

Improving User engagement thanks to a close synergy between the User relations online desk and the corporate website

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Abstract

To increase dialogue with Users plays a crucial role in strengthening brand reputation and improving word-of-mouth advocacy, which sometimes represent a much more powerful conversion tool than advertising.

People today often ignore the messages they receive because they are overwhelmed by a flood of communications and find it difficult to identify those that really interest them. It therefore becomes essential to better engage Users by listening their specific requests in order to be able to provide tailored answers for an immediate and concrete feedback to their questions.

One of the strategies that Istat decided to implement to achieve this result is to make more and more synergistic the relationship between the User relations online desk and the corporate website.

How performing it?

When Users contact Istat via the User relations online desk:

1. providing a first and immediate reply to inform that the dedicated office has taken charge of the request in order to show adequate attention to the User
2. in case of thematic questions, supplying complete answers and always refer Users to the site for further information
3. in case of warnings of technical malfunctions or misprints on the site, sending a second answer with the link to the web page once it is corrected, to underline the importance of the User's message.

The aim is always to improve citizens' engagement. Through the online channel of direct communication with its Users, Istat develops and strengthens a virtual dialogue and further shortens the distance between Public Administration and its audiences. It is essential that Users feel properly cared for and that answers reach them quickly, even when there is no response that can indeed satisfy the specific request.

Through a plain language consistent with an institutional and functional communication style and thanks to the continuous reference to the corporate website, the User relations online desk responds to specific needs for information, accessibility, transparency and participation of web Users-surfers, whose number is constantly growing.

It is therefore possible to divide the activities into two macro-areas:

- the information and service area: external communication, information activities on regulatory provisions and services offered by our Organization, guaranteeing the exercise of access rights, participation, promoting information on topics of general interest
- the listening and checking area: thanks to a continuous process of reciprocal exchange between the corporate website (through a User satisfaction survey and forms to collect

- feedback) and the online desk for relations with Users, products and services offered have a targeted improvement that increases the citizen's brand loyalty

The paper will mainly develop the following aspects of the topic:

- work processes and communication flows between the User relations online desk and the corporate website
- practical examples aiming to demonstrate how this synergy has been increasing engagement and dialogue with audiences
- brief mention to the new projects started by Istat even following the results obtained thanks to the above said synergy: one for the design of a new website and the other for a new User relations desk.



Improving User engagement thanks to the User relations online desk and the corporate website and their synergy – Istat experience



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People today often ignore the messages they receive because they are overwhelmed by a flood of communications and find it difficult to identify those that really interest them.

It therefore becomes essential to better engage Users by listening their specific requests in order to be able to provide tailored answers for an immediate and concrete feedback to their questions.

One of the strategies that Istat decided to implement to achieve this result is to make more and more synergistic the relationship between the User relations online desk (otherwise said 'online Citizens' information desk') and the corporate website.

Key words: users, listening, care, feedback, website.

1. Introduction

To increase dialogue with Users plays a crucial role in strengthening brand reputation and improving word-of-mouth advocacy, which sometimes represent a much more powerful conversion tool than advertising.

People today often ignore the messages they receive because they are overwhelmed by a flood of communications and find it difficult to identify those that really interest them.

It therefore becomes essential to better engage Users by listening their specific requests in order to be able to provide tailored answers for an immediate and concrete feedback to their questions.

To improve the involvement of users, Istat develops and strengthens a virtual dialogue with them and further shortens the distance between the Public Administration and its public.

It is essential that Users feel adequately followed and that the answers reach them quickly, even when there is no answer that can actually satisfy the specific request.

Among the strategic levers that Istat has put in place an important role is played by the institutional website and the User relations online desk (otherwise said 'online Citizens' information desk'), as well as the synergies between them.

2. Improving user engagement through the corporate Web site

Always in line with the desire to outline an even more citizen-oriented strategy aimed at increasing the Institute ability to reach expert and less experienced users, it is fundamental starting a dialogue with one's users and activating a listening network for them.

There are several tools that can help in this sense, providing us with direction and suggestions to improve the path we have started.

