Chapter IV: Methods, techniques and tools used in statistical offices to support data dissemination

TABLE OF CONTENTS

4.1. METHODS, TECHNIQUES AND TOOLS USED IN STATISTICAL OFFICES TO SUPPORT DATA DISSEMINATION

(DECORUM OF COMMUNICATION)

4.1.1 Introduction

Good organisation is indispensable in order to get through the discord of vast and heterogeneous messages disseminated by information media. In dealing with the press, statistical offices can have a significant effect by **establishing press offices**, which follow certain rules of conduct. These rules are determined by the communication environment of a given country, so rules are not rigid or inflexible. Some of them may be in contradiction with others. The fulfilment of this mission depends more and more on statisticians who are increasingly involved in the process of making **press releases** noticeable, explaining terms face to face to journalists on briefings, **press conferences** or during **interviews**. Fast developing electronic tools are supporting these efforts, giving impersonal help. Interaction with the press is enhanced by access to database, by metadata provided even by revising several data electronically. A good advice is to give the right product to the right people at the right time. In implementing this advice in practice, some **elements of code of conduct** could help.

4.2. EFFECTIVE NEWS MEDIA SERVICE IN STATISTICAL OFFICES

To fulfil their specific tasks, the media, the business world and administrative institutions constantly require **comprehensive information tailored** to their individual needs. The statistical offices are striving to supply the whole society with comprehensive information by providing extensive press services for the media. Without the mediation of the mass media, it is generally not possible for statistical institutes to distribute their results to the general public: figures are transmitted to the general public by news agencies, newspaper and TV, radio stations; regional data to regional, and economic statistics to business papers. The media can often make information more readily available and more easily understandable to large audiences. **The media is effective in presenting information** in relation to citizen and public concerns and can inform the public debate and shape public opinion.
Statistical offices had become increasingly aware of the importance of good media contacts and most of them had established press offices in the early nineties – or hired staff to improve the communication with the media. The step was a recognition that the mass media represented a constituent part of the distribution of statistical information.

In their presswork, the offices make use of the **whole spectrum of tools** employed in both traditional and modern methods of press activity. The independence and neutrality of official statistics, the objectivity and validity of statistical results are factors, which contribute to the **high market value of the figures** on the information market and are considered to be of particular importance especially by journalists.
In general, **target groups** of the press services offered are first of all **news agencies**, but also **radio and television stations, newspapers and magazines**, and independent journalists. A rapidly expanding and increasingly specialized media – in print, broadcast and cable – means **more outlets for statistical information** but cannot be reached one by one.
A self-containing question is the extent to which **analysis** should be provided by statistical offices. Majority of working group participants were of the opinion that official statistics should be independent of the political process and feared that too much data interpretation would damage their

image of neutral data provider. As matter of consensus it was later agreed that a statistical office can provide the interpretation of data to describe a phenomenon but should not endeavour to go into its causes. **Forecasting was seen as the most difficult**, and apart from population-projections (accompanied by their different assumptions and scenarios) is not usually undertaken by statistical offices.

Once press unit established, and data are at disposal for dissemination further questions arise, such as the choice of convenient time, place and adequate methods to get into contact with mass media. Methods, techniques and tools applied all hinge on aims followed by the press unit.

Expected gains from press releases were formulated by Statistics Netherlands*: national statistical offices have always generated impressive quantities of figures, which have always been gratefully received by specialists within government and the academic community. The office had rarely had problems reaching the specialists, since they were greatly interested in figures and knew where to find the experts when they need detailed information. But Statistics Netherlands also wished to reach the public at large. And the Dutch majority is not so much silent as it is passive. This means that Statistics Netherlands has to actively pursue and interest them, and that the* ***statistical data has to be made accessible in more ways than one****. Issuing press releases is the most efficient way to inform specialists and non-specialists about socioeconomic key figures.*

Communication environment decides: a vivid example of it is that of Norway. *As usual, on April 30th 1991 a press release were put into action in order to inform public about the first results from the 1990 Population and Housing Census. But as a result, 21 newspapers only (out of 148), with a total circulation of 13 per cent of total newspaper circulation, communicated them to their readers. The reason was that the newspapers had shown great interest in connection with the data collection (and such contributed to an answering per cent of 99). Thus they had not considered the census as news any more. According to the press office, another reason might be that the text was summary and dull, not presenting the results as news. However, when the results for the counties and communities appeared, the local papers readily took notice of them and commented on the data. Apart of this or not, the statistical office had halved its number of annual press releases and was ready to use several other means to inform the media about its products.*

Market-moving economic data do require special treatment: strict deadlines, sometimes even hermetically closed rooms for their transmission were invented, known as **"embargoes" and "lock-ups"**. Such a strict treatment of reporters' behaviour does not mean the same for the data released. They need special care: explanations, comments and background information for indicators should be provided to ensure the quality of the media coverage. New tools to convey them are seen on metadata, which provide a multidimensional insight into repository of statistical information.

4.3.1. FORMAL PROCESS OF RELEASE

What and how to issue to the news media

Key figures are the protagonists of statistics when from the immense flow of data certain ones are to be conveyed. Releases are taken over by news agencies, national daily papers, TV and radio stations; regional figures by regional media and economic statistics either by news agencies or by business press. Explanations, comments and background information for indicators should be provided to ensure the quality of media coverage.

4.3.2 Content of press releases

What to issue by topics is generally determined well beforehand, as the use of **advance release calendars** has became widespread since 1996. In this way the bulk of the data to be diffused for the news media is given. The calendars' publication frequency varies and as a reminder, a number of

offices issue for the news media topics to be covered every week. Meeting publication dates not only requires a great deal of discipline inside agencies (see also 3.5) but also helps to maximize the coverage of the releases.
Besides normally obtainable releases on occasion may occur **particular announcements** either due to the importance of the matter (concerning censuses, for example or because of an unexpected event). The latter may include changes in methodology, regional data as well as responses to the controversial media coverage of data published earlier.

4.3.3 Authors and spokespersons

The answer to the question **who is responsible for the final publication** varies along the agencies. In Sweden the response is that the responsibility for the content of press releases rests with the **statisticians**. The press releases are not written by the staff at the Press Office but by the statistical experts. Authors in the subject-matter divisions deliver their texts to the Press Office by e-mail via the internal computer network on the day before dissemination or, as exceptions, the same day as the dissemination is to be fulfilled.
One of the goals of Statistics Sweden is to improve dissemination and accessibility of the statistics to the mass media and general public. The Press Office is responsible for the last stage of dissemination of all news messages to the media. According to the organisational plan the press office is a part of the staff at the Director General's office and that gives the press officers immediate access to the head of Statistics Sweden.

*As to Norway, the Director General is the **official spokesman** for the office. A press coordinator and other members of information staff also take the initiative and make the media aware of important statistics to be released in the near future. However, the policy is that the editors and journalists should contact or be contacted by the division responsible for preparing the statistics. To facilitate this contact, Statistics Norway's telephone book is distributed to all media (like in Sweden).*

*As a matter of policy, Statistics Canada is very open to journalists. **Subject-matter specialists** are not only permitted, but are required, to deal with enquiries in their areas of expertise. Similarly, **managers are authorized spokespersons** for their programs. It is also Agency policy to provide journalists with complimentary copies of its publications, or complimentary subscriptions to its periodicals, on request.*

*In Netherlands, a spokesperson of the statistical division is named in the press release. Statistics Netherlands followed the option taken by the universities: **the statistician is his own spokesperson**. With over 400 statistical surveys it is very difficult to get to know the ins and outs of all of them. This turned out to be very good for the image of the office, more or less by accident: journalists see Statistics Netherlands as a very open organization. The Press Office talks to journalists every day and can assist spokespersons in conducting an interview. They are prepared for difficult questions, procedures are explained for them, and the experiences are less nerve wrecking. It is standard procedure to read the draft article before it is published, so that the press office can add information, correct mistakes, and comment on the tone of the article.*

4.3.4 Flow of the press release

According to practice at Statistics Finland in 1994:

1. *The basic structure of the release was planned before the actual publication*
2. *When the statistics were ready, the subject-matter department in question made a draft for the release on the basis of the aforementioned structure (three days before publication)*
3. *A press officer edited the release (it had to be ready one day before the publication)*
4. *The release was sent to translation (if it was to be translated)*
5. *The release was sent to the Director General who may wish to comment on it*

6. *The release was sent via different channels to the customer (the sending was programmed the day before the publication to begin at 7. a.m. on publication day).*
7. *The customer received the message and asked for more information, the release is received:*
    - *on Internet;*
    - *by e-mail at 7.00-7.15*
    - *by fax at 7.00 a.m. – 4 p.m. (depending on the number of releases during a particular day)*
    - *by mail after the publication*

The main requirement is that **the dispatch be simultaneous**.

4.3.5 Extra services

In addition **data shooting** could be mentioned as the means by which the user can have an online subscription to predefined tables or time-series. At the moment of release the material will be sent to the user's computer. CD-rooms also are used to store statistical data.

Some extra communication lines and products may be exploited as well. *In Germany in the middle of nineties **telex** was still in use – and an interactive service, called **videotex**. It had more than 500,000 subscribers who could recall information from the Telekom computer via the normal telephone network either to their own personal computer equipped with a modem or to their own television set including the necessary supplementary equipment. As an information service, the interactive videotex system provided a survey of the most recent press releases of the Federal Statistical Office. A great advantage of the interactive videotex system was at the time the interactive communication with all users who, via this medium, were able to make direct inquiries to the Federal Statistical Office and place orders for printed and electronic publications.*

To complete the flux of announced press releases, several press units produced **extra printed publications**. *In Finland it was a monthly bulletin, which gave more structural and summarized information in an illustrative form. The bulletin advised how to make graphics and included all kinds of statistical stories and was largely referred to the media as a source of news stories and articles.*

*In The former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia, following the interest for publishing statistical data using graphic forms of presentation with less (or without text) for several economic magazines in the country, the statistical office regularly prepared **special supplements** with the latest ("newest") statistical data. It should me mentioned here that offer sometimes exceeds the demand: most of would-be users (such as TV stations, magazines, even quality papers) of graphic presentations made by NSOs prefer to apply own ways of representation.*
*In Italy since mid-90's a "Note Rapide" publication had been distributed. These **monographic letters** had no defined periodicity, with intent to be issued more or less every two weeks. These Notes are a means of **distributing non-programmable statistical data, or statistical documentation, or in-depth reports** on current issues, also with a view to marketing needs. In fact, these notes are not only for the media, members of Parliament or universities, but also specific target according to subject. For example, the "Note Rapide" on smoking was directed toward the medical sector.*

Last channel of communication is of **personal** nature but not one, which serves building of contacts with the representatives of mass media. It is about **verbal information** asking when pressmen often appeal to the office directly for various data and pieces of information. Even when every such request is rapidly satisfied by phone, or by fax this practice may make great demands on the people working at the press section. A solution to this could be the introduction of an online interrogation system.

4.4 APPEAL FOR PUBLICATION STANARDS

Luxemburg and Belgium are countries geographically close, small in size, and with a clientele, which is assumed to be largely the same. Publications of every kind have to comply with language requirements in Luxembourg and in Belgium. As Luxemburg's Statec and National Bank of Belgium (institution in charge for economic statistics of the country) are so close, they maintain frequent contact and also take part in a Eurostat working party on "Dissemination of statistical information" at the European Commission.
Both of them do think that there is an urgent need for more contacts between institutions like theirs in order ***to establish European publication standards*** *and common working methods with a view to improve access to statistical data intended for an ever wider public, and giving users a clearer idea of statistical work and products.*

The two agencies are aiming at a ***common approach*** *to the presentation of data tables,* ***uniformity*** *in the design of the graphs and the dissemination of methodological notices, which are more effective and easier to read, starting at European level, but why not at the level of the countries represented in the ECE's working group on dissemination for information media?*

For the time being, the two institutions can still take advantage of the fact that they ***enjoy a degree of monopoly****. They have expertise and experience in their field, acquired over many years. In the absence of competitors capable of publishing faster, they can be more meticulous about the quality of our products. It can be used to establish perfect credibility.*

Conventions of publishing
For all forms of publication, a pleasing layout is suggested, which offers easy access while retaining a substantial content of quality data. It is surely a good thing to adhere to dissemination schedules in order to avoid any loss of credibility, but this must not be at the expense of product quality.
Quality must be the primary consideration from the point of view of both staff competence and speed of response.

- ***Layout:***

For paper publications, though demand is falling as electronic products come on to the market, it is vital for covers to be attractive, colorful and of good quality. The inside pages must also be of good quality.
As "paper" customers are declining in number, why make them suffer with dowdy publications, which are badly printed and often expensive?
The above points continue to apply to CD-ROMs, other electronic products or the web; **general presentation is always important**;

- ***Easy access:***

Efforts are made to **minimize the changes to the structure of the tables** disseminated from one period to the next, in order not to inconvenience the reader.
The tables are preferred **to keep in the same positions** within each publication and they retain the same identification number from one period to the next.
Paper publications are disseminated according to topic (foreign trade, national accounts, etc.).
Tables of contents are carefully structured, clear and precise.
All tables are all based on a common backbone, a basic template.
In electronic publications a **system of key words and links** between tables and the meta-data relating to them make it easy to find data.

Except, of course, for paper publications, customers must be able to download data on to their own administrative systems. They must also be able to rework them according to their own needs.
A PDF format is often inappropriate; intelligent formats, which are easy to reuse and to convert are preferable.
Some customers will need to be able to download data on a large scale on to huge data systems; this applies particularly to universities.

- ***Contents:***

The series disseminated will cover a long enough period of time to permit meaningful statistical analysis by university researchers.
The **tables will be clear and easy to read**; let us not forget that our customers are not necessarily all familiar with our jargon. What about journalists, for example, who are rarely statisticians but usually economists? So one needs to be precise, leaving no scope for misinterpretation of the various concepts, which are so simple to experts.
Some other minor points, which seem obvious but which one tend to forget also have to be highlighted:

- "flashing" logo which attracts the customer's attention because it looks good, and which permits rapid identification of the publishing institution
- reference to the information sources
- contact numbers for people in the institutions

- ***Quality:***

The series disseminated must be guaranteed; one must not publish just anything without prior verification.
The National Bank of Belgium set up a huge program with this in mind, training experts in mathematical statistics.

