



## Using Information More Efficiently

### The Office for National Statistics keeps information up to date with technology from Identity Systems

One of the key drivers of social change around the world for the past two decades has been the increased availability of information. Technology—from fax machines and cell phones to satellite television and the Internet—has made it possible for a wide variety of people to share information, anywhere, anytime. This access to impartial information is vital to open, democratic societies: it enables governments to make decisions and citizens to understand what is happening in their country.

Paradoxically, the wide-spread availability of information can also be a hindrance to organizational effectiveness. As more and more data is stored in various systems, it becomes increasingly likely that information will be needlessly duplicated, entered incorrectly, or maintained in a format that is not readily accessible.

#### Taking care of business

That was the situation facing the United Kingdom's Office for National Statistics (ONS). Among its other responsibilities, ONS maintains the Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR), a comprehensive list of UK businesses. It provides a sampling frame for business surveys carried out by ONS and is a key data source for business activity analysis. The IDBR covers businesses in all parts of the economy, aside from some very small firms and non-profit organizations—in all, 99 percent of the economic activity in the UK.

Before the IDBR was implemented in 1995, different government departments maintained separate statistical databases, updating them by surveying businesses. Duplication of effort across the departments made this an inefficient, costly process. In addition, with data spread across different systems in different formats, it was difficult to develop a comprehensive view of business. Finally, the system created a burden for small businesses.

"They had to spend time they didn't have responding to multiple surveys designed to gather the same information," explains John Perry, Head of Business Register Unit, ONS.

The IDBR was designed to remedy these problems by providing a system that improved quality of service while reducing the burden on businesses and cutting costs.

#### Finding the answer

"What we were looking for was more than name key matching," John says. "We needed something that could integrate with existing systems and find duplicate information across different data sets with no common linkage and different data quality standards."

They found the solution with software from Identity Systems.

Identity Systems products are specifically designed to search, find, match and group identity data. The software emulates an intelligent business user's ability to

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determine a match based on a variety of factors, overcoming spelling, phonetic and other errors and omissions in the data. The software is designed to work with multiple languages and character sets. It offers the speed and scale to perform high-volume searches quickly against very large databases.

Originally, ONS selected SSA-NAME3 from Identity Systems as the basis of the solution. It ran alongside ONS's Ingres database without requiring major changes to the existing system. Recently, ONS upgraded to ISS, the flagship product of Identity Systems, running on a Windows server. This permits greater flexibility in how the solution is used today and will be used in the future. The system handles 12 million addresses, representing more than two million existing businesses and another two million that are no longer operating.

The Identity Systems solution permits ONS to use existing data much more efficiently by matching and linking information across databases. This synergy has enabled the development of a truly comprehensive business register, with a centralized company view that was not possible under the old system. ONS now is more responsive to their customers and other government agencies that require company information. This is an important consideration, as ONS's budget is funded by other government departments, so failure to provide a high-quality service could result in a loss of funding.

In the end, perhaps the most important accomplishment is that the new system reduces the burden on small businesses in the UK. The availability of more complete, more accurate information means fewer, more targeted surveys.

"We no longer have to go to companies multiple times, because now we can find the information we need in our databases," John says. "And that means companies can take the resources they would have spent responding to the surveys and put them back into the business, instead."


**About the Office for National Statistics**

The Office for National Statistics is the government department responsible for collecting and publishing official statistics about the United Kingdom's society and economy. ONS carries out the ten-yearly census and is also responsible for the registration of vital events in England and Wales through the General Register Office.



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**About Identity Systems**

Identity Systems is the pioneer in enabling organizations to build and maintain high-quality identity data search and matching software solutions.

The company has been in this area of specialization since 1986, and has over 500 clients worldwide who rely on its robust, enterprise-wide software. For more information, please visit our Website.

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