

Strategic Developments in Dissemination and Marketing

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Abstract: Statistical offices will be required to give increasing emphasis to their dissemination and marketing activities to meet the growing demands for more statistical data, additional analysis and interpretation, alternative forms of presentation and delivery of statistical information and further improvements in quality and timeliness. The

paper describes the strategies being followed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to improve its dissemination and marketing performance.

Key words: Statistical dissemination; marketing; data bases.

1. Introduction

Increasingly statistical offices are becoming output focused. This new paradigm is essential for the survival of statistical offices. We must ensure that our products and services are relevant to community needs – this is possible only if statistical offices have an output focus and liaise carefully with customers. Sundgren (1989) developed these arguments in an articulate way.

The best indicator of customer interest in certain products or services is whether they are prepared to pay for the privilege of receiving them. This view is supported by all statistical offices I have spoken to who have had actual experience at selling products and services. Despite some initial trepida-

tion, all have agreed that the marketing of statistical products and services in exchange for money has been a very positive experience and has resulted in a more efficient and effective statistical service. In his Presidential address to the 1989 Session of the International Statistical Institute, Fellegi (1989) stated:

“Let me assert from personal experience that nothing motivates the review of published output to the same extent as the need to sell it at realistic prices. It provides an incentive to engage in ‘marketing’ in the best sense of the word: i.e., to interact with clients in order to find out, and respond to, their real needs.”

When the revenue from marketing activity (or at least a high proportion of it) can be retained by the statistical offices, greater budget flexibility results. Such funds provide means for new collections, product development, and technology support for new initiatives which otherwise might be disallowed by budget constraints. The Australian

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Bureau of Statistics (ABS) is fortunate in having such flexibility.

Of course, marketing will not be effective unless you have the right products. Indeed a key element of marketing is determining which statistical products are in demand. In addition to discussion of the ABS's marketing activities, the paper will also discuss the dissemination strategies we follow, highlighting those changes I see as most important for a statistical office of the 1990s.

Section 2 of the paper discusses ABS marketing experience to date whereas Section 3 summarises the main marketing issues we are now addressing and what steps we are taking to address those issues. This is important foreground for the remainder of the paper. Section 4 outlines, in a general sense, the dissemination strategies the ABS intends to follow. Sections 5 and 6 deal respectively with publications and electronic data services. Some concluding remarks are made in Section 7 with emphasis on the importance of public relations activities.

2. Marketing in the Australian Bureau of Statistics

If asked in the past, senior management of the ABS would have said that the ABS was aiming to meet users' needs and requirements. For the most part, the ABS was successful in meeting users' needs, but the introduction of very modest charges for ABS publications and services has shown that the ABS's output was not as focused on customers' requirements as we previously believed.

2.1. Charging policy and experience

Much ABS output is of general benefit to the community as a whole, rather than to specific individuals, organisations within the community, or governments. In this respect, most of the expenditures incurred in *collect-*

ing statistics should be viewed in the same way as expenditure incurred on other national institutions (such as parliaments) and infrastructure (such as roads and schools).

For this reason, the Australian Government has accepted that all the costs incurred in providing statistical services cannot be recovered from individual users. Nevertheless, it has been agreed that some of those costs can and should be recovered from organisations or individuals who derive special benefits from them. From the beginning of 1988, as a result of a change in government policy, the ABS more actively pursued a "user pays" policy. As a result, the ABS implemented a market-oriented approach to statistics, trying to move away from the predominant product or collection oriented approach. The arrangements established with the government allowed the ABS to retain most of the money earned in excess of a specified target (currently \$6 million).

ABS statistics continue to be readily and freely available through all media, e.g., newspapers, television and radio, and statistical publications provided free of charge to public libraries. We also have a Library Extension Program to encourage libraries to stock ABS resources and assist the libraries in using these resources. However, users requiring their own copies of publications are required to purchase them.

This emphasis on fees has had at least four benefits:

- It encourages users to address their real needs for ABS products, both statistics and services.
- It has placed an onus on the ABS to perform.
- It quantifies the demand for ABS products and services and this is a reliable indicator of how ABS resources should be distributed.
- It relieves the taxpayer of the financial

burden for statistical services which have a specific and identifiable value to particular users.