- ***Adherence to dissemination timetables:***

Dissemination timetables must be published and we must stick to them.
There must be a **precise procedure for dispatching** the data disseminated.
Thus, National Bank of Belgium adheres to a dissemination schedule for dispatching a particular item:

1. 15.30 e-mails to preferential customers (though they cannot modify the information in any way), indicating any timing embargo. This mainly concerns press agencies - to give them time to prepare their articles before going to press – and ministerial offices)
2. 16.00 publication on our Internet site
3. 16.30 e-mails sent to non-preferential customers (on request)
4. the next day: dispatch of « paper » publications by post.

One will note that **e-mails are sent out simultaneously and automatically** at the times specified in the schedule.

Luxemburg's Statec has not set any specific schedule for issuing its announcements. Nevertheless, editorial office practice is taken into account by issuing announcements simultaneously before noon, avoiding the end of the week if possible.

- ***Press releases:***

Press releases adhere to a **fixed layout, containing succinct information**, which journalists can easily reprocess.
One certainly must not neglect the appearance of the releases, which need to be "attractive". We voluntarily limit these releases to a maximum of two or three pages.

- ***Service:***

For all forms of publication, the service supplied to customers needs to be of good quality in terms of the answers given and the time taken to supply them.
In case of statistics, it is **the Datashop** that normally has to deal with customer inquiries (see Eurostat's Datashops 2.2.3.). Datashop should be an integral part of the circulation set-up.
This unit plays a vital role in presenting our image to the outside world. It will also provide an **"after-sales service"** for statistical publications, capable of explaining the methodology used, the accuracy of a figure, adherence to schedules, etc., within a maximum of 24 hours.
The team should therefore comprise staff capable of coping with the mass of questions raised by customers with a highly varied understanding of statistics. These **people must be bilingual, if not trilingual**, with a good knowledge of the database and the methodology.
They will have comprehensive IT equipment and all the necessary links with other data producers at home and abroad, particularly to international institutions (Eurostat, IMF, BIS, ECB, etc.). Their role will also extend to **redirecting customers** to the producers if they cannot provide the inquirer with an immediate answer.
In the case of the NBB and STATEC, this relay role is all the more important in that they already act as the central collection point for data produced by other organizations.

Press well addressed?

And at the end of all these: the press!
What is its role?
Can it improve the statistical offices' image as data producers?
Is the press necessary in order to reach the various user groups one want to reach?
Do statistics need the press more than the press needs it?
Can one manage without the press?
Obviously one is dealing here with the role of the press in relaying the data disseminated by the producers.

It is true that up to this point it went about ensuring and projecting a positive brand image. And this all can be either **negated or enhanced by the press**.
Its role is to relay statistical information to the general public. It will do so objectively only if the message is clear and unambiguous and the journalists have understood it properly.
It is therefore crucial to stick to all the points mentioned.

Journalists are unquestionably **sensitive**:

- to the clarity of the tables and press releases which we supply;
- adherence to dissemination schedules, and the accuracy of those schedules;
- simultaneous release of announcements (one agency must not get ahead of another)
- the speed with which we answer individual questions
- the attractiveness of the topics which we suggest to them
- the transparency of the concepts used.

One must never forget that **journalists are not statisticians**; they do not understand the whole subject; what they pass on to the public may therefore be totally wrong. It is the statistical agencies' job to ensure that their message is clear, and to react in order to correct their mistakes.
If these conditions are met, the press will act as a springboard for our institutions.

Do statistics need the press to reach the public that we want to target?
Obviously, this question does not concern experienced statisticians who are familiar with our jargon and the methods used.
These experts represent only a marginal group among customers; it must be acknowledged that **the press is an essential intermediary** in the circulation of data, because it will translate abstruse statistical concepts into everyday language.

So one cannot manage without them, **one must adapt to their demands**.
If we agree that the press plays a basic role in bringing the data to the general public, we must conclude that we should take the initiative and approach the press.

1. via press releases
- issued regularly
- of good quality
- on topics of interest to a broad and varied public
- in a standard electronic format
- in the form of handy files with a content, which is easy to handle

2. via press conferences
3. via other less conventional means (information and training days, panels, etc.)
4. by providing them with a **full "after-sales" service** which enables journalists to take their research further by putting them into contact with the experts and giving them access to detailed documentation.

4.5 A JOURNALISTIC APPROACH TO STATISTICAL DISSEMINATION

At Eurostat a breakthrough was achieved in early nineties in media relations. Since then effective and relevant procedure of news releases is making its way. Description of path finding is by John Wright, Eurostat's former press adviser.

4.5.1. Creating a good press for European statistics

Releasing official statistics to the news media – why is it so important to get it right? Some possible answers to this question:

- Official statistics record matters of great significance for both nations and individuals.
- They are one way in which the ordinary **citizen can judge the state of the nation and its place in Europe**, and how well (or badly) governments are running things.
- And they can be a very good way – because, on the whole, they tend to measure things warts and all; free of the "spin" that inevitably governments try to put on information released to the public.
- **Politicians are wary of statistics**. In totalitarian states "unacceptable" statistics are suppressed. In democracies Ministers don't mind when statistics put government in a good light but tend to wriggle when they show all is not

well. They know that fiddling the figures is unrealistic but that doesn't stop them trying to influence their "presentation".

- The fact that politicians can be uneasy about statistics underlines their importance as a **public commodity**. Unfortunately, the public can often find them boring and difficult to understand. The news media, finely tuned to the public mood, tend to reflect this attitude. (Incidentally, this also makes it easier for politicians to push them under the carpet.)

- The aim of official statistical agencies must be to try to show the public, through the media, that **statistics are important by making them interesting**.

It has to be said that for the vast majority of ordinary people in Europe the European Union is very far from the most important thing on their minds. This makes the task of persuading the news media to be interested in EC statistics fairly daunting. But such **statistics are the raw material** for people to make certain judgements about Europe and their place within it.

How to obtain more publicity

How to persuade Europe's news media to publish them? Let's look at it from their point of view:

- The news media will only publish something that they know will help them sell newspapers or boost listening or viewing figures.

- So, the “product” offered them must be something that will **grab their attention** – slots into their agenda. Having come up with this, one must present it to them in the right way, at the right place and at the right time - and then monitor the results in order to make any necessary adjustments.

The brief for starting the news release programme was: to obtain more publicity for Eurostat and the statistics it produces. The **classic way of communicating with the press is by news release** – a brief summary written in a way that journalists find "user-friendly" and which gives them interesting and “newsworthy” information requiring little effort on their part to turn into good copy.

So a programme of news releases on the various regular statistics and ad hoc bulletins emerging from Eurostat was launched. The first attempt was on the regular Consumer Price Index.

One had to find the best way of issuing the news releases. At noon each day at EC Headquarters in Brussels Europe's news media were briefed by the Commission Spokesmen on the news of the day about the Community. Next to the briefing room all the latest EC news releases were laid out ready to be taken by journalists gathering for the briefing.

What better place to display statistical wares? The journalists accredited to the Commission represented all the major media outlets in the Community; sometimes they could number two or three hundred. So all one had to do was make releases tell a story they wanted to pass to their readers, and visually attractive enough.

Solid base for comparisons

The news release programme began with regular indicators such as the CPI, unemployment figures, industrial, production, agricultural prices and quarterly national accounts. Much of further topics provided by Eurostat were also fascinating – and fortunately the press shared this view: in many cases, it enabled them to produce country-by-country “league tables”. One was operating by one of the basic rules of the game: enabling journalists to enable their readers to compare themselves with others, feeling good, bad or neutral in the process.

There are many ways in which this news release programme can be developed and refined. The key thing is the "product" – to maintain and improve its quality. The danger always is that the statisticians

will think that this sort of work trivialises theirs. But, as they saw their work receiving extensive coverage in Europe's major newspapers, they became more and more willing to suggest ideas for news releases.
As for the press, several have been complimentary and there have been some constructive criticisms. But the biggest compliment, the best – and the only – market test is that they continue to use them, approximately in the way they are issued.

4.5.2 Eurostat and the press

Initiation for the practice with press releases was adequate – as stated later by Eurostat:

1. *In building up its relations with the news media, Eurostat has kept firmly to the principle that official statistics should be independent of the political process. In large part this has been the secret of its success.*
2. *Eurostat believes it is counter-productive to issue huge amounts of data to the news media. There are lots of statistics that will* ***make a "story" for the press*** *but inevitably many will simply disappear down a black hole. The media cannot use them all. At some stage there has to be a process of selection. You may not even like what they select and how they present it.*
3. *Clearly, Eurostat's "product" has to stand out from the hundreds and hundreds of the European Commission releases. Eurostat have carefully established a reputation for giving good "stories" in its releases.*
4. *Data have to be* ***released at a time convenient to the media*** *rather than to statisticians. Noon is Eurostat's time, given the fact that it is tied to the Commission briefing. The general rule is* ***data are released as soon as possible*** *after they become available. Pressures to hold back a release need to be resisted and the essential criterion followed.*
5. *It is important to have someone in charge of the press operation with the necessary journalistic/press relation skills and experience to make it work – someone who knows what makes news.*
6. *Those who run the office must have* **the courage and imagination** *to adopt a course that may not please some elements of the organisation who might think their work is being trivialised. It may also displease the political "masters" who are frequently ill at case with stories that statistics tell. Pressures to bend to the political will must be resisted if media and public confidence is to be maintained.*
7. *The objective should also remain firmly in view: it is to enhance* ***the credibility of official statistics and the reputation of those who produce and issue them*** *by bringing them to the attention of as many people as possible.*
8. *The essential argument about credible official statistics being one of the* ***cornerstones of democracy*** *should constantly be borne in mind and deployed frequently.*
9. *If one thinks this way about news media relations the process could lead to examining other aspects of one's statistical operation. Close and productive contact with the media is an excellent way of keeping a* ***statistical office in touch with the mood and tastes of public****. Which, as the news media are the first to appreciate, are constantly shifting and changing.*

4.5.3 What might be friendly for journalists?

For once to be friendly easy and reliable connection is desirable, because nothing is more frustrating than connections that do not work when you need them – confessed an editor with a small Norwegian newspaper when describing experiences with data-based information. And what is good for an expert can be bad for journalists. Journalists need **standardized, easy to understand user interfaces**. Sophisticated tools, which experts do like, are a nuisance for most journalists. Fulltext option is very important, references usually have little interest. Graphics are fine for some, others find them difficult to understand. Most of **papers like to make their own graphics**.

As to statistics, numbers usually are good news – at least they give quotes. As always, exclusive news are the best ones. Generally regular statistical reports are not much used by media. But sometimes journalists analyse them and find angles for reporting. Statistics are suitable to illustrate and compare.

4.6.1. NEWS RELEASES

4.6.2 Ready made reports

In 1991 the National Norwegian News Agency (NTB) established a new service offering major companies, organisations and public institutions distribution of press releases through the agency's nation-wide distribution network. The service was called PRM (Norwegian abbreviation of "pressemelding", i.e. press release). This transmission service was not part of NTB's ordinary news service its releases were transmitted directly to the subscribers' computer systems in the same way as NTB's news.
The main part of the receivers consisted from approximately 80 Norwegian newspapers as well as the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation and its 17 regional offices and other national and regional radio- and TV-stations. The newspaper clients alone constituted 90-95 % of the total circulation of daily newspapers in Norway. Other receivers were all the Norwegian ministries and a number of major companies and organisations.
The press releases in NTB's transmission service were written and edited by the customer/supplier. Nevertheless, NTB urged its clients to present the news in a form which was to the point and journalistically professional. Thus, the supplier contributed to making press releases an interesting electronic transmission service, which was being monitored by the media on a regular basis.
NTB would not interfere with the contents of the press releases. However, having the editorial responsibility for the distribution, caused NTB to assume that the press releases being distributed through press releases would satisfy certain journalistic criteria:

The messages must have a definite news or information value.
The messages must be written according to Norwegian rules and regulations.
The professional/ethical code of the press must not be violated, such as the rules regarding printed advertisements.

NTB also reserved the right to deny transmission of press releases containing severe criticism of or polemics against named persons, companies, organisations or the media.
NTB had not laid down these guidelines in order to carry out censorship. NTB had deliberately chosen a very restrictive policy regarding "admittance" to this service.
The PRM-service had proved to be a useful tool for serious suppliers of news and information, enabling them to get directly in touch with the major information channels in Norway.

4.6.3 Structure of the release

4.6.3.1 From golden rules to golden mean

A press or news release is an **announcement about an event of general interest**. For effective presentation news agencies follow some very simple rules – applied for general news, events of every possible sort. Their reports are like an **inverted pyramid**, e.g. the bulk of its content is on the top and as the text becomes more and more detailed, it narrows. In order to keep the description of the event succinct, a size of four-five paragraphs is seen as a maximum (it is to say some 3000 characters in total).
The quick and effective use of these reports requires application of standardized units, building of a **module-like structure**, especially in respect to the top of the pyramid. This seemingly absurd architecture is destined for answer four substantial questions enabling to assess the **newsworthiness of the announcement at a glance**. What happened and when, where the event took place and presumably why did it occur – these are the common questions to be answered in brief.

Headline determines the fate of the report so its framing is seen as an art in itself. It has to be attractive, flashy and at the same time contentious and exact, reflecting the essence of the event conveyed. Reconciliation of these controversial aims allows the headline to be misleading but only to a certain extent (sometimes it is said that at longest up to 25 percent). The headline has not to be longer than 90 characters.