To outline an even more citizen-oriented strategy, Istat has aimed to increase its ability to reach expert and less experienced users through its institutional website.

Therefore, to get to know its users better and improve their user experience more and more, Istat uses various tools:

- usability tests,
- feedback collected from users,
- annual user satisfaction survey
- web data analysis.

2.1. Usability tests

For this reason, in 2020 Istat conducted usability tests with users aimed at bringing out the major criticalities of the as is site and laying the foundations for the construction of a new site that is configured as a real information hub: an essential point in the ecosystem of official statistics, complete, authoritative and above all accessible and usable. A new site that offers a digital experience for visitors, more usable, more accessible, more flexible, more memorable, more useful, oriented to the needs of users both in a desktop and mobile environment with attention to the multichannel services offered.

Therefore, starting from the analysis of the user experience of its users with the as is site, in general terms, we want to deepen the reasons for some known problems (e.g. people's difficulties in finding certain information within the themes) and obtain information on the main problems / needs encountered / expressed by the current users of the systems as they are.

The tests carried out were of three types:

- Moderate remote usability tests with 10 users (max 60 min per session), to investigate main problems and needs with respect to the user Interface (qualitative analysis)
- Unmoderated remote usability tests with 40 users (max 20 min per session), to obtain benchmarks for the future system (quantitative analysis)
- Remote user interviews, to deepen the context of use with 18 users (max 60 min per session), to define and formalize user group profiles, usage scenarios and high level user needs for each identified profile.

We have carried out tests on 4 different target users:

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- public administration,
- journalists,
- citizens
- data analysts, data journalist and researcher.

The tasks, some different depending on the target, were assigned to the users who were part of the sample. Some examples of tasks are: search for tables, microdata, infographics.

Through the tests carried out, various critical issues were identified: unclear paths, non explanatory labels, information on copyright.

Some critical issues have been overcome in the current site, others are at the basis of the design of a new website.



2.1.1. Some Changes on www.istat.it to meet the users' needs

Examples of problems that have already been solved on the current site are:

- The label on the home page "Indices for monetary revaluations" changed in "Revalue rents and maintenance checks"


The download area was called "downloads" instead of "attachments"

- The "visualization" home label changed in "Infographics"
- At the bottom of the infographics we entered the license under which they are distributed (Creative Commons License – Attribution – 3.0)

The “**Visualization label**” is not very predictive of the information contained in this area.

All users, in fact, say that they would not have expected to find inside graphics, infographics, cartographic representations.




Infographics

Some users report that they would like information on **copyright** and on how to share, publish and use images on the site.


INFOGRAPHICS

POSTCARD FROM ITALY



Click the image to download pdf

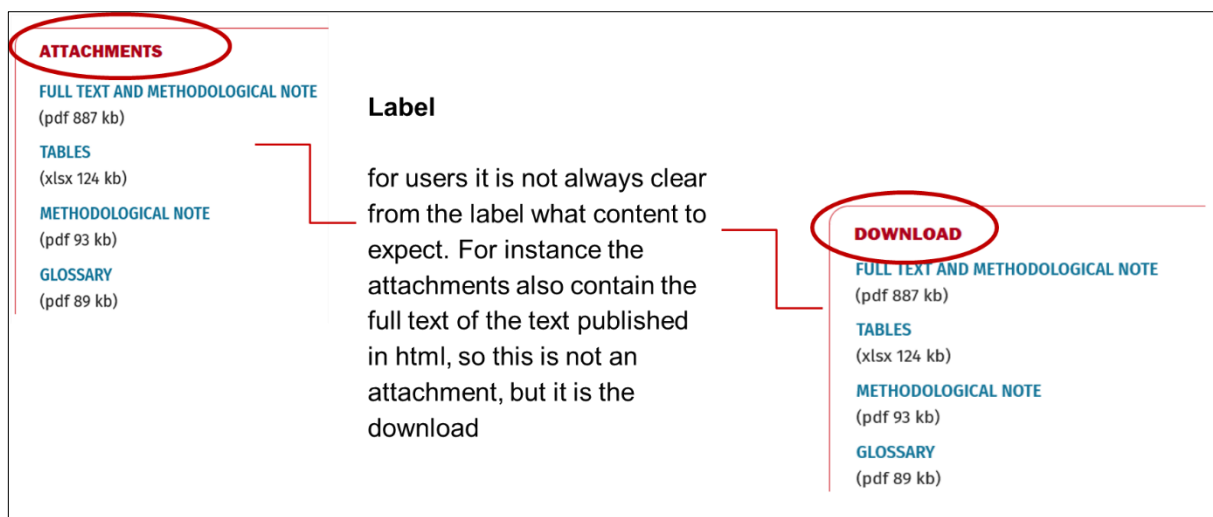
➤ [Event 10th Italian day of statistics](#)

