Strategically improving user communication

through user engagement

Why engagement?

- *Engaging - to draw into, to involve*

- *Effective user engagement is a critical success factor for a statistical agency to be seen as **relevant** and **effective***

- *NSOs need user input into*
  - work program & priorities
  - design of collections, standards etc
  - content & design of outputs
  - dissemination, methods of access & services

Aspects sought by users

- Relevance
- Timeliness
- Quality fit for use
  - Accuracy
  - Consistency/coherence
- Accessibility (data & metadata)
- Service & price

Users are diverse

- Strategically, need to recognise the different types of users and engage with them appropriately

- Also recognise importance of engaging with stakeholders (eg govt ministers, privacy guardians) as well as users

- Note that users can be within an NSO or the wider national statistical system

Many methods for engagement

- Advisory Council
- Advisory groups (eg CPI revision)
- Program evaluations
- Participation in professional associations
- User groups
- User Conferences/Forums
- Market research

- Outposting of staff
- Outreach officers
- Client managers
- Joint ventures & strategic alliances
- Special web sections
- Newsletters, blogs, twitter etc
- Seminars

NZ Meeting of Users

- Required by statistics legislation

  "*The Statistician shall, at least every 5 years, convene a meeting of users of official statistics to review user needs for such statistics.*"

- The value obtained is related to the effort put into its organisation

- Engage the users, rather than just talk to them

- Must be open, be honest about what can and cannot do, and follow through with commitments

ABS segments

- ABS has conducted several major client research studies over the years

- Established and refined its user segments

- Segments are based on 'client value', related to 4 key attributes - relationship, influence, end-use, and risk

- A segment defines a user by the nature of their interaction with the ABS - the type of relationship or the service channels they use

ABS Segments

- Clients
- Partners
- Customers
- Target groups
- Self-servers

Engagement of Clients

- Mostly government

- Special recognition of 'lifeline' clients whose support is critical to the ABS
  - Engage with them as organisations

- Key clients - ongoing, strategic relationships

- Get clients involved with Advisory Council, user groups, etc

- Engage their help with publicly debated issues

Engagement of Partners

- Mainly outside of government - academics, media analysts, selected clients

- ABS consults and collaborates with on a range of statistical, methodological and communication issues

Engagement of Customers

- Largest group of users and most diverse

- Users have a transactional relationship with ABS, usually fee for service

- Serviced through a range of different service channels - information consultancy, microdata, retail customers

- Engagement primarily through newsletters, with more sophisticated users invited to participate on user groups

Engagement of Target Groups

- ABS engages with these on a non-commercial basis, primarily to add value to the dissemination process

- Media, schools, intermediaries, libraries

- Serviced through targeted programs, including special section on website

Engagement of media

- Importance of managing public relations (with respondents to maintain cooperation, politicians, media, other opinion leaders)

- The media is the main means of getting results known to the public, politicians etc

- Also need to maintain good working relations to assist with issue management

- Main engagement is through Public Relations Unit, but subject staff encouraged to engage with media to maintain profile

Engagement of schools sector

- Investment in future users

- Engagement primarily through client managers allocated to the sector

- Created education versions of key products

- Special section on website

- Library Extension Program

Engagement of Self-servers

- Broadest & least understood segment
- Website users, enquiry service
- Undertake regular customer surveys and obtain feedback

Impact of ICT

- ICT has transformed, and will continue to, communication with users & dissemination

- Internet, www, database technology & software tools
  - leading shift from printed to electronic outputs
  - Self-help

- Email alerts, RSS, twitter & podcasts

- Web 2.0 technologies

Impact of information technology

- improved communication & dissemination

- Internet, www & software tools
  - leading shift from printed to electronic outputs
  - Self-help

- Email alerts, RSS, twitter & podcasts

New technologies

- Can allow interaction rather than one-way communication with users

- Web 2.0 tools - blogs, wikis, - facilitate interactive & collaborative communication with users, particularly selected target groups

Issues with new technology

- Enabler
- Cost & benefits
- Need to be cautious to maintain public credibility
- Management oversight & approval
- Avoid incorrect/inappropriate re-packaging of data
- Resources for development, moderation etc

- 'most business tasks are too boring for community features' ---> resources better spent improving basic features & usability of existing websites
- + getting data and metadata management right

User perspective

- From a user perspective, communications by a statistics office can be haphazard, uncoordinated and duplicated

- Can be seen as a waste of time if no follow up

- Users can have a different view on the balance between confidentiality and access to data

- Statistical issues are often of lesser priority to users than other issues

- Pricing/cost recovery can get in the way

Success factors

- Culture change needed

- Constant focus by senior management

- Be responsive to feedback

- Make organisational changes and invest in infrastructure

- See staff movements out as an opportunity

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