Next module is the **lead**, which steers the attention of the users. This is the **first paragraph a**nd ought to be arresting as well, while summing up in four-five extremely concise sentences everything about the event imparted, possibly in no more than 3-400 characters. Golden rules applying to its composition are that it has to condense the very meat of the story the best solution is to be compiled from all subsequent paragraphs and such reflecting the whole issue.

Then comes the **discussion** of the topic concerned, which describes the details of the event, arranged in an order of their importance with a constant view of the headline and the lead. A correct report does contain **quotation of the source** (or sources), which it has been drawn on but inevitably will lack the full scope of them.
An inverted pyramid is a shaky building and when a report of a news agency is processed, it often happens to be overturned. It stems either from command of confronting the sources, or from the integrity of the given kind of the media.

Therefore when **other means of communication than news agencies** use these reports to present the events in their own, they as a rule **destroy the pyramid**, carving their parts from beneath. The extreme version is to be seen on the screens of stock exchanges, where even the headlines are cut so that they become a hint to an up or down directed arrow. Statisticians should not complain about that: the preliminary GDP figure scarcely could be described much longer than that and certainly is a mere lead at the very most.

Consequently in contrary to the scientific studies, **conclusions are not to be drawn at the very end** of that sort of data presentation but on an inverted way, **in the lead**. This start must contain the most important points and only very few numbers.
Statistics can well be presented in a journalistic way but then some golden rules will alter. First of all, a news release issued by any statistical office is a source in itself: there is no need to minutely list how data was collected. Though the official source must be mentioned with its logo on the release together with the date of issue and preferably with the names of available experts.

Statistics is all about the changes, positive or negative alike. It poses extraordinary difficulties concerning the headlines, especially when reporting on a frequent (monthly) basis. **What happened** is shown by figures, **when it happened** is inevitably indicated by reference periods of the report as well as the territorial scope of units observed. What is **left is the explanation**, and it sometimes plunges the author of the presentation into tight corner. A statistician can use only **verifiable inferences, which do not allow extraneous variables taken into**. Thus creating an explanatory context must be kept within borders of statistics, most preferably by applying findings of other subject-matter departments. One obdurate menace persists: one had to make figures interesting by showing details but when acting that way how not to get lost in details, how to preserve the underlying message?
The golden mean of rules might be composed from several cases.

Umpteen 'KISS'es in Europe

Keen to Indulge with Scientific Studies, KISS? Forget it, when reporting about your latest figures for the large audience. Instead, have another KISS. Keep It Short and Simple, KISS – says the watchword approved by Eurostat.
Every year dozens of attendants of Training of European Statisticians (TES) courses about effective presentation of statistical output meet this endearing slogan. By seducing authors of press releases to be curt and terse it instructs about the best way to be friendly to mediators. Although it might imply a

sort of passing touch, actually expresses the reverse of that: long lasting care to shorten all figures and explanations and cram them into miserable size of some seven paragraphs. In top of that you had to do that by trying to construct an inverse edifice from words and figures. Worried lest you become SSICK of such a KISS.

Dutch translation of tables

Statistics Netherlands started to write press releases more for the general public in early nineties. In the eighties, the specialists formed the main target group for the SN press releases. These press releases were in fact quite difficult to understand: many technical details, lots of figures, and full of statistical nuances. A ***'table in words'*** *may be a good description: interesting to specialists, but fairly* ***useless to the general public.***
The problem with these press releases was that ***journalists had to translate*** *them as it were. Articles based on these press releases were often criticized by statisticians: 'These journalists just do not understand our press releases!' Whereas in fact the statisticians just did not write something journalists could use. As a result those press releases produced very limited results.*
After a press office had been set up in 1992, a new policy was formulated where news value and communicative success became the basis. The message to the statisticians was: Keep your press releases simple, don't use too many figures, especially not in the lead.
The result was immediate. As soon as press releases became easier to understand, ***more newspaper articles were written*** *and published. The press office used much of its resources for checking and editing drafts written by statisticians, limiting itself to communicative aspects; trying not to interfere with the contents.*
The Press Office gave some guidelines for press releases to the national press:
- *The first paragraph (the lead) has to contain the main news item. Think what your message is before you start to write, otherwise it will be a table in words. The* ***lead is often a summary*** *of the focus of the press release. Don't present all aspects, but select the most interesting.*
- *Make the text short and* ***free of jargon****. Add one table with the full results, and keep this table simple, or add one simple graph or figure to show the trend. Use headings that make journalists want to read on.*
- *Popular support for Statistics Netherlands can only be increased if the public knows that it is the* ***source of the information****. Therefore Statistics Netherlands has to be mentioned at least once in the lead.*

Just facts, nothing dramatic

During five years prior to 1994, the use of statistical material in the Finnish media had grown by over 50 percent. It was deduced from the clipping collected by a private firm (see also 5.4.), According to this data, each release produced about 60 news stories in the Finnish press.
A release suitable for that can be divided in part as follows:

1. Publication **date and time**;
2. News story which tells what is new;
3. Routine report, which is nearly the same in all releases of the same statistics. Statistics should tell the **basic facts** although nothing dramatic has happened;
4. Survey on special aspects of the data, such as regional, trade and commodity breakdowns, time-series etc. The survey may vary from release to release
5. Statistical graphics which illustrate either the news story or special aspect story
6. Explanation of methods
7. Source & further information

Pure figures or journalistic form?

Editors and journalists have often claimed that the "borders" between the subjects presented have been too distinctive. The **data** should as often as possible **be presented in a broader context**. Comparisons should be made on say regional levels within Norway, or with data from other countries. Another way may be to use statistics from other subjects to explain the results. For example changes in use of oil and electricity might be compared with the movements in prices for the two types of energy.

To what extent the presentation should be journalistic and popular can be discussed. The journalists do not agree on this point. Some prefer to present the statistical news as received from Statistics Norway in order to save time. They of course favour a journalistic form. Others prefer just facts formulated exactly and simply.

Selecting instead of journalists

Seven advice how to write a successful press release
On demand from statisticians participated in the writing press release courses in Sweden a booklet had been delivered to them in late nineties, which was prepared in co-operation with a couple of reliable newspaper journalists familiar with statistics, and with whom we office had good relations. The booklet gave the following advice:

1. Use **headlines rather than headings**. An example: Consumer price index, February 1997 is a heading. It does not tell you anything what has happened with CPI since last month or last year. It is much better to write; CPI increases in February. The journalists then immediately will know what has happened.
2. Begin with a summary. Most **newspaper stories have a summary**, a preamble in the beginning. You can read 5-6 lines and then you know what is the point. A summary in the beginning is very helpful for journalists who are in a hurry.
3. Emphasise the main findings. The whole news release is often a summary of an investigation, report or measurement. To help **stress on head news**, otherwise there is a risk that they will observe wrong journalists to see **what is important** you have to lay or focus on some funny details that is not the main point in the news release.
4. Use graphics only for clarification. As employees at a statistical office we are used to read statistics, figures, tables and diagrams. We can interpret the figures and understand what information there is possible to see. We can read connections and so on. For a reader that is not used to deal with statistics **all tables and diagrams often are frightening**. Be careful when using tables and diagrams.
5. Keep short. If you have seen a newspaper office you know that there is a lot if people shouting, running around, talking with each other and in telephone, all at the same time. The fax machines are permanently producing sheets of papers (at a Swedish newspaper fax there arrives 400 to 500 fax pages a day). It is necessary to keep short when writing – a few pages is enough – otherwise your news release will not have any readers or at least few readers.
6. Follow the basic rules of presentation. They are expressed already above. And besides them you have better to: Avoid technical expressions and statistical professional terms, Explain connections, Write as simple as possible, Note who is to be contacted for further information.
7. Add a facts box. Explain professional terms in a facts box at the end of the news message. It is an appreciated service.

4.6.3.2. Canadian guidelines not just for headlines

Guidelines on Writing for *The Daily*

Revised
September 1995

Introduction

- These Guidelines are intended to help authors. There are no hard and fast rules. Preparing an effective release for *The Daily is* a process built on solid analysis. Every release should be treated individually. The Board's message to authors and analysts is simply: be creative in the ways you communicate information in your release.

The readership

- The news media are the primary audience for major releases in *The Daily*. Releases are written for the general news journalist who is not a specialist in any one field, such as economics. Most Canadians get their statistical information from the media, while the media get theirs from *The Daily*. That's why *The Daily* plays such a vital role in Statistics Canada' s communication with the Canadian public.

- Explain the importance and relevance of your data. Ideally, you should not discuss the data in isolation. You should discuss what this new information adds to our understanding of important issues in the society. Being quoted is the best way to ensure that your story is read the way that you intended it to be.

Keys to an effective release

- *The Daily is* not just a recitation of data in words. An effective release tells a story about the data. It places the most important and significant statistical findings in the context of long- and short-term trends and of the broader economic or social environment. In short, it shows readers the origins and significance of the most current information.

- Before you start writing, ask yourself one question: **Why should public want to read about this?** Too often we produce numbers without taking the trouble to understand what the data show about a particular aspect of society.

- One key issue is newsworthiness. Is the information sufficiently important and novel to attract coverage in the news media? Focus on what you consider to be the most important message. The news media may choose a different focus.

- Developing an effective release is a creative process that should not be constrained by a template (i.e., any pre-set, detailed outline of release content). For example, different

monthly releases for a particular data set should emphasize different factors and should not be carbon copies of each other.

Analysts must ask themselves which of their data tell the most significant story, then come up with the story of the month.... Let 's try not to set a pattern that survives each month.

--Dr. Fellegi, Chief Statistician

Framework for analysis: Finding the story

- Analysis is simply finding a story in the data and communicating that story to your readership. Often people think that analysis should be confined to long-term research projects. This is not true. Analysis can be part of *The Daily,* or other regular publications, as well as research papers.

- Effective releases use the data to answer crucial questions such as: What happened? When did it happened? and Who did it happen to? or Who acted?

- Ask yourself several questions before you start writing a release. How do the data cast light on current economic and social issues? What are the underlying trends? What factors account for those trends? Is the growth (or contraction) widespread, or is it confined to a single industry, commodity or province? What are the similarities between groups and sectors? How can the geographic distribution be explained?

- The Board has commented on three major facets of analysis - trend, identifying the important contributors to trend, and the use of year-to-date figures.

(**Note**: The following guidelines on analysis may not be applicable to all series. Use them as a guide, not as a template.)

1. Trend

- Journalists don't readily understand the significance and limitations of trend statistics. Calculated trend lines and associated statistics may be helpful in preparing a release, or charting trends. But they are too technical for most readers. Consequently, avoid quantifying trends in a release, such as this:

> The export trend rose for the twentieth consecutive month, to 14.6% above its July 1992 level.
>
> "Preliminary statement of Canadian international trade,"

- Instead, refer to short-, medium- and long-term trends in plain language, not as trend statistics.

  For example:

  Following substantial growth in the first five months of 1994 (+83,000), employment in construction stabilized. This seems consistent with the trend in the number of housing starts, which recently slowed after marked increases in early 1994.

  "Labour force survey,"

- Focus on the short-term trend. Compare it to the medium-term trend and, if appropriate, to the long-term trend and cycles.

  Short-term trend: latest three to four months. Medium-term trend: the period since the last turning point in the series. Long-term trend and cycles: an analytically significant period stretching beyond the last turning point

  Example:

  In November, the number of employed jumped by 95,000, pushing the unemployment rate down 0.4 percentage points to 9.6%, the lowest level in four years. The employment increase follows a small decrease in October and continues a trend of strong employment growth, which has averaged 40,000 a month since January 1994.

  "Labour force survey, November 1994,"

- Look at the significance of short-term trends at three levels:

  - Statistical significance: Is the movement large and sustained enough that it can be distinguished from random variations?

  - Analytical significance: Is there any indication that the change in movement is transitory or reflects significant change in the business world? Sometimes the movement is significant, but is due to temporary factors such as retooling, or a change in legislation, or other such factors.

  - Relationship to medium- and long-term movements: Is the short-term trend different in character from the medium-term trend? Is it accelerating or decelerating? Has the current value surpassed the previous peak or trough value from the previous expansion or contraction phase?

  Example:

  Following a period of accelerated growth in the first quarter, the trend for industrial goods has begun to slow. Metals and alloys, the largest component of the sector, have been losing steam all year, exhibiting very little growth in recent periods.

"Canadian international merchandise trade, June 1994,"

- An aggregate's latest behaviour is an essential element of the story. However, some releases are based on data sets that are so volatile that the "latest wiggle in the line" is often meaningless. In such cases, concentrate on trends. You should warn your readers of the hazards of attaching too much importance to the last wiggle.

2. Contributors

- Analysts should keep one key question in mind when it comes to assessing changes in a trend - what triggered the change in behaviour? The best way to answer that is to think in terms of contributors. What contributor (industry, commodity, sector, province, etc.) had the most to do with the movement? What contributor exhibited exceptional growth or decline? What contributor changed the most over time?

- An effective release does not attempt to include mention of all the variables, or even the topics contained in the data set. Trying to be too comprehensive will often interfere with pursuing a strong story line.

- Be selective. Focus on major findings. Don't write about every contributor. Only a handful may have had anything to do with recent or medium-term trends. Write about only those, which contribute to tell the story you have chosen, and leave out those, which have nothing significant to say about a variable. Information about insignificant variables can be included in tables.

  Example:

  The machinery and equipment sector has had the greatest influence on the pattern of overall import growth in 1994. Most groupings within the sector have shown increases, the only exception being agricultural machinery.

  "Canadian international merchandise trade, June 1994,"

- Get to the root of a change. Don't 'peel the onion" by discussing broad classifications before getting to the heart of the matter. They are an artifact of Statistics Canada's classification systems and are meaningless to the outside world.

  For example, don't write:

  > "The largest contributor to the monthly increase in the CPI was a 0.5% rise in the transportation index."

  Instead, say

  > "Higher auto insurance premiums and air fares helped push up consumer prices this month."