We believe each benefit has been substantially met. It is apparent that users, including Australian and State government agencies, are closely examining their data needs now that modest prices are being asked for statistical products. In general, they are focusing more sharply on what their requirements actually are. In turn, this is placing pressure on the ABS to produce data that is both relevant and timely. One specific effect has been an increase in the provision of services tailored to meet the specific requirements of clients (information or statistical consultancy services), with the additional costs of meeting this service being met by the client.

Overall, we have been pleased with progress on "marketing." Gross revenue is one tangible measure of success. Gross revenue from statistical products and services has increased from about \$1.0 to \$13.0 million over a four year period and in recent years has been growing at 25%–30% per annum. Although this is only 8% of our ongoing budget, marketing has had a far more significant effect on the work programs of the ABS.

Of the total revenue raised in 1990–91, slightly more than half was from the sale of publications and other printed products. Revenue from information and statistical consultancy services have been growing at a much faster rate. It is now nearly \$5 million per annum and is expected to surpass revenue from publications and other products in the near future.

2.2. What is marketing?

Marketing is often seen as synonymous with 'selling' but in fact it embraces a much wider range of activities, each of which needs to be

considered before decisions are taken about the output of a statistical agency. To be successful in this undertaking, a number of questions need to be addressed. They are listed below according to the standard marketing approaches of product, promotion, price and place (sometimes called 'the marketing mix').

Product:

What goods and services should we offer? What quality should we offer? How are they to be packaged or presented? What post-sales service should we offer?

Promotion:

Who are the target groups? How should we reach them? What image should we present in advertising and other promotional material? To what extent should we use direct marketing or personal selling?

Price:

What price should we set? Should it be set below "market" price for "public interest" reasons? Should we offer discounts or incentives of any kind?

Place:

How should we sell (distribute) our products? Should we use agents or distributors? What customer services should we provide (delivery, ordering or credit arrangements)?

These questions are difficult to answer. Of course, past experience within a statistical agency may be a good guide. However, past practices often obscure current opportunities. New ways of looking at such issues are required.

One useful source of information for the ABS is the records of sales of specific products and services. Sales records certainly inform you about successes and failures. Nevertheless, sales figures do not indicate the reasons products and services succeed or

fail. Market research provides the answers to such questions.

2.3. *Market research*

The ABS has commissioned, or undertaken itself, a number of market research studies. These include a major study of the attitudes and perceptions about the ABS held within government agencies and the private sector. ABS's performance as a provider of information was evaluated and future opportunities and threats identified.

The research has found that clients generally have a favourable image of the ABS; negative impressions were mentioned by only one in four clients. Positive impressions typically refer to the quality of ABS products. Negative impressions are usually related to the lack of relevance of ABS standard products and the quality of client service. Importantly, price is generally not seen as a negative factor except by government agencies.

Among the strengths identified were:

- The high quality of ABS publications and other products and services.
- The fees generally represent "value for money"; some respondents saw the fees as low.
- The market expressed a desire for more information on what is available from the ABS and the uses to which it can be put; the market believes there is a proper role for the ABS in the provision of "value added" statistical services.

Major weaknesses identified include:

- Low awareness of the range of ABS products and services.
- Lack of understanding of the benefits of using reliable statistical information.
- Lack of timeliness of ABS's statistics. Also, the ABS is not yet seen as a dynamic and responsive organisation

in dealing with user needs.

- Electronic data services were seen as lacking user friendliness and reliability.

2.4. *Pricing*

The policy for pricing ABS products and services follows guidelines on costing of government activities. In setting policy we considered:

1. The ABS has public interest obligations to ensure that basic statistics, at least, are both readily available and affordable; and
2. The ABS needs to continually improve its revenue performance to meet external revenue targets and, increasingly, promote work that generates revenue.

These objectives could be seen as contradictory and any conflicts must be solved on an individual basis.

In determining the price of individual products and services, it is the ABS's aim to recover an increasing proportion of its total dissemination costs. We aim to meet this objective at some aggregate level by increasing revenue or reducing costs. However, it is appropriate that those products containing basic statistics are priced at affordable levels and consequently, the dissemination costs involved may only be partly recovered.

It is the responsibility of the individual subject matter managers to set the prices of the statistical products and services as these managers are claimed best able to judge both the market and the costs.