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2.2. Feedback collected from users through the web pages of the site

Since May 2012, another important way of listening to Users through the company website is the collection of feedback (in compliance with the Italian legislation on web communication of the Public Administration). On each page of the site a space has been set up where users can tell if the content was useful or not and possibly leave a comment. These comments are read and classified into comments and suggestions, negative comments, off topic, anomalies, questions and congratulations.

These feedbacks are particularly useful not only to meet the needs of users more and more, but also allow us to correct any typos in a very short time ("I point out that on page 7 - figure 5 (Italy: male (M) and female (F) deaths by age in the years 19181920) there are some typos in the legend").

Ti è stato utile questo documento?

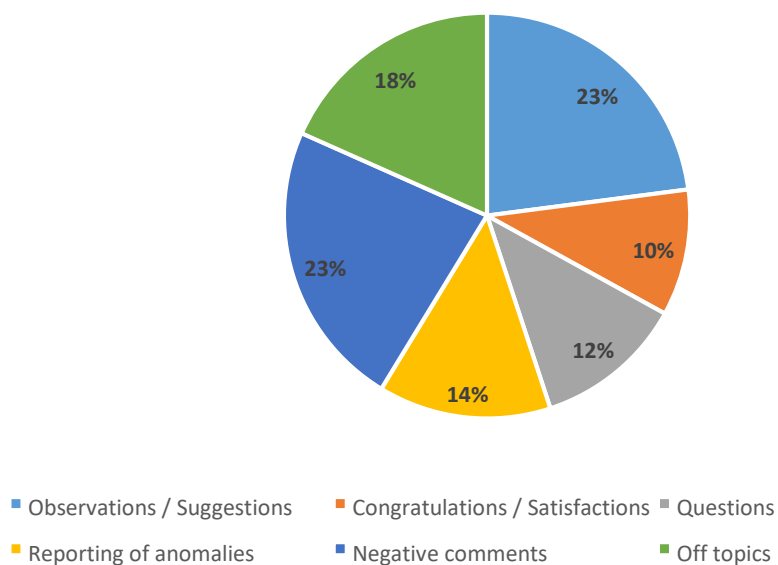
☐ Sì ☐ No

Per informazioni scrivi a comunica@istat.it

Qui puoi lasciare un commento:

Invia

Feedback collected from users. Year 2020



In 2014, in order to reduce the questions sent by users through this channel, the sentence 'to contact the site editor, please write to comunica@istat.it' was added to the comment box and this implemented the flow of communications between the editorial

staff of the corporate website and the online information desk with a view to enlarge collaboration between the two structures for improving User assistance and thus increase their level of engagement with the Istat brand.

3. A service managed through a dedicated mailbox

This online desk addressed to Users (or Citizens' Information Desk) was born in 2007 from an idea of Istat Management as a service run by the Communication Directorate through a dedicated mailbox.

Over the years, the offer of assistance to citizens has continuously increased and improved thanks both to the growing collaboration of each individual Department of the Institute and the analysis of the results of exchanges with the Users themselves, which reveal that citizens have an overall satisfaction with both the organization services and operators who work at the online desk.

When someone does not want simply data, but explanations, clarifications, in a word 'attention', a personalized email allows us easier to achieve this goal and to enhance our credibility towards each target.

Is this service in contradiction with the one offered by our Contact centre that gives assistance to users in their search for data already disseminated by the Institute?