- It is as important to include events, which run counter to expectations as it is to describe

expected relationships. For example, it would be worth noting that consumer prices are remaining stable while manufacturers' prices are rising sharply.

- Just as changes in methodology need to be noted for survey data, changes in government program rules and regulations need to be noted for administrative data. Substantial changes in these rules and regulations should be reported in your release and their impact assessed.

  Example:

  In 1993, tax filers received a 17% tax credit on the first $250 they gave and 29% on the rest. In 1994, the federal government lowered the threshold to $200 to allow more Canadians a bigger tax break for charitable giving. The new threshold may have an impact on donations for 1994.

  "Charitable donations, 1993,"

1. Year- to- date

- For most series, January is an arbitrary month at which to start analysing data. Avoid year-to-date and year-over-year comparisons unless absolutely necessary. Concentrate instead on changes from the last turning point, or from other meaningful reference points.

  Example:

  After expanding for the previous six months, employment declined slightly in September.... The number of employees that businesses have added to the economy since February 1994 remained in excess of 300,000.

  "Employment, earnings and hours, September 1994."

Telling the story: Strong lead, meaningful sections

- Write in a journalistic style, using the "inverted pyramid". Present the most important facts first, followed by subsidiary points in order of decreasing importance.

- The lead – he opening paragraph or paragraphs – is the most important element of the release. The lead should tell a story about the data. It summarizes the story line concisely, clearly and simply, and sets the story in context. The lead should contain few numbers and, in some cases, might contain none at all.

- A clear story line is essential to an effective release. It should convey some central theme or message. It should be a coherent, integrated recounting of key results in context, building from idea to idea, answering "why" wherever possible. The story line should be developed from the lead paragraph throughout the text. Relevant charts and text tables should illustrate the story line.

Example:

Workers and businesses experienced far fewer work-related time-loss injuries in 1993 than in the late 1980s. After increasing every year between 1983 and 1989, the number of injuries resulting in lost time dropped for a fourth consecutive year in 1993.

"Work injuries statistics, 1993,"

Use subheadings with strong verbs

- Subheadings are an effective tool for strengthening the organization of a release. They advance the story and break the text into manageable, meaningful sections. A concise subheading that summarizes the major finding in the subsection is preferable to one that merely states the next topic (e.g., "Inventories").

  Examples:

  Gender gap narrows slightly

  "Labour force income profiles, 1992,"

  Retailers expand workforce

  "Employment, earnings and hour, April 1994,"

- It is more effective to structure releases by issue rather than by type of data. This approach builds the story line and keeps the analysis from fragmenting.

- Use seasonally adjusted data wherever possible. Unadjusted data should not be used unless it is necessary to develop the story line. Some users, however, do prefer unadjusted data. You can accommodate their needs by including unadjusted data in tables.

Limit numbers in the text

- Try not to burden the reader with too many numbers. Put only key figures in the text; less important figures should be relegated to accompanying tables. Use text to present analysis and context, not to verbalize tables.

  Example:

  Consumers resumed their spending on goods in May after pausing in April. Seasonally adjusted retail sales rose 1.0% to $17.1 billion, coinciding with similar movements in employment in the trade sector over the latest two months.

"Retail trade, May 1994,"

Use available information to establish context

- Once you have a good overview of what is happening in your data, link that information to real world events and related information. What events in the economy or sectors may have influenced the performance of the indicator or one of its subcomponents over the short term (e.g., a sharp rise in interest rates, strong export demand, retooling of auto plants, strikes, crop failures)? Do other data released by office confirm or contradict the trends apparent in the data set?

  Example:

  If cigarette prices had not been reduced but the prices of all other goods and services had behaved as they did, the yearly rate of increase for April would have been 1.5%, the same rate of increase as in February and March.

  "Consumer price index, April 1994,"

- Wherever possible, draw on information from other programs to provide economic and social context and to illustrate relationships between events. It is good practice to consult colleagues about their interpretation of data from other programs and to read *The Daily* regularly to see how other analysts have interpreted economic and social developments.

  Example:

  The April 1994 business conditions survey (released by Statistics Canada on May 3, 1994) indicated that manufacturers were very positive about the backlog of unfilled orders and that satisfaction with orders received had reached a record level. The data from the monthly survey of manufacturing continued to substantiate these opinions.

  "Monthly survey of manufacturing, April 1994,"

Group regional information

- When provincial breakdowns are the focus of the release, it is most effective to conduct province-by-province analysis because that is the way regional media use the release. The lead paragraph(s) might look at the most significant variations.

- The length of text allocated to provinces should bear a reasonable relationship to their importance in the phenomenon being measured. Keep in mind the size of the province or territory when describing its impact on the national aggregate.

Write about the real world

- Write using vocabulary which expresses real people doing real things in the real world rather than about statistics. That is, say "manufacturers increased their shipments by 10% in June" rather than "shipments were up 10% in June."

Keep vocabulary simple

- Avoid jargon. Write in the same terms you would use to explain your program's results to a non-expert such as your neighbour. If you must use terms that require long definitions, explain them in a box. Avoid interrupting the flow with long definitions or descriptions of methodology.

  Examples:

  Canadians who filed income tax returns for the 1992 tax year received on average $25.80 in transfer payments for every $100 of employment income.

  "Economic dependency profiles, 1992,"
  (Transfer payments were defined in a box.)

  Consumers paid the same amount for the consumer price index's (CPI) basket of goods and services in June 1994 as they did in June 1993. Excepting May, when the basket cost 0.2% less than it did in May 1993, this is the lowest year-over-year movement since 1961.

  "Consumer price index, June 1994,"

Write only enough to tell the story

- The length of a release will vary from one period to the next. When there are important developments in the data, the text is normally longer. Similarly, when nothing much has happened, the text will be shorter.

Use standard tables

- Standard tables that appear consistently in each release allow journalists to obtain key numbers quickly. Tables should provide only basic data. Using tables helps minimize numbers (data points and percentage changes) in the text and eliminates the need for discussion of insignificant variables which are not part of the story line.

- In addition to the standard tables, you may sometimes want to include brief analytical

table(s) in the text.

Illustrate with charts

- A picture is indeed worth a thousand words. Charts can be extremely effective in expressing key results, but should be kept simple and clear. An effective chart has a clear, visual message. Instead of traditional chart titles (e.g., Sales of Widgets, Canada, 1980 to 1994) use analytical interpretive headings (e.g., Widget sales returned to their pre-recession peak in 1994) to reinforce the findings being illustrated. When you label a chart, take care to avoid ambiguity.

  Example:

  The number of beneficiaries receiving regular benefits has declined for 21 months

  "Unemployment insurance statistics, April 1994,"

- Insert charts into text where they illustrate what has been discussed. You should keep charts to one column-width, which requires simple, straightforward presentation.

Put survey concepts in a "Note to readers" box

- An effective "Note to users" box can be essential to understanding some releases. Boxes containing notes to users and definitions explain the significance of a release or the concepts and terminology. However, it is far more preferable to weave a definition into the text if it can be done without impairing the readability of a release.

  Example:

  Note to users

  Unless specified in the text, all figures in this release are seasonally adjusted to ease month-to-month comparisons.

  The majority who collect unemployment insurance benefits receive regular benefits (839 in 1993). To qualify for those benefits, a person must have experienced an interruption of earnings, be capable of and available for work, and

be unable to find suitable employment.

In addition to regular benefits, claimants can qualify for special benefits (e.g., training, maternity, sickness and fishing).

Data on the number of beneficiaries relate to a specific week of the reference month. Data on benefit payments, benefit weeks, and claims refer to a complete calendar month.

"Unemployment insurance statistics, May 1994,"
The Daily, July 27, 1994.

Example (no box necessary):

The most noticeable increase in value came from wholesalers of other machinery, equipment and supplies (among other goods, they buy and sell computers, office equipment and industrial machinery).

"Wholesale trade, May 1994,"
The Daily, July 21, 1994.

- Data availability or new product announcements related to the release are not essential to understanding and should not interrupt the story's flow. Place such announcements at the end of the text.

Example:

Detailed industry data and other labour market indicators are available from *Employment, earnings and hours* (72-002, $29/$285) and by special tabulation.

For further information on this release or on how the new administrative data has affected the survey's variables and industries, contact Stephen Johnson (613-951-4090 fax: 613-951-4087), Labour Division.

"Employment, earnings and hours, May 1994,"
The Daily, July 28, 1994.

Style guide

D*aily style guide* was developed to achieve professional standards of information presentation in *The Daily*.

As for any publication, it is important that *The Daily* achieve consistency in presentation. This *Style Guide* outlines the accepted standards as they apply to text, graphs and tables.

<u>Abbreviations (abréviations)</u>

Use abbreviations sparingly and, when in doubt, spell them out. Don't assume that your readers will know what an abbreviation means. Write terms out in full at first mention, followed by the abbreviation in parentheses. The abbreviation alone may be used in the remainder of the text.

- The Consumer Price Index (CPI)

Do not use periods with metric unit and International System (SI) symbols, or for abbreviations made up entirely of upper-case letters or ending in an upper-case letter. Exceptions to this rule are place names and personal names, which would include periods.

- 80 km
  U.S.
  300 rpm
  P.E.I.
  4 000 kwh
  I.P. Fellegi
  UN
  CPI
  PhD

Following the first mention, be consistent within the same text; don't spell out a word in some places and abbreviate it in others. And once you have selected one style of abbreviation (STC) don't switch to another form (StatsCan) in the same document.

CPI	Consumer Price Index
C/QPP	Canada and Quebec Pension Plans
GDP	gross domestic product
GSS	General Social Survey
SIC	Standard Industrial Classification
SNA	System of National Accounts

Approximations

Approximations of numbers in the text (e.g., about one in five, approximately 2 million) should be avoided if using them could create confusion in moving back and forth between accompanying tables or graphs and text.

- 230) will be available in February.
- The December 1993 issue of *Gas utilities* (55-002-XPB, $16/$160) will be available in March 1994.

Base year (année de base)

Ideally, the base year for index numbers is given in parentheses immediately after the first mention of the index and is not carried elsewhere in the text.

Categories (catégories)

Although residual categories are often large and noteworthy, the term "other" is vague and ambiguous. Where possible, define the category or identify its components in a *Note to readers* box rather than referring to it simply as "other."

Change over time (variations dans le temps)

In levels: The preferred practice is to include the level at the end of the period, the percentage change throughout the period, and the level at the start of the period.

- "Police departments reported 732 homicides in 1992, a 3.2% drop from 756 in 1991 . . ."
- "The Raw Materials Price Index (RMPI, 1986=100) continued to decline in December, falling 2.2% to 107.6 from November's revised 110.0."

Concise language

Although concise language is desirable, shorter is not always better and clarity should always take precedence. For example, writing " . . . life insurance companies' assets and segregated longer-term, retirement-oriented investment asset funds" may be shorter, but " . . . the assets of life insurance companies and their segregated funds (longer-term, retirement-oriented investment assets) . . ." is infinitely clearer. Don't let a laudable intention obscure the meaning.

Consistent terminology

Terminology between various elements of the release must be consistent. For example, if the title and text refer to "assets and liabilities," the table or graph should not be labelled "balance sheet."

Contact

All releases conclude with the statement:

- For further information, contact **person's name** (**613- phone number**) of **unit or section**, **division**.

- Example: For information on this release, contact John Smith (613-951-9000) of the Information and Current Analysis Unit, Prices Division.

Inclusion of a contact's unit or section name is optional. If a fax number and an Internet address are included, they should be added after the phone number as:

- (613-phone number; fax: 613-fax number; Internet: address@statcan.ca)

Etc.

Etc. is the abbreviation of *et cetera*, the Latin phrase meaning "and other things." Avoid using it, but if you must, do not use "and" before it.

Correct:

- July's increase was also driven by higher sales of farm and paper products, agricultural supplies, industrial and household chemicals, etc.

Incorrect:

- July's increase was also driven by higher sales of farm and paper products, agricultural supplies, industrial and household chemicals, and etc.

Increase/decrease (no equivalent entry)

Increase and *decrease* are the workhorses of *The Daily*. A particular challenge in writing a *Daily* release is to express the movement of data without overusing *increase* and *decrease* in both their noun and verb forms.

The following are some suggested synonyms:

- Increase / Decrease
- accelerate / abate
- accumulate / contract
- advances / decelerate
- ascend / decline
- augment / drop
- climb / dwindle
- expand / ebb
- gain / erode
- grow / fall
- intensify / hit bottom
- jump / lessen
- mount / moderate
- rise / plunge
- surge / recede
- swell / reduce

Some substitutes, such as "exaggerate" or "diminish," may have a judgemental connotation. Be careful when using them.

When expressing increases and decreases over time, give the most recent percentage or level first, followed by the figure for the comparative reference period.

- In December, 74.3% of passenger cars sold in Canada were manufactured in North America, up from 68.5% a year earlier.

Lists (énumérations)

These simple guidelines will make your lists easier to read:

1. Use a colon after an introductory statement containing "follows" or "the following."

- The following indexes recorded an increase: animal production, machinery and motor vehicles, and crop production.

When the introduction is not a complete sentence and one or more of the listed items are needed to complete it, no colon or dash should be used.

The indexes that recorded an increase were animal production, machinery and motor vehicles, and crop production.

2. *Keep the items in your list parallel.*

This means that parts of a sentence parallel in function must be parallel in structure.

Incorrect:

- The duties assigned to the section were *operating computers* and *to recruit personnel*.

Correct:

- The duties assigned to the section were *operating computers* and *recruiting personnel*.

3. Place compound elements at the end of a series.

- Total assets of trusteed pension funds were divided among several investments: bonds, stocks, and mortgages, real estate and other securities.

4. *Use semicolons instead of commas between the compound elements of a series.*

- Five categories of exports outpaced th compound growth rate: computer and information services; non-insurance financial services; architectural, engineering and other technical services; insurance; and non-financial trading commissions.

5. *The arrangement of items may be dictated by chronological, alphabetical or geographical (east to west) order.*

- The annual rate of "other" job losses rose from 13.0% at the peak of the business cycle in 1988 to 14.0% in 1990 and then to 17.5% in 1992.

