

Distr.
GENERAL

18 June 2012

ENGLISH ONLY

**UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION
FOR EUROPE (UNECE)
CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS**

Work Session on the Communication of Statistics
(Geneva, Switzerland, 27-29 June 2012)

Session 3: Building Credibility

**USING SHORT STORIES, VIDEO SUMMARIES AND INFOGRAPHICS TO BUILD
CREDIBILITY IN STATISTICS**

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1 Introduction

Statistical agencies around the world rely on the citizens and businesses of their country to produce statistics. Without their cooperation and involvement there would be no outputs, Governments would have no evidence to form policy, organisations would have no data to make decisions and citizens would not understand the society they live in.

Historically statistical agencies have relied on print publications to disseminate their information, developed long before the advent of the internet and often seen as the only source for users to obtain statistics.

However things have changed and competition for people's attention is now at its greatest with the advent of the internet. If agencies across the world do not respond to changing user needs they can be left behind. There is the risk that other organisations can replace the official commentaries about the statistical data when they may not understand wholly what the key story is.

A key driver of the dissemination strategy within the ONS over the coming years is about telling the story behind the numbers. This is as important as the data collection that forms the stories as it is important to give the information that citizens and businesses provide back in a meaningful and understandable format.

2 Short stories

The world is changing with more and more demands on individuals' time. There is great importance in getting our messages over to as big an audience as possible and ensuring our data is accessible to all. Sometimes we tend to have too much focus on the 'expert' users, those who use the data on a day-to-day basis and who understand the topics. However, the general citizen can often be overlooked when we develop our outputs. Examples of this include:

- Publish little commentary on a topic but a large number of spreadsheets with the assumption that everyone can interpret them.
- Include lots of technical terms or produce confusing graphs and charts that lose engagement with the audience.

- Produce lengthy reports that contain a large number of important key points but of which people choose not to look at because of the length.

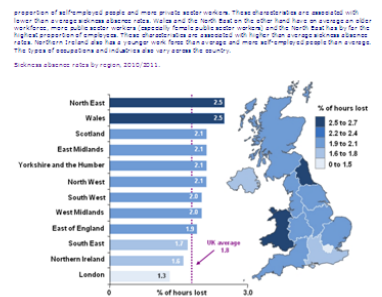
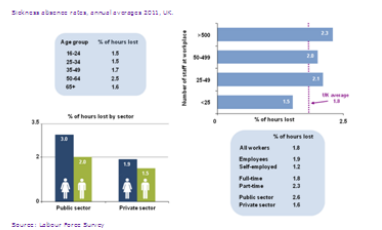
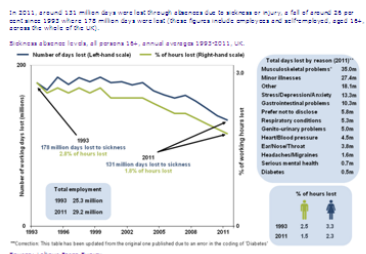
One simple but effective way we have found of overcoming these obstacles is through the use of short stories.

Our short stories are based on a format which has been around for many years in journalism, consisting of telling the key points in a coherent yet succinct way. It strikes a balance between keeping the information limited but ensuring there is enough to paint as big a picture as possible.

Generally the aim is to include around 3-4 different items of interest on a topic, using interesting infographics to explain them and limiting the content to around 2-3 pages of A4. Here is a screenshot of a short story on sickness absence that explains a range of items on the topic (the full story can be found in Annex A)

Sickness absence in the labour market

131 million days were lost due to sickness absences in the UK in 2011, down from 178 million days in 1993.



Sickness higher for women and older workers
 Women have generally higher sickness absence rates than men but both sexes have seen a fall over the past 20 years. High has gaps from being around 0.8 per cent of working hours lost to sickness in 1993 to around 0.6 per cent in 2011. Over the same period men have seen a reduction from 2.2 per cent to 2.0 per cent.
 Rates are generally much higher for older workers than younger ones and sickness absence rates also remain higher for men aged 65 and over. In 2011, 2.4 per cent of working hours were lost to sickness in 2011 compared with 2.2 per cent in 1993. The highest gap between the two periods is for men aged 65 and over, where the percentage of hours lost to sickness has fallen from 3.0 per cent to 2.4 per cent.

Lower sickness for the private sector and self-employed
 The percentage of hours lost to sickness in the private sector is lower than in the public sector, 1.6 per cent and 2.6 per cent respectively. There is a number of things to consider when interpreting these differences such as:
 • There are differences in the types of jobs between the two sectors and some sectors have higher sickness of women than others.
 • On average, women have more sickness absence than men and the public sector employs a higher proportion of female workers.
 • The analysis only looks at sickness absence as a whole. For men, fewer hours are lost to sickness due to mental health problems than for women. For women, more hours are lost to sickness due to mental health problems than for men.
 • Individuals within the private sector are also more likely to be self-employed and the self-employed have a higher percentage of hours lost to sickness than individuals within the public sector.