Of course it isn't. The services offered through these two different channels have the same aim (better meet the Users' requests for information), but they are both necessary for satisfying all kinds of requests.

Moreover, according to the Law 150/2000 (still in force and concerning Communication activities in Public Administrations in Italy) this email box is also aimed at:

- making easier the use of services offered to citizens;
- executing, by listening the citizens, those processes aimed at verify the quality of services and the resulting users' level of satisfaction.

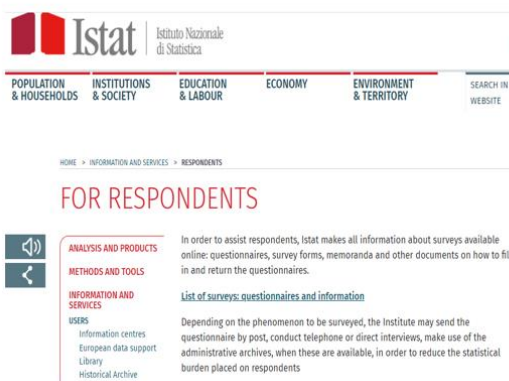
Main types of requests processed by comunica@istat.it regard:

- Reports of malfunctioning of Istat website

- Applications for authorizations to link at our website or to use our data for other releases
- Ongoing surveys (Censuses included)
- Truthfulness of the surveys, queries on questionnaires ○ Requests for forms
- Explanations on questions mandatory
- Information about ongoing tenders
- Polemics on our data, especially inflation and other economic data ○ Clarifications on our data
- Nominations for entering as employees in Istat
- Other requests (f.i. school visits, rankings competition examinations...)

Among the most frequent requests processed by comunica@istat.it:

Information about on going surveys



Nominations for entering as employees in Istat



In the first half of 2021, with specific reference to issues strictly related to the corporate website, over 200 exchanges of emails took place between the website editorial staff and the Citizens' desk in order to solve matters raised by Users or providing them with assistance in the event of technical malfunctions of the Istat site.

3.1. When citizens contact Istat via the User relations online desk

Fundamental is providing a first and immediate reply to inform that the dedicated office has taken charge of their request in order to show adequate attention to the User.

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In case of thematic questions, supplying complete answers as soon as possible (thanks to the collaboration of the competent internal production or data collection structures) and **always** refer Users to the site for further information on the topic of their interest.

When the email regards warnings of technical malfunctions or misprints on the site, sending a second answer with the link to the web page once it is corrected, to underline the importance of the User's message.

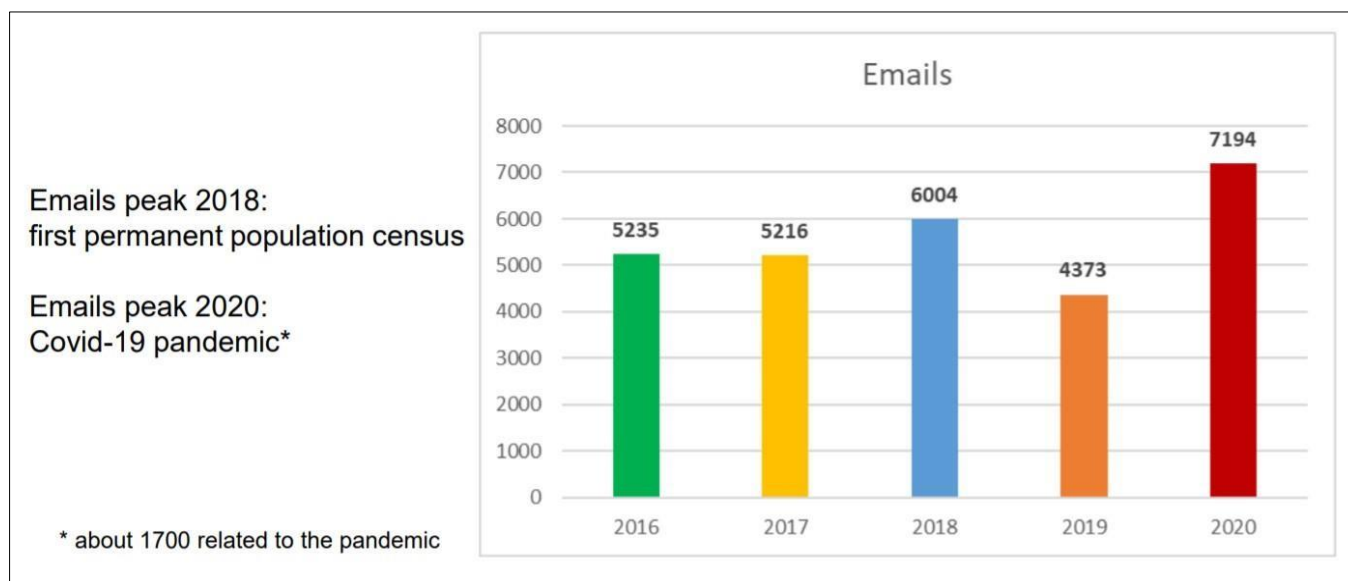
The aim is always to improve citizens' engagement. Through the online channel of direct communication with its Users, Istat develops and strengthens a virtual dialogue and further shortens the distance between Public Administration and its audiences. It is essential that Users feel properly cared for and that answers reach them quickly, even when there is no response that can indeed satisfy the specific request:

Through a plain language consistent with an institutional and functional communication style and thanks to the continuous reference to the corporate website, the User relations online desk responds to specific needs for information, accessibility, transparency and participation of web Users-surfers, whose number is constantly growing.

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- the listening and checking area: thanks to a continuous process of reciprocal exchange between the corporate website (through a User satisfaction survey and forms to collect feedback) and the online desk for relations with Users, products and services offered have a targeted improvement that increases the citizens' brand loyalty.

3.2. Some numbers



Two concrete examples of this fruitful exchange and synergy are represented by what happened both during the pandemic and at the start of the recently concluded agricultural census.

A practical example



#IstatperilPaese

Information on the health emergency and the recovery during the pandemic

- Deluge of requests via @comunica on pandemic and deaths since early March 2020
- Answers always referring to the dedicated section of the Corporate website
- **FAQs** originated from the email experience

With reference to the first example: once the pandemic exploded, a deluge of requests from frightened users began to arrive asking for data and information that Istat had not yet reorganized and made available in an updated manner according to the needs of the moment. Therefore, via the citizens' desk we started to collect all these requests by macro themes and from these ones we started to draw up the FAQs for the dedicated section of the site that the Communication Directorate promptly decided to realize (characterized by the hashtag #IstatfortheCountry). In this web area, the statistical content implementation was continuous once it became available from our production structures. Since the web area release day it was thus possible to refer users to it any time they contacted us via email.

Another recent practical example of this successful cooperation regards the latest

Census of Agriculture: WHY?



- Respondents involved through the informative note
- Related site not yet completed
- Dedicated toll-free number often busy

They contacted us via comunica@istat.it

FAQs originated from the email experience



A similar thing happened for the agriculture census (second example), for which the respondents' questions began to arrive at the Citizens'desk before the dedicated site was created.

Thus, it was possible to start from them to create targeted FAQs which were then inserted into the site once released.

4. Conclusion

This growing synergy between the corporate website and the online information desk for users represents therefore a successful strategy, as shown by the growing number of emails (included those of thanks) that we frequently receive.

Defining the degree of User satisfaction and grasp eventual unmet needs for the development of improvement paths where concretely practicable and verifiable: this complies with the need to identify the demands and expectations of our Users with respect to the rendered services.

As a result, increased credibility of Istat image and reputation among its public, in full compliance with our Mission and our Vision.

Currently, the Management of the Institute, also in light of these results, set as next priorities for our structure those to design and build a new website and to migrate the current online support desk to citizens towards a CRM platform (CustomerRelations Management) which will allow us to work in an increasingly efficient way towards users and to better monitor the results of this activity, even if the visual interface to users will remain unchanged given how effective the direct email tool has proved to be in terms of 'Users at the center, always'

Both projects already started and hopefully by the end of the year the related architectural structures of this new single multi-contribution access hub will be completed. Release target: 2022/2023.