- All census profiles contain population counts for such characteristics as: ethnic origin; fertility; home language; industry; labour force activity; level of schooling; mobility status; and religion.

- Provinces showing public sector growth were Newfoundland, Quebec and British Columbia.

6. *Data values may determine the order of presentation in a list.*

- Six provinces and territories posted sales increases in September, ranging from 0.1% in Ontario and Alberta to 1.3% in Prince Edward Island.

7. *If you have more than three items in your list, consider listing them on separate lines with bullets.*

Violent actions included:

- having anything thrown at you that could hurt you
- being pushed, grabbed or shoved
- being slapped
- being beaten up
- being choked.

Overused words

"Major," "overall," "relatively," "very," "generally," "virtually," "total" and "basically" are often unnecessary words that do nothing to clarify or express meaning. Sometimes they add important nuances but, as rule of thumb, if the meaning is unchanged by omitting the word, leave it out.

For example, the sentence

A small dampening of the overall movement in the All-items index resulted from a 0.4% decline in the clothing index,

gains rather than loses clarity when "overall" is removed:

A small dampening of the movement in the All-items index resulted from a 0.4% decline in the clothing index.

AND

- **"Relatively" is often superfluous unless you are making an obvious comparison, as in this sentence:**

  Compared with the 0.7% increase in retail sales in June, July's 1.3% rise was relatively robust.

  Something is no smaller for being relatively small, no bigger for being relatively big.

AND

- **"Total" is needed for emphasis only when you move from dealing with the parts to dealing with the whole, such as in:**

  The residential sector posted a 1.4% increase in the value of building permits.

Significant decreases in the total value of building permits issued in June . . .

Reference period (période de référence)

The reference period is given immediately under the main descriptive title of each release and data announcement. It consists of a date or dates.

- **Monthly Survey of Manufacturing**
  December 1993

If the data are preliminary, this should be signalled in the reference period line to avoid repeating "preliminary" throughout the text.

- **Estimates of labour income**
  November 1993 (preliminary)

The adjectives "preliminary," "estimated" and "revised" should not be used in the text itself. Avoid variations such as "special revisions," "advance estimates" or "very preliminary estimates." In some cases (such as in the capital investment intentions release), a text compares preliminary intentions with revised intentions; in these cases, the adjectives should be retained.

Specifications

Specifications about the nature of data such as "seasonally adjusted," "Financial Management System basis," "National Accounts basis," are introduced once in the text near the beginning and are generally not repeated thereafter. If more explanation is required, it should be provided in an accompanying *Note to readers* box.

Titles, headings and subheadings (titres et sous-titres)

For the main title of a release, follow the usual rules for capitalization and capitalize only the first letter and proper names (see **Capitalization**). The main title may include references to base years and dates:

- **Real gross domestic product at factor cost by industry**
  July 1993 (preliminary)

Subsequent subheadings follow the same style for capitalization and should be used as guides or signposts that take the reader through the text, for example:

- **Goods-producing industries**

Subheadings such as *highlights, summary, introduction* or *overview* will be deleted from any release; they are uninformative since release articles are, by definition, summaries or highlights.

Subheadings that are too numerous, too long and laden with jargon lose their impact. They should provide information about what follows, not act simply as uninformative labels.

Make each word, and each subheading, count.

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4.7 Press briefing, news conferences, lockups, question-and-answer briefs, TV and radio briefing, etc.

Press conferences
These opportunities are seen as a special method of **presenting relevant statistical data** to information media, sort of the focus point of activities destined for mass media. They might be **regular or individual**. In Norway and in Macedonia for instance, the chief statistician presented the latest statistical data for social and economic phenomena in the country as well as the latest statistical publications (which are given to journalists) at quarterly press conferences. The director would inform media about the activities of the office with respect to the preparation of new surveys, introducing (establishing) new methodologies, i.e. for the activity of the office as a whole. In Norway the first conference of each year was also used to give a survey of the year before and an outlook for the year to come. In Slovenia and in Poland they used to take place once a month, on the day when results of industrial production were completed. In Germany annual conferences gave preview on gross domestic product and results of foreign trade, price and wage statistics.
Individual press conferences are generally arranged to present important concepts or to herald censuses. Although they generally met with very good coverage (in Germany up to 150 to 200 "press echoes" in papers and numerous radio and TV contributions), they are not almighty everywhere. In Canada press conferences were considered as a technique to raise the profile of the releases so prior to early nineties Statistics Canada had held formal press conferences. After their appraisal however it had been stated they performed poorly in cost-benefit terms and were cancelled altogether and replaced by news media lock-ups and background briefings.

Briefings
More modest and more intimate forms of press conferences, they give opportunity for questions to be answered face to face by subject-matter specialists and also to provide interviews. They can be regular as well as in Canada where were used for four major economic releases (consumer price index, labour force survey, international trade and gross domestic product) – or organized **for topics of great public interest**.

4.7.1 When and how to hold press briefings, news conferences and lockups

Such events should be held exclusively when appropriate otherwise they will lack the fond belief of press: exclusivity. News conferences are destined for conveying developments of overriding importance – for the public at large, not for statistics. Briefings are modest likes of them and can be tied to certain event (such as explanation of a revolutionary breakthrough in methodology) or serve background information. When arranged for reporters who are familiar with the topics, the later form may be extraordinarily useful. Briefings may sometimes occur in rather dim conditions.

4.7.2 Release of data under key

*In publishing **market-sensitive macro-economic data**, the UK's Central Statistical Office (CSO) has progressed a long way in seven short years from the days when economics journalists shouted headline numbers down the telephone at release time.*
The concept of a privileged lock-up briefing for journalists has stood the test of time. But today electronic links pump out volumes of data at the instant of publication.

Today, the CSO (which became ONS) goes to some lengths to ensure different interest groups have fast access to macro-economic data. The ***major customers*** *at the instant of publication are the* ***press*** *and a range of* ***financial practitioners****, but the* ***general public*** *is not forgotten. The press office is responsible for disseminating high-profile economic data to press, public and Parliament.*

Under lock
In deciding how the data should be released to the press, the agency consulted some of the principal international news agencies. Basically, the choice lay between transmitting the data electronically on to the news agencies' systems, like the UK Treasury, and agency journalists attending a lock-up briefing, as at the Department of Commerce in Washington (see also USDA, 5.1, U.S. Census Bureau 4.2.1.)
The ***agencies consulted*** *were unanimous. They* ***wanted a lock-up briefing****.*
This suited the Statistical Office for the system allows ensure that journalists are properly briefed, and reduces the likelihood of error when the numbers flash on to dealing-room screens at the instant of publication. At the same time a bold decision was taken: it was agreed that, at least in the case of the higher-profile numbers, the ***statistician responsible for the series would brief the press*** *– but always with a press officer in attendance.*

Over the years this has worked well. The journalists know they are hearing the details and the background from the man or woman who knows most about the series. And, just as importantly, ***statisticians come across not as faceless bureaucrats*** *but as human beings.*
Access to the lock-up is on a strictly privileged basis. Only media with a proven need to have the data at the instant of publication may be represented, and this effectively restricts attendance to national and international news agencies, radio and television. ***Other journalists****, including those from the national and regional press, attend* ***a later briefing for newspapers****.*

The lock-up briefing is held in a ***special room*** *which houses* ***computers and telecommunications equipment*** *owned and maintained by the individual media outlets. The procedure begins at 9.00 am, when the journalists are admitted. For the first few minutes they are free to phone their news-desks and test the computer links. Lights on the wall indicate when modems are disabled, and the data of the day are, not handed out until all the lights are at red, and all the phones are on the hook.*
With ***communications cut****, the journalists are briefed and can use their terminals as word processors. At 9.28 they are allowed to phone their offices. But they may say no more than who they are and where they are, and electronic modems must remain disabled. At 9.30 the press officer in charge sounds a buzzer, taking the time from a terminal linked to the* ***atomic clock****, and only then may computer* ***links be switched in*** *and data transmitted.*

Ultimate sanction
Every reporter must agree **to comply with the lock-up rules**, although inevitably some chafe against them. But the ultimate sanction is of **office** – that of **banning** an individual or an organisation from future lock-ups.
With the passage of time, the agency has sought to make new data available more quickly to the public at large – to those without access to news agency screens. Initially a Statcall was launched, which allowed callers to a series of premium-rate phone numbers to hear a professional broadcaster reading the text of the latest press notices.
But clearly this was of limited value, and fax – with its ability to transmit tables and graphics as well as text – appeared to offer the best way forward. As was the case with Statcall, the office's Statfax is operated by a private-sector company. The press office transmits the press notice to the company's computer, and within a few minutes of publication it is available to anyone with a fax machine.

Press notices have long been available to public as well as press. Media representatives, of course, receive them free, but sales to paying subscribers generate a substantial income each year. Several years ago they were **renamed 'First Releases'**, in recognition of the fact that these documents are potentially of as much interest to the man in the street as the specialist media correspondent. The responsible statistician's name and phone number were added to the front page.

In the meantime, the **news agencies increasingly compete** to deliver more and more data to City of London screens within a few seconds of publication. A number of the **financial agencies** maintain dedicated systems in the office's press lock-up room, and some use purpose-written software. Some file live to the wire, cutting out intermediate processing, so that data are transmitted direct from the statistical office, and appear on dealing-room screens **worldwide within a matter of seconds**.
But even this is not enough to satisfy specialists in the City of London. Financial analysts are required to make more or less instantaneous commercial judgments on the basis of the latest macroeconomic data.

Briefing fatigue
On three occasions experiments were made with telephone conferences, with a statistician briefing and answering questions on macro-economic data published just 30 minutes earlier. The conferences were moderated by press officer, rather in the manner of a radio phone-in. CSO also has tried – with considerable success – **lunchtime briefings for financial practitioners** following publication of labour market statistics and quarterly national accounts data.
But this is asking a great deal of the statisticians responsible for the different series. In a single morning, they are required to brief news agencies, City analysts and newspaper journalists – in three separate sessions. Those who have tried it admit there is a real danger of "briefing fatigue".

In order to shorten the release time an **online service** was launched, an electronic system that delivers the content of First Releases to paying subscribers by electronic means at the instant of publication. The service is available to anyone who wants to pay for it – whether a news agency or a financial institution.
These developments are particularly interesting, because they signal the coming together of the needs of press and commercial interests.
The statistical office of UK has always tried to provide a **level playing field** for genuine news agencies. They have access to the lock-up briefing and to standard sets of printed material. But if they want more they must deal with office on a purely commercial basis. In the same way as non-press organisations, they must pay for additional data and/or electronic delivery, and they do not receive the material until 9.30 am. In this way, the office aimed to provide a level playing field for commercial interests, even if it meant data being supplied to news agencies in two very different ways.

Live worldwide television
One of the innovations was live television, broadcast from the office's press office suite within a second or so of macro-economic data being published. Let it be stressed that this is not mainstream television, but a service provided by news agencies to financial institutions and broadcast to dealing-room screens.
The lock-up procedure has had to be **modified to accommodate television** reporters who need to be on camera at 9.30. Cameras are not allowed in the lock-up room, and so TV journalists are escorted to another room at 9.28. After that, the same rules apply.

Hasps against embargoes
In Italy, Istat adopted from 1995 a release ("lockup") technique similar to the one used in Great Britain. Press agency journalists receive the bulletin in the press-room ***half an hour before the release****; they take part in the briefing with the officer responsible of data and, at the fixed time (from 1996 the time had been fixed at 9:00 am, the opening time of the Italian financial market) they send the data to their agencies by telephone or modem. Disseminating the data at the same time, not only are the agencies in an equal condition. Above all, it is not necessary to introduce embargo techniques, which could cause an insider trading phenomena or only lead to suspicions. Furthermore, disseminating the data at the beginning of the day* ***allows media to organize and program services*** *from the morning, with subsequent positive effects on the promptness of the information. At the same hour fixed for the release, the press agency sends the bulletin via fax to all the agencies, newspapers, televisions and the authorities included in the mailing list for the free*

transmission of the data. All the press bulletins are available on line, through the Internet web site, usually by 10:00 am of the release day.

4.7.3 How to organize meetings with the press

Cautiousness is the key word for organization when sending statisticians into the limelight. They have to be aware about **importance of appearance before public**, of punctuality (despite the fact that there will be always at least one reporter who will be late), of time limits (the maximum length is 20 minutes for leading speakers, 10 for others). Also about speaking straight into the microphone, about noting down questions or giving the word to others when being not capable to answer.
On press conferences preferably there will be someone chairing and moderating the meeting. Proper organisation presumes dispatch of **invitation notices** well in advance (according to a list of adequate reporters), their reminding two days before the event, ensuring their smooth pass into the building (porters informed about the exact time and place of the event) afterwards their admittance to the sufficiently spacious room, capacious enough to put up TV cameras, their bustling staff, lamps and wires. When entering, invited journalists will discard their card and sign an attendance sheet to be kept as a reliable connection for the future.
Chairman's table is of course thoroughly covered with hangings, otherwise the audience will keep looking at the feet of those sitting behind it instead of listening to them. On the tables there should be not only refreshment placed but also **folders marked by logo**, with **"press material"** and probably with a pen in them. The pages will be turned and thumbed with a discreet noise during the conference in order to find a phrase or a figure to be questioned while from other ones the whole story will be written later, peppered with some of the speakers' remarks. It should be fortunate **to have a quiet corner** where after the big performance radio and TV interviews could be taken in relative silence.

4.7.4 TV and radio interviews, press photographers and their requirements

4.7.4.1 Greeting someone to be seen by millions

In front of stage lights
It is **the impression** made by interviewees, **rather than the content** of interviews that tends to stay with the viewer.
Always **be prepared** for any interview. Make sure you are the best person giving this interview. You should be dressed appropriately, avoid jargon and use examples and pictures as much as possible. Try to avoid statistics. If you must, **use numbers instead of percentages**. Try to stay in the time limit. Remember **the first and the last questions are the most important**. Try and use every question as a means of getting across your message and not the interviewer's one.

