by selected cities.

37. These needs of businesses are not always easy to meet, in particular with regard to timeliness taking into account the total number of orders. Besides, some data on the regional level or selected cities are not available immediately at the federal level. Nevertheless, efforts are made to ensure these strict requirements.

38. Two years ago Rosstat began to conduct a survey on opinions of managers on how their business is going. Quarterly surveys on the business outlook in industry, construction and retail trade conducted by Rosstat provide the opinions of businessmen on the current situation and its perspective and therefore supply enterprises, small businesses, other entities and individual entrepreneurs with data to estimate their behavior in the market.

39. Reputation management is to be maintained especially with the permanent customers of the Information & Publishing Center “Statistics of Russia” who use official statistics in their research and refer to the sources of data and, in this way, advertise our activity for other potential users. Among these customers “Gasprom”, “Lukoil”, RAO ES, Artur Andersen, CIS Ernst&Young, etc. For large companies, the Information & Publishing Center proposes the subscription for its database of all official publications since 1997.

40. Special attention should be paid also to those companies that contact statistical offices or the Information & Publishing Center for the first time, explaining patiently and properly the possibilities of information base, availability of indicators and nomenclature and terms of needed statistical data supply, etc.

41. As a rule, these users prefer receiving data in electronic format and this position is quite comfortable for statistical offices. Reputation is being supported due to skill and experience of staff though the timeliness is sometimes a problem to be resolved.

### **VIII. GENERAL PUBLIC**

42. For ordinary citizens, the role of statistical information has increased significantly during the last few years as it contains basic data to define their position and behaviour in the marketing of goods, labour and capital. Traditional questions of this target audience concern mainly wages and salaries by industries and by regions, inflation rate, prices for goods and services, etc. Everyone needs reliable knowledge of the reality of markets and the range of these questions has been recently widened. Rosstat still receives letters with these questions and informs the general public on its website on how many of these letters were received and answered and what kind of questions they contained.

43. Most citizens do not know much about Rosstat's activities but are interested in various social and economic phenomena. Internet technology gives them the possibilities to learn more via Rosstat's website on methodology, metadata used, main results of surveys, statistical publications recently issued and planned to be published, etc. The main page of Rosstat's website has a special section "Actual current information" which is accessible free-of-charge and contains answers to many questions of the general public.

44. Among them, many indicators that were mentioned above which people are interested in, include, for instance:

- Consumer Price Index (published monthly);
- Production, turnover, reserves and average prices for main consumer goods (weekly);
- Situation in domestic market of crude oil extraction, output of petroleum products and their prices (weekly);
- Production and use of GDP (published quarterly);
- The ratio of money income of population to minimum subsistence level (monthly) and other actual statistical data.

This and SDDS sections of Rosstat's website include other statistical data useful for general public. The returns of the All-Russia Population Census-2002 are also available free-of-charge on Rosstat's website. Hopefully, as more people use Internet, it will improve the reputation of Rosstat.

### **IX. CONCLUSION**

45. The reputation of an NSO depends essentially on the opinion of the general public who learn statistics mainly from newspapers, radio and TV and therefore from journalists. That is why our efforts must be concentrated on permanent work with the mass media and, in parallel, improving all methods of dissemination.

46. Obviously, at present the trust in statistics may be ensured by presenting people more information on statistics, which assumes: equal accessibility to statistics and its independence, high quality of statistical data, transparency of methodology and active professional position of statisticians in explaining the published statistical information. The last point leads us to the next item of our agenda – how to tell a story behind or together with figures, moreover it is really necessary for the general public – one of the most important target audiences – to understand statistics better.

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