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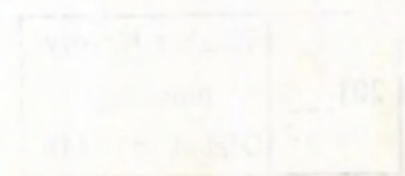
Making Data Meaningful

Part 3:

A guide to communicating with the media



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NOTE

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Introduction

Making Data Meaningful Part 3: A guide to communicating with the media is intended as a practical tool for managers, statisticians, and communication and media relations officers in statistical organizations, particularly those organizations that are in the process of developing their communication strategies. This guide aims to help producers of statistics find the best way to get their message across and to communicate effectively with the media. It contains suggestions, guidelines and examples—but not strict rules or rigid templates.

The *Making Data Meaningful* guides¹ have been prepared within the framework of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Work Sessions on the Communication of Statistics², under the programme of work of the Conference of European Statisticians³. The first two guides are:

- *Making Data Meaningful Part 1: A guide to writing stories about numbers* (first published in 2006)
- *Making Data Meaningful Part 2: A guide to presenting statistics* (2009)

The first edition of *Communicating with the Media: A guide for statistical organizations* was published in 2004. The Internet was not new at that point, but its impact on information dissemination was not as pervasive as it is now. Social media were just beginning to emerge.

This new edition reflects the increasing impact of the Internet and social media, including Facebook, Twitter and blogs. These topics are now covered in more depth and across the various aspects of media relations, rather than in one isolated chapter. New discussions include the integration of social media with broadcast and print media, measuring the impact of social media and online press rooms.

The guide recognizes that there are many practical and cultural differences among statistical organizations and that approaches may vary from country to country.

A group of experts in the communication of statistics prepared this guide. They are (in alphabetical order):

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¹ These guides can be downloaded from <http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/writing/>

² Information about the UNECE Work Sessions on the Communication of Statistics is available from the UNECE website at <http://www.unece.org/stats/archive/04.05.e.htm>.

³ Information about the Conference of European Statisticians is available from the UNECE website at <http://www.unece.org/stats/archive/act.00.e.htm>.

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1. Principles, objectives and management issues

As a rule, it's fair to say that journalists and statisticians have little in common. Yet, journalists and national statistical organizations are virtually inseparable. Why? Because the general public is an important audience for the statistical organizations, and the news media are powerful tools for reaching this audience.

The challenge for a national statistical organization (NSO) is to help journalists understand the data. Tell them a story. Tell them about the world they live in. Tell them how their numbers help the public understand what they see around them as they drive to work every morning and watch the news on television every night.

1.1 Principles of dissemination

Dissemination of statistical information to the media is based on the same core principles that underlie the general dissemination activities of the NSO.

Relevance: The information should be relevant to the social, economic and general conditions of the country and meet the needs of both public and private decision makers. For the media, relevance translates into newsworthiness. However, the statistical organization must be careful to present information in a way that does not trivialize the data or findings. The goal is to inform citizens about the availability of the data or information. Media coverage is desirable because it enlarges the audience for the message and will increase knowledge and stimulate debate among the broader public.

Confidentiality: The NSO must protect the confidentiality of individual respondents, whether persons or businesses, for all data collected. The organization should not release any information that identifies an individual or group without prior consent. Nor must the organization reveal information that undermines the confidentiality of its respondents. This restriction applies to the media the same way it does to any other customer of the organization.

Independence and objectivity: Information should be presented in an objective and impartial manner, and be independent of political control or influence. The Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics⁴ set criteria by which independence and objectivity can be judged.

Timeliness: Information should be current and released as soon as possible after the reference period. The timeliness of information will influence its relevance.

Accessibility and clarity: In principle, all users should have equal access to data as well as to metadata (though see also the discussion on pre-release practices in section 1.4 below). Information should be publicly available in appropriate formats through appropriate delivery channels, and be written in plain and understandable language adapted to the level of understanding of the main user groups. The statistical organization should ensure that the media, like other clients, are able to access and

⁴ See <http://www.unece.org/stats/archive/docs.fp.e.htm>

correctly interpret information on statistical methods, concepts, variables and classifications used in producing statistical results.

Coherence: The use of standard concepts, classifications and target populations promotes coherence and credibility of statistical information, as does the use of common methodology across surveys.

Adherence to these core dissemination principles will enhance the credibility of the NSO and build public trust in the reliability of its information.

1.2 Objectives of dissemination

Increasingly, organizations and individuals recognize the importance of using statistical findings to make evidence-based decisions. For many citizens, the news media provide their only exposure to official statistics. Therefore, it is critical that the statistical organization communicates effectively with the media to achieve three important dissemination objectives:

- To inform the general public about the latest releases of official statistics and reports on the social, economic and general conditions of the country.
- To demonstrate the relevance of statistical information to both the general public and to public and private-sector organizations and businesses to inform decision-making throughout society more effectively.
- To increase public awareness of and support for statistical programmes and services.

The extent to which the NSO can communicate effectively with and through the media has a large impact on how well it can achieve these objectives. Thus, it is in the best interest of the NSO to build a strong working relationship with the media, to make it easy for journalists to report on statistical information in an accurate, timely and informative manner, and to take steps to increase media coverage as a way of reaching the broader society with important statistical information.

1.3 Understanding the media

To communicate effectively with the media, NSOs must understand their media community. This understanding calls for an awareness of the types of media in the country, the needs of these media and their coverage area, so that the NSO can provide customized services that meet their various information needs.

The media use many vehicles to reach their audiences, including newspapers, magazines and other periodicals, as well as radio, television and the Internet. While television and the Internet remain the primary news sources for citizens of industrialized countries, newspapers and other printed media can provide more detailed coverage of statistical information.

The key to building a strong working relationship with the media is to understand who they are and how best to meet their information needs in a manner that is both proactive and user-friendly. This relationship includes an obligation to communicate effectively by providing information that is clear, relevant, objective, easy to

understand and useful. A good measure of success lies in the extent to which different news media use the information releases from the statistical organization, the accuracy with which the information is reported and the trust explicitly or implicitly communicated along with the information.

1.4 Management issues

The management of NSOs should consider a number of issues related to the dissemination of information to the media. It might be preferable to develop policies on many of these issues.

Allocating resources: The NSO should first decide how much it wants to invest in media relations. The statistical organization is only as relevant as the extent to which its information is known and used across society, so investing in media relations is fundamentally important to the success of the statistical organization.

Pre-release of data: The NSO may wish to develop a policy concerning the electronic pre-release of statistical data to the media under embargo (see chapter 5). This system provides an opportunity for journalists to digest the information at dispersed locations and build their storyline before the data are officially released to the public. However, a pre-release also places the integrity of the NSO at risk if the embargo is not honoured and creates a potential risk of inequitable access to information.

An alternative to the embargo system is the media lock-up. Under this system, members of the media are physically "confined" to a media room for a certain period of time to give them an advanced look at the news releases and let them prepare their stories for transmission precisely at release time. While the lock-up reduces the risk of unauthorized pre-release, accessibility is limited to journalists working near the NSO.

Not all statistical organizations pre-release their data. Some organizations, either for logistical, security, or other reasons, release their data to everyone at the same time. A media advisory notice sent to the media in advance of the release could put reporters on the alert.

Media monitoring and response to erroneous statements: The NSO should consider establishing a system to monitor the news media that serve them regularly. A fundamental step in this monitoring is to measure how extensively the media cover the releases of statistical information and how accurately the information is reported.

In instances where journalists misinterpret or erroneously report the data, the NSO can request a correction in the media, either informally or formally. This process of monitoring and correcting ensures that the public is not misled by the erroneous report, and protects the NSO's reputation for accuracy and reliability.

Media relations and official spokespersons: Members of the media frequently call the NSO seeking information to help them prepare their articles. NSOs may wish to prepare a set of policies and procedures concerning media requests for interviews, providing comments on programme issues and data interpretation. The NSO can provide a list of media spokespersons or designated experts on topical subjects who are directly accessible to journalists, particularly when new statistical information is released.

While collaboration between subject-matter experts and journalists can result in enhanced media coverage, difficulties can arise when statistical experts deal with journalists, who are in most cases generalists. To ensure standard messages for media consumption that do not contain confusing information or unnecessary detail, it is important that the spokespersons receive media training. This training should also cover the policy of the organisation on equal treatment of users and the principles of statistical independence.

Fees and charges for products and services: In most cases, NSOs provide all but very specialized statistical information free of charge. When fees are necessary, however, recognition of the special role of the media as gatekeepers to the public, coupled with the diminishing marginal cost of Internet dissemination, argues for exempting the media from those fees in the interest of broader dissemination of statistical results.

Government authorities: The pre-release of statistical data to government authorities may give rise, justifiably or not, to media allegations of censorship, tampering with or suppression of data. This can undermine public trust in the objectivity of the data released by the NSO. The pre-release of data to government authorities should be carefully managed with a clear policy detailing how pre-release of data is to be handled.

2. Organizational aspects

2.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the organizational aspects of statistical cooperation with the news media: the structures and staffing that should be in place to optimize a statistical organization's communication and cooperation with the media. This organizational perspective is distinguished from two other perspectives: the managerial or policy perspective and the operational perspective.

The managerial or policy perspective is about strategic decisions, usually made by general management or political authorities, regarding the broader orientations of communication policy and relationships with the media. These aspects have been discussed in chapter 1.

The operational perspective addresses the concrete procedures that are developed and implemented in order to communicate on a day-to-day basis. Operational aspects are discussed in later chapters.

Chapter 2, therefore, is not about why some things should be done, but about creating the structures and instruments that make it possible to do them. Because some topics may be considered not only from an organizational point-of-view but also from a policy or an operational one, they are also addressed in other chapters.

Recent technological changes have had a significant impact on the way statistical organizations communicate with the media. In this era of instantaneous, interactive communication, expectations have been raised. The media are demanding more information, more rapidly. At the same time, monitoring the media and how they use the statistical information has become more important—and more challenging—for statistical organizations.

In the area of cooperating with the media, it sometimes makes sense to outsource or subcontract a specific job to someone who has the necessary expertise or who can do it in a more cost-effective manner. This topic will be addressed later in this chapter. But outsourcing, of course, does not mean that the work can be handed out and then forgotten. Outsourced jobs have to be closely watched before, during and after their execution.

2.2 Gearing the organization for "outgoing" media work

Most of a statistical organization's media coverage will likely be the result of the organization's "outgoing" media work—that is, its proactive efforts to package and distribute statistical data in a way that is appealing, understandable and useful to the media. This dissemination of useful information should be a primary aim of any statistical organization's media strategy.

A precondition for efficient media work is a professional communication unit in the organization. Having a centralized unit by no means implies that all the work should be done by that group, but it implies that the communication unit should have the central

responsibility for planning, developing and controlling the quality, timing, and priority of the outgoing media work.

The communication unit should include staff with an academic background in journalism and communication. It is advisable to employ at least some staff with direct experience working in the media, as these individuals will have first-hand knowledge of the way journalists think and work. To maintain and further develop competencies in this area, staff members should cultivate close ties to the media world not only by regularly handling incoming media inquiries, but ideally also through regular outreach and interaction with the media. These relationships could be developed through such activities as membership and involvement in professional media organizations, periodic informal conversations with reporters, and through study visits to real-time newsrooms.

Even if you have communications staff with skill and experience in media work, statistical staff throughout the organization still need at least some basic knowledge and training in media relations. This knowledge can be achieved in different ways. One good practice is to take new staff through an introductory course on working with the media (see chapter 7), particularly if they are going to write about statistics for the media or answer questions from journalists. This training could be an internal course, but you could also use instructors from the "real" media world. More seasoned staff could also benefit from refresher courses in media relations, and senior management should be thoroughly trained in interviewing techniques.

Most statistical material developed for the media should be produced in close cooperation between subject-matter and communication specialists. It is necessary that management actively supports this cooperation, stressing the importance of both statistical and communication skills in the process. Otherwise the communication unit—being a relatively small part of the organization—will have difficulty in getting its message across.

Draft news releases on new statistics could be written both by subject-matter and communication experts, but should conclude with a dialogue between both units. The communications team may be more skilled in writing in plain language and pulling out the important points for the user. If the statistics in question are not produced with the user in mind, the results risk becoming dull, too long and detailed, and possibly even irrelevant. Rewriting a news release afterwards is time-consuming and unnecessary work.

One important way of keeping the statistical staff attentive to media needs is to collect and disseminate feedback on the performance of "their" statistics in the media. Did the news release or other publication get any attention—and how much? What angle—if any—did the media choose compared to the angle chosen by the subject-matter division? Read more in chapter 6 on media monitoring.

Some of a statistical organization's initiatives may necessitate media campaigns of a size that requires careful advanced planning and additional skill, expertise or staff resources that are not readily available within the organization. In such cases, the organization may consider outsourcing work to a communications or public relations agency.

