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Meet the inquiring citizen – he's not like you

Topic 5 – Who uses statistics, what do they need and how should we engage with them?

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Introduction

The ONS has a mission to deliver better statistics, to help make better decisions. Part of that mission is to "improve our web and social media channels dramatically, and to find innovative ways of making our statistics more engaging, easier to understand and accessible." Last year we launched Visual.ONS - a separate website and a bold attempt to bring new light to official statistics aimed not at the expert user or the stakeholder community - but at ordinary people.

Our goal was to marry statistical and economic experts with data journalists, data visualisation experts, social media leads and designers to create articles that use statistics to deliver powerful messages of relevance to people. And we aimed to do this through topicality - fast moving, quick reactions to changing events that gave people information when they needed most. The advent of the EU referendum debate has proved to be the ultimate test of the mission of Visual.ONS. At a time of heightened political scrutiny and sensitivity, during a campaign that has seen both sides mis-use official statistics, how relevant could we be?

Methods / Problem statement

The first challenge was to build it. Creating Visual.ONS required a new platform, letting us tell stories in forms users are familiar with from their daily use of media. It required a new content strategy - putting collaboration at the heart and making the digital teams and statistical teams partners in content creation. We needed teams with the right skills, who understand digital. We needed statistical areas to trust those digital experts, to buy in to the experiment.

We needed to show worth and value - what does this look like? What does innovation feel like? We needed to make mistakes to learn but not feel as though censure was every time. We needed to understand the inquiring citizen - who is he or she? What do they want from a national statistical institution? We needed buy in from the most senior leaders in the organisation.

All of these things were brought into sharp focus when we proposed articles around the EU referendum. What would we write? Who would write it? Why would we write it? What would the impact be? What risks are there for the ONS? The EU referendum has proved to be the ultimate test of Visual.ONS

Results / Proposed solution

<http://visual.ons.gov.uk/uk-perspectives-2016-the-uk-contribution-to-the-eu-budget/>

<http://visual.ons.gov.uk/uk-perspectives-2016-trade-with-the-eu-and-beyond/> <http://visual.ons.gov.uk/uk-perspectives-2016-international-migration-to-and-from-the-uk/> Partnership and relationship building - it's a true collaboration Clear mandate from the most senior leaders - in writing Skills needed on both sides - statistical and digital Define the parameters of the work in detail Measure success in centimetres, not metres Protect your team

Conclusions

Change is hard Change is slow No change worth having is easily won Start small and grow Engage everyone
Accept compromise Do it again