Dos
Arrive early enough at the studio. You should watch the programme where you will be appearing on beforehand to get an idea of the style. Do not hesitate to ask your interviewer to cover special points. Five minutes in the make-up room and a glass of water will help you. Record, watch and discuss your interviews afterwards.

Don'ts
Do not drink alcohol before the interview. Do not take notes into the studio with you. Do not be over-friendly with your interviewer and do not start a discussion with him or her. You should always explain and give background information. Do not just give monosyllabic answers.

Additional advice for radio interviews
If reporter visits you, find a quiet place to go. Concentrate on the reporter's face and questions and not on the microphone. Ask for another try if you are not satisfied with the result.

Telephone interview
If you are not prepared, call them back in ten minutes. Use that time to make notes. Ask to do it again, if you do not like it. Avoid interviews longer than 5-10 minutes, their message can easily be changed.

Studio interview
Ask who may also be invited to confront you on air. Take notes on a small card if you like to do so. Concentrate on the interviewer.

Remote studios
Listen hard because you cannot see the interviewer. Always be polite to listeners, even when their questions irritate you. Write down the name of the callers at the beginning. Use names only once.

Preparing for an interview:
Ask the following questions when a reporter calls requesting an interview:

- How did you come to call me?
- Who else is being interviewed?
- What is your deadline?
- How much time will you need to talk with me?
- Do you need anything besides an interview, such as photos, etc.?

Promise to call back. This gives you time to think about whether you want to do it or not. If you want to, decide on 3 messages of public interest and practice delivering them in a clear way.

The audience has to relate to these messages. Think of several **quotable statements before the interview**. Keep in mind to avoid jargon, acronyms and terms of statistics, create "word pictures" and offer the reporter a business card.
Offer the reporter a background article and a list of people he could interview. Always come up with positive answers.

Conducting an interview

"An interview is like a journey, has its reasons, direction and destination."

Do not let broken in by interviewer, when cut in listen up to the end of the interruption then go on: "Well, as I have mentioned…" Any interviewee at any time can tell the interviewer the question posed has nothing to do with statistics or cannot be answered by its means.

To prepare for the interview, ask reporters what they read and whom else they talked with. Give short answers. Try to **get across your message**. Do not speak off the record. You may ask to review the story for statistical accuracy. Do not respond to a question if you do not know the answer. And do not answer hypothetical questions. Even a general statement is better than saying "no comment". Do not answer phone calls while the interview. And do not forget treat reporters equally.

Tips for TV
Look open, relaxed and responsive to create a good impression. Look at the reporter. Speak at your normal voice level. Sit fairly erect, but leaning slightly forward. Do not wear a colour that will make you blend into the background. Avoid using jargon and technical words.
Feel free to ask whether the interview will air or will be edited. The reporter will make you look good. If you are not satisfied with the interview, **ask to do it again**. Try to smile and look in the same way at additional shoots following a TV interview.

Press photographers
Unlike family photos, press pictures and its surroundings are chosen not by you but by the reporter who might exploit rolls of films and dozens of minutes just to pick the right snap. Never try to put on a pose you think is advantageous for you but may seem ceremonious. If the picture is taken in your

office, be conscious of photographers' inclination to turn up the equipment, sometimes the furniture as well, just to find a suitable background to your portrait.

4.7.4.2 Creating a "media event"

How to make attention drawn

For events like simple gathering with a handful of key journalists over breakfast, more formal press conferences, public discussions or other briefings, **different kind of publications can be produced**: fact sheets and press releases before the event; and reports describing the project and the discussions afterwards.

Try to add value by coming up with a **different twist on the story**, a mini-exclusive, or maybe the opportunity to hear the reactions of people with interest in statistics. The speaker should give short, entertaining and comprehensible presentations. He/she should stick to his/her allocated time (usually 10 minutes), use PowerPoint, avoid jargon and state the conclusions early.

You could also **invite journalists to academic conferences** and workshops as an inexpensive way of attracting their attention. Be aware that these conferences are not too academic or useful to the media.

Honoring the embargo
An embargo is an agreement among authors of scientific manuscripts, major peer-reviewed journals and reporters to release advance copy about a manuscript to the news media with the understanding the media will defer coverage until the journal's publication date.
Reporters have time to analyse and report on the complex stories behind the data, which leads to better quality news coverage. Those who do not respect an embargo can be excluded from future embargoed information.

Embargo through Extranet

Using the Internet as a primary vehicle for data dissemination can present challenges for reporters who are used to receiving the data set in advance of the actual release on an embargoed basis. No longer were there printed reports with the U.S. Census Bureau that reporters could use to write their stories. In a few cases, program divisions were willing to download the data onto floppy diskettes, which then were given to reporters, sometimes taking up to 10 diskettes.
For Public Information Office this meant copying of vast **amounts of data downloaded from Internet** and sent by fax to reporters. Instead of this roundabout way a low-cost and effective solution was implemented since January 1998, called **extranet site**.
*It is a special location on the Internet outside the U.S. Census Bureau's firewall that allows select customers **access to embargoed news releases and data**. Customers allowed access included accredited reporters; staff in the Census Bureau's 12 regional offices and lead agencies in the State Data Center System. State Data Centers are organizations in each state and the District of Columbia that have cooperative agreements with the Census Bureau to help disseminate its data.*

*The Census Bureau's **economic indicators are released under a "lock-up**" procedure and are not included on the extranet server (see also 4.1.3.1. U.K. ONS, 5.1. USDA).*
*Access to the server is by typing ww.census.gov/dcmd/www/embargo/embargo.html afterwards a password is needed. It allows access to the **embargoed directory page**. The user sees a version of the news release that is designed particularly for extranet users. It was learned during trial period that posting the same release that is broadcast-faxed to reporters did not provide the kind of information that a reporter surfing the net needed. With input from reporters, **the release format was redesigned***

to include high in the body of release hyperlinks to specific tables in the data set, with a brief summary of the data included in each table. The extranet allows reporters to access embargoed data. They can access the data in their convenience, 24 hours a day.

4. 8 (Users' selection from databases) Use of computerized statistical output in communication with press and other media

New and multiple dimensions opened when statistical offices began to offer their **databases on-line**. It was assumed that data validated in the statistical production process as aggregates were accessible to the general public (within it to reporters) but it soon became obvious they could not manage without adequate help.

Medium-neutral output

*Statistics Netherlands opened its database under name StatLine (see also 3.4.) putting it on the Internet in 1997 to be consulted free of charge. It was the first step towards a flexible standardized medium-neutral output database. Input for StatLine was **generated from existing publications**. It was planned to turn process around and to **make output from StatLine an input** for other output sources. This clearly affected the statistical production process: before publication became possible all data had to be put into StatLine. To make it easier, the StatLine input process had to grow part of the statistical production process: micro data – StatLine – publication.*
*StatLine was much in favour of the tendency towards (standard) tailor-made products and publication on demand (printouts, e-mail); flexibility and efficiency were increasingly important factors and these techniques became more profitable as **the format of the output was standardized**. It was expected some publications to disappear altogether as their edition was too small, while new ones to be introduced, either on paper or electronic devices.*
*To open up the information in **the multi-dimensional database**, whose format was developed by agency itself, advanced at the time search techniques were used. Users on the Internet were used to fuzzy search. In the development of the interface Statistics Netherlands made a distinction between expert and non-expert users. Experts users knew what they wanted, they understood the concepts behind the database and were familiar with the vocabulary used. For them an **index was offered**.*

Offer from data processing system

In Germany providing an extending offer to external users by 1994 signified also their access to database. Originally the Statistical Information System of the Federation STATIS-BUND was a data processing system used by the Office to distribute statistical information, maintained since 1976. It comprised a database with approximately 700,000 completely documented time series and a comprehensive set of tools for tabulation, mathematical and statistical analyses, and the production of charts and setting copies ready for publication.
*As regards the distribution of statistical information, the experience gained in operating the system had clearly shown that only **user-specific services** would meet the **individual requirements** of users. With regard to the required timeliness and periodicity of data, the flexibility in requesting different or recurring data, and the hardware and software components available great differences was experienced amongst users.*
First an on-line use was established to the system, with complete access to all its components; the second stage of development signified supplying users with data and metadata on magnetic tapes.
*Third type of service for external users was that of the STATIS-BUND database, namely the BASIS-BUND: the abbreviation in German stands for "Ordering and Retrieving Data from the Statistical Information System of the Federation". This service allowed users to request selected data from the STATIS-BLIND database by a PC-aided procedure and to transfer them to their personal computers by file transfer via the public telephone network. This **procedure was not based on on-line access** to STATIS-BLIND. The user rather ordered specific data in a request file transferred by him to the BASIS-BLIND PC. In general, the data would be provided some hours later or on the following day at the latest.*

The equipment required to use BASIS-BLIND comprised a personal computer and a modem. Upon system registration, users would be provided with the necessary utility programs on disks.

Apart from facilitating data requests, BASIS-BLIND offered the opportunity to obtain information on the STATIS-BLIND stock of data. Both the respective current list of data in stock and a large part of the segment documentations would be indicated for a hierarchical search on the BASIS-BLIND PC. Selecting a catchword or subject from the list shown for the hierarchy level concerned, the user would be provided with all catchwords or subjects of the next lower level. Continuing this selection, he would finally be referred to a data unit (segment) or time series.

New users identified

Italy's Istat, while shifting to the electronic dissemination, also opened its repository from 1996. Databanks were made available at the centers of regional statistical information, the Chambers of Commerce and other connected centers as well as BBS (Bulletin board system), for those having an access to a PC and a modem, otherwise through the Internet.

Between the experts accessing Istat's computerized files, perhaps requesting on payment specific processing and the population who reads statistics on the newspapers, a new kind of intermediate user was emerging. Even without being an expert on statistics, ***the new user wanted more*** *than the information given by television and newspapers and was able to get the* ***information in an interactive way****.*

The Bulletin Board System (BBS) allowed an on line download of press releases and current economical data. With an on line availability of Istat's data bank, in this way data extraction sample selection, their printing, the further processing and analysis necessities could be handled directly by the user.

Istat also produced a ***CD Rom*** *containing an informative subsystem of all the statistics concerning the business cycle. The product enabled queries and an* ***integrated use of data*** *connected to the economic situation classified according ATECO 91, divided on a three digit level and available from January 1996. The product called ConIstat, allowed an integrated reading of data, the use of some standard functions (by trends and cumulate percentage variation), the production of graphs, the download of data functional with other computer software.*

On-line library

In Slovakia it was a special purpose project for interconnecting the Statistical Office with other government bodies initiated in 1992, which created a network of information systems ***fit for an on-line data exchange****. This led to a next project, called Electronic Information Service (ELIS). The libraries of ELIS consisted of files with statistical publication that were regularly issued by the office, the structure and content of publications stored in it being equivalent to those used in printed form. The publications might be selected from libraries using key words as selections criteria.*

The ELIS service was provided to on-line users 24 hours a day and in addition there were users applying to services in off-line mode, requesting the data either on diskette or on CD-Rom.

Multi-dimensional matrices

A warehouse solution for macro-data dissemination was developed in Romania by 2000 with technical assistance from PHARE funds. In a classical-by-now view of a Statistical Information System with 3 layers (Production, Reference and Dissemination), this database named TEMPO belonged to the Statistical Reference Environment, containing established ***data in a standardized, uniform description****, associated* ***with metadata****. It pursued the aim of supporting statistical operations of data production, analysis and dissemination across subject-matter divisions, and represented a consistent, domain-independent system for the management of time-series.*

The database contained statistical time series with different periodicities, held in multi-dimensional matrices. Matrix dimensions were related to statistical nomenclatures and classifications. Major categories of metadata were added to the matrices. The system had support for textual information in many languages.

System functionality covered both data management and data consultation. The "Consultation" application also was presented, going through matrix search, calculation, matrix export, matrix saving and retrieval.
The main objective of the system was the ***improvement of access to reliable statistical information*** *both for internal and public domain users according to their requirements.*

The TEMPO database consists of statistical time series (with yearly, half-yearly or monthly, quarterly data) and related objects (classifications / nomenclatures, measurement units, methodological notes, data sources, etc.). Statistical indicators, no matter the statistical domain they come from (i.e. industrial statistics, labour force, education, population, national accounts, agriculture, trade statistics, tourism, etc.) have a multi-dimensional nature, i.e. they can be represented as ***multi-dimensional matrices****, known also as "hyper-cubes" or "cubes".*
In order for a matrix to be displayed, an extraction of its cells needs to be done. By default the whole matrix is extracted, but in the case of long time-series, a matrix can count tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of cells.
Searching is done starting from the list of statistical surveys or of external sources. While for the in-house statisticians all terms applied were understandable, a demonstration of system showed, that it might be too ***complicated for an ordinary user****.*

4. 9 Improving data sets and metadata released through the Internet to media

4. 9. 1 "Push" techniques

Eurostat decided to change its website in 1998 when it became clear that ***Internet was a major instrument for the dissemination****. The aim was to provide a more efficient tool for the data distribution and to create a site with an easy access and with a rich variety of information at different levels for different users.*
The ***new site*** *appeared in three languages – English, French and German – and included many new and useful functions for informing, marketing and selling statistical information.* ***Biggest changes*** *were the development of a* ***search engine*** *for the site and a system that made it possible to personalize the elements depending on the user profile. Moreover,* ***electronic ordering*** *of products and the possibility of* ***electronic payment*** *was used. Lastly, the management and administration of the site became simpler to save resources.*
The site gives clear and complete information about products and clearly notifies users whenever new products are available.
There are three types of information:
- *Institutional information about Eurostat (static information)*
- *Product information (more dynamic information)*
- *News (news releases, indicators, dynamic information)*

Services offered
To obtain the objectives the server had to have the following functions:
a) communication functions
b) a system which makes the site personal depending on the user
c) electronic shopping
d) a system for subscriptions of different types of information ("push" techniques)
e) the possibility for users to connect to data bases and dynamic pages
f) search engine
g) safety provisions

Communicating with the user
Internet can easily be used as a platform for discussions in newsgroups or chats. The system that used is similar to the DSISIRC2.
The tool provides the following services:

- *simple e-mailing and the possibility of using mailing lists*
- *discussion forums such as newsgroups or chats*
- *a function that manages documents like in a library with a possibility for users to upload information.*
- *shared agenda*
- *shared directory*

Personal site for different users

*Eurostat wanted to be able to provide users with a **personal web site**. The system recognizes a user who has registered his preferences and generates a personal/customized view of the site automatically for that specific user.*

Advantages of a personalized system were that customers would find information more quickly and encourage them to return often. It provides users with information according to their own preferences and it allows Eurostat to have a presentation that is not only based on products or on "statistical themes".

