

How the census can help your business

What were you doing on 27 March 2011? Hopefully, one of the things you were doing on that day was filling in the 10-yearly census form that went to every household in England and Wales.

Two years down the line and the numbers have been crunched and a steady stream of data has started to flow from the Office for National Statistics covering everything from the number, sex and ages of the population, to our living conditions, health, occupations, whether we have more than one address, how we travel to work and our educational qualifications.

But what has this got to do with your business?

Well, depending on the type of commercial activity that you undertake, census statistics can tell you an awful lot about your employees and customers. And that can help you to arrive at important decisions about where to locate your business and how you can develop and target your products and services.

Major business decisions invariably carry an element of risk, so anything that increases confidence and minimises risk is to be welcomed. Census statistics can inform growth plans and provide management, board and investors with reliable evidence and the confidence to enable them to make those important decisions. The data can also help to identify where your business might benefit from more detailed market research to address specific business development issues.

One great advantage of census statistics is that they are available down to very small geographical areas. So, as well as information about the population at a national level, you can also drill down to individual local authorities and even to postcodes.

Another advantage is that census data is usually free of charge. Only when someone needs a specific piece of data that does not form part of the standard range of statistical output tables will any charge be levied.

While dozens of statistical tables are derived from the census, help is available when it comes to finding the information that you need. Alongside the statistics themselves, ONS publishes Statistical Bulletins that summarise the key issues for each set of figures published. There are also a number of 'short stories' that offer some analysis of some themes such as methods of travel to work, the provision of unpaid care and families and households. There is even a selection of interactive maps and graphics that make finding the data you need easier and more interesting.

To explore the range of census data, visit the Office for National Statistics website at www.ons.gov.uk/census, or contact Census Customer Services (01329 444972 or CensusCustomerServices@ons.gov.uk)

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Marketing to older people

For businesses providing goods or services to older people, for instance domiciliary care, mobility aids, specialist holidays or tailored financial products, census statistics can offer some useful insights.

Figures from the 2011 Census reveal that one in six people in England and Wales (16.4 per cent) is over 65. Whilst the overall proportion has changed little since 2001 the general growth in the population means that the number of over-65s has increased by nearly 900,000 over the decade. Furthermore, the number of people aged over 90 increased by more than 26 per cent from 340,000 in 2001 to 430,000 in 2011.

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Planning to expand?

Effective business development is built on sound research and intelligence. If your growth plans include opening new premises, census statistics can tell you about the numbers, age profile and levels of educational qualifications of potential employees in your catchment area. Not only can this information help to identify the best place to locate a new facility, but the inclusion of the most up to date data in business plans can demonstrate the thoroughness of your research to banks and potential investors.