Outsourcing communication work may be particularly beneficial for undertakings such as a census, where active support in the media can make a big difference to the outcome. Internally, the organization should set up cross-departmental working groups at an early stage to plan and effectively execute a comprehensive outreach campaign and to provide clear guidance to any outside consultants. The organization must also have staff dedicated to facilitating the relationship between the outside contractor and internal personnel, monitoring performance and maintaining tight control of budgets and plans. Ideally, the contractor should be a partner in the initiative, essentially functioning as an extension of the staff, enabling the organization to do more, and be more effective than it could be on its own.

2.3 Gearing the organization for handling "incoming" media enquiries

It is in the interest of both the media and the statistical organization that the media be able to access statistical data themselves. Otherwise, the organization will spend too much time serving the media, and the media will spend too much time trying to contact the statistical organization, in particular outside office hours.

The basic question within this context is: What "statistical needs" do the media have? Among the most frequent are:

- Finding out whether data are (or are not) available.
- Finding out when new data will be published.
- Finding news releases on published data.
- Finding other relevant publications, summaries, written comments, etc.
- Finding "raw" data in output databases.
- Obtaining metadata.
- Getting confirmation that data have been correctly interpreted.
- Obtaining a quote for the organization for their story.
- Finding a spokesperson.

Most, if not all, of these needs should be addressed on an organization's website, but the organization must be prepared to respond to e-mail, mail and telephone requests as well. The best practice is to set up a specific "press room" as part of your website, providing the services and information required by the media, as well as a list of persons to contact in and outside office hours (see chapters 4 and 5).

An advance release calendar on your website is a necessity for the media, as well as for the credibility of your organization. The release calendar could extend as far as one year ahead, but the next three months are the most important to the media. All statistical releases should be listed on the release calendar, but generally the most important to the media are the short-term economic indicators. It is vitally important to your organization's credibility that you adhere to announced release dates, and clearly explain the reason if it is necessary to make an exception and deviate from a pre-published date.

All your news releases and all your publications should be available to the media for free, preferably on your website. If this is not possible, provide contact details for ordering the publications in paper or web format.

A user-friendly database with all or most of your output data is of great benefit to the media. When reporters call with statistical requests, you should make a habit of guiding them to and through this database. Over time, they will learn to help themselves—even outside your normal office hours—and to locate useful data above and beyond what they were originally looking for.

Your news releases and other publications should contain all the metadata necessary for the media to understand the content. More detailed metadata should be made available from links in the data releases. It should be possible, nonetheless, for the journalists to get in contact with staff in the subject-matter division who are able to explain and clarify the data and the metadata.

As a general rule, journalists prefer to talk to the staff members directly responsible for the statistics in question. Hence, one best practice today is to provide contact data—e-mail and phone—of these persons in all news releases, database tables, etc. It may sometimes be preferable, however, to list a contact within the communications unit who can provide the media with basic information and screen any media requests. This will ensure that they are routed to the proper subject-matter expert and that the expert has the necessary information at hand to address the reporter's specific questions.

An alternative could be to have a call centre that handles incoming phone, e-mail and mail enquiries—both from the media and from other data users. But with a call centre it may be difficult to ensure that staff have sufficient hands-on experience with individual statistics. And often these staff members will have to check with the subject-matter division and call back instead of answering immediately.

A precondition for letting the subject-matter divisions handle incoming media calls is that they are educated to the task through sufficient media relations training (see chapter 7). Such training should prepare them to handle routine enquiries and to know when to pass more difficult or sensitive questions on to formal spokespersons or superiors.

2.4 Putting the results of media work back into the organization

Systematic media monitoring is a necessity for statistical organizations acting in a rapidly changing environment. We will be looking at the tools and methods for this in chapter 6, but mention a few organizational aspects here.

First, an organization must be prepared to allocate money and resources for this task. Media monitoring is a job that lends itself well to outsourcing. Most countries today have professional media monitoring services that can do the job much faster and cheaper than you could yourself. Remember, media monitoring today is a 24/7 task that requires staff around the clock to do the job properly. Some governments have set up a joint monitoring system for all government agencies but, even then, some of the work is often subcontracted.

One purpose of media monitoring is to be able to react to problems such as errors or misinterpretations in your media coverage. As monitoring can be costly, you have to balance your need for a fast reaction against the costs. But remember that a fast reaction saves you resources in the long run by immediately stopping the spread of errors or misinterpretations.

The responsibility for reacting to problems in the media has to be clearly assigned within the organization, most naturally to the communication unit. The communication unit, of course, has to rely on the subject-matter experts to identify and address errors and misinterpretations. Hence, good internal communication channels must be in place. There must also be internal channels to inform the organization when and how the problems have been resolved. Such information about recent media coverage could be communicated in a regular overview report, a staff e-mail, or the employee newsletter.

The topics of negative press coverage and how to handle a real media crisis are treated in-depth in chapter 8. Internally, the division of responsibility should be different when dealing with the different levels of media mishaps, from honest mistakes to real antagonism or a hidden agenda. Routine problems should be handled by the communication division with subsequent reporting back to the management. More serious problems must involve top management and maybe even politicians.

3. Emerging technologies for communicating with the media

3.1 From radio, television, and magazine news to social media and crowdsourcing

Today, we live in a world of converging media where all modes of communication and information are continually changing the way mass media and consumers—print producers and readers, radio broadcasters and listeners, TV broadcasters and viewers, social media channels, and computer applications and users of applications—create, consume, learn about, and interact with each other and information resources.

Over the last decade, effective communication has shifted from top-down to bottom-up. That is, listeners, viewers and readers of the former traditional media are now choosing how, where, at what time, and in what amounts they wish to consume information.

With the spread of the Internet and mobile communications, people now have the means to create and distribute their own messages or "viralize" (redistribute on-line) messages from others. Today, people are more likely to trust themselves, their families, and their communities for information than traditional news outlets.

People also are finding it hard to keep up with the pandemic of information that reaches them through a multitude of sources. It's no longer a case of staying up for your local evening news to watch the segment you are most interested in. People multitask at all hours—watching TV, listening to music or podcasts, doing homework while texting on their phones, reading their e-mail or posts on Facebook or some other networking channel.

Today, people are picking and choosing the types and kinds of information that they want to receive. They are subscribing to blogs rather than newspapers, browsing and filtering YouTube videos rather than reading magazines, or reading RSS feeds that they have subscribed to, to stay abreast of the world's happenings and their favourite pastimes and interests. Research shows that traditional journalism is shifting from "news round the clock" to "as it happens news." This change is largely the result of the proliferation of social media. In fact, the New York Times now has a "social media editor" to oversee their social media strategy. Renowned journalism schools have added social media to their requirements. And, many statistical organizations are exploring and creating social media channels and training staff to communicate in this new area.

3.2 What are social media?

Today's world is about do-it-yourself information and community-based communications and collaboration. Web 2.0 is a category of Internet tools and technologies created around the idea that people who consume media, access the Internet, and use the web no longer passively and absorb everything that is available. Social media are changing the way people communicate and connect effectively with

others online. Social media tools allow users to get involved, to create, to share their own content, and to design their own user experiences.

Web 2.0's dynamic social media tools, as compared to Web 1.0's static content pages, have been woven into the very fabric of the way content is consumed and websites operate. Well-developed social media tools can help the media more easily access, understand, and use data to complete their work.

Social media applications have quickly become part of the Internet mainstream. As individuals become increasingly accustomed to the interactive experiences of using social media in their personal and professional lives, they come to expect the ability to define their own web experience in all of their Internet activities. Measured against that expectation, users' satisfaction with traditional, static websites will most certainly decline. There is a growing expectation for statistical organizations to provide delivery options and customization that a website cannot provide on its own.

Social media tools for communication are widely used by businesses, governments, and individuals alike. The tools include:

- Interactive web journals or blogs (WordPress, Blogger, LiveJournal)
- Micro-blogs (Twitter, Tumblr, Blauk)
- Audio podcasts (iTunes, Podanza, Podcast)
- Images and photos (Flickr, Imgur, Panoramio)
- Videos (YouTube, Vimeo, Google Videos)
- Professional and personal networking sites for information sharing (Facebook⁵, MySpace, LinkedIn)
- Wikis (collaborative authoring, i.e., Wikipedia).

Use of social media in the workplace has been especially beneficial in fostering increased collaboration. Various tools, including wikis, mashups and social bookmarking / tagging, applications have allowed users, both within and outside the workplace, to interact, pool resources and share expertise in new and dynamic ways.

"Mashups" combine data from numerous sources and present them in user-customizable interfaces. They have numerous uses, but are most frequently seen on Internet news websites, where data about events are overlaid on interactive map backgrounds. Statistical organizations must capitalize on these intensely popular social network media and technologies to work most effectively with the public and the media.

3.3 Opportunity and demand for use of social media

As a strategic asset, the Internet can help NSOs foster better communication with and interest from the media and the public about their programmes. By listening to what the media need, organizations can provide better media services and media offerings that focus on data users' most pressing demands for information.

⁵ Facebook currently has more than 500 million active users, over half of whom access their account at least once daily.

Deciding how to engage in a chaotic, social media-driven environment has become a hot topic. The challenge that faces NSOs is the pressure to proceed swiftly but cautiously into the realm of social media. An equally serious motivation is that organizations want to preserve trust and credibility with the public and the media.

While internal communication tools have certainly proven to be useful within the workplace, social media have excelled at facilitating increased external communication and information sharing. For example, there are currently 45 active blogs published by U.S. Federal agencies. The diversity of subjects covered by these blogs is testament to the power of the technology to provide a quick and easy way to disseminate information to targeted individuals, while providing simple mechanisms for simultaneously soliciting those individuals' comments and questions. Similarly, micro-blogs, like Twitter, have gained enormous popularity as mechanisms for publishing quick status updates, facts and commentary.

3.4 Balancing accuracy and quick access

NSOs must establish and maintain high credibility. Their information must be reliable and trustworthy. They must adhere to their published calendars for releases. They must ensure consistent messaging among spokespersons, staff, and information posted to blogs, wikis, RSS⁶ feeds, etc. A high level of credibility will encourage journalists to use and even seek out information from the statistical organization.

The need to balance privacy, confidentiality and security creates an environment that can be at odds with the agile Web 2.0. Organizations must weigh their approaches of proceeding slowly and cautiously against the benefits of openness, timeliness and transparency when communicating with media, users, and advocates.

3.5 Not your father's newspaper: integrating social media with broadcast and print

The traditional way government organizations communicated with the media was through news or press releases or at special events such as news conferences. Reporters were handed printed statements and they would publish their articles from these materials within a day or two. Public information officers typically wrote these one-page articles with headlines to grab the attention of journalists and to fit into their readership's interests. The articles were presented in friendly language so that media and the public could easily understand them. Having ready-made articles made it easier for journalists to extract interesting and newsworthy information in a format that required little effort on their part.

In our era of electronic communication and social media, statistical organizations have a great deal to gain by reaching out to the media through a variety of channels.

Communicators in the media and statistical organizations are being forced to go where their consumers gather to get their messages to the people—this is the new bottom-up vs. top-down communications model. Consumers are "crowdsourcing"—looking to like-minded consumers who use social networking channels like Facebook, Twitter,

⁶ Really Simple Syndication – see the next page for more details.

Blogspots, YouTube, etc., to respond, react, share and provide feedback. As the model shifts from newspaper to blog, some considerations include:

- Outreach using social media requires strategic planning and full integration with marketing, communications, public and media relations, and preparing editorial calendars and promotional campaigns.
- Adding social media to this traditional mix requires research into social media activities, as well as successfully measured programmes and best practices.
- A strong partnership between information technology and communications areas helps define technological needs and communications requirements. This relationship ensures that online Web experiences will best engage participants within the social media culture and appropriately exploit new tools, technologies, and identify staff expertise requirements. Depending on your organization's level of commitment to social networking, you may want to include specialists and specialties like: advertising; public relations; partnership management; online, earned, and paid media; as well as experts in multicultural audiences, metrics, measurement and consumer research.
- Social media skills are especially important for public relations and media jobs. You cannot simply assign duties of social media to existing staff. Training, support, and planning are necessary here.
- Blogs require plain language, conversational writers, messaging approval processes, and fully trained and dedicated staff to adequately monitor and appropriately respond to comments.
- Consistent messaging across media must be monitored.
- Editorial and release calendars must be established and maintained.

In addition to the social media already mentioned, other channels include:

- **Syndication/RSS Feeds:** Syndication enables you to disseminate new information to the media without requiring reporters to visit your web page and without cluttering their in-boxes with e-mail updates. The latest news and information can be summarized in a standard XML format, called a "feed" or a "channel," which can be read from any Internet-connected device. Media subscribe to online content that interests them, in their preferred format and on their own schedule. The most common feed format is RSS, which means "Rich Site Summary" or "Really Simple Syndication."
- **WAP (Wireless Application Protocol):** Wireless Application Protocol empowers mobile users with wireless devices, including mobile phones, pagers and personal digital assistants (PDAs), to access information easily. Some statistical organizations use WAP to disseminate key economic indicators such as the Consumer Price Index, gross domestic product, retail sales index and unemployment rate.
- **SMS (Short Message Service):** Short Message Service allows users to send and receive text messages to and from mobile telephones. Some journalists at business newspapers have enquired about receiving key economic indicators by SMS to their cellular phone. However, so far no statistical organizations are disseminating facts and figures in this way.

