

Honoring a 75-year tradition with style

Gabrielle Beaudoin (Statistics Canada)

gabrielle.beaudoin@canada.ca

Abstract

After a decade of digital publishing, Statistics Canada has poured its expertise into the design and development of an integrated release vehicle. The transformation of the Agency's official release bulletin into a modern portal has received high praise from news media and continues to generate high satisfaction scores with website visitors.

This presentation will demonstrate how user-focused design aligned with well-defined business requirements and the use of sophisticated technology allowed Statistics Canada to vastly improve user experience and expand its product line while realizing efficiencies. It will also describe the intricate and well-defined processes applied by both program and service areas to publish a high-quality and relevant bulletin on a daily basis.

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Honouring a 75-year Tradition with Style

Prepared by Gabrielle Beaudoin
Statistics Canada

I. INTRODUCTION

After two decades of digital publishing, Statistics Canada has poured its expertise into the design and development of an integrated release vehicle. The transformation of the Agency's official release bulletin into a modern portal has received high praise from news media and continues to generate high satisfaction scores with website visitors.

This paper will demonstrate how user-focused design aligned with well-defined business requirements and the use of sophisticated technology allowed Statistics Canada to vastly improve user experience and expand its product offerings while realizing efficiencies. It will also describe the intricate and well-defined processes applied by both program and service areas to publish a high-quality and relevant bulletin on a daily basis.

II. MEET *THE DAILY*

The Daily is Statistics Canada's official release vehicle since 1932. First published as a single typewritten factsheet mailed to subscribers for a modest annual fee of \$1.50, the bulletin has remained popular through time by staying harmonized with publishing industry standards.

In recent history, the 1995 launch of the online edition and the introduction of the *Smart Daily* application in 2008 were important milestones. The former introduced *The Daily* to the world, while the latter transformed the publishing process, improving quality, consistency and coherence in Statistics Canada's releases.

Changes of the past five years have focused on enhancing readers' experience and further integrating functionalities for maximum efficiency.

Canadians expect their *Daily* bulletin online at 8:30 a.m. every working day. In the past five years, Statistics Canada has met this requirement for the 2.4 million readers (annually) who visit *The Daily* online.

History of *The Daily*

1932 – First English edition

1935 – First French edition

1953 – Saturday edition discontinued

1970s – Focus on analytical content

1980 – New format: the facsimile

1990s – Journalistic style adopted

III. USER FOCUSED DESIGN

Needs and expectations of information seekers have evolved significantly since the launch of the online edition in 1995. The proliferation of news sites and information sources and the availability of innovative formats and venues have changed how people search, review, discuss, and use information on the economy and society.

Cognizant of that new normal, Statistics Canada took upon itself to modernize its official release vehicle. The purpose was two-fold. First, make *The Daily* more user-focused. To that end, *The Daily Readership Survey* was held in January 2014 to elicit feedback from data users, followed by focus groups to review the analytical components of *The Daily*. The objective of both consultations was to inform the redesign by measuring readers' satisfaction with the current bulletin and seeking their feedback on what would meet their needs.

Consultation results laid the path for redesigning the bulletin and developing new features. They are described in the next two sections.

IV. WELL-DEFINED BUSINESS REQUIREMENTS MET WITH SOPHISTICATED TECHNOLOGY

The second purpose of the redesign was to integrate into a single interface the functionalities, features and tools that have been developed over many years. The overarching objective being to streamline the publishing process while increasing coherence and quality.

First, the new *Daily* website integrated both the old *Daily* and the mobile application, along with new user-focused features. The new site applies fluid design attributes, making it no longer 'mobile-friendly', but 'mobile by default'. Users accessing it from any device benefit from the full experience.

Second, the *Smart Daily* included a new Automated CANSIM Tables (ACT) program, that built synergy between the agency's data repository (CANSIM) and *The Daily* bulletin. Tables are now created by pulling source data and placing it into an interface with computing ability. The ACT is also programmed to assemble all table components (table and column titles, dimensions, standard symbols, metadata, survey title, etc.) from other website resources, thus ensuring accuracy and consistency. This program saves valuable time for authors. As well, once tables are created for a release (for example, the monthly GDP), they can be reproduced in minutes for subsequent releases, pulling data and metadata as directed by the ACT program.

