

CENSUS CASE STUDY

Background:

Isle of Man Government's Cabinet Office undertook its interim census in 2016.

The census is a large, high profile logistical project which touches every household and individual on the Isle of Man and has a fixed delivery date.

Historically, it's been a paper driven and labour intensive exercise which has produced extremely accurate results with virtual full completion.

In 2016 the Cabinet Office took a decision to modernise its delivery of the census by bringing it in line with the Government's digital strategy.

It's vitally important that each census runs smoothly and public confidence in Government's handling of personal data is paramount. It would not be desirable for an unintended side effect of any improvements to impact quality and accuracy of the information obtained from the census.

It was also necessary to design a system usable for both the interim and for future full census.

Solution:

To begin, the Cabinet Office approached Isle of Man Post Office about a viable solution to track census mailings. During the initial meeting the Post Office put forward its end to end 360° mailing solution which would enable the Cabinet Office to manage census data a more effective and efficient way.

The process began with the questionnaire artwork being supplied by the Cabinet Office.

The data for the mailings was provided by the Cabinet Office and merged into the agreed artwork format for print distribution to all households on Island. An initial mailing to inform Islanders of the forthcoming census was sent, which was followed by the official census mailing item.

Each official item was then given a unique barcode ID which was then used to track responses and return items once distributed.

Printing was undertaken by Isle of Man Post Office's print division, IMS, using its high spec digital printers to ensure a professional finish before items were enveloped and dispatched to approximately 42,000 occupied households. The forms contained a unique online code which recipients could use to access and complete the census online and the results were later merged with the postal responses.

Once all items had been posted both IMS and the Cabinet Office were able to use the 360° mailing solution to track any responses and undeliverable items.

Response data was then captured through the IMS scanning and data capture service and uploaded to a secure hosted system that was accessed on a self-service basis by the Cabinet Office and their field research staff. Research staff were able to filter data and manage their work through the system.

To add to this, once all households had responded, researchers were able to go into the system and classify data. Data was then cleansed and IMS provided a data extract as a CSV file for Cabinet Office to use ready for analysis. All forms were provided to the Cabinet Office, both physically and digitally, to be used by the Public Records Office.

Result:

Isle of Man Post Office delivered a solution within a tight timeframe which satisfied the Government's need to streamline and digitise its census process in line with Government strategy.

Using the 360° mailing solution the Cabinet was able to reduce its field staff requirements from 170 down to 78 in 2016 and the Cabinet were able to produce its Census report within 11 months of the Census night, whereas previous reports have taken longer to produce.

In terms of Census form completion, 20% were completed online and 80% were paper returns.

Adam Smith of the Cabinet Office commented following the completion of the Census project:

"In planning for the 2016 Census it was clear to us that in order to be able to successfully undertake a Census which would maintain the same level of accuracy and completeness of data, we needed a solution which was able to handle mixed inputs of both paper and online forms, be able to track the status of each household and capture, and record the information from the forms. The Isle of Man Post Office was able to provide all of the services we required, from the mailing and receipt handling of Census forms (both paper and online), and a technical solution which was able to provide up to date, daily management information and also enabled the Census Office to provide customer support to the general public.

This ability to produce daily management information was crucial to the success of the Census as it allowed the Census Office to monitor the status of each household, to direct resources to those that had yet to reply and also to prevent resources being wasted on properties that had already responded or were vacant. This management information was also important in being able to manage the team of coders, by allowing the Census Manager to monitor their progress in terms of volumes of forms being processed to ensure that the project remained on track.

Without the involvement of the Isle of Man Post Office it would have been unlikely that the 2016 Census could have been undertaken within the budget that was available, particularly in the recruitment, training and wages of the significantly larger field staff that would have been required. It would have limited the ability of Economic Affairs to have implemented a number of the improvements that were identified from the 2011 Census."