When it can be assessed, market price should be used. This is most easily identified where there is direct competition, but judgements on market price can also be made when similar products or services are available. Subject matter managers are increasingly confident that they can assess the value clients place on particular products or

services. When a market price is not available, cost plus pricing has been used. Costs should include support costs, as appropriate, and an allowance for return on capital. There are some problems with cost-based pricing (e.g., it does not encourage the ABS to become more efficient) and we anticipate moving to a more value based pricing policy, particularly for information consultancy services.

2.5. *Managing the marketing focus*

We were successful in introducing a marketing culture in the organisation and more quickly than we originally anticipated, for the following reasons:

- a. We engaged a professional marketer who was active in educating ABS staff about the main principles of marketing.
- b. All ABS subject matter areas were encouraged to become involved in the full range of marketing activities.
- c. Senior ABS staff made it clear that marketing had their full support.
- d. A strategic marketing plan was developed, distributed broadly and discussed with staff.
- e. Additional resources were provided to support marketing activity.
- f. Targets were set to provide a further incentive.

A Corporate Marketing Unit was established to assist our marketing efforts. It has a key leadership role in ABS marketing activities. Its responsibilities include:

- strategic marketing planning;
- development or commissioning of key market segment plans and subsequently leading the implementation of these plans;

- market research;
- ongoing assessments of the competitive environment;
- management of the marketing and sales efforts across all ABS offices;
- promotions policy, strategies and standards; corporate promotional activities; promotion of significant commercial statistical products and services;
- maintenance of a direct mail data base; and
- training and support for marketing and sales activities.

One of the marketing strengths of the ABS is its regional office network. The ABS has offices in each of the eight State capital cities where the majority of our non-government customers are located. This has facilitated closer contact with customers as well as having accessible bookshops.

Problems that have emerged are:

- Within the ABS, the "marketing culture" has resulted in some unsociable attitudes with some managers concentrating on parochial rather than corporate goals. Statements like "what's in it for me" and "what is my revenue share" are heard more often than is healthy;
- The need for better management information systems, although this will be addressed to a large extent by the new Financial Management Information System currently being developed;
- The need for more training in customer relations;
- Lack of support and product knowledge provided to staff responsible for selling products; and

- Many of our early promotional activities were unsuccessful, mainly because there was not sufficient targeting.

2.6. Demand for products/services

The fastest growing demand is for services in information consultancy, statistical consultancy and user funded surveys. However, our experiences have revealed the need to improve the infrastructure to support these services. In particular, information consultancy requires access to output data bases and directories so consultants have ready access to both published and unpublished data. The real challenge for the ABS is to efficiently meet the very high potential demand for these services.

For publications, it is clear that the growing demand is for thematic or "all about" publications (as distinct from collection based publications) in addition to compendium publications such as the Year Book. Examples of thematic publications include Australian Economic Indicators, publications about particular social groups (e.g., aged persons), and topics of particular interest such as the environment and small business. Collection based publications will remain important particularly to the public image of the statistical office but they will not generate the additional revenue that ABS is looking for.

3. Strategic Marketing Directions

Although our marketing experience has been very positive, it is now time to move from a largely experimental phase of marketing to a more coordinated and focused approach. We need to consolidate our learning experiences and address weaknesses in the marketing strategy.

To facilitate this we have substantially revised the Strategic Marketing Plan to give a new strategic direction to our marketing.

It sets out the principles to be applied in the further development of the ABS's marketing activities and was developed to describe and promote a common marketing purpose. An important part of the process has been a series of discussions with each ABS workgroup by a senior manager responsible for the marketing function.

The key objectives in this new marketing strategy are:

- Develop an organisation culture that is demonstrably client focused.*

Key activities will include the development of client service standards, increasing key account management activities, and monitoring client service performance through blind tests and other means.

- Fully understand our market and its major segments.*

Key activities will include market research studies and client satisfaction surveys. We will also be adopting a market segment focus to our marketing activities.

- Develop and promote the ABS's ability to provide a "total information solution" to clients' needs.*

We will improve our client management practices, particularly for government agencies. We will also be increasing community awareness of the range of ABS products and services through coordinated promotional activities.

- Continue to improve the ABS's revenue performance.*

Key activities will be seeking out new clients, increasing the size of business with existing clients by providing a quality service and a better understanding of their needs, actively

seeking business partnerships to assist our commercial goals, and taking a more active stance on the development of new products.