- **Audio streaming/podcasting:** Audio news releases, interviews, commentary and public service announcements can be recorded in MP3 format and streamed from a website and/or distributed via podcast. The added advantage of podcasting is that it is a form of syndication (see above) and enables reporters and others to subscribe to and download to broadcasts automatically.
- **Video sharing:** YouTube has become the most popular video-sharing site and can be used to broadcast video news releases (VNRs), public service announcements, special event videos and other types of video productions.

3.6 Organizational hoops and hurdles

NSOs may come up against legal, cultural and/or technological barriers when attempting to reach out fully to the media and public and to collaborate on programmes via social media tools.

First and foremost, the terms of service from private sector vendors for many social media platforms are not appropriate for governmental organizations. As the need for these governmental organizations to maintain privacy, confidentiality, and the public's trust is of utmost importance, entering the sometimes unsure, chaotic world of social media requires a cultural change. Carefully thought-out policies and procedures must be created to provide rules of engagement and to maintain organizational needs and requirements.

Committing to and engaging in social media requires:

- Developing and presenting the business case.
- Getting commitment from senior management (partnering with senior management affords a wider perspective on organization operations and goals, and also of unidentified risks, ranging from perception to exposure or disclosure).
- Establishing a working group of internal stakeholders (the group of program areas who will benefit from increased media exposure can outline and coordinate required procedures and guidelines to achieve a corporate voice and to establish pilot projects for approval from senior management).
- Conducting pilot projects to measure success, risks, and resource requirements.
- Partnering Information Technology with the Communications department on matters of infrastructure and security has proven to be successful in achieving social media goals through a close, collaborative, web management relationship that aligns technology and branding.

3.7 Challenges of metrics and measurements

Many organizations are monitoring various types and forums of social networking to weigh the importance and use of social networking concepts on their websites for their targeted audiences and within the social media strata. While there is no exact science

to measure success in social media, a basic evaluation step is to benchmark your current level of activity. The following are some ways you can measure success:

- **Blogs:** Software applications can create reports to monitor and compare daily activities and messaging for statistical outputs to determine whether you need to adapt those outputs or the way they are communicated, and to learn how many bloggers quoted your articles or whether third-party spokespeople carried your messages to others.
- **YouTube:** Tracking and comparing posted videos from dates posted, dates first viewed and then regularly scheduled metrics of cumulative views through each video's life cycle. Comparing subjects, approaches, audiences, viewers' comments, ratings and favourites to quantify the value of the initiative helps you discover hot topics, needs and interests. These data provide guidance on how best to communicate with viewers.
- **Facebook:** Facebook provides a tool that allows you to keep a sum of total fans including new, removed, subscribed, unsubscribed and re-subscribed fans. You can also track the quality of posts; interactions per post and total interactions; viewers' likes, comments, wall posts, discussion posts; page views, unique page views; audio plays; video plays and photo views.
- **Twitter:** It includes tools that allow you to examine your impact via tweeting. TweetStats.com and TweetReach.com can show who is tweeting and re-tweeting your messages, the number of tweets you get during a day, and the times of day that people tweet. You can see the average number of replies to your tweets and whether tweets and re-tweets are generating calls to action.

In a further effort to determine the success of social media, some organizations have created enterprise dashboards to share metrics among programme managers and corporate leadership. For example, the U.S. Census Bureau's 2010 Census Integrated Communications Campaign used dashboard metrics to proactively refocus messaging, timing, calls to actions, and target topics and audiences.

Dashboard metrics can include comparisons of current "buzz" levels of activity, point to the data peaks and valleys in social media trendlines and look at social media activity using word clouds and rivers of news around emerging hot topics to learn specifically what might be happening in the world of social networking. Dashboard metrics can also help you compare current research findings like nightly polls around long-standing issues, perceptions and opinions of organizational programmes.

3.8 Summary

We need to proactively reach out to and disseminate easy-to-use, meaningful, topical and valued data to the media because their reach across multiple channels and audiences far exceeds that of most NSOs. Organizations should seek to learn more about and to effectively use twenty-first century communications channels, data visualizations and social media tools to engage and expand our audiences for statistics. By doing so, we can continue to serve as leading sources of quality data about the world's people and economies. In turn, journalists will be more likely to create meaningful and more accurate stories from the data we collect.

4. Using the web to communicate with the media

4.1 Communicating with expanded audiences and handling media requests

Expanded audience for statistical data

Prior to the Internet, most statistical organizations viewed their users as a small, elite group of experts with a high degree of interest in and knowledge of the data. In contrast, with the Internet, the customer base for statistical information has expanded so that anyone with a computer and an Internet connection can access this information online.

However, as a result of this widened availability of the data, many new users are not statistically literate or as familiar with the subject matter and technical language as the original customer base. This diverse range of users is forcing statistical organizations to be more user-focused rather than product-focused.

New role for the media in disseminating statistics

Now that the public can access information directly on the web, the role of the media in disseminating data has changed, although it is still important. Media professionals now play the intermediary role of transforming raw data into knowledge.

As well as interpreting data and writing articles in language the public can understand, journalists can point the public back to the original sources of the data if more detail is needed. Before the public had direct access to the data, users had to contact statistical organizations directly for data and interpretation. Such mediated access ensured that appropriate metadata, including the appropriate methodology, limitations, explanations and definitions, would accompany the statistics.

With the web, self-service access allows users to browse on their own, making the need for adequate, retrievable and understandable metadata even more important. Journalists and other users continue to contact the statistical organizations for help in interpreting the data.

The products are changing

The primary method for statistical organizations to provide data used to be printed publications. Some also provided data on tape and CD-ROM. Now the products can be electronic versions of paper documents, electronic-only documents, tables, databases, spreadsheets, and so on. The data may also be accessed and, in some cases, manipulated using a variety of web-based applications developed specifically for that purpose.

The focus is shifting from just providing numbers to providing words and text to explain the numbers, and more context and analysis of the numbers. Data are no longer enough: users want information. Some of the new products are, in fact, services, including web help and searchable databases.

Writing specifically for the web, rather than for print documents, and writing for all audiences, rather than just the subject matter experts, is becoming increasingly important in communicating with users. This style of writing requires different skills and approaches from writing for paper. Most analysts would much prefer to write a 20-page paper with all kinds of details than a two-page summary in plain language.

Some organizations charge for their products

For some statistical organizations, cost recovery is still important. When all data were available only in publications, or through special requests, it was far easier to know what to sell and how to set the price.

With the web, the pressure has been to provide more and more data free of charge, striking a balance between generating revenue and the public's right to information. Some organizations provide limited access to databases to paying subscribers. They perform special tabulations or do consulting on a fee basis, or they provide special services to paying subscribers. While news releases are generally available free of charge, the degree that web information is available without charge to journalists varies.

Getting credit for your data

Some international organizations have investigated methods of sharing data electronically, allowing others to display data directly from many statistical organizations. While this type of aggregation and access allows more people to find and compare data, one key consideration is the loss of the connection to the original data source.

Related issues involved in data sharing include:

- Presentation of the data is no longer controlled by the originating organization;
- Policies for attribution must be followed to ensure proper credit for the data, and to ensure accurate secondary sourcing.

Provision of metadata is even more critical because the user at that point will not be on the site of the original data provider, which might have had links to metadata. Metadata, the data about the data, are particularly important on the web.

Statistical organizations need to consider two types of metadata:

- Discovery metadata, which help users find what they are looking for.
- Interpretative metadata, which help users understand what they have found.

Discovery metadata might include indexes, site maps, and lists of terms (A to Z, glossaries). Frequently, technical terms and jargon are impediments to users who are unfamiliar with the subject. Interpretative metadata might include links to descriptive information, footnotes, and metadata repositories as companions to online databases.

4.2 Improving your website to best serve the media

Write in plain language

We want our users to understand our information. Our content must therefore be geared to people who are interested in statistics but who aren't statisticians, scientists, or subject-matter experts. Content written for the web, and employing the principles of plain language, includes:

- Language that people understand, not jargon and acronyms and technical terms.
- Short sentences and short paragraphs. The old adage that a paragraph should be 3-5 sentences is no longer true on the web. Forget the ancient guidance from your literature teacher!
- Headings and subheadings to help readers scan the content.
- Bulleted lists and bolded points to help readers see the main ideas.
- Active voice and direct sentences without lots of qualifiers and side thoughts.
- Consistent style so readers aren't distracted. Having a good web editorial style guide⁷ helps reinforce your organization's writing policies and standards.
- Rounded numbers whenever possible. Readers don't need three decimal points to get the message.
- Access to definitions in a glossary and clear footnotes to explain more difficult concepts.

Use reverse pyramid writing

To communicate with journalists, statisticians need to write their stories the way journalists do. Journalists use the "inverted pyramid" style, where you write your conclusions at the top of the story and follow with secondary points.

Don't make the readers dig for the main story; they may never find it. A simple reminder is "Lead with the Lead." The phrase is to remind you not to lead with a long introduction or background statement or methodological assumptions. It is fine to revisit your original conclusion at the end of the story, if appropriate, but don't save the best information or conclusions for last.

Writing and organizing for the web vs. paper

Traditionally, statisticians wrote papers in a standard style, including some or all of the following: title page, table of contents, executive summary, introduction, and then the chapters. These sections would help the reader know what was included in the report and what each chapter is about (similar to a site map or jump links within reports now used on the web). This paper-oriented format does not work well on the web. Readers want to see links to topics, maybe a summary graphic, and key points right on the first page.

⁷ For example, the United States Energy Information Administration's Web Editorial Style Guide: <http://tonto.eia.doe.gov/abouteia/pdfs/EIAWebEditorialStyleGuide.pdf>.

Writing for the web does not mean posting a paper document on your website. It means rethinking how to structure and present the information so users can navigate through the report. Remember that readers cannot "thumb through" a website like they could a paper volume, so you need to give them a way to see the content up front.

Usability testing

How do you know if users are finding what they need on your site? Are they frustrated? Confused? The best way to find out is to actually watch users work on your site.

Feedback from users can be collected from usability tests, customer surveys, focus groups, and in-house helpline staff. A United Nations Economic Commission for Europe survey of websites from NSOs and international organizations found that most were aimed at a group of professional users and were designed accordingly. Very few had features especially designed for the casual or first-time user.

Good navigation (sections, links, resource ideas for the media)

Many NSOs are turning to database delivery of information to improve the usefulness of the information, to increase the timely availability of data and to save money. With the increased reliance on databases, the interfaces are critical to the success of the site. Users who are unsuccessful in using the databases may have to resort to contacting the NSOs directly, at a much greater cost.

If web development is distributed across the organization, the result can be inconsistent presentation and unconnected navigation, and even competing data access applications. Implementation of style standards assures consistent "look and feel" and avoids problems with presentation.

Some statistical organizations are using content management systems with fixed templates for efficient work and for the purpose of establishing corporate identity. Combining the standards with a web audit helps erase the differences by identifying what authors need to change.

Statistical organizations should consider strategies to ensure that people will find their site, including using keywords in the content of their web pages, encouraging links from other sites, improving marketing and paying search engines to ensure high rankings. Brochures and other handouts can be used to expand awareness of the site.

Data revisions and notifications

The ease and speed with which the content of websites can be revised has led to an increase in the number of revisions. A printed erratum is no longer needed to signal a change. Files can be updated and reloaded without the user ever knowing that a change has been made. While this is a great advantage to the statistical organization, the journalist may unknowingly present pre-revision data. A system of notification or labelling is therefore critical in the new web-based information environment.

Some statistical organizations require all material to be dated to allow for version control. Others indicate clearly that a revision has been made, and include the date and nature of the revision. Some organizations post their revision policies on the web.

As a statistical organization, you should have a policy concerning who can authorize changes, how they will be noted on the web, and what, if any, additional efforts will be made to notify users of the change. You should also consider under what circumstances a news release should be issued to signal a revision. News pages should show revisions to ensure that the news release data match any later revisions.

Some organizations have implemented subscription notification systems to advise users when there is an update to a particular set of statistics or data products.

Collecting feedback on your website from the media.

Statistical organizations want to know who is using their website and what is being accessed. Web logs record every transaction on the web server and are a rich source of information about activity on the site. Page views, file downloads and user sessions all measure user traffic.

Some sites may use registration to determine customer and media information. Web trends are useful in evaluating the architectural structure but only indirectly reflect on the usefulness of the content. Web logs cannot differentiate between journalists and other users.

Creators of websites may also want to know how satisfied users are with the website and what suggestions they have for improving the site. Some statistical organizations provide feedback forms and conduct surveys of web users to collect this information. These surveys can provide useful insights into any problems that may exist.

Other organizations register users to get access to statistic; although this process can drive away those users who do not want to register. Some organizations use commercial ratings and tracking programmes to assess satisfaction with their websites.