The ACT program was further enhanced to publish 'responsive tables'. This feature allows authors to prioritize which columns will be displayed first on various screen sizes. For example, for a table with 13 columns, the first two columns would typically be displayed on a smart phone screen. With the new *Daily*, authors can 'program' a table to display columns 1 and 13 as a default on a small screen, columns 1 to 5 and 13 on a tablet, and all 13 columns on a laptop. This ensures users view the most relevant information by default on their device.

Finally, the creation and display of interactive charts was also integrated into the program.

V. IMPROVED USER EXPERIENCE

Prior to redesign, *The Daily* layout was clean and effective, but somewhat outmoded. It allowed visitors to browse from the ‘list of releases’, then to drill down to releases of interest.

The redesign transformed the website into a sleek, modern interface that presents Statistics Canada to the public in a way that conveys the agency’s dynamism and professionalism.

Navigation and layout

An attractive layout with visual elements and user-driven navigation has been adopted. Releases can be searched individually or browsed across channels.

Releases are grouped under 32 themes or ‘subjects’ (such as health, environment, agriculture) allowing readers to easily find information on the subject of interest for one particular day or to browse that information from one period to the next.

For ease of navigation, the ‘Releases by subject’ section also presents telling visual elements (eye-candy of the number of items under each subject; arrows guiding navigation), and content filtering features.

Consultations have shown that frequent users made extensive use of print release schedules to help them find editions of interest online. This finding drove the creation of an interactive online calendar, giving readers the ability to browse information in chronological order, by type (major economic releases, upcoming releases, products), etc.

Indicators

Users also expressed a need for easy access both high-level and indepth information from *The Daily*. While some enjoyed reading the bulletin in its entirety, many wished to land quickly on key numbers. To meet that need while ensuring the single numbers were provided in context, Statistics Canada added an ‘Indicators’ feature in its *Daily* application. Indicators can be displayed in every release, guiding readers to the most crucial information at a glance. Using the same logic as for tables and charts, the indicators are created with a self-contained program that pulls information from CANSIM, makes calculations, and publishes the information within the release. All indicators are also grouped together into one section to facilitate navigation across releases.

Special interest

Finally, a ‘Special interest’ section was added to the bulletin to support users who want to learn more about statistical concepts, read indepth pieces such as *Canadian Megatrends*, or browse familiar topics *By the numbers* (Halloween by the numbers, Fathers’ Day by the numbers, National Seniors Day by the numbers, etc.)

VI. INTEGRATED PROCESSES, DECENTRALIZED PUBLISHING

The Daily redesign project also served to strengthen Statistics Canada’s Official Release Program by integrating into a single portal all the steps necessary to publish the bulletin.

Within the *Smart Daily* application, subject-matter specialists schedule their releases in advance; insert their text and footnotes; create tables and charts. *The Daily* staff also conducts all its work with the application: set the editorial calendar; review and edit text; verify that tables and charts render properly; send the bulletin for senior management's approval; and finally, publish online.

With all the publishing steps integrated into a smart application, Statistics Canada's *Daily* has reached the level of sophistication required to meet its users' diverse needs without making any compromises on quality and efficiency.

VI. RESULTS

The annual Website Evaluation Survey conducted by Statistics Canada since 2000 is an effective means to measure satisfaction of visitors to the Statistics Canada website as well task completion. The online survey is completed by over 10,000 participants.

In 2016, 75% of participants expressed overall satisfaction with the site, up from 70% in 2015. Survey results also showed that 81% of participants completed their task successfully, up from 75% in 2015. Success in task completion was high, with 86% of frequent visitors (those who visited the website six or more times in the last six months) and 78% of infrequent visitors indicating they found what they were looking for. The success rate was highest for participants looking for information in *The Daily* (91%).

VII. CONCLUSION

The Daily redesign launched in June 2015 met all its objectives. It is fully mobile, user-focused and relevant. With all publishing steps integrated into a smart application, Statistics Canada's *Daily* has reached the level of sophistication required to meet its users' diverse needs while ensuring the coherence and quality of the statistical information published for Canadians every working day.