Information is disseminated on **different levels for different users**. Some information is distributed free of charge and some is charged for depending on the user profile.

Type of users

General users have limited rights to access products. They have no discount on paying products but they can benefit from free products.
They have no direct access to databases.

Professional users These users need statistical information for professional use, their user profile allows them to access all product categories including databases and
it is free of charge for them.

Resellers are the distributors of hard goods, their user profile allows them to
get discounts when paying for products and to benefit from free products.
They have no direct access to the databases.

Media: mainly journalists who need statistical information from Eurostat for their work. Their user profile allows them to have access to all product categories without paying for it, except the databases.

The DSIS-IRC is a web site for particular interest groups. It is currently used by the EU national statistical institutes' press offices and Eurostat for the exchange of information.

News releases, some indicators, product presentations, events and software are free for all users.

Access to Eurostat's short reports called *Statistics in focus*, nomenclatures and databases depends on the **user profile**.

User views

Users have the ability to view the Eurostat site according to their points of interest. Options are:

- **themes** – the user has a web page, which allows him to see Eurostat's nine themes.
- **categories of products** – The products are news releases, Statistics in focus, CD- Roms, printed publications, methodologies, nomenclatures, software, indicators, statistical files, data bases, product presentations, forums, events.
- **free or paying information**
- **most recent information**: The user can see the most recent information assorted to all themes or products and he also has the possibility to choose a specific theme or product.
- **reseller**: the user can see all information of a reseller in relation to the user's geographic localization.
- **user profiles:** Users have the possibility to customise (personalised view) their own views of themes, categories of products, free or paying and most recent information, including their preferred language.

Subscriptions

All Internet users are able to surf freely on Eurostat 2.0 and see what kind of services and products Eurostat offers. The user will be able to select information and then subscribe to information that is

regularly updated (news releases, indicators, Statistics in focus etc). However to be able to have a subscription the user have to register.
Three levels of relation with the users are foreseen:
- users who do not wish to leave any trace on the site
- users who register by leaving their personal data in an on-line form
- users who wish to subscribe to one or more Eurostat services. These users will have to leave more than their basic data if they wish to pay on-line for instance.

When users subscribe to a service, they get **a notification** as soon as a **new product** is available on the Eurostat server. This notification is free of charge. When subscribing, the user can choose between being informed that new information is available on the site or receiving the new information automatically.

Connection to the databases
All Eurostat information is stored on different database servers and it is vital that access and selection of information can be done from these databases. Eurostat 2.0 site supports more than one language, therefore, it is necessary that the **multilingual web pages work independently** from each other. However, the same links inside the different multilingual web pages need to point to the same product, if requested by the user.
It is very important that the users are able to find information in a minimum amount of time and with a minimum of clicks. Therefore a flexible and powerful **search tool** is essential. The search engine conducts search on the site itself and also for information stored in three of Eurostat's "external" databases, such as New Cronos.

Media in the center
Entering the site of Eurostat at www.europa.eu.int/comm/eurostat/ the user will find – at a single glance all relevant information: the most important indicators and the latest news releases and publications issued.

- *Key indicators – in particular **the euro-zone indicators** (inflation, unemployment, industrial production, foreign trade etc.) and the Euro yield curve.*
- *More than 300 short term and annual statistical indicators: the EU's population, its economy, trade relations, regions, environment as well as over one hundred basic indicators from the Eurostat Yearbook – all free of charge.*
- ***News releases** all available since 1998 as well as a selection from 1997, with links to the new releases published by Member states and in the European Economic Area (EEA). News releases together with euro-indicators are updated daily at noon CET.*
- *The euro-indicators **release calendar**.*
- *Publications – a description of more than 300 publications and CD-Roms, including the complete collection of Statistics in Focus, the Eurostat series containing the latest results from the main surveys and studies with the possibility to order on-line.*
- ***Eurostat news** – the latest information on the European Statistical System, forthcoming events, new methodologies, calls for tender.*
- *Detailed information on Eurostat databases enable identification of available variables.*

***Journalist can benefit**, via the Media Center, **from privileged access** to the publication series Statistics in Focus. In order to obtain this free service, registration has to be made in advance, and a copy of the press card has to be sent to the Eurostat Press Office. Once registered, journalists may send requests directly to the Eurostat Press Office as well as to Media Support, which provides journalists with individually researched statistical data.*

4.9.2 How to help user via Internet

What about the **minimum level of explanation** that needs to accompany the data to make them comprehensible?
Meta-data have to be organized; what is the optimum system of organization offering the best way of reaching our ultimate customers?
Any inefficiency could destroy the brand image that national statistical offices have struggled so hard to build up. The Internet enables them to communicate with the entire world; it also enables the entire world to detect their weaknesses and shortcomings immediately. However, there is a common problem to be resolved: the provision of methodology.
At Luxemburg's Statec a project was considered for **the presentation and structuring of meta-data**, which would facilitate access to everyone without swamping the user needing a succinct definition, and without failing to satisfy those seeking a more sophisticated methodology.
The position of National Bank of Belgium regarding the methodology circulated on the web is well-defined and will be divided into three sections:

Provision and structuring of metadata for a given variable

Detail	Information supplied
Minimum definition	- Name of variable - Unit - Reference period
Detailed definition	- Concept - Source - Calculation method - Information on any breaks in the series
Comments	- Differences in relation to other, familiar common concepts -Explanation of changes over time (in relation to economic and social phenomena, society events etc.)
Bibliography	- Own publications - Publications from other statistical offices/sources
www links	- Statistical system - Other
Specific contacts	- Experts' particulars (telephone and fax no., e-mail addresses)

Methodologies circulated on the web:

1- Definitions: - methods used
- presentation of algorithms
- descriptions of conventions
- statistical concepts
- descriptions of statistical variables
2- Classifications: - description, extent, duration of validity
- relations between NBB and associate producers
- contacts
- codes, labels
- languages
- thesaurus
3- Description of files and identifiers
- chronological series

- multi-dimensional tables
- graphs
- bibliography

4.9.3 "For concepts and methodology, click here"

National statistical agencies, as professional agencies in charge of producing official statistics, have the **responsibility to inform users** of the concepts and methodology used in collecting, processing and analysing data, of the accuracy of these data, and of any other features that affect their quality or "fitness for use".
All **data users** – generalists or experts – are **entitled to information about the data** with which they are provided so that they get exactly what they are looking for.
Technical data users are certainly more likely to consult such metadata. General users, including journalists, tend just to want data, any data, to meet a particular need. Usually, they are not interested in, or perhaps cannot make sense of, methodology or data quality considerations. Methodology is a primary concern in about one per cent of calls received by Media Relations at Statistics Canada.
General users assume that the **data provided are quality data** because they come from a professional statistical agency. So they assume these data can be used over and over again, in different contexts, without much questioning.
While general users may not normally be interested in methodology, when survey results are seen as surprising or controversial, the media and the public will take an interest in metadata and data quality considerations. When statistical and other agencies reach **different conclusions** on key issues because of **differing methods** of calculation, the media will become interested.

It is not always possible to write a statistical release without using precise terms and concepts that many may consider to be jargon. Furthermore, being concise when writing releases sometimes means omitting some important contextual information, which could lead to misinterpretation of the intended message. Evaluating how much **contextual information** to include in a release is a challenge that requires **judgment, knowledge** of the subject matter and **understanding of media needs**.

Finding the right balance
The Statistics Canada's Daily is still distributed as a print product to journalists who prefer the print format. Because there is no linking in the print or PDF versions, care is taken not to load the texts with too much metadata. Doing so would just make it more difficult for journalists to find the story lines. In The Daily, there is no such thing as a backgrounder that can be attached to a release.
The Daily does inform users of the availability of ***information on data quality and methodology****. But because of its target audience – general news journalists – and its intended use, it does not always present measures or descriptions of data quality and documentation on methodology. Journalists interested in additional metadata must either telephone Statistics Canada with their requests, or search electronic metadata available on Statistics Canada's Web site.*
Metadata *are included in Daily releases* ***when they are essential to understanding*** *certain concepts. They can consist of a* ***"Note to readers"****, which appears as a box and is usually located near the beginning of the release. This box may contain* ***definitions*** *and other information that explain the* ***significance of the release*** *or the concepts and terminology used, or provide background information about the survey or statistical program. Notes to readers also inform users of changes affecting comparability of the data, and may also describe any significant external influences.*
Subject-matter authors ***sometimes incorporate definitions*** *into the text if this can be done without interrupting the flow of the text, especially in cases of long definitions or descriptions of methodology.*
Each release published in The Daily also includes a statement to advise journalists and other readers that more information is available about the quality of the data released and the concepts and methodology associated with these data. A contact name is provided with a telephone number and e-mail address.

The web-based product

With a print release, statistical agencies are limited with respect to the amount of information – translated into the number of pages – that they can expect reporters to digest. The **limitations associated with the print version disappear** with the electronic format. On the Internet, we are no longer limited to a static paper medium. Space is still at premium to avoid as much as possible the need for users to scroll horizontally or vertically. However, a lot more information can be provided to users, and it can be organized and presented in such a way that the needs of most users can be met simultaneously.

The **two-dimensional journalistic inverted pyramid** associated with traditional print press releases has become a **three-dimensional concept**. For example, through the use of hyperlinks anywhere in the release technical or general users can now be given access to more information or detailed documentation about the data and access to previous releases without having to telephone.

What metadata to provide

As more and more journalists use the electronic versions of The Daily, particularly the HTML, Statistics Canada is progressively taking advantage of the many possibilities the Internet has to offer. The **metadata** include:

- General information about the **survey program**, including program clients, target population, statistical units, frequency, type of survey, survey start date and reference period;
- An **overview of data collection** and questions asked, including geographic coverage of collection, design and procedures and organisation responsible for collection of administrative data (where applicable);
- An overview of **data processing**;
- Themes and subjects covered;
- An **overview of data quality**, including estimation procedures;
- Products and services derived from survey program, including geographic units disseminated, release time and reference documents;
- Contacts for more information, for example the survey manager's name, telephone and fax numbers, and e-mail address.

This information comes from a general meta-database, which has been internally available for nearly 20 years but was enlarged and made available on the Internet. The Daily needs just a hyperlink to the specific entry in the **meta-database**.

Another improvement is the linking of terms to a **glossary**.

4.9.4 (FOOTNOTES ON THEIR FEET) Showing metadata in news releases: how much or how little?

4.9.4.1 Early attempt to tailor metadata

At its 1996 meeting in Geneva, the work group on dissemination to information media decided to ask the Work Session on Meta Information Systems (METIS) to prepare a set of guidelines for minimum standards to be met in putting metadata on the Internet. Following discussion and subsequent correspondence it was agreed that:

1. The metadata required to accompany statistics on the Internet is essentially the same as the metadata required for statistics in other media. All information considered necessary in paper publications should also be provided on the Internet.

2. It is convenient to categorize the necessary **metadata into two broad groups**:

(a) metadata which assists users in their search for statistics.
(b) metadata which assists statistics users in assessing and interpreting the data.

The parallel information in paper publications are the contents page and index in the case of (a) above, and in the case of (b) it is the sources, methods, definitions and classifications used which are usually explained in footnotes, annex notes and sometimes in separate books of notes in the case of some quarterly and annual publications which change little from year to year.

As a **minimum standard**, it should be possible to search for statistics **on the basis of theme or subject**, and it is desirable to be able to search for statistics also by keyword or by variable. Having located the desired statistics, it should be made easy to return to a level at which it is possible to search for other statistics. In order to meet these minimum standards, it is necessary to adopt the most appropriate technical solution in each case.
The minimum standards for metadata, which enable statistics to be properly interpreted by exactly the same way as they would be for statistics published on paper. In order words the variables and other **terms used** must be **clearly defined**, **sources** should be **quoted** and any **classifications system used** should be made clear.
The techniques employed will depend upon the software being used and need not be standardized.

Fortunately, modern proprietary software allows such metadata to be made available readily and it is simply a matter of choosing the appropriate software in each case.
It is assumed here that the metadata is required for statistics, which are published on the Internet for wide use in much the same way that they are published in other media. The requirements are different for other kinds of data, which are transmitted or stored for specialists use. For example, where large quantities of micro-data from a particular survey are transmitted between specialists then their metadata needs may be similarly specialized.

4.9.4.2 Eurostat's guidelines for higher metadata coverage

As the use of **Internet for disseminating** became more and more common, the general public and mass media had via Internet a direct access to data, news releases and even statistical publications. Consequently users needs to be assisted in the search for data, in their interpretation and when processing them increased considerably. In order to comply with them, Eurostat recommended as early as in 1998 a set of guidelines.
It stated that **quality in statistics** means reliable data and comparable data and to assess data quality, we need higher metadata coverage and presented Eurostat to be a source of harmonized and multilingual metadata for the whole European Statistical System (ESS). Of course, harmonization is the result of cooperation between Eurostat and the other statistical offices of the ESS, where Eurostat plays a coordination role. There are good examples: The European System of Accounts, the Monetary Union convergence criteria, the Harmonized Price index and the Labour Force Survey.
Metadata guidelines themselves concern the **whole field of statistical dissemination**, for all kind of users, **not only for mass media**.