Most statistical organizations use feedback to determine what users are interested in and what kinds of information they need. This feedback can determine the type of products that are prepared and the mode of dissemination. Some organizations have created short presentations of information on topics of interest that are included on their home page.

Many use questions posed by users and answers provided by staff to create content. This dynamic application produces an FAQ ("frequently asked questions") section. Analysing the types of questions that people pose via telephone and e-mail can also identify areas for improvement.

4.3 Online Press Room

More and more NSOs are including a special section on their websites that is tailored primarily to the needs of the press. Journalists have come to expect to find media information in one place on an organization's website. This area should be given a

name that is easily recognizable to journalists such as Press, Press Room, Press Centre, or Newsroom and should be located just one click away from the homepage. Avoid calling this press section "News" because that label can be confused with new any other stories generated by your organization.

Suggested content for a Press Room

Your Press Room section must offer a simple way to contact the press relations department. Include at least one press relations contact name, phone number and e-mail address. This should ideally be the name and address of a person, not a generic inbox such as publicaffairs@statisticalagency.gov. Why? Journalists on deadline will not take a chance on sending a message to a generic e-mail address because they fear they will not receive a timely response.

When listing multiple press contacts, help people select the best contact by indicating the person's speciality or other differentiating characteristic. You should also let journalists know when they can expect to receive a response to their e-mails.

Include links to all relevant organizational information, such as:

- Organizational overview and background materials describing what you do and why: mission statement, fact sheets, history, and basics such as the number of employees and year established.
- Budget and other financial information.
- Titles, biographies and high-resolution photos of the senior management team.
- Key speeches, presentations or testimony (including video or audio of important speeches given by high-level executives if available).
- Organization or director's blog.
- The organization's strategic plan and annual report.
- Calendar or listing of forthcoming statistical releases or other key dates, to show what's on the horizon.
- Embargo policy.
- A directory of subject-matter experts so that journalists can contact the expert directly listing names, title, and a brief sentence or paragraph describing the specialization—e.g. earnings, population, etc..
- Publications listing or index.
- Frequently Asked Questions about the organization, its work, or on specific topics of interest.
- High-resolution, downloadable photos and graphics from your organization that are in the public domain and that you know are likely to be requested by the press and external audiences.
- Stock video clips (sometimes called b-roll), video news releases and radio sound-bites.

Making this information available in a single place on your site helps journalists build the foundation for their stories. Provide print-friendly versions of content people would

normally want to reference offline, such as annual reports, press releases, speeches, and executive bios.

How to feature press releases

Your press section should show the most recent press and news releases on its main page and include a link to a designated page or section for press releases. Label this area "Press Releases." Lists the most recent ones first. Archive all past press releases and make them sortable by date, with a separate listing by subject. Make it simple to search press releases and archived press releases independent of the rest of the site. All press releases (new and archived) should feature complete press contact information and dates. Finally, providing an e-mail distribution list and RSS feed for press releases has become a well-established feature.

Ideas to help the media

Highlight thought-provoking facts that journalists can use in their stories. Creative content and interesting facts pique journalists' interest reflect well on your organization. Journalists are usually under rigid deadlines, so it is helpful to provide them with electronic links from the press section or the press releases to related information.

Journalists often regard articles from independent newspapers and magazines as being more credible than an organization's own press releases and promotional materials. Many organizations are therefore now providing links to or information on what other media outlets have said about the organization.

It may be useful for your organization to create an online "Journalists' Guide to Using Official Statistics." If you have any complex recurring themes, such as economic recovery, you might consider asking someone (like a senior statistical economist) to write an article for the website press room explaining these issues.

If you are working with colleagues who can write well, get them to describe how their organization functions, what they do, how they do it, and why. This bridges the journalistic-corporate gap by getting some positive messages out there (together with some nice photos and good page layout). One idea might be features on "A Day in the Life of [fill in with subject-matter expert position]."

One simple technique that may reap great rewards is to establish and nurture relationships with the journalist(s) who most frequently feature your organization and data. Give the journalist a call when something out of the ordinary is about to be released.

Start building your press room

Talk with friendly journalists in order to understand what they need from you, and to find out how well these needs are being met by the website. Then, build their needs and requirements into your press section. Face-to-face meetings or focus groups with key journalists who frequently cover an organization or a particular dataset are other ways to determine the usefulness of your website.

Some best practice examples include:

- United States Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/News/> and <http://www.ers.usda.gov/News/ERSInTheNews.htm>
- National Center for Health Statistics: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/>
- Australian Bureau of Statistics in the news and in blogs: <http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3310114.nsf/home/news+&+media>
- Office for National Statistics Frequently Asked Questions on Methodology Changes: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_economy/FAO.pdf

Finally, consider discussing your press room concepts and prototypes with the journalists themselves.

But keep in mind that some organizations have chosen other models that could also function well. For example, some make press releases available on their website to make it easier for the general public to access them.

4.4 Issues of changing skills to provide these services

Changing the skill mix to support the web

Statistical organizations need specific skills to support disseminating information on the web and to deal with the media. The shift to more visual data, including maps and animated longitudinal data, requires staff with geographic information systems and data visualization skills.

Changing the skill mix has obvious resource implications for an organization. And shift was not just technical. It was also psychological, requiring employees to be more flexible and to change their outlook from the old way of doing business. It has often been difficult to convince data producers to change their methods and orientation. Staff also had to understand new ways to write electronic news releases, create a press area or press room on the website, and to deal with the media's new access to all kinds of information.

It was originally believed that the web would provide self-service for users, and that telephone and e-mail support would be minimal. In fact, most organizations have been surprised to find that the number of enquiries have in fact increased with the availability of information on the web.

Huge increases in the numbers of users translate into many more questions and comments. Customer service staff are having to be retrained to answer e-mail questions or to provide help on the telephone to the media and other users. Press offices also have to learn new technology and dissemination methods to work with the media.

5. Writing for and releasing information to the media

5.1 Introduction

Statistical organizations cannot sit idly by and wait for the media to contact them with questions and requests. Nor can they simply disseminate raw data and expect the media to tell meaningful and accurate stories about the numbers. Instead, an organization must engage the media by presenting statistical information in a way that is appealing, understandable and useful. The relationship between a statistical organization and its media contacts can be mutually beneficial: providing journalists with valuable content in exchange for a broader audience for statistics.

5.2 Writing a good news release

The news release is the fundamental tool for presenting information to the media. It provides interesting and newsworthy information in a concise, ready-to-use format. Its primary goal is to convince a reporter that you've got a story worth pursuing. Some media outlets—particularly smaller publications and websites—may simply republish news releases. Most will devote time and energy to pursuing a story about the particular information or event.

The statistical organization should ensure that the subject matter of the news release is timely and newsworthy, that the information provided is factual and accurate, and that the release is written in clear and easy-to-understand language.

But even with the best news release, there is no guarantee that it will be picked up by the media. News organizations may have other themes on their agenda or they may decide that the news release is not newsworthy.

Statistical organizations may have different names for a news release: "News Release", "Press Release" or "First Release" are common terms. Shorter releases on metadata, which provide background material, or those announcing an upcoming event may be called a "Media Advisory," "News Bulletin," "Tip Sheet," or "Note to Editors." Finally, to convey more in-depth information to the media, some organizations will issue a "Backgrounder" or "Fact Sheet", generally longer and more detailed than a normal news release.

Regardless of terminology, be consistent in naming your release of new and interesting data; do not use multiple names for essentially the same news content. The media should immediately recognize the label on a package of potential interest to them.

News releases are written for journalists who are usually working under time pressure. As a result, the release should be tailored to their needs. Some guidelines follow.

Contributors – writers and reviewers

Creating and distributing a news release normally involves contributors from different parts of the organization, each with a distinct role in researching, writing, reviewing and validating a news release. The three main roles are:

- **Subject-matter specialists** – Subject-matter experts who analyse data, identify main trends, check for accuracy, and draw conclusions, providing the basic content of a news release.
- **Press Office** - Communications professionals who look at the newsworthiness, language, style and readability of the news release; arrange for translation, if needed; connect to the media and journalists; and transmit the release.
- **Organization leadership** - The hierarchy or senior management of the organization, who validate a release and ensure that it is in line with the mission and strategic objectives of the organization.

The division of tasks between those three main contributors may vary across statistical organizations. In some cases, subject-matter specialists have been trained to write up their own material and are able to create a more or less final news release that the Press Office disseminates to the media. At the other end of the scale, communications professionals from the Press Office may write all releases in a journalistic style, on the basis of information obtained from statisticians.

Generally, best practice is that subject-matter experts and communications professionals collaborate to develop a factual, informative, well-written release, which is then reviewed and approved by the management.

What to write about

Write a release only if you have a story to tell, not because it is the routine thing to do. The story is NOT that you finished a report or have some data, it is what the report has to say or the story the data tell.

Even if you have no new data, consider doing a specific release if a topic is in the public arena, for example the effects of a hurricane on energy production, or something unexpected has happened and you have data pertinent to this occurrence. Releasing for a special date is another possibility; this may be an upcoming conference or high-level meeting, or a “special” day like Labour Day or Valentine's Day.

The news release should add value to the information already available from your organization, or there is no point in issuing one.

Structuring content

Format and layout

Follow established news release format and layout, including succinct information that journalists can easily reprocess and repackage. The more familiar your news release looks and the less effort it takes to convert it into an article, the more likely it is to be published.

KISS: keep it short and simple!

Effective news releases are about one page long, and should never be longer than three pages. Writing too much is the one sure way of condemning a release to the rubbish bin. Write in simple and concise language, at the level of the general public.

Inverted Pyramid and "Cut-Off-Anywhere" principles

The inverted pyramid principle enables a journalist to assess the newsworthiness of a release at a glance. The most important message is at the top, with additional points following in order of decreasing importance. It is "inverted" because conclusions are at the beginning rather than at the end, contrasting with generally accepted academic or scientific writing styles.

The first few sentences should contain few, if any, numbers. The body of the release should describe details of the event or report, arranged in order of their importance, with a constant tie-in to the headline and lead. Statistics are all about change: up, down, new high, new low, first time. Readers want to know what is new, what is different. Make the figures interesting by communicating enough detail to get the key message across without getting lost in it. There is no need to explain in detail how data were collected. Much of what interests statisticians will not necessarily thrill the general public.

Construct your release in such a way that an editor can cut it at any point and still be left with a complete "story", however short: headline, headline + subtitle, headline + subtitle + summary, and so on.

Headline

The headline or title of a release often determines its fate: it may convince a reporter to either keep the release or throw it away, so its composition is an art in itself. It should be catchy and interesting, yet exact, and capture the essence of the story. Headlines are sometimes criticized for being sensationalist or misleading because they don't tell the whole story. However, their purpose is to capture the attention of the reader, nothing more. Explain the details later. A good headline should be one line or two at most. Write it last so you can best identify the most important points you ended up including in the release.

Lead

A release starts with a lead paragraph, like a newspaper article, which captures the reader's attention and, at the same time, conveys the principal message of the data. It should be arresting, while providing a concise summary of the ensuing information. Write a short, easy-to-read paragraph, not a large block of text. Condense the story, presenting only the most interesting aspects. Think of the main message before starting to write; what is the story the data tell?

Accepted journalistic style dictates that the lead be no more than 35 words. While this is not a hard-and-fast rule, it is generally best to keep leads to no more than 2-3 short sentences and 3-4 lines long. When in doubt, break a long paragraph into two smaller paragraphs, and break a long sentence into two shorter sentences.

Some other recommendations for press releases

Jargon-free

The release should be readily understandable to anyone not familiar with the topic. Avoid using jargon and technical terms. Spell out all acronyms. Keep numbers short and easy to grasp: 30 million instead of 29 888 632.

Tables, graphs and maps

If picture is said to be worth a thousand words, so is a well-constructed table, graph or map. Tables are a good way of summarizing results; but graphs and maps can show trends or patterns in a way no text could. But they can also get easily overloaded with information and become too complex to interpret. Keep tables small and simple, avoid too many layers. Limit the messages you want to put in a graph or map, and use graphs only to illustrate a point. Make sure all units of measure—bars, lines, pie slices, table rows and columns—are clearly labelled. Refer to the table or graph at the appropriate place in the text. Make the source data for graphs available so that news organizations can make their own graphs if they wish. Avoid complicated graphs and diagrams as you risk confusing or losing readers unfamiliar with statistics.⁸

Sub-headings and bullets

Use sub-headings when possible to break the text into manageable portions. Sub-headings should be bold-faced but not underlined, as underlined text might be mistaken for a hyperlink in the online version. Use short, bulleted lists rather than long text enumerations, because lists can be scanned much more quickly.

Don't be afraid to use one-sentence paragraphs to emphasize a point.

Source information

Mention your statistical organization as the official source of the data in the lead paragraph, as in: Fact, fact, fact, "as released today by (name of the statistical organization)," or "according to the report released today by the (name of the statistical organization)." If possible, the organization logo should appear in a prominent position on the first page. Getting due credit raises public awareness of the organization, its mission and activities, and may also increase trust and credibility.

