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Frequently Asked Questions

Businesses to benefit from free statistical information

Businesses will soon gain free access to a wealth of valuable statistical information that will help them identify growth opportunities and make better decisions, thanks to funding from the 2007 Budget

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

What is today's announcement all about?

A large range of Statistics New Zealand data and products will be made freely available from 2007/2008. Budget 2007 has allocated \$6 million over the next four years, plus \$2.7 million in capital funding for 2007/8, to make around 250 million pieces of information freely available. This funding covers re-engineering outdated IT systems to ensure that the information is available in a more accessible form on the Internet. This information will be valuable for businesses, local government, communities and the public.

Why is the government doing this?

Every year Statistics New Zealand surveys thousands of people and businesses, and produces statistics that reveal who we are, how our economy is working and where there is potential for development. This initiative is about giving the information back so that more New Zealanders and New Zealand businesses can make informed decisions to benefit us all – whether it is about local government accessing population information to assist in planning, or helping businesses to analyse potential growth areas that will result in a stronger economy. This information is being made accessible to ensure all players in the New Zealand economy and society get full value from the investment that government has made in official statistics.

What products are going to be made available for free and when?

- Digital Boundaries – August 2007
 - StreetLink – August 2007
 - Small Area Population Estimates and Projections – August 2007 (Estimates)/ mid 2008 (Projections)
 - Regional and Local Statistics – November/December 2007
 - Detailed Business Demography Data – by end 2007
 - Household Expenditure Data – by end 2007
 - Detailed Import/Export Data – mid 2008
 - Retail and Wholesale Trade Data – mid 2008
 - Economic Time Series – mid 2008
 - Migration and Visitor Data – mid 2008
 - Redeveloped INFOS Database – mid 2008
 - Coding Tools for Occupation/Industry – late 2008
- (see definitions of these products below)***

Digital Boundaries

- These digital files allow mapping and geographic information systems to show the boundaries of statistical and administrative areas, for example, territorial authorities, urban areas, or area units (which are roughly the size of a suburb).
- Visualising information in map form is becoming a common way of understanding such things as market concentrations, catchments for setting franchise areas, potential market and competition, and for purposes such as choosing outlet locations. Making these files free will reduce the cost of purchasing or operating mapping systems.
- The Digital Boundaries File currently costs \$3,300 plus GST for the standard five-yearly census pattern, or \$25,212 plus GST for the annual detailed file. This will become available for free in August 2007.

StreetLink File

- This file relates ranges of addresses to statistical and administrative areas such as meshblock, area unit and territorial local authority.
- It allows businesses to get official statistics for areas that are relevant to their business and customer base. For example, a garden maintenance business can see how many households they have contracts with and then look at the growth potential for each of their operators.
- Currently the StreetLink file costs \$6,000 plus GST for first supply. Annual updates are \$2,000 plus GST for previous purchasers or \$250 per update for quarterly updates. It will become available for free in August 2007.

Small Area Population Estimates and Projections

- These figures are population estimates (the current position) and projections for 'area units', each of which is about the size of a suburb. Population projections look at the likely population of areas in the future, given scenarios of migration and birth and death rates. They can be very helpful for planning five, 10 or even 20 years out and give information around the likely market in the future.
- Calculated annually and including breakdowns of age-group and sex, these are useful for estimating market size and penetration, and for evaluating areas for locating outlets, allocating franchise areas and a range of other business planning purposes. This information is widely used by businesses to identify the size and characteristics of their local market; and by central and local government to plan services and amenities.
- The average cost to a business for a simple customised request is around \$250 plus GST. Prices range upwards for more comprehensive information. Population estimates will be available free from September 2007; projections from mid 2008.

Regional and local statistics

- Every three months Statistics New Zealand produces a report for each territorial authority area (city and district), and for each region. This includes a variety of local and regional information such as population estimates and projections, births and deaths, crime, business locations, employee count and accommodation statistics.
- Businesses and local government alike can use these reports to monitor their market conditions, giving them confidence in their knowledge of the local conditions and more certainty in their planning.
- The Quarterly Regional Reviews currently cost \$1,000 plus GST per year for one territorial authority or region. They will become freely available in November/December 2007, when the September quarter 2007 reports are released.

Detailed business demography data

- This information profiles New Zealand businesses by area unit: how many businesses there are and what industry they are in, plus a rounded view of the number of employees.
- It is useful for businesses that provide products or services to other businesses, enabling them, for example, to target particular areas, measure their share of the market and direct their sales force. This information can also show areas of opportunity for services such as food outlets, hire services or gas bottle filling stations.
- The average cost of a customised request for this kind of data is around \$1,600 plus GST. From December 2007 this information will be available free.