- e. *Only develop new products and services in response to identified market needs and in accordance with appropriate quality standards.*

Fully researched business plans (including market research where appropriate) should be given before approval is given to proceed with developing new products or services.

- f. *Equip our people to achieve our marketing vision.*

There are three important aspects to this objective:

- staff development,
- improving the infrastructure to support consultancy services by, for example, developing output data bases and directories of published and unpublished data (more about this in the next section), and
- improved management information on marketing activities.

The successful implementation of these objectives is key to the ABS's future. It will largely determine whether the successes we have achieved in recent years will continue in the future. All managers must regard marketing as a key part of their responsibilities, even for those who deal mainly with internal services.

4. Dissemination Strategies

Publications will remain a very important part of the dissemination activities of any statistical office. We are still many years away from using electronic services as the main means of disseminating statistics, par-

ticularly with the increasing emphasis on analysis and interpretation. There are many challenges facing statistical offices to ensure that the publication program remains contemporary. These are discussed in Section 5.

Electronic dissemination of statistical data will continue to grow in importance and it is vital to the long term future of the statistical office that it establish a primary position in the market for both electronic products (e.g., floppy disks, CD ROM) and electronic services (e.g., on-line time series services). Often this will require working closely with a private sector supplier but I believe it would be a major strategic error if statistical offices left this field entirely to the private sector. As with publications, electronic data users are increasingly seeking more value added, particularly software that assists in accessing and analysing data on electronic products. Developments in electronic dissemination are described in more detail in Section 6.

However, the most important challenge for statistical offices will be how they can manage their data holdings better so that it is more accessible and relatable across statistical collections. Sundgren (1989) has observed that:

"Users of statistics are rightfully irritated when they have difficulties to locate and interpret the statistical data they are looking for, and they are not happy when they have to go to several places in order to get all the data they need, instead of getting everything in one place, including some advice about how to combine data from different sources. . . . If a statistical office wants to be successful in this competition it must be active, imaginative, and flexible, and it must use its relative advantages in methodological competence, and coordination and integration possibilities".

That is a big challenge but I think he is right

in his prescription for the direction that statistical offices should be taking. Despite the encouraging growth in the use of ABS data, it remains underutilised. Current use is limited by lack of guidance on data availability; data accessibility, particularly across collections. An important exception is the time series data base and steps are being taken to develop a similar capability for small area data. Often data across collections and over time are not comparable. For these reasons the ABS are undertaking what we have termed the data management project. Data management is not a new issue for statistical offices but it is growing in importance. Client-driven statistical services call for a fast and flexible response in combining available data.

In pursuing data management, the ABS has not tried to develop an "ideal" organisation-wide system. Such an undertaking would require a great deal of resources and promise only uncertain pay-offs. The approach we are adopting is to develop some facilities now to meet the highest priority demands, and also to identify the major data management problems we are facing so that our service and our data management practices will improve much sooner. In particular, this approach will identify the most important data reliability problems.

We have, at the same time, decided to move from a collection-oriented approach to systems design to one which emphasises common input and output systems across collections; this decision is one step to better long-run management of data, but by itself will not be sufficient as the data comparability issue must be tackled.

The most significant facilities under development are:

- a. The time series data base facility (INFOS) has been enhanced. It has

been agreed that we should move towards a single data base for published and publishable time series data. INFOS will be the only output data base used for deriving all products and services (including publications) which contain time series data. Significant steps have been taken towards implementing this objective.

- b. A Small Area Data Base is being developed with similar objectives to the time series system. It will be developed using the ORACLE data base system.
- c. A Data Catalogue is being developed which will describe ABS data holdings with supporting meta data. There are plans to make this an "active" catalogue in the sense that it will be possible to extract the relevant statistical data once it has been identified using Data Catalogue facilities.
- d. Standard classifications have been used for coding purposes but the same degree of standardisation has not been used in presenting the data. Steps have been taken to improve the compatibility of how we present standard classifications in the various statistical collections.

These developments and the increasing demand from users for "all about" statistics and more analysis and interpretation have important implications for the way statistical offices are organised. Traditionally statistical subject matter experts have been linked closely with the pertinent collections. As Sundgren (1989) recognises:

"One effect of modern technology is that the ties between input and output will be weakened, both physically, logically, and in time. The statistical end-products and typical usages of statistics will be based on combinations of input data from many

different sources, and the data collected by one statistical survey will be used for many different purposes, by different users, and at different points of time."