Glossary, contact and additional information

Avoid using terms that most people will not know. But if there is no way to avoid using uncommon, technical or statistical terms, explain them at the end (for instance, in a "facts" box), in a clear footnote, or link to a glossary. The news release should identify

⁸ For more information see "Making Data Meaningful Part 2: A Guide to Presenting Statistics".

a contact person, with a phone number and e-mail address to whom the media can turn for additional information. Always include a URL link to the complete report or at least to a website where additional information may be found. Be specific—make sure that the URL goes to the data, not simply to the organization's website.

5.3 Efficient delivery of news releases

Writing a good news release is not a guarantee that it will be published. It must also be delivered efficiently to reporters in a way that maximizes its chances of getting picked up and becoming news.

Timing of news releases. When is the right time?

Statistical organizations should carefully consider the timing of their news releases in order to increase the likelihood that they will be noticed and acted upon.

- Some news releases, especially those dealing with market-sensitive economic information, should be issued as close as possible to the time that the new data are made public. Generally, release dates for key data and reports are announced well in advance.
- If there is some latitude for timing, do not release your news at a moment when you risk having it drowned out by hotter news (if this can be foreseen and avoided). A release in the middle of the summer holidays may get picked up more easily than on the opening day of the Olympic Games, for instance.
- And finally, there are 'opportunistic' releases, riding along with specific dates or events. Make a press release with pertinent data on Labour Day, a national holiday, a high-profile conference or international meeting. Copy-hungry journalists might be grateful for interesting, factual and trustworthy related information and use it.

Apart from timing the date, it also pays to time the hour of your release. If you want to make the evening news or tomorrow's newspaper, you should know how news desks function and what their deadlines are. This way, you can deliver at the time that is optimal for them. If you would like them to elaborate or consult specialists for interviews or video and photo sessions, give them enough time to do so.

Creating and maintaining media lists

To target news releases in a precise manner to the media sources who will be most likely to use the information, you need to have an up-to-date, accurate and detailed list of contacts. Some recommendations:

- Draw upon all possible resources to compile a list: membership lists of professional or specific-interest organizations, yellow pages, web searches, attendance lists at conferences or workshops.
- Complement this with internal lists of contacts that exist in your organization. Do not limit yourself to press or dissemination services: subject specialists probably have interested contacts, for example, journalists who have previously contacted them with questions.

- Make it possible and easy for media, journalists or anyone to register via self-subscription (on a dedicated "contact us" part of your media page or press room), so they are sent all or specific releases. LISTSERV technology allows you to create and manage media lists, but allows recipients to subscribe themselves.
- Segment your list. Not all media and journalists are interested in everything, so try to target and send only what is likely to interest them. Do not forget regional and city media, or special-interest niche or trade publications.

Making releases visible

If you want journalists to pick up your news release, send it directly to them. But it's also important to ensure that reporters can easily locate your news and information even if they are not on your distribution list. To ensure this:

- Create a news room or media section on the home page of your website (see chapter 4). Make sure that it is updated regularly and contains useful material—both news releases and more detailed background information, when appropriate—to make it worthwhile for journalists to bookmark and visit often.
- Make it easy to re-use and re-distribute your information by taking advantage of social media and Web 2.0 technologies, some of which were discussed in chapter 3. Make your information available in XML format via RSS feeds or other syndication methods; and use Twitter to "tweet" about your latest news and to link to the new releases posted on your website.

Pre-releasing information: Embargoes and Lock-ups

Embargoes

Some statistical organizations pre-release information under an embargo. This means that, under clearly defined rules, journalists or other stakeholders get access to the information prior to its public release, on condition they do not disseminate or use it until a specified date and time.

An embargo is useful when the release contains complex information, as it gives journalists more time to digest the release, prepare a story and line up interviews in advance. By making it easier for journalists, chances are increased that complex messages will be covered. This is, however, not a guarantee that journalists will understand and report correctly.

Make sure that the rules of the embargo are clearly spelled out, that journalists or other recipients explicitly agree to comply and that they are aware of the sanctions for non-compliance. The ultimate sanction for releasing information prematurely—and thus violating an embargo—is, of course, the blocking of access to future embargoed material.

Embargoed information may be forwarded via e-mail or made available in a special Internet location outside the organization's firewall. It is wise to limit the number of recipients of embargoed information, as this lessens the likelihood of a leak and makes it easier to identify a violator.

Lock-ups

An alternative to the embargo is providing advance access to information under lock-up conditions: journalists are confined to a secure work area where they can view the information and write their stories, but they cannot transmit them to the outside world until the specified release time.

Lock-ups are used mainly for the release of high-profile or market-sensitive data.

Identifying and training spokespeople in your organization

The spokesperson is an individual designated to speak with the media, on the record, about a particular topic. Depending upon the subject matter, the spokesperson can be a statistician or other subject-matter expert, someone from the communications staff or a senior manager. A news release should name the spokesperson who is available to provide further comment. Journalists may prefer to speak to the statistician or other subject-matter expert who is most familiar with the data, but for a news release with policy or strategy implications, a senior official may be requested. Generally, a member of the communications staff skilled in media relations is best able to serve as the primary point of contact for providing basic information and, if necessary, routing the request to the appropriate subject-matter expert or senior official.

The spokesperson must be available by telephone and e-mail when the information is made public, even if this is outside normal working hours. If the spokesperson or his designee cannot be reached, this may have negative effects on your organization's image and reputation.

All spokespeople and, ideally, all staff members who are likely to come in touch with the media, should undergo media relations training. Particularly for releases on sensitive or potentially inflammatory topics, staff within the information service or customer call centre should be briefed to speak with a single voice and be consistent in the message they bring (media training is addressed in chapter 7).

5.4 News conferences and media briefings

Press conferences can be an effective way to reach the media. They should, however, be used sparingly and only for the delivery of major news. One key factor for a successful live press conference is quality visuals: charts, maps, or other eye-catching graphics; if you can, choose a beautiful or interesting setting. If your announcement does not hold any element of visual interest, a time-efficient alternative might be an audio news conference, where reporters dial in, capture soundbites and ask questions from their own phones. Moreover, using state-of-the-art technologies such as webinars or video teleconferences can be good for your image.

Holding a news conference requires advance planning. Here is what you will need to do:

- Secure a briefing room and/or teleconference lines.
- Invite the media.
- Prepare a press package (including a news release, speaker biographies, copies of charts or other visuals, and other pertinent background information).
- Prepare visual aids (PowerPoint slides or large charts).
- Foresee sufficient staff to perform all tasks required (meet, escort, hand out documentation, etc.) and have IT and technical support on standby in case something goes wrong.
- Plan the event beforehand, including prior rehearsal/media preparation, if necessary (see chapter 7).
- Prepare a list of possible questions & answers, especially on the more difficult and controversial aspects of the release, also covering off-topic issues likely to be raised.
- Arrange for visitors to enter the building and find the briefing room.
- Allot space for camera crews.
- Ensure power for video, lighting, recording devices, etc..
- Reserve microphones or boom microphones so the audience can hear the questions.

5.5 Conclusion

Writing and delivering a press release in a way that makes reporters' life easy will create goodwill and ensure not only that your news is picked up, but also that the tone of voice will be positive. Paying attention to details always projects professionalism.

6. Monitoring and measuring media activities

6.1 Overview

This chapter will discuss various tools for monitoring the media and provide some case studies.

A key part of the mandate of an NSO is to communicate the findings of its statistical and analytical programs to the public. NSOs reach a wide audience through the media. An integral aspect of an organization's media relations section should be monitor and measure media coverage. Statistical organizations are major users of media monitoring services, and for good reason. These programmes are critical to the successful delivery of an organization's mandate.

An effective media monitoring programme can:

- Provide concrete data allowing a statistical organization to assess the effectiveness of its products and programmes, ranging from publications to comprehensive communications strategies. Information gathered from analysing media coverage can be used to measure performance and to help improve these products and programmes.
- Provide data for analysing media coverage for individual news releases, and for identifying opportunities for improvement.
- Detect errors or inaccurate interpretations of statistical information in media articles or newscasts, allowing an organization to respond to them promptly. Responding to errors in media reports is an opportunity to build and strengthen relations with media.
- In times of crisis, monitor media interest in the event and the public's reaction, and use the results to adjust and improve crisis handling (see chapter 8).
- Take account of emerging issues and public concerns about critical organization programmes, such as the census, allowing staff to develop policies and services accordingly.

6.2 Some questions to ask

Communications professionals are under pressure to show return on investment. But managers face other pressures as well, such as relating to budgets.

Here are some questions an organization should consider before deciding on the type of monitoring service it wants to set up.

What media do you need to monitor?

What media are to be monitored? Newspaper articles? Television? Radio? The Internet? Social media such as blogs? Tweets? YouTube? Facebook? Video sharing services?

For most organizations, the core coverage will mean monitoring the news and, for some managers, news might very well be synonymous with printed newspapers. But

today, monitoring has to start with the Internet. Most "traditional" print publications are published on the organization's website much faster than in actual print.

There are also countless blogs, tweets, wikis and other forms of electronic communication whose writers might comment in one way or another on a statistical organization's material. Organizations must decide the extent to which they want to keep track of this cyber material.

Erroneous statements and data errors can quickly become "viral," reaching large numbers of constituents. Web-based tools are available to organizations to help manage large volumes of information. Responding to erroneous information contained in non-conventional media raises unique challenges. One challenge is judging the risk of spreading the misinformation further, and the credibility of the source in determining whether to respond. Another challenge is determining just whom to respond to in a blog or a tweet.

What kind of information do you want to retrieve?

You might like to be notified every time your organization—or one of your publications—is cited or mentioned in the news. Most monitoring services can deliver this level of service.

You might also like to discover whether your figures are used in the news without your being cited. This awareness of data being used by others would constitute a larger challenge to the monitoring service, as it demands an intimate knowledge of the figures and the different contexts in which they may be used.

Sometimes you may have other organizations releasing competing figures in areas in which you are working. Monitoring these competitors—or colleagues—might be of interest too.

And finally, you might like to follow the total discussion and dissemination of all kinds of statistical data in your country. Even if your monitoring service were able to deliver these data, the amount of information would be overwhelming.

What custom monitoring features do you want?

One important feature of any monitoring service is the speed of delivery. Old-fashioned newspaper clippings are slow and cumbersome as they need physical distribution, and often you will find out too late to react to critique or misunderstandings. A good alternative is summaries of articles that some monitoring services are able to deliver by mail or data stream. In most instances you don't need the complete article to judge it.

A web monitoring service may be able to deliver automatic extracts from articles, where your organization or your figures are mentioned. The extract should be long enough to judge the context of your figures and contain a link to the full text.

Some monitoring services deliver only once a day, but the best services provide live monitoring around the clock.

Television and radio monitoring is essential, as in many countries these media are the most important. Monitoring television and radio can be more difficult than monitoring written news however, as television and radio news broadcasts are not often available—and hence searchable—on the Internet. Commercial media monitoring services may offer monitoring of at least the news broadcasts, but probably not of the entire air time.

Monitoring television and radio may be in the form of summaries, delivered to you after prime time news. This service offers you the possibility of checking the complete news item at a later time when the story is available at the website of the broadcasting agency. Full text transcripts or audio/video clips of the news story are seldom necessary.

More sophisticated media monitoring services can tailor-make search engines that provide detail on scores of individual topics. These engines can search for articles written by individual journalists at individual newspapers on selected topics.

Some monitoring tools come equipped with technology that can help assesses media coverage on the basis of various components, such as regional issues, the economy, health, women and many other topics.

Will you do monitoring in-house or hire a service?

A variety of tools are available for monitoring media. Many organizations use web-based or electronic monitoring services provided by private-sector firms. These offer customized packages of media coverage based on the organization's needs. Cost may be the most important factor.

Organizations can also develop their own interfaces that allow employees access to media reports from a variety of news sources, including print and broadcast transcripts.

They can subscribe to services from news agencies such as national or international wire services to receive content directly from news outlets as the stories break.

The number of staff members needed to deliver and maintain a media monitoring programme within an organization depends on how sophisticated the service is to be offered.

Here you need to consider: what is the price and what are the terms? Choosing a media monitoring service is a complex decision.

How should the results be made available internally in your organization?

Media monitoring is only useful if the results can be distributed internally in your organization and made available to relevant staff in a timely way. The possibilities for this distribution may depend on the way media monitoring is delivered by the service, and the kind of metadata you may add to the results.

It is relatively easy to set up a system that once or twice a day produces an e-mail with an overview of today's media coverage for the management and other interested employees. Normally this will include extracts or summaries, preferably with direct links to the full articles.

It may be more of a challenge to give the authors of your releases or publications specific feedback on the media coverage of exactly their release or publication, as this would require the matching of individual media citations with individual releases and the adding of metadata. Such feedback, however, would be immensely useful to your staff.

