

Open Government Case Study: Infoshare

Infoshare: access to over 30 million aggregated, confidentialised, time-series data

Change from closed subscription service to self-serve online tool

Available in different forms to meet needs of users

Confidentiality and privacy of individuals protected at all times

Over 82,000 users in first year of release increased to over 100,000 over the following year

Purpose of agency

Statistics NZ is New Zealand's national statistical office and leader of the Official Statistics System. It has been delivering New Zealand's most important official statistics for 120 years.

What has been released for re-use?

Infoshare, a self-service open online data tool on Statistics NZ's website, contains over 30 million aggregated, confidentialised, time-series data. More than 110 million cells of data on topics include:

- economic activity (eg price indexes and production figures)
- demographic measures (eg births and deaths)
- a long-term historic series of population and economic data
- arrivals and departures of the population and visitors
- wholesale and retail trade
- exports and imports
- building consents.

Data is available in Excel (.xls), comma delimited (.csv) or Table Query (.tqx) formats.

Release rationale

Statistics NZ wished to increase access to data for decision-making by replacing INFOS, a closed subscription service with only about 90 data subscribers.

Data release via Infoshare complements the release of statistical information in other forms such as reports and products. Statistics NZ releases information in different forms to meet the needs of a diverse range of users.

Risk mitigation

Supporting users - Users were given information about the new Infoshare tool both during development and after release. Ongoing user support is also provided.

Confidentiality and privacy - The confidentiality and privacy of individuals is protected at all times as required by the Statistics Act. Data is adjusted to make sure that no individual or business can be identified. Under specific conditions, researchers can access anonymised individual level data via the Microdata Access Services.

Data integrity and quality - The integrity and quality of data is considered throughout the statistical production process and sound statistical methodology is applied.

Cost and timeframe

The Making Information Freely Available (MIFA) programme provided baseline funding of \$1.06 million. Infoshare was released in two stages in 2008 and 2009. After the initial set-up it became part of Statistics NZ's core service to users. In 2013/14, it will be incorporated into NZ.Stat, a free web tool that will provide additional functionality, including machine to machine data transfer.

Impact

Opening up the data has resulted in a vast increase in its use. In its first year, more than 82,000 users were recorded. In 2011/12 there were more than 100,000 users.

Economic and social impacts

Auckland management consultants Coriolis Research use Infoshare “all the time as a primary source of data, particularly trade data” for client projects. They value online access that is free of charge.

NZ Retailers Association creates data tables (mostly business demography data) to help members to:

- compare themselves against the market
- understand the dynamics of their specific market sector
- take decisions based on fact rather than ‘gut feel’.

First NZ Capital regularly uses data from Infoshare, converting them into charts and performing correlation analysis with data from other sources.

The Reserve Bank reproduces Statistics NZ data on its website, providing a macroeconomic statistics hub for researchers, analysts, and decision makers.

Efficiency impacts

Infoshare contains information on Government finance including financial information for local authorities, Crown Research Institutes, and the Public Health Sector (District Health Boards).

The Reserve Bank uses economic and social statistics from Infoshare to set monetary policy for New Zealand.

Local and central government agencies use Infoshare data for a wide range of policy making, research, and analysis.

Transparency and democratic impacts

Releasing Infoshare data for re-use:

- makes it easier for government agencies to work together
- reduces the cost of providing an existing government service
- reduces the cost of accessing and processing this information for existing users.

Users can now access the data in Infoshare free of charge.

The Reserve Bank uses data from Infoshare in research, which is published via a variety of channels, including the Reserve Bank Bulletin, discussion papers, and analytical notes.

In his blog Econometrics Beat, Canadian economist David E Giles describes the historic long-term, social and economic data series available in Infoshare as “a valuable and serious piece of data research”.

Users value online access that is free of charge

Government and business use the data to carry out analysis and provide information for researchers and analysts

Infoshare: described as “a valuable and serious piece of data research”