The additional demands being placed on subject matter statisticians make it imperative that their responsibilities for conducting statistical collections are reduced so they can take up the extra responsibilities. These new statistical units will have a range of functions, the most important being:

- statistical leadership, including intelligence on the emerging societal needs for statistics and the conceptual development of statistical collections and output;
- liaison with clients to obtain a better understanding of their needs;
- product development, particularly those products which cut across collections;
- development of output data bases, preferably increasing data sets on existing output data bases;
- providing analysis and interpretation services; and
- specialist consultancy services based on their subject matter.

Section 2 of the paper pointed to the large increase in demand for information consultancy services. Section 3 emphasised the importance of improving the infrastructure to support these services. Obviously the output data bases and catalogues described earlier are important infrastructure improvements. Collection specific data bases such as foreign trade and population census are also important – they should be designed so that they can be readily accessed by information consultants.

Output data bases are generally thought

of as containing macro data possibly in tabular form. Developments in capacity of microcomputers, data storage the capability (e.g., CD-ROM) and "rapid access" micro-computer tabulation software allows the establishment of many output data bases comprising micro data (and associated meta data) which can be used to support special data requests for clients.

There are other important infrastructure activities. It is vital that our staff have the requisite training. Skills in client servicing are particularly important and it will be necessary for more of our staff to have these skills. Graduates with communications training will become increasingly important to statistical offices.

5. Publications

Although electronic services will become more important with the increasing proliferation of technology, these services will not supersede publications for some years. Publications will remain very important to the image of the statistical office. If publications are dull and unimaginative, there is a high probability that the statistical office will be perceived as equally dull and unimaginative. On the other hand, a dynamic, well presented publication program will reflect well on the statistical office.

Clearly, publications affect our image in customers' eyes. However, they also have a significant effect on politicians, the media and other persons of influence. They also affect the image our own staff have of their organisation. They are our most tangible product and staff feel good about the ABS producing high quality and innovative publications.

What will be the future challenges for our publication programs?

- a. We need to ensure our publications are understood by our readers. We often

take this for granted but research we have commissioned has shown this not to be necessarily true.

- b. We must maintain a high standard for our flagship publications such as the Year Books.
- c. There must be more emphasis on thematic publications and less emphasis on collection based publications.
- d. The publication program must be influenced by emerging societal issues.
- e. The extent of analysis and interpretation in publications should continue to increase.

5.1. Understanding publications

We commissioned a private company, Communications Research Institute of Australia (CRIA) to study the effectiveness of publications. Their report recognises the very significant improvements that have been made to publications in recent years but was critical in a number of other respects. In particular, it was critical of the typography of the publications, use of complex language and the extent to which we try to understand the audience for our publications.

The following lists some of the main points coming from the report.

- Publishing standards are a means of encompassing good data management practices for publications but they are of little use unless they are accepted by the organisation and enforced.
- In a similar vein, there is insufficient coordination of the publication processes. Too much is left to the inclinations of individual subject matter areas.
- However, the ABS needs to shift its corporate thinking from “control” of the end product, which is inefficient, to

“control” of the production process if it is to improve the management of its publications.

- ABS publications are difficult to understand for all but the most sophisticated readers – publications need to address the specific needs of their audience. There should be more audience research to assist with the design of publications.
- Table and graph headings tend to be too long and complex.
- More generally, the typography of ABS publications could be improved considerably to make them more readable. This includes issues such as text length (lines of text which are too long or too short are hard to read), choice of typeface, use of white space, paper stock, etc.
- There is a need to develop typography skills within the ABS.

I would be surprised if some of these criticisms were not valid for many other statistical offices.

Since then, CRIA have redesigned several ABS publications as models for further publication redesign work. A key component of this redesign work has been several rounds of audience testing to pinpoint problems with prototype designs from the audience perspective.

These new publication designs are completely different to traditional designs. They have been well received by audience and also internally by ABS staff responsible for publications. They will provide the base for revised publishing standards which will be incorporated in electronic stylesheets to be used for publications.