Finally, it would be useful if the results of media monitoring are searchable within the organization by as many staff members as possible. A suitable user interface may be made available by the commercial monitoring company or you may set one up yourself, drawing data from your own database with media citations.

6.3 Responding to a media error

From time to time, journalists get it wrong. They may misinterpret data, make an erroneous statement about the organization, or use an incorrect number. Statistical organizations should establish a policy on how to respond to the media in such cases.

It is important to correct misinformation. First, providing the correct information ensures that the public is not confused by the erroneous report, or in the worst case, misinformed. Secondly, it helps protect the statistical organization's reputation for accuracy and reliability. Thirdly, it helps educate the journalists.

Also, journalists sometimes use an organization's data without identifying the source. A statistical organization may wish to follow up with particular journalists to ensure that they cite the statistical organization as the data source in future. Audiences have a right to know the source of the data.

How might a statistical organization go about responding to an error in a media story? First, the responsibility for responding should be clearly assigned in the organization. There must be no doubt about who is responsible for promptly assessing the impact of the error and determining the most effective course of action.

Communications staff and subject-matter experts should work together in determining the need for a response and the most effective approach. The approach will depend to some extent on the media in which the error appeared. Responses might be either formal or informal.

Informal response: A low-key approach is useful for a minor issue such as an incorrect number in a news report on the Internet. The appropriate action may involve phoning or e-mailing the journalist and having the problem corrected online. Such an informal response might take only a few minutes. Errors that appear on the web should be corrected immediately. Otherwise, they might spread to other media. You might also wish to follow-up to ensure the correction has been made.

Formal response: This may be necessary in matters that are more complicated, such as a misinterpretation published in a news article, or aired on radio or television, on the day following release. The approach can vary depending on the severity of the error. For example, a telephone call may be appropriate to inform a journalist of the error.

A more formal written response, such as a letter or e-mail to the editor or producer of a newscast, may be warranted in the case of a major error, in particular if the error is uttered by a politician or a commentator. We should, however, be aware that the figures we issue are supposed to be used by all actors in the societal debate, and that politicians in particular should be allowed some room for interpreting the figures as they deem necessary.

Timing is critical. Responses should be sent as quickly as possible, preferably on the same day that the error occurred. If an organization takes too long to respond, the media might ignore any request to print or air a correction.

We need to differentiate between opinions expressed in media reports and factual errors. Opinions may be negative towards an organization or its programmes, but they may not be factually incorrect.

Opinions that are damaging to an organization's reputation may warrant a response, depending on the impact or extent of coverage. Negative opinions expressed through media with very limited circulation may not warrant a response. But a negative editorial in a major newspaper with extensive readership may require follow-up.

In responding to an error, organizations might want to inform not only the journalist who wrote the report, but also the individual quoted in the report, if this person appeared to have been responsible for the error.

Responding to errors is an opportunity to build and strengthen relations with media. When contacting journalists, for example, media relations staff can provide contact names for them to call at the time of the next release. This access to contact information should lead to more accurate coverage in the future.

Before contacting the journalist, media relations staff can also scan previous reports by that journalist to identify issues of concern, and to understand the journalist's areas of interest and viewpoints. This research could lead to opportunities to expand coverage of a particular release or to suggest story ideas that the journalist might consider in the future.

Finally, you should make the response to the media visible internally in your organization. This response could take the form of a note in the daily internal media bulletin that an error or misinterpretation has been discovered in this or that media report, and that it will be dealt with in this or that way. Informing the staff about the response will prevent other staff members from attempting to deal with the problem, and in the long run it will increase staff awareness of errors or misinterpretations and their confidence that incidents are dealt with in a professional manner.

Media monitoring in Statistics Denmark

Statistics Denmark is a small national organization with a staff of 550. Media monitoring is bought from a commercial provider, who delivers journalistic summaries of media citations of the organization, its publications or staff three times a day. Automatic web monitoring is delivered around the clock. The provider monitors practically all national printed media—more than 900—as well as 2,000 Internet news sources.

The media mentions are forwarded in mail and data stream format complete with metadata on source, page, time of day, journalist, etc., allowing the information to move automatically into our internally-created database. Each media mention is identified by our staff and supplied with metadata identifying the exact release or publication responsible for the coverage. Our internal publication system automatically links the media mention to the staff member(s) responsible for the release.

Media citations are routinely reviewed for errors or misinterpretations, and action is taken immediately if this happens. Every morning at 10 o'clock an e-mail is automatically drawn from the database with the media citations of the last 24 hours—including any comments from our media centre—and forwarded to interested staff members.

A user interface on the intranet makes it possible for all staff members to follow the coverage of "their" releases or statistics in real time, and to search for earlier coverage. It is possible to search by releases, dates, media, journalists or just text strings.

Ten days after publication, authors of news releases or publications—and their managers—receive an automatic e-mail with an overview of the total media coverage generated.

Once a month we publish an internal newsletter with media statistics of the month: How many media mentions did we get compared to the same month last year? How many mentions did each department and division get compared to last year? Which releases got the most coverage and which releases got the least coverage? Which media provided the best coverage? The data for this monthly newsletter are, to a large extent, drawn automatically from our media coverage database. We are a statistical organization, hence what counts is statistics!

Media coverage statistics are widely used internally for decision-making. For example, we may have as many as five news releases on a single day, but only three can be placed visibly at the top of our website—the others will just be mentioned with a link. In this situation, the releases are prioritized according to media interest, the releases with the greatest number of previous citations at the top of the website. We issue 550 news releases a year.

The same goes for internal development work. Whenever our releases or publications are discussed, figures on media coverage are always useful information.

Every month we get around 2,500 media citations, making it somewhat more than 100 mentions per working day. The external costs of media monitoring at Statistics Denmark is around 57,000 Euro a year. Two members of the media staff work at least half-time on monitoring, but a lot of other staff members around the organization are engaged as well.

Monitoring of blogs is carried out by individuals. We use Google Blogs Search (<http://blogsearch.google.com>) and the results are stored and handled in our own database.

Media monitoring in Statistics Canada

Statistics Canada provides daily media monitoring of major newspapers and magazines, as well as radio and television broadcasts.

The organization has created an electronic interface for employees to view media coverage through its NewsBriefs feature on the Intranet. It provides access for all staff to daily news articles and broadcast transcripts from more than 45 major Canadian news sources.

The service allows employees to browse news sources or perform searches including articles of interest (usually coverage of a specific release or mention of Statistics Canada), release coverage (identifies each release and related media coverage), news by topic, and other functions.

It includes immediate e-mail notification when there is news related to a specific release and comprehensive reports summarizing the entire coverage of a release.

Media monitoring staff usually arrive around 7.30 a.m. (earlier on Mondays because of the additional media coverage from the weekend) to review news feeds and identify articles that may require follow-up or response.

Throughout the day staff continuously monitor Internet news sites and blogs and peruse a variety of electronic media services and databases to which the organization subscribes.

Statistics Canada monitors social media by using common web, news and blog search tools, e.g. Google (blogsearch.google.ca), Yahoo (news.yahoo.ca), addictomatic.com, RSS News aggregators, etc.

Some search alerts are set up for automatic notification by e-mail. Searches are also conducted in Twitter and in Facebook. Some sites on the web, including social media-type sites and some micro-blogs, are also searchable using Dow Jones Factiva (to which Statistics Canada has a corporate account).

The organization has also experimented in the use of the social media search interface service developed by Radian6 called the "Social Media Dashboard".

Canada's media monitoring program combines a self-service approach where all staff can access media monitoring products and services through the Intranet with a dedicated and continuous monitoring function. This program alerts managers to contentious or erroneous media coverage where immediate action may be required.

6.4 Conclusion: learn from the media

A robust programme of media monitoring will strengthen an organization's ability to communicate effectively. This programme should extend beyond simply monitoring and responding to media.

Information gleaned from analysing the volume, extent and tone of media coverage can be used to make informed decisions on the organization's programmes and activities. Ongoing concern expressed in media reports about the quality of the information or a declining amount of media coverage for a particular release may be useful in evaluating programs and changes to releases.

In some cases, a response can lend credibility to an organization or extend the debate on a particular issue. A lack of response, however, could result in greater exposure of an error, as misinformation is shared among interested users.

7. Media training

7.1 Introduction

Do statisticians need media training? If they engage with journalists on air, in print, or online, then the answer is yes. Senior staff may meet journalists only a few times a year to talk about policy or aspects of running the organization. Subject-matter experts may encounter the media on a more regular basis, answering queries and delivering briefings.

Both groups can benefit from tailored training, but individual needs will vary. Senior managers may wish to run through role-playing scenarios and work out key messages prior to a live TV interview; subject-matter experts may need to know how to handle tough questions from the journalists they speak to on a regular basis. Learning how to deal with difficult interviewers, how to boil down complex ideas into clear soundbites, and how to present information on radio or television can help improve the delivery of statistical messages to the media and public.

Who does the talking? Organizations should draft a policy on how to handle media requests for information and interviews. Commentaries need to remain policy-neutral. Subject-matter experts, while qualified to talk about numbers, may not be equipped to handle policy issues or the interpretation of data. Managers must talk to employees when they first join the organization to work out when to refer to their line manager. Staff need to be clear about how they are expected to respond. If in doubt, calls for 'comment' should be referred to a manager. Some statistical organizations routinely forward all media calls through to the media/information office for appropriate comment.

7.2 Clear communication

Communicating through the media can strengthen the image of statistical bodies with the public and policy-makers. Talking to the media gives organizations greater credibility if they wish to be seen as open and honest. Making statisticians available to explain in a clear, concise manner what the data mean generates better understanding. However, statisticians can fail to communicate because they sometimes:

- Concentrate on small details, not the bigger picture.
- Look at their work from the inside out, not the outside in.
- Put methodology before the results, not the headline before the story.
- Use too much statistical terminology (jargon) rather than plain language.
- Fail to visualise what they talk about and fail to paint pictures with words.
- Lack soft interpersonal skills.

A coordinated approach to media training can provide statisticians with the self-confidence and skills to get their messages across.

7.3 Types of media training

Training can be provided:

- Internally—using the organization's own staff to deliver courses/refresher sessions on handling the media.
- Externally—through a media trainer: often former TV/ radio journalists offering tips on presentation/delivery.
- Online, through an internal e-learning course or short video training module.

No single method is best. Internal courses obviously save money. When organized by former journalists working in-house, they can prove invaluable. But external trainers can offer fresh perspectives on the fast-changing media world and insights into how to handle tricky interview situations. Online training modules are best employed as refresher or introductory courses to complement existing training.

7.4 Evaluating training needs

Ideally, departmental managers should draw up and maintain lists of "who does what" in terms of talking to the media. Managers need to recognise that while many staff will need to be familiar with the needs of the media, not all staff will be called on to represent the organization on network TV news. Managers must make judgement calls: senior staff who never speak to journalists probably don't need media training. Equally, senior staff who have trouble with public speaking or self-confidence should not do "live" TV or radio interviews. Conversely, junior staff may be excellent media performers and might handle a combative interview with authority. Before deciding who does what, it is worth establishing a structured approach to training. The following four-step method is one possible framework.

Levels of training

Basic: for everyone who deals with a journalist at work. The course is typically geared towards understanding how the print media work, and how the needs of newspaper reporters differ from broadcasters. A basic course would introduce staff to the way the media work and help develop awareness of the kinds of pitfalls associated with off-the-cuff conversations with newspaper journalists. A basic course would be a one-day workshop introducing staff to the way journalists think and operate. The course might also include tips on how to prepare for a newspaper interview, how to write a news release, and how to prepare and "pitch" a story to a news desk. A mock phone interview with a newspaper journalist and a mock recorded radio/video interview would also help staff understand the dynamics of communication. The course could be provided by experienced internal staff or external journalists and trainers.

Intermediate: for statisticians and communications staff whose job involves hands-on dealings with the media, and who might handle TV/ radio interviews on their statistical topic, or offer comment to the media as information officers. This level of training would include message development, showing how to identify potential issues before an interview arises, explaining differences between broadcast and print interviews, and offering practical exercises on how to communicate best on radio and TV. Again, this would be a one-day course.

Advanced: essentially geared towards senior managers who might be called on to do live broadcast interviews or act as "ambassadors". Advanced courses can coach staff in how to deliver clear, confident messages, how to present with authority by bridging across difficult questions to give cogent answers, and how to stay calm and "on message", even in a potentially stormy live interview. Advanced courses will typically involve chunks of theory with intensive practical experience. They could also include a mock live TV or radio studio interview, a mock pre-recorded television interview, and a mock live interview where a statistician is speaking directly to a studio presenter via satellite link.

Continuous: designed to refresh media skills. It may involve in-house training—purchasing a digital voice recorder or a video camera, tripod and microphone, and introducing lunchtime sessions that allow staff to face mock broadcast interviews and sharpen their skills. Continuous training could take the form of a one-day refresher course with an external training company. Alternatively, it can be done online, in the form of an e-learning package (see section 7.5).