Household Expenditure Data

- This information shows what households spend money on; how much they are spending (on average); and what sort of individuals and households are the main buyers.
- Retailers and manufacturers can use it to understand their market and market share, to adjust their product mix and look at the market potential for new products. Combined with population census information, it can provide an indication of which geographic areas are likely to have higher concentrations of potential buyers.
- The typical cost to access customised information about household expenditure is currently around \$800 plus GST. From December 2007 this will be available free of charge.

Detailed Import and Export Data

- Statistics on imports and exports are available as monthly dollar values and quantities for most items. Data for each detailed commodity is broken down by the country of origin or destination.
- For example, wine can be broken down into some 35 categories depending on the size of container, alcohol volume, whether red or white, sparkling or still, and whether or not it needs further manufacturing. This allows the wine industry to monitor volumes and values of wine exports and imports, where it is going to or coming from and how this compares with past months or years. Many businesses are currently paying for this information to monitor their competitiveness, their markets and their market share.
- The average cost for a customised request on import/export data is around \$400 plus GST. From mid 2008 this will be available free.

Retail and Wholesale Trade Data

- This information shows the value of stocks and sales for different types of retail and wholesale outlets.
- It helps businesses to understand their own industry and others they might supply to or receive products and services from, and benchmark their performance.
- The typical cost to access customised information about retail and wholesale data is around \$400 plus GST. From mid 2008 this information will be free.

Economic Time Series

- Economic indicators, such as the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Balance of Payments, trade indexes, and the Consumers Price Index and Producers Price Index, measure the economy.
- They can be used by businesses as general indicators and benchmarks, or for specific purposes, for example, in supply contracts to adjust prices for inflation.
- While there is free access to this data currently via the Statistics NZ website, accessing current and historic data in one place currently costs a minimum of \$600 per year plus GST. From mid 2008 this will be freely available.

Migration and Visitor data

- This shows the number of people arriving in or leaving New Zealand.
- This information is used by the travel and tourism industry to monitor inward and outward flows: where people are coming from and going to, for what purpose and for how long.
- The typical cost to access customised information about migration and visitors is currently around \$700 plus GST. From mid 2008 this will be available free of charge.

'INFOS' (Information Network For Official Statistics database)

- INFOS is a large database of information that is available immediately after official release. It contains economic information (price indexes, labour market and production figures) plus demographic measures, arrival and departure data, wholesale and retail trade, exports and imports, building consents, and exchange rate series (to name a few).
- This database provides businesses with information about the economic environment, their market, and developing trends. Price indexes, for example, can help businesses understand industry costs and can be used to set and manage escalation clauses in contracts. Building consent data can be used to target areas and sectors where building activity is likely to generate demand for products and services.
- The minimum fee for INFOS is \$600 plus GST per year. Users then pay for information they access. An average business user may spend around \$1,200 per year. It will become freely available from mid 2008.

Coding tools for occupation and industry

- These tools will allow businesses to determine which industry they are in for statistical purposes so that they can compare themselves to the correct industry group and allocate an industry or occupation code to their customers.
- This is a new tool that is scheduled for release free of charge in late 2008.

Example: packages of information that can add value

To make business decisions, packages of information are needed. For example a business making a decision whether or not to locate in an area, such as in Auckland, is likely to want:

- *information on retail sales trends in Auckland of certain types of goods*
- *information on demographic trends, such as age, sex, ethnicity for Auckland*
- *information on household income in Auckland*
- *information on the numbers of other similar businesses in Auckland*
- *an ability for businesses to link their own financial data to the above statistics and other Statistics New Zealand information (e.g. on income) .*

All this information would be made free by this initiative.

How can people access this new information?

The information will be available on the Statistics New Zealand website – www.stats.govt.nz and by calling the Statistics New Zealand Information Centre, on 0508 525 525

Have other countries done this?

Yes. Australia and Denmark have both seen big surges in use of data following similar initiatives to make statistics freely available. The Australian Bureau of Statistics reports data downloads have approximately tripled since they made similar information free in 2005.

What is the uptake of the data expected to be?

A similar upsurge in data uptake is expected in New Zealand. In 2003 Statistics New Zealand made Census information freely available on the Internet. This has resulted in a significant increase in public usage from around 250 paying subscribers in 1993 to over 20,000 accesses in the last year alone.

The INFOS system currently has 93 annual subscribers. Once the system is redeveloped for easy use on the web, based on international experience, usage could increase to between 1500 to 2,000 users per month, and businesses would become the predominant sector using the information.