5.2. Flagship publications

Flagship publications are extremely important to the image of the statistical office as

are the flagship products of all organisations. The Year Book has been the traditional flagship product of many statistical offices and will continue to be so. The ABS has taken steps to improve the presentation of the Year Book taking aboard many of the recommendations emanating from the CRIA report. Perhaps, more importantly it has taken steps to increase the "ownership" of the Year Book among subject matter statisticians. Their contributions have improved greatly as a result. We should not be relying on one flagship publication. Statistics Canada has had considerable success with three new quarterly flagship publications:

Social Trends
Perspectives on Income and Labour
Economic Indicators.

This is the likely trend of the future. The ABS has had considerable success with its monthly Australian Economic Indicators. Users are increasingly seeking value added through objective analysis and interpretation and the bringing together of data from a range of statistical collections (including those conducted by other agencies) in a coherent way. From a marketing perspective, it is also easier to market a relatively small number of flagship publications than a large number of collection based or more narrowly focused publications.

5.3. *Thematic publications*

Market research clearly shows users are seeking more "all about" services. This applies equally, if not more so, to publications. Examples of themes are the environment, housing, tourism, small business, manufacturing, youth and migrants. Our market experience with such publications has generally been very positive. There are many other topics where there are several

sources of information. The challenge for statistical offices is to bring this information together. We know our data best and have also developed classifications and other data standards to facilitate comparisons of data. Statistical users will become increasingly frustrated if we do not rise to this challenge.

5.4. *Addressing emerging societal issues*

It will not be sufficient to produce publications and other products on request. We need to anticipate societal needs by:

- a. keeping abreast of debates within government,
- b. monitoring media reports, and
- c. maintaining close contact with the most influential statistical users.

The real challenge will be to develop the statistical products that meet these needs and ensure they get sufficient publicity to influence the public debates.

5.5. *Analysis and interpretation*

It is now generally accepted that statistical offices should be involved in analysis and interpretation. It has certainly been supported by market research. The ABS has taken the view that the goal of fostering the production of accurate, timely, relevant and impartial statistical information can be best achieved when the agency responsible for production of data also assumes some responsibility for analysis of that information. Analysis focuses on explanations of what has been collected; it should describe what has actually happened, explain relationships and develop linkages among statistical series. It must be impartial and objective and focus on what has happened rather than forecasting what might happen in the future.

6. Electronic Dissemination

The ABS has been involved with electronic dissemination since it began supplying magnetic tapes to clients in 1965. In 1985 we introduced the AUSSTATS on-line time series service. This was followed shortly afterwards by the VIATEL teletext service, CD-ROM products and a plethora of floppy disk products. Foreign Trade commenced its TELESTATS electronic mail service in 1986 (i.e., delivery of prespecified foreign trade statistics to individual subscribers' electronic mail boxes) and this was followed by a similar service in 1989 for the first few pages of selected economic indicator publications.

None of these initiatives were based on an overall ABS plan to develop and provide electronic dissemination services. Rather, a 'gap filling' philosophy was adopted in response to a perceived need or marketing opportunity.

The nature of this activity led to an uncoordinated and loosely controlled approach to electronic product development. Not all such activity has been unproductive or unprofitable. For example, CDATA86 (the Population Census based CD-ROM product) was a notable success with nearly 1000 copies sold. However, it became apparent that a much more rigorously defined framework for electronic dissemination activity was needed to guide our future electronic dissemination activity.

The main problems we face with electronic dissemination are:

- with some notable exceptions, sales have been low;
- the majority of electronic products has been collection based. On the other hand, demand has been quite good for customised floppy disk services such as time series, small area data and foreign

trade. The first two services cut across collection activity;

- the products have not been user friendly. The lack of a standard user interface and standard data formats for all ABS products has caused problems for users; and
- quality assurance of electronic products has not been good.

In an overall marketing context, electronic data services are seen as an important area of long term growth. There is an act of faith in adopting this position. Most electronic services are not likely to be profitable in the short term, but demand will grow as the wider user community becomes more computer literate, and services should become more profitable. Although current users are critical of our services, market research has shown that they want us to perform better rather than simply leave electronic services to other organisations who may have specialist skills.