Evaluating success of the training

Course success needs to be evaluated. To ensure that training remains on track, it is helpful to log each person's training record: date/time/course/level. The external or internal media training provider can offer feedback to both the trainee and, where appropriate, the organization itself. A statistical organization should set up a group to discuss media training issues, evaluate feedback from trainers, draw up lists of who needs further instruction, and evaluate whether interviews have been successful. If an interview goes badly, consider more training, help and support.

Examples of current media training methods

United States National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS): conducts in-house, formal media training sessions several times a year and one-on-one sessions as needed before a high-interest report is released. These sessions focus on training statisticians to develop clear talking points and navigate difficult and controversial questions from reporters. In addition, the lead statistician for a report will often participate in an audiopodcast to practice question-answering techniques. NCHS also provides media training tips and instructional video clips on the organization's intranet site, as well as media training online as a refresher and introductory course (see section 7.5).

Statistics Denmark: offers coaching if an employee is to be interviewed by radio or television. Employees are coached by communications staff in how to answer questions and develop key messages. All employees of Statistics Denmark who might have contact with the news media undergo an internal media course, providing information on media policy, press techniques, and written and oral communication. Employees should be able to speak to the news media about their subject matter work. Staff contacted by the news media must be able to assess when a matter should be referred to others in the organization. The internal course is run by an external communications adviser as well as an internal journalist and media coordinator. New employees also receive initial orientation on Statistics Denmark and media relation shortly after their first working day.

Central Statistics Office, Ireland: uses a specialist company to train statisticians to talk to the media. The trainers are usually journalists who provide practice scenarios on how to communicate clearly and with confidence and engage with listeners. An in-house presentation skills course is also available to all staff. It is not as tightly focused on the media as the external course, but it is recommended to all staff who deal with the media. At Director level if someone is likely to spend a lot of time dealing with the media, particularly television then specific training for TV interviews and televised press conferences is arranged for them. This would usually be for national campaigns such as a Census.

United States Census Bureau: contracts out for expert media trainers to work with upper management, especially those who are expected to have frequent interaction with the media. Statisticians and other subject area specialists, identified by their supervisors as potential media spokespersons, are trained in-house by public affairs specialists from the Public Information Office (PIO). PIO will provide refresher media training on request, and staff can find online assistance on the Census Intranet. Under the PIO online heading "Working with the Media," staff can find topics such as "Preparing for Interviews" and "How PIO Can Help You." Finally, a course titled "Media Skills Training" is taught by PIO to groups of Census Bureau employees upon request.

Office for National Statistics, United Kingdom: gives media training to all staff who might speak to a journalist on the phone, via e-mail, or face to face. ONS hires external media trainers (often former newspaper editors/ TV and radio broadcasters) to provide basic, intermediate and advanced courses. The more advanced the class, the smaller the class size. Special one-to-one master-classes with external trainers can help senior staff revise their messages ahead of important announcements. ONS has purchased video equipment for in-house refresher courses.

7.5 General media training

Preparing for a media interview

Most media calls received by information officers are not calls for interviews: they are calls to check specific numbers, to question statistics, and to ask how they should be interpreted. However, interview requests arise, often when high-profile statistical documents are published. The key to a good interview is preparation. In an interview, statisticians hold all the factual cards. They must get information across in an engaging, accurate and entertaining way, drawing pictures with words and delivering memorable words that make an impression. The trick is to anticipate what the statistician might be asked and prepare answers.

Before agreeing to a print or broadcast interview, a media relations/information officer should discuss specifics and set out a few ground rules (for instance, restricting questions to a statistician's specialist field). All interviews should be underpinned by "soundbites"—putting all the information in crisp, clear sentences that sum up key messages.

Setting out objectives

An interview is a two-way street. Find out a few details before agreeing to do anything. Who is the reporter? What angles do they want to cover? Don't ask to see questions in advance for a broadcast interview. Always mention your own statistical angle: tell them what you're prepared to talk about and not talk about. If you think you have an interesting angle, say so: the journalist may not have had the time to make sense of the information. Statistical organizations are best placed to explain data patterns and trends, but broader political questions may be for others to answer. Ask the journalist how much they know about the subject. When is their deadline? Why are they interested in covering the story?

Newspaper interviews

Interviews with print journalists are almost always conducted over the phone. Do not make unguarded remarks. Deal with specifics. Take time to think of the answer, or agree to phone back. Even better, ask for the questions via e-mail, and reply via e-mail. The statistician or communications officer should always feel in control. Print journalists may be satisfied by e-mailing a few questions that can be directed to the statistician. Most quotations are best provided by e-mail: they make sure the data printed is accurate, they make it easier for the journalist to "cut and paste" the quotation into their story, and help control the message.

DO	DON'T
Gather as much information about the interview and subject matter in advance. Ask the journalist to provide background, and offer to supply answers via e-mail (to avoid errors).	Answer questions which you, or the statistician, are not equipped to answer.

Comment on trends and patterns shown by the statistics—help the journalist to make sense of the data.

Comment on the policy implications of the statistics themselves.

Radio interviews

Radio interviews are potentially difficult if they are being broadcast “live”, but much easier to handle if pre-recorded, as the interviewer wants your ‘best’ and most entertaining answer: not necessarily the best statistical answer. Try to avoid unplanned and direct head-to-head “live” confrontations in a radio studio: the presenter may have your organization's fiercest critic on the telephone. If they catch you by surprise, it can be difficult to stay on track.

DO

- Find out whether the interview will take place in the studio or on the telephone. If a journalist is coming to see you or you are giving a telephone interview, you will need a quiet room with no background noise.
- Check whether the interview is pre-recorded or live. Pre-recorded permits statisticians to make mistakes: wrong answers can be edited. In a live interview, a statistician will have no second chances.
- Know the nature of the interview: are they putting you in a head-to-head situation with someone who will argue against your figures? If so, be confident that you can tackle the adversary, and work out what you can say in response. If you can't, decline the interview.
- Ask how long the interview will last, and find out who will be listening. Is it for a news bulletin, a discussion programme or a light-hearted topical show? Find the right tone of voice.
- Write down your key points before the interview. Keep repeating them throughout the interview to ensure your message gets heard. If reading from statistical tables, highlight the data to mention with a marker pen. Sound like you are saying it—not reading it.
- Keep it simple. Paint pictures with words. Be friendly and open. Use informal, everyday language. Talk as though you were talking to just one person. Emphasize the positive.
- Sit comfortably upright with your feet flat on the floor. Relax.

DON'T

- Use technical language.
- Sound unconfident: avoid nervous “ums” and “ahs.”
- Keep talking to fill silences. It is not your responsibility to keep the conversation going.
- Make a sound other than speaking, e.g. shuffle paperwork, tap your fingers or accidentally hit the microphone.
- Wear tight-fitting clothing.

Television interviews

Often a triumph of style over substance, TV interviews are about style, soundbites and appearance, especially when commissioned by news programmes. Current affairs/documentary programmes pose greater challenges: a longer format, longer answers, and more complex issues.

DO

- Be aware that there are three types of TV interview: a face-to-face interview, either sitting or standing, at your organization (where you look at the reporter); a down-the-line interview with a studio (where you look straight into the camera lens); or a studio interview (where you sit with the presenter in a TV studio and answer questions).
- Try to discuss the topic with the reporter/host before the interview.
- Anticipate what you will say, and work out some clever phrases that will liven up the answers.
- Run through likely questions and answers with a colleague: the tougher the questions, the better.
- Dress smartly and wear solid colours. Appear well groomed. Be positive and friendly.
- Accept makeup if offered. Regular TV interviewees should consider investing in some basic makeup.
- Check your appearance immediately before you start. If you do a live TV interview with your hair sticking up on end, people will remember how ridiculous you looked, not how wonderful you sounded!
- Look at the interviewer all the time, blink naturally and maintain eye contact at all times.
- Look down the camera lens if you are doing a down-the-line interview with questions asked through an earpiece.
- Talk in a measured, conversational and entertaining way.
- Give short answers: they should be no longer than 10 to 20 seconds. Try to end each answer on a significant or interesting point, which might even guide the interviewer to the next question: "Levels of inward investment have been high over the past year, according to our figures, but we've also been carrying out new research into how we've fared over the past five years, and these figures are much more interesting and give us a better picture...".
- Paint pictures with words and use metaphors or mental images that everyone will understand.
- Stay focused.

DON'T

- Wear weak colours. Avoid loud or checkered patterns and pin-stripes, distracting items or jewellery (particularly brooches/ big earrings).
- Touch your face, be distracted or look furtive.
- Lose eye contact at any time—before, during or immediately after the interview.
- Talk too quickly.
- Be put off by anything around you, especially if the interview is live. A passing car, something shouted in the street, or a camera being moved in a studio can break your train of thought.
- Worry too much about the statistical content—once you have remembered a few key headline figures and three key points, you should have enough information to talk for several minutes.
- Shift around in your seat or on your feet, fidget, blink or look down.

Online media training/advice

Many media training companies, consultants and public bodies now publish tips for conducting media interviews on their websites. Plenty of advice can be found online. Below is a model for media training developed by the United States National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS). The graphics have been left in to act as a template and practical guide by public affairs/media officers.

Example of an online model for media training U.S. National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS)

NCHS has developed an online media training curriculum for statisticians. The aim is to enhance, refresh, and/or initiate training for personnel with varying degrees of media experience. Setting up a standard basic or refresher training course that can be completed at a convenient time in one's organization and at short notice is a good complement to traditional seminars and individual training sessions.

Content covered in a basic media training course are loosely defined as follows:

- What the media interview clearance process entails at the organization.
- How to anticipate and prepare for questions from the media.
- How to decide what your message is and how to best convey and stick to that message.
- How to determine the way to communicate complicated data to a general audience.
- How to achieve a positive physical appearance.

Adding an online media training course

The NCHS Public Affairs Office provides an in-house media training program that prepares staff for television interviews as well as coaches them for interviews in other media such as radio or newspaper. NCHS has typically offered one-on-one training for statisticians

who are associated with an upcoming release that is judged to be of high media interest. This training focuses on identifying difficult and out-of-scope questions, determining the main and secondary messages featured in the upcoming release, and learning how certain items in a report can best be communicated to a wide, general audience.

NCHS has also offered quarterly or biannual media training seminars. These sessions are more in-depth and focus on the delivery and content of a message to a reporter on the phone, in a live radio format, or on camera. Appearance and mannerisms are addressed by videotaping each trainee's performance. In addition, the NCHS media training video is shown to staff, and a brief overview is given of media outreach activities and protocol at NCHS. The online media training does not replace either of these types of training; it is merely a process by which tips for handling media inquiries can be provided on a last-minute basis or as a basic or refresher course. The following is a brief example this course, which complements the other training.

Areas to cover

Types of Media. This area includes the discussion of print and electronic media as well as the types of interview formats that are often used by different media.

Protocol for Setting up a Media Interview. This area covers the process by which an interview is approved and scheduled and how a statistician can protect him or herself from violating any important protocols.

Preparation. This area includes assessments to be made by the statistician, such as, "Why do I want to do this interview?" "Am I really the right person to do this?" and "What is my message?" Also, the statisticians are instructed how to prepare for an interview and achieve message control by setting their own agenda and choosing their sound-bites.

Types of Media

- ◆ Electronic Media
 - Radio - National Public Radio
 - Television - ABC, CBS
 - Web-based - Web MD, MSNBC.com

Protocol for Setting up a Media Interview

- ◆ Media interview requests must go through the NCHS Office of Public Affairs (OPA).
- ◆ When a member of the media contacts a member of NCHS staff directly, he or she should be directed to call OPA at 301-458-4800.

Facing the Music - Preparing for the Interview

- ◆ What is your message?
 - Set the agenda - Only answer what you know; don't offer any opportunity for hearsay.
 - Choose your sound bites - Memorize or write down key information that you feel is important to highlight, then find an opportunity to say it.
 - Remain cool under pressure - Remember that you are in control of what you say, no matter what the question.

Things to Avoid. This area reminds statisticians to avoid speaking in "statish," to review and practice the wording of any complicated material, and to explain acronyms.

Physical Aspects. This area instructs statisticians on dressing properly (i.e., dressing in a manner that best represents them and their organization), identifying and eliminating distracting mannerisms, and maintaining good eye contact.

Checklist. A checklist for preparation and for the interview itself is provided.

Preparation Checklist

- Why should I do this interview?
- Am I the right person to do this interview?
- Have I developed the main message(s) I want to convey?
- Am I dressed properly (for a television interview)?

Interview Checklist

- Set the agenda/ lay ground rules
- Stick to the main message(s)/points
- Eliminate distracting mannerisms
- Maintain good eye contact (during television and radio interviews)
- Reinforce your main message(s)/points

Review. A short quiz follows the presentation in order for the trainee to review some of the most important aspects of the training.

Frequency

This course is designed as a basic introductory or refresher course for statisticians who may come into contact with media inquiries or interview requests, or, if a statistician has an unexpected interview request, as a last-minute tips course.

Other Features

The course gives directions to staff on how to request further media training.

Don't...