Largest workforce report highest sickness levels
 Workers in organisations with more than 500 employees had the highest percentage of working hours lost in 2011 at 2.0 per cent. These workers lost 22.4 million days of work in 2011, 1.9 million more days than workers in smaller organisations. The smallest percentage of working hours lost to sickness was in small organisations, 1.3 per cent. These workers lost 1.3 million days of work in 2011, 0.3 million fewer days than workers in larger organisations. The largest difference between the two groups is for workers in organisations with more than 500 employees, where the percentage of working hours lost to sickness is 0.7 per cent higher than in small organisations.

Since moving from the longer reports to the short story format we have significantly increased the coverage that our stories get within the media and also have more non ‘expert’ users using the data and engaging with our statistics. This has been noted by the increased use of the data in the stories and also from follow up queries from audiences we have not been in contact with before.

Generally, for the labour market topic, a different short story is published each month: this means that over the course of a year ONS disseminates more information on the labour market than we did previously using long annual reports. The advantage of short stories is that they are staggered throughout the year which has a number of benefits such as:

- Spreading out the workload and resources across the year
- Getting data out more quickly on the most high profile topics
- Responding quickly to the public agenda
- Providing bite-size information on the labour market allowing users, in particular the media to cover all of them rather than a small section from an annual report.

3 Video summaries

In 2011 ONS launched a YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/onsstats) with the aim of explaining the key messages in our stories in a new format using short video commentaries.

The summaries have an audio commentary describing graphs which are animated to talk the viewer through what the graphs are showing. They also use other visual aids such as maps, population pyramids, etc.

Similar to the idea on short stories, the content of the video summaries is based on the assumption that the viewer has no knowledge of the topic they are viewing, thereby once again, engaging with the non-expert users.

The videos are quite often reused in the online media with some of the UK's largest newspapers embedding them into their coverage of our stories. This gives the added bonus of getting our message out to an audience who would not normally come to our website – this, in turn, potentially opens up a much wider audience (see example screenshot from www.guardian.co.uk)

theguardian

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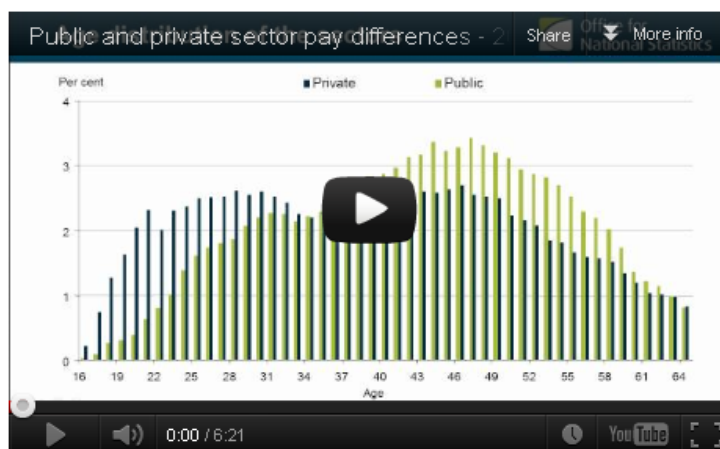
News > Datablog

DATABLOG
Facts are sacred

Public v private sector pay: who earns more?

More information

Working out the differences between the two sectors is tricky - the ONS has assumed, for instance, that assume employees of the banks nationalised in 2008 were in the private sector throughout And, if you're hungry for more, the video below is how the ONS explains the figures, and how it came by them.



The current videos have been designed around Excel and Powerpoint to build on skills that many people within the organisation already have. This also gives the advantage of using almost universally acceptable and accessible software. The content in most instances reuses what is already put together for our other dissemination products and so does not add too much burden to the production timetable. A typical video can be started and completed within a day.



We have received a variety of praise from different people on the innovation of these podcasts, for example several teachers have commented that the video summarising the balance of payments was a useful way of describing our statistics and have been using these videos as teaching aids within the classroom. ONS now view video summaries as part of our core business outputs.

4 Infographics

Building on the work of the short stories and video summaries we have also been working on making the graphical representation of our results more interesting. It is common for many citizens without a numerical background to have difficulty in interpreting charts, or if they understand what a chart shows, what the key messages are within them.

The aim of the infographic is to include some pointers to certain key trends on the graphs, use maps to show variations across different regions and try and use images to make the information more appealing. A full version of the example below can be found in Annex B.



5 Conclusion

Statistical agencies spend large amounts of money in collecting and producing data. The work ONS has been doing in modernising the way it reports our information using short stories, video summaries and infographics has had a positive impact in terms of the coverage of the information.

This has helped us reach out to an audience which we have failed to serve properly in the past – the general citizen. It has also helped build trust in our statistics as people can understand them better and do not feel they are being misled by confusing reports.

Finally the coverage of our stories has increased significantly as they summarise the key messages in our data and make it particularly easy for users to understand and reuse our content.