General Guidelines for both experts and general public:

- The guidelines are aimed at **promoting a consistent interpretation of statistics** from different sources, by considering data quality and international comparability as strategic issues. The implementation of any guideline depends, ultimately on ability to meet the requirement of the users.
- The organisation of databases for the dissemination on Internet should be considered as a quality challenge. The set-up of appropriate tools for the organisation of web pages and the

management of hyperlinks can lead to an overall **improvement of the whole information base, affecting all the dissemination channels**.

- The knowledge of **national environments can vary significantly**. This means that statistical information supplied on the Internet need to be strongly supported by metadata. A higher degree of information is generally required to assess data quality and to help international comparability.
- Metadata **for Internet should be written for general consumption**, in easily readable pages and avoiding any counterproductive information overload. Hyperlinks should be used, as much as possible, to provide specialised users with more detailed information.

Groups of metadata users

A major effort should be made to understand **who the users addressed are** (general public and mass media, subject-matter expert, statisticians), what they need, why (for which purposes) and, finally, how such requirements can be met by data suppliers.

A **difference** can exist between **user-friendliness and user-orientation**, between what users want and what they really need. One cannot simply rely on user's opinion: some users are extremely reluctant to accept even the basic information they need to make a correct interpretation. Information suppliers are sometimes in the position of trying to help somebody who does not want to be helped.

A minimum set of metadata can be set up with reference to user groups:

- general audience, including mass media: users that are either not expert, or subject to strict time constraints for retrieving and using the information;
- expert users: skilled in searching, retrieving, assessing quality, interpreting and eventually producing statistical information on their own.

All users can either look for a customised service (a sort of pre-defined menu) or ask for the full list of options. As in a good restaurant**, prices and waiting time may change**, with the second option, but the satisfaction can better be guaranteed. It all depends on **quality standards** of the restaurant.

Groups of metadata

Users need to be assisted in their search for data. Which data are actually available and how can they be retrieved?

Users need to understand the meaning and the limitations to the use of the data. They have to be **provided with the key elements for a proper interpretation** and a quality assessment of the data. Web pages should be organised accordingly, allowing the user to shift easily between data and information at different levels, for a customised investigation.

Expert users and statisticians must be able to **assess the quality of statistical data in greater detail**, so they can make any further data processing reliable and consistent.

Users search for different purposes and with different levels of understanding. It should be recommended not to limit the search to hierarchical subject-matter classifications, but to include other possibilities, such as free-text search, indexation with synonyms and a thesaurus linking natural term to statistical tables. As far as subject-matter classifications are concerned, some harmonization would improve navigation facilities.

Information assisting interpretation

The challenge is to provide users with what they really need to make a correct interpretation, even if **users in practice may choose** to drop part of the information.

The following elements can be recommended, among others, as "best practice" for assisting interpretation:

- content description (statistical population, geographical coverage, observation unit, reference periods, classifications and standards, etc.);
- labels for rows and columns;
- basic definitions (concepts, variables, measurement units,…);
- comparability over time (break in series, missing data,…);
- comparability with other sources;
- footnotes highlighting specific precautions;
- explanation of symbols;

- methodological notes and model assumptions;
- information on error sources and accuracy;
- institutional source for the data;
- copyright and restrictions of usage;
- links to press releases and general information;
- contact points for additional information.

The general philosophy is that the new environment created take into special consideration the **distinction between two user profiles**: general public and experts. General public will be assisted by a "guided" access" and several pre-defined search profiles. The shift from the "general" mode to the "expert" mode will give the chance to access the information base in a deeper way, without loosing the friendliness approach.

Metamomentum

Even a common **vocabulary of key metadata** items was under development during 2002 to be used by participants of Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange (SDMX) initiative (www.sdmx.org). The project is one of the four panels of scheme, sponsored by BIS, ECB, Eurostat, IMF, OECD and UNSD. The initiative favours open and effective international cooperation in maintaining and if necessary developing new e-standards for their data exchanges. Besides the implementation of the vocabulary development of a **framework for metadata repositories** was planned as well as a practical case study on emerging e-standards for data exchange and the work on maintaining and advancing existing standards for time series data exchange.
By definition achieved during UNECE work sessions concerning statistical metadata (METIS), this kind of information are "data which are needed for proper production and use of the data they inform about"; data describing statistical data and – to some extent – processes and tools involved in the production and usage of statistical data.
Many international organizations and national agencies already have on-line database available to external users, remarked a contribution to joint UNECE/Eurostat Work Session on Statistical Metadata in March 2002. Because the **design and content of these databases vary enormously**, there is wide variation in ability of such on-line facilities to meet user requirements. Furthermore, the evolution of such databases and their creation by other agencies will mean that data will become even more accessible. This trend highlights the need for organizations **to make metadata even more available**. Unfortunately, experience to date is that the provision of metadata with data significantly lags the availability of data.
Envisaged common vocabulary would contain key metadata items, related standard definitions and context explanations. The vocabulary will be used in existing dissemination frameworks, such as IMF's Special Data Dissemination Standard and other frameworks used by national statistical agencies. The product would reside in an electronic glossary on the Internet linked to the SDMX web site, most probably from 2003.

4.10 (ELECTRONIC CORRIGENDA) Handling data revisions to data sets on Internet

Revising information released on the Internet

Despite all the best efforts to disseminate statistical information that is error-free, statistical agencies do have from time to time **to publish corrections**, errata or revisions to already-released data. The Internet enables to release information more rapidly than before, but faster release increases the potential for errors.
Some of the practices of Statistics Canada and the U.S. Department of Justice's

The mission and scope of Statistics Canada and U.S. Department of Justice's Statistics differ considerably. Statistics Canada provides statistical information on virtually every aspect of the nation's society and economy. Much of the data produced by Statistics Canada is frequently updated. The U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics focuses on crime and justice data, which are usually updated annually. According to the United States model, data cannot be sold. Reimbursement for reproduction such as distribution on CD-ROM is permitted. No charges are made for data made available on the Internet.

The nature of the revisions dictates the strategy
At Statistics Canada, journalists rely mostly on The Daily / Le Quotidien, the Agency's official release vehicle, to get their statistical information. Over 1200 releases are published each year in The Daily.
At the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), most of the material targeted for media attention is released by news release. Usually, these data are included in a published report although some data is released exclusively through a news release. BJS produces about 24 news releases a year. The Internet versions of reports are considered the official version.
In both agencies, the nature of the error will dictate the strategy to adopt.

HTML documents
*At **Statistics Canada**, all changes to already-published numbers in releases to the media **get corrected, at a minimum on the HTML version**. Occasionally, changes to the analysis will also be made. If the error is of little consequence, only the HTML version will be corrected, sometime the same day or the next day, **without any notification** to media and other users. However, if the error is considered important, it will be corrected as soon as detected in the HTML version and an erratum will appear in every version of the following edition of The Daily. For example, this is the case for a release that would receive wide media coverage or an error that could **affect markets**.*

*At the Bureau of Justice Statistics, data that appear on HTML pages usually come from published reports. In all cases of **changes to numbers**, the Internet versions are **corrected**. If an error is found in a report, corrections to the HTML pages are made at the time the electronic versions of the report are corrected. As these pages frequently change, no special notification is included.*
For text and HTML versions of reports and news releases, a notice of revision including the revision date appears immediately after the title, and may also appear at the end of the file. On some occasions, a notice of revision is also included on the HTML abstract for the report where users find the links to the report.

PDF documents
*At **Statistics Canada**, when **an error** is discovered in a PDF product, it **remains available** on the Web site, whether the product is free or not, **until a revised version** is published, provided the revision can be made quickly and the error is of no serious consequence. In the meantime, all purchases of the paying product are tracked down so the revised PDF file can be sent to clients when it becomes available. For both free and priced products, authors are encouraged to release the product again in The Daily to notify users of the revision. A notification also appears in the on-line catalogue.*
The same procedures apply for HTML products other than The Daily, except that clients are directed to the appropriate URL.

*The Bureau of Justice Statistics produces all publications in both PDF and text formats. Publications that involve news releases are generally not sent to the printer until several weeks after release. There are two exceptions: The official release time for the Labour Force Survey and the Consumer Price Index releases is 7:00 a.m. time, editorial corrections are made to the PDF and text versions that are made available at the time of release, and a revised version is posted on the Internet when the publication goes to the printer. For PDF documents with data changes, **a notice of revision** including the revision date is included **on the front page** and on any other pages affected by the change. Spreadsheets related to the publication are also corrected and the date noted in the date field required on all spreadsheets.*

If the data are critical to the findings and the publication is not a periodical, an erratum may be issued. This printed enclosure is produced as if it were a regular publication and is inserted in all of the remaining stock.
Periodic reports that are updated at least annually and include trend data may include the revisions in the next edition. In the relevant tables, a note is included stating that the data from prior years are revisions to earlier releases.

On-line and other databases
The strategy adopted for revisions to data in ***Statistics Canada****'s on-line databases depends on the* ***gravity of the problem****. Access to the database can be restricted until the extent of the problem can be ascertained. Secondary distributors and major clients are also immediately notified by e-mail and asked not to use the data until further notice. They are also expected to inform their clients of the situation.*
As soon as the data are revised in the database, a decision – based on the extent of the change – is made as to the timing of their release. They can be ***sent as files*** *on the same day to distributors and clients or re-released the following morning at official release time, which gives clients access to the revised data. In addition, a letter is sent to users to explain the situation and apologize for any inconvenience.*
At Statistics Canada, the creation of publications and other products is undergoing profound change with the implementation of dynamic database publishing from CANSIM4. This new publishing method enables the Agency to produce several mediums (such as paper, HTML, PDF, CD-ROM) with minimal effort using only one data source, which can ***simplify*** *the process associated with the* ***dissemination of revised data****. Whenever errors are discovered, they can be corrected in CANSIM, thus CANSIM is always the authoritative source and is always available.*

The Bureau of Justice Statistics data are archived at the National Archive of Criminal Justice Data at the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research at the University of Michigan. Errors in the data that could affect an analysis, particularly a replication of published results, are corrected.

Important revisions
In cases when ***revisions are considered important****,* ***Statistics Canada****'s media-relations officers* ***alert*** *major Canadian news agencies and key reporters directly by telephone as soon as the problem is found to limit the use of the erroneous data or analysis. The media are given the correct data as soon as they are available.*
In addition, a message is sent to The Daily's listserv clients to inform them of the error and give them the correct information.
From time to time, **journalists themselves discover errors** in major economic releases during media lock-ups, which are held 30 to 45 minutes before the data are officially released. It is at that point too late to change the various versions (in Canada's two official languages) of the *Daily* release and accompanying products, if any.
Statistics Canada has an excellent track record with regard to meeting pre-established release dates for its major economic indicators. Thus, the Agency would not postpone the publication of such releases unless a major flaw were discovered, and this has never occurred. Instead, the various versions are amended as early as possible after their release. If appropriate, an **erratum is published the next day**.
The Agency is continually exploring ways of further improving the flexibility of its production system to allow for last-minute changes. The HTML version of *The Daily* in both official languages could potentially be changed shortly before the official release time. This would depend on a variety of factors, including the nature of the changes. The delivery of the listserv and the availability of the PDF versions, which are not considered official release versions, could be delayed.

Reporters have noticed errors in Bureau of Justice Statistics reports during the embargo period. These errors are generally revised before the actual release. To date, none of the errors encountered has been deemed to be serious enough to merit any additional notification.

Notification of other users is not done. In the United States, considerable attention is being given to Internet privacy. Government agencies are required to have a statement of the data they collect about visitors on their web sites.

Additional notification through contacts with the media, listserves, and client lists can also be employed. The greatest challenge both face is notifying users of the free web products since they are anonymous. Clearly the speed of delivery and the size of the audience have changed with the Internet. Expectations are that changes will be instantaneous and effortless. Last minute changes are not always feasible. **Data changes** that once resulted only in a paper erratum now **affect many files**. One no longer know who all of one's customers are.
Media and others may access free sites and one would never know who they are. Additional techniques need to be developed to ensure proper notification of revisions to data.

Key Issues

Methods, Techniques and Tools used in Statistical Offices to Support Data Dissemination

Effective News Media Service in Statistical Offices

Formal Process of Release

Appeal for Publication Standards

Journalistic Approach to Statistical Dissemination

News Releases

PAPERS USED:

4. (Effective…) O7, O4, O2, C5
4.1.1. (What and how to issue…) O2, O4, O7, O9, O11, C5, G4, G7, V8, P ECE's Annex, G8, O7+A, G r.p.O13, O r.p.: Experiences with data-based…)
4.1.2. (News releases..) O8
4.1.2.1. (Selecting the subject…) ?
4.1.2.2. (Structure of the release…) Ot15, Ot., r .p. 3., C5, G room paper
4.1.2.3. (Examples…) ?
4.1.3. (Press briefings, news conferences…) O4, O6, O2, G room paper
4.1.3.1. (When and how to hold…) G5, C20
4.1.3.2. (How to organize them)
4.1.3.3. (Question and answer briefings) ?
4.1.3.4. (Use of embargoes) Booklet on Translating Research to Policy and Practice=BTRPP, from Lena/Franziska: transferred to 4.2.1., C2
4.1.3.5. (TV and radio interviews) Economic and Social Research Council=ESRC, from Lena/Franziska
4.1.3.6. (Creating)
4.2. (Use of computerised…) – (O8 left for 4.1.2), O9, C20, G10, V6, C6
4.2.1. (Improving data sets.), C14, V7, V8, C2+BTRPR, V13,
4.2.1.1. (Showing metadata… …+ from 3.4. …metadata adapted to the needs of media and public) (C6 transferred to 3.4) Ot9, C16
4.2.1.2. (Handling data revisions…) V19

Note: Luxemburg-Belgium shortened, Mr. Eurostat also,