Transforming the user experience for the Office for National Statistics' business register

CGI is working with the Office for National Statistics to build a modern web-based national business register, streamlining business processes and improving working practices and user experience for employees.

Maintaining comprehensive records on all UK businesses

For more than 30 years, the Interdepartmental Business Register (IDBR) - a comprehensive list of UK businesses - has played a critical role in the ONS' everyday operations as a trusted source of accurate information, used to develop government policy. However, this core system was due a significant update in order to meet current and future user experience expectations, accessibility and technical standards, as well as Government Digital Service (GDS) requirements. The ONS took this opportunity to modernise while embracing all the innovations a browser system could enable. The goal was to accelerate employee productivity by providing real-time access to data and streamlining working practices.

Tailoring the solution around its users' needs

Our longstanding partnership with the ONS meant that they trusted us to thoroughly understand the scale and business-critical nature of their core system. They knew we would help them to effectively transform their business processes and system via a carefully considered and human-centered approach. To achieve this, we worked closely with their teams using GDS methodologies.

We initiated the project by working with over 70 different ONS database users, as well as external government departments, to enrich our understanding of how each user behaved within the system, allowing us to map everyday user journeys, highlight common challenges, and identify key opportunities for improvement. We were then able to distil this down to the key personas that would guide our design approach throughout the project.

Partnering with the ONS to build a more user-centric database of UK businesses

To validate our approach in the early stages, our developers created initial prototypes to test with users and demonstrate the proof of concept, as well as the potential business value of the final product. By using the agile process outlined in the GDS guidelines, we were able to gather regular user feedback and iterate on the designs as they were being developed.

These early trials successfully demonstrated an uplift in user experience for navigating the database, editing and creating new entries. The transformative shortcuts, features and faster page loading times also increased the efficiency when moving between and comparing far-reaching fields of data.

For extensive company records, enhanced visualisation was used to clearly represent data in an accessible and easy to understand way. We also introduced automation features to improve data integrity - ensuring the highest quality, accurate and up-to-date information was being generated.

Throughout the Beta stage of the project, we continue to work closely with the ONS user group to test prototypes and give them the opportunity for continuous feedback. We've also run robust end-to-end tests to address issues that impact end user productivity and ensure compliance against GDS, accessibility and technical standards.

Looking ahead to launch

As the project reaches maturity, the legacy IDBR system will be run concurrently with the new register as its various features are brought online. This will ensure business continuity for the ONS and validate the data integrity of the new system. The final deployment will be a future-facing system that delivers advanced flexibility as the business register continues to grow and will enable the adoption of new features and capabilities as and when they emerge.

Key business benefits

- Accelerated and digitalised workflows that drive greater efficiency

- Enhanced visualisation and reporting capabilities so users can clearly see relevant data and use this to make more informed decisions

- New self-service functionalities which bypass the need for specialised support on various tasks, streamlining workflows

- Improved data integrity through automation resulting in more accurate reporting and more valuable data for the UK government

- A more efficient user experience, helping to ensure all team members are equipped with robust data

- Greater compatibility with new technologies and working practices, making the ONS more adaptable to future changes in technology and delivering greater flexibility around the integration of new tools

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is the official government body responsible for collecting, analysing and publishing statistics about the UK's economy, population and society.

About CGI

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