

Audience Research

A briefing paper for senior managers

JISC Content

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Researching your audiences is essential to deliver services which provide the maximum public value.

This is a briefing paper for senior managers in the public sector who are responsible for **developing and implementing policies and strategies** for the delivery of portfolios of services, programmes and research.

The digital revolution

In the last decade, millions of pounds of public funding has been available to investigate and experiment with digitisation and online services. Digital technologies have fundamentally changed how content can be delivered, presented, exploited and interacted with.

Digital services are now used widely in the delivery of public services, and programmes such as the DCMS and BERR **Digital Britain** seek to focus and stimulate the delivery of digital public services.

Why is researching digital audiences important?

Advances in technology are matched by rising demands and expectations of the public. Delivering high quality programmes and services which meet the evolving needs of the public is essential.

In times of rapid change and budgetary constraints, organisations should be delivering programmes and services which make best use of resources and effort. Demonstrating *value for money* and *impact* are key governance priorities in government policy across the public sector.

Increasing value for money is not just about reducing spend – it is also about achieving more with the same budget. For example, market intelligence can inform and support collaborative activities such as the joint procurement of e-resources to enable content to be procured more efficiently and to improve the user experience.

In general, evidence from audience research can support better decision-making.

Key points to consider

Monitoring and evaluation

Audience research should contribute to the evaluations of research programmes and performance monitoring of services and organisations. Key performance indicators should not be

just about demonstrating a certain number of visitors or website hits – they should require services to demonstrate a richer understanding of who their audience is, how they value the service, and its impact.

Balance of investment decisions

You may be required to decide between funding a service with a large audience, and a service with a small audience which is highly valued (eg a niche service). Knowledge about the value and impact of services and research programmes on their audiences can help you make these types of balance of investment decisions, and enable you to manage your portfolios more effectively.

Empowering your staff

Empowering the staff who deliver your services to understand their audiences will be key to changing practices.

It is important that your service managers have the necessary resources and top-level support within organisations to ensure that they can meet the challenges of understanding how their audiences interact with digital content.

Think about what support is available in your organisation and sector – the Strategic Content Alliance has produced some practical guidance on audience research, which is a good place to start.

Further reading

The Guide to Researching Audiences

<http://sca.jiscinvolve.org/2009/02/05/download-audience-analysis-toolkit>

The Strategic Content Alliance

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This briefing paper and The Guide to Researching Audiences have been prepared by Curtis+Cartwright Consulting Ltd on behalf of the Strategic Content Alliance. They are part of a series of guides developed to support people in the public sector understand their digital audiences and deliver audience-focused services.

This work is part of a wider initiative led by the Strategic Content Alliance, which aims to support UK citizens gain best value from the public investment that has been made in digital content.

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