6.1. Overall strategy

The ABS aims to be a leader in the electronic dissemination of statistical data. To achieve this, we need to:

- improve existing services so that they reflect the quality image of the ABS,
- monitor the use of statistical data by clients and where appropriate, develop new services or use new technologies to meet changing needs,
- educate the market on the availability and capability of ABS electronic products.

Our short term strategy has been to become more expert in electronic services, in anticipation of increased demand, while at the same time addressing the shortcomings of existing core electronic services. For core

services, our preferred position is to be a retailer. For non-core services, the role should be essentially as a wholesaler, although we may want a more active involvement if the product or service is seen as strategic and the ABS's reputation would be enhanced by our involvement. An important question is to decide on what should be the core services.

6.2. Products

In the shorter term the ABS is offering the following as core services.

1. **PC-AUSSTATS:** A subscription based on-line time series data base with access through users' microcomputers and communications technology. Data manipulation and analysis software are also being provided for application on users' microcomputers. Data can also be readily exported to other common software packages. In the longer term, additional output data bases e.g., small area statistics, are likely to be made available for on-line public access.

2. **Standard magnetic tape and floppy disk services:**

These will be determined by analysis of the market demand for such services. In regard to this the following points should be noted:

- these services will be derived from the same output data bases as publications to ensure data integrity,
- there will be more emphasis on customised services based on output data bases, and
- the ABS will offer to provide non-standard magnetic tape and floppy disk services but the prices will be higher for such services.

3. **CD-ROM products:** The most success-

ful product from the 1986 census was CDATE86, a CD-ROM product containing a wide range of small area data and basic mapping facilities. We intend to produce CDATE91, containing data from the 1981, 1986 and 1991 censuses with an improved interface, software and communication. We are also adding detailed topographic features (with appropriate indexes) to the digitised boundary files to enhance the mapping capability of CDATE. A range of data analysis and mapping functions will be provided to support this data. Also, data can be exported to other software packages if the user so desires.

4. **TELESTATS:** Broadcast facsimile facilities, when they become available, are likely to replace the TELESTATS service for non-economic indicator publications.

Our general strategy is to provide electronic products and services which not only comprise data but have the option of being enhanced by data manipulation/analysis software facilities to enable users to make more effective use of the data. This will be the case for on-line data bases, floppy disks and CD-ROM products. Importantly, we need to have, as far as practicable, a "common look and feel" about our electronic products and services.

7. Conclusion

Statistical offices will be required to give increasing emphasis to their dissemination and marketing activities to meet the growing demands for more statistical data, additional analysis and interpretation, alternative forms of presentation and delivery of statistical information and further improvements in quality and timeliness. This will provide many challenges. These have been

discussed and some insight given as to how the ABS plans to meet these challenges.

In summary, the most important challenges will be:

- to develop a marketing culture – experience shows that this will happen more rapidly if statistical products and services are exchanged for money and professional marketers are engaged to support statistical offices;
- to obtain a better understanding of our markets through effective user liaison and more traditional market research methods;
- to develop client servicing skills in statistical offices;
- to develop the infrastructure, particularly output data bases, that are required to support client servicing;
- to recognise the critical importance of strategically managing our data and other information resources and to take the steps needed to do this including the collection of comparable data from different collection sources;
- to enhance our publication program through better presentation, increased analysis and interpretation and more emphasis on the topics of greatest interest to society;
- to become a leader in the electronic dissemination of statistical data; and
- to change the organisational arrangements that are prevalent within many statistical offices whereby there is a close association between output activities and the associated statistical collection work.

If these challenges can be met, there will be

much improved statistical outputs. However, the job does not stop there. Public relations activities are also of vital importance. We must ensure that prime decision makers and others of influence are aware of our work and understand the main findings. Personal representations and seminars are important but can be expensive. The media is a cost effective way of increasing awareness and contacts with the media should be cultivated and supported to assist this process.

The benefits are many. An improved image is clearly of benefit to marketing activities. It also helps cultivate a positive image among politicians and others of influence which certainly assists arguments on budgets, etc. The ABS has also found that the improved public image it has enjoyed in recent years has coincidence with an improvement in response rates in business collection. We believe there is a link and that respondents are more likely to cooperate if they think that completion of a collection form will serve a useful purpose. Finally, there are very great benefits to the staff themselves. Their morale and work performance is likely to be greatly improved if they feel positive about their organisation. Good external publicity is probably the most effective way of achieving this.

8. References

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