- ◆ ... speak like a statistician.
- ◆ Sure, you went to school for years to become an expert in your field, but if you explain statistics in a way that people cannot understand, your message will be dead in the water.

The Way You Look Tonight...

- ◆ Remove distracting items
 - This includes dangling earrings, big necklaces, ribbons, flashy scarves, etc.
- ◆ Any of those can distract from your message!!!

Your Checklist – The Interview

- ◆ Set the agenda.
- ◆ Stick to your message.
- ◆ Eliminate distracting mannerisms.
- ◆ Maintain eye contact (television).
- ◆ Reinforce your main message points.

Test Your Knowledge

- ◆ When a reporter calls you and says, "I'd just like to clarify this data," you should...
 - **A.** Clarify the data, then notify OPA.
 - **B.** Direct the reporter to contact OPA.
 - **C.** Clarify the data, but tell the reporter he or she cannot quote you until he or she talks to OPA.
- ◆ Right answer is **B. Direct the reporter to contact OPA.**

7.6 Training journalists

Journalists can be helped to understand statistical data better. Training helps them access and interpret data independently, saving time. The following is a list of possible ways of educating journalists and developing better working relationships.

University outreach. Statistics Denmark organizes visits to three different universities to speak to students about statistics. A journalist and an information specialist from Statistics Denmark visit each university once a year. They provide a guest lecture session, which ranges from two to six hours. The day focuses on the proper use of statistics in the media, statistical pitfalls, how to extract a story from large amounts of data, and generally introduces them to services offered by Statistics Denmark. If time allows, students try out some exercises and ask questions.

Guidance online. Taking reporters through statistical tables and series online is a very effective way of helping them to navigate through data. When reporters call, a statistical media officer can guide them to the right databases and correct series, thus helping them to help themselves in the future.

Exchange visits. Statisticians visit a newsroom and journalists visit a statistical organization. Helps mutual understanding, but logistics are often difficult to arrange and benefits are limited. These types of visits may need to take place over several days to develop understanding.

Workshops for journalists. It is useful before a "big" statistical release where reporters are invited to a formal seminar and workshop on specific statistical subjects. This method helps the media understand the data before the release date, cutting down on demand/calls for specific information.

7.7 Conclusion

Media training should play a pivotal role in every statistical organization. Good media training develops clarity of thought, sharpens key messages, and gets important information across to the widest possible audience. The media are the quickest path to the public. Although effective communication is everyone's responsibility, it lies mainly in the hands of confident speakers and senior managers. It is the latter group who must make a total commitment to media training. The key is to set up a system, choose the most engaging staff to get positive messages across, and give them regular refresher sessions. Practice really does make perfect.

8. Handling media crises

"There cannot be a crisis next week. My schedule is already full." —Henry Kissinger

8.1 What is a media crisis?

What would happen if someone in your organization released confidential data? What if you are accused of suppressing information for political reasons? What if market-moving data are not released on time or not released to everyone fairly? In these and other situations, statistical organizations will find they have a crisis on their hands. A crisis occurs without warning and creates a chaotic and disruptive atmosphere. With a crisis there can be apprehension, confusion and lasting damage to the reputation of your organization. If handled properly, there is also an opportunity for a positive outcome.

A crisis by its very nature is temporary. There may be after-effects—which include how the crisis was handled—but the actual crisis is usually short term. The key to addressing a crisis is to use the best possible talent and develop the best solutions in the shortest period of time.

A negative incident in a statistical organization becomes a media crisis when the media become aware of it and get involved. Even with policies and control procedures in place, unexpected events could disrupt the operations of an organization and negatively impact its image for a long time.

To pre-empt a negative reaction, it is often advisable to contact the media through the release of a press statement that tells the organization's story before someone else does. This proactive approach can diffuse a potentially harmful media crisis. If the media were to report on the incident before you have time to tell your side of the story, you could still issue a press statement outlining your point of view, offering organization contacts for the media to talk to, and explaining clearly what happened and how the situation will be resolved.

Despite our best efforts, things will occasionally happen that place a statistical organization in an awkward or embarrassing position. Whether it is loss of confidential data or an intrusion by computer hackers, we must be prepared to react and quickly take control of the event to minimize damage to the organization.

8.2 Being ready for a possible media crisis

Preparation is the key to handling crisis communications. This chapter will show you how to handle a crisis and give you tips on how to be better prepared. It provides tools and guidance to inform properly the media, your employees, other affected parties, and the public during an emergency. By taking an open and honest, proactive approach you should be able to:

- Protect the reputation of your organization.
- Coordinate with appropriate offices and "speak with one voice".
- Prepare spokespersons to give consistent, accurate responses.
- Control the spread of rumours by the public, media, or your own employees.

Plan ahead

Determine who and how to respond. Create a "Crisis Response Team" and make sure the members receive crisis communications training. Members should include the head of the organization, the head of public affairs/media relations, and any others who play a critical role in the running of the organization. Don't wait for an incident to occur before you decide who should be involved on the crisis response team! Keep the number of members manageable. You may even want to identify a location that can be used by the crisis response team if an emergency arises. The location should provide privacy and the necessary means to take action.

Identify vulnerabilities

Five types of crises are of particular concern to statistical organizations:

- **Data releases** - mistakes requiring significant and frequent data revisions.
- **Organization image** - unlawful or ill-perceived activities (e.g. sexual misconduct, drug use, financial infringement, indictment or arrest of a senior organization official), allegations against your organization, or things that make respondents less likely to participate in surveys/censuses. These are the most difficult to counteract.
- **Community** - adverse condition created by outside individuals/organizations hostile to the organization or its mission (e.g. computer hackers, anti-government activists, negative blog campaigns).
- **Facilities** - damage caused by explosion, fire, water leakage or natural disaster.
- **Employee** - loss of life, bodily harm, sabotage or issues surrounding working conditions.

Make an assessment of any things that could go wrong during the normal course of business. In your efforts to deal with technological breaches, don't overlook things that could affect the reputation of your organization.

Prepare standby statements

Standby statements are concise, "fill-in-the-blanks" messages that can help with crafting the first response/statement given to the media. They should reflect your identified vulnerabilities. Vulnerabilities of statistical organizations in different countries can be different, so focus on the situations that might be applicable to your organization. Below is a list of possible standby statements to develop:

- Unauthorized computer access to organization website.
- Sudden interruption of work.
- Public denunciation of data or need for data by an elected official or community leader.
- Protest or demonstration by a population subgroup.
- Alleged sharing of confidential data with other agencies or law enforcement.
- Telephone system overload (for data collection or fulfilment activities using telephone).
- Falsification/loss of confidential data or personally identifiable information (PII).

Sample Standby Statement

Unauthorized Leak of Data

At [time and date] an [unintended release of XX data] occurred resulting in [illegal trading? unfair access?] and [whatever else happened] to [affected parties].

[How the organization plans to rectify the situation and make sure it doesn't happen in the future.]

We will provide additional information about the [crisis] when it becomes available.

For further information, contact [name and contact info].

When releasing information to the media, stick to the facts included in the standby statement—never respond with "No comment." If pressed, say: "The situation is still being assessed. We'll have a statement for you as soon as we have all the facts."

Once the standby statement has been released, a Crisis Response Team should meet to conduct a situation analysis, focusing on the following tasks:

- Analyse media response to the standby statement.
- Assemble a list of all resulting media questions.
- Conduct any necessary research and develop talking points that respond to expected media questions.
- Respond fully to all subsequent media questions, using the approved talking points.
- Continue to identify any potential issues that could become problems.
- Assess lessons learned to improve future performance or prevent recurrence.

Plan and practice. Develop a Crisis Communications Plan. Conduct crisis communications training for those likely to serve as spokespersons in the event of an emergency and those who may be involved with determining what to do and how to handle the media. If possible, simulate some of the situations that might confront your organization.

Distribute procedures to staff. Draft written procedures or a manual that is given to appropriate staff. Staff should keep a copy at home as well as on their laptops or hand-held mobile computing devices to refer to while travelling. Call-trees (systematic lists of prearranged contact chains) should ideally be kept in an electronic database that is continuously updated, and includes telephone numbers (work, mobile, home) and e-mail addresses (work and home) for key individuals:

- Organization employees.
- Parent organization employees, if required.
- Contractors.
- Reporters, with their media outlet information.

Standby statements should be routinely modified and updated, and distributed to all key personnel. The most recent edition should be kept in an electronic file available to all approved staff.

Be sure your communication plans include how you will notify your organization's internal employees about crises, and keep them updated.

8.3 Crisis examples

Media crises can arise from the unauthorized or early release of statistical data, or the release of statistical data containing errors. Media calls to the organization are often the first indication of a problem with data errors. If this happens, organization media specialists need to interact quickly with the subject specialists who produced the data to develop talking points that respond to known and expected media questions.

With the advancement of information technology and the Internet, the collection of personally identifiable information has increased. The accidental or deliberate exposure of this sort of information has become a major source of real and potential crises for national statistical organizations.

Below are three examples of circumstances that can lead to a media crisis. The first involves a mistake in a news release written by a media specialist, the second is an error made by a statistician who prepared a report for release, and the third is a breach of respondent personal information.

Data error in a statistical news release

An NSO issued a news release announcing the release of an annual statistical compendium, citing findings from the organization and other organizations. The news release highlighted a finding that "text-messaging" had doubled in volume in the past year. That afternoon, a reporter from the major newspaper called to report that this information in the release appeared to be incorrect. The reporter had contacted the source of the data, an international non-profit membership organization that represents the wireless communications industry, and learned that the text-messaging data represented one month, not the whole year.

What happened next? The organization's media specialist contacted the subject-expert staff who had produced the compilation, and they confirmed that an error had been made. Within an hour, a revised news release was issued through the organization's wire service and website. Media specialists also contacted reporters who had called during the day with questions about the compendium. In addition, a copy of the revised news release was sent to the data source organization with an apology.

Why did this mistake occur? The media specialists had received data findings from subject specialists and used them to create a news release. Unfortunately, the news release author had only the findings, not the statistical source tables. To minimize future occurrences of such errors, subject specialists are now required to furnish the source tables with the findings so data can be checked and verified by the authors of the releases.

Data error in a statistical report

An NSO issued its annual news release on income and poverty data findings from a major population survey. The next afternoon, the subject experts who had prepared

the data notified the media office that they had discovered a statistical error in the findings. The error concerned the "female-to-male earnings ratio", which was reported as unchanged, but which had actually declined from the previous year.

By the next day the news release posted online had been replaced with bolded statements and the phrase "REVISED" placed at the top of the new text. At the same time, appropriate corrections were made to all the relevant material on the website, including the webinar presentation script and PowerPoint slides and the PDF version of the full report.

Breach of respondent personal information

Many NSOs are now using laptop computers to collect survey and census data from respondents and administrative records. In the process, personally identifiable information, such as names, addresses, national identification numbers, and other personal data, are entered on these laptops as control information. If compromised, the personally identifiable information can be used by criminals to identify or locate individuals for identity theft or to perpetrate other crimes. The accidental loss or theft of a laptop containing personally identifiable information can result in a serious crisis for an NSO, and steps must be quickly taken to protect those who are potentially at risk.

When an NSO recently discovered that a number of laptops used by survey takers had been lost, the following steps were taken:

- A Crisis Team was gathered to assess the problem and determined that each laptop contained no more than an original ten-respondent case load, and most had already completed and transmitted at least half of their cases to the processing centre.
- Letters were sent from the director of the organization to the respondents whose data were on the missing laptops to notify them of the situation and to provide information about using consumer-reporting services to monitor for potentially fraudulent activity.
- Talking points for use by organization spokespersons were prepared and approved.

8.4 What to do when a crisis occurs

First actions

Get the facts. Try to determine, as best you can, what actually happened. Answer the following questions:

- Who is involved?
- What actually happened?
- Who is affected by the crisis?
- What immediate measures can be taken to fix the problem?
- Who needs to be contacted?

Follow-through

- Respond with actions or statements that will take the event out of the "emergency" phase and get accurate information to the media and the public.
- Report up and down the chains of command, including satellite organizations and parent organization.
- Gain some measure of "control" of how the event is regarded by the media and the public, continuing to provide accurate information and having the situation under control.

Monitoring

- Is the event over?
- Has media or public interest in the event subsided?
- Does more need to be done?

Follow-up when the crisis is over

- Evaluate how the crisis was handled.
- Did the Crisis Response Team work efficiently?
- Brainstorm the lessons learned.
- Should something be changed in crisis communications in future?
- Determine what triggered the crisis and what should be done to avoid the same kind of crisis in future.

Things to keep in mind

The Internet and web applications mean that crises can develop and spread very rapidly, so emphasis needs to be on "planning ahead."

As crises do not happen only during working hours, be prepared for evenings and weekends when important responders may be hard (or impossible) to reach.

Finally, remember that the public's immediate assessment of an organization in crisis is based on these four factors of earning trust and credibility:

- Empathy and/or caring (usually assessed within the first 30 seconds).
- Competence, expertise and readiness.
- Honesty and openness.
- Dedication and commitment.