



David Ackermann, 25th November 2008

---

## **21st Meeting of the Wiesbaden Group on Business Registers – OCDE, Paris**

### **Profiling in Switzerland Costs and Benefits**

---

#### **Profiling in Switzerland today**

The Federal Statistical Office (FSO) introduced the profiling of some large businesses and organisations of public administration in 2001 at the time of the business census. The first work undertaken in this area arose from the reactions of several large businesses which no longer wished to fill in volumes of paper questionnaires, as the basic information was already available in their central personnel files.

Since 2001, two members of staff have been working to establish partnerships between the FSO and 40 of the largest businesses and public administration organisations in order to keep track of their structure in our Business Register (BR). These 40 units have been chosen mainly due to their size in terms of number of employees and local units.

The profiling developed to date has allowed us to build up a solid partnership with these businesses while at the same time ensuring a regular follow-up of the structures and addresses in the BR. This enhances the register and ensures a high quality for the survey which provides the basis for business statistics. In particular, the introduction of profiling has considerably improved the follow-up of large administrations whose up-date sources in the register were previously insufficient.

In addition, profiling enables the transfer of statistical data on employment for the business census (BC) and employment statistics (STATEM). The business census takes place every 3 to 4 years; the employment statistics are produced quarterly. Thanks to profiling, the quality of employment data is guaranteed for both of these statistics.

The following characteristics of businesses in the BR can be tracked with profiling:

- Legal and organisational client structure (for public administration, specific organisations are monitored)
- Location of the units
- Situation of different statistical units
- Possible links in the case of a business administration group
- Employment (information from the 2 surveys mentioned above)
- Economic activity (NOGA) at the level of the business but also its establishments

### **Profiling as a component of the general business statistics programme**

Approximately two years ago, the FSO launched a priority project called “General business statistics programme” (GUS). The aim of this programme is to reform business statistics and to develop a coherent and integrated system for business surveys.

The general objectives of the programme are:

- To optimise output (by producing information, findings and articles that are better adapted to the needs of our clients)
- To minimise the burden on data suppliers (who are mostly small and medium businesses)
- To meet new demands (national and international standards, bilateral statistical agreement between Switzerland and the EU)

Information on the main points of this complex project can be found on the following internet site (<http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/fr/index/news/00/04.html>). This project is currently in the final stages of conceptualisation and will gradually be implemented as of 2009.

This project aims to place emphasis on the use of administrative data and profiling as primary sources for business statistics with the aim of saving time and money not only for the FSO but also for the data suppliers, in other words, businesses.

One of the main tasks of this project will be the development of data collection strategies for future surveys. Client needs will also be considered in this project in order to determine statistical output in the future. Data collection strategies will then be established by taking into account the potential use of secondary data sources and the possibilities made available through profiling. Direct surveys will be chosen for information which could not be obtained from a secondary data source or through profiling. Data collection strategies will also be used to determine to what extent information could be calculated using statistical methods without having to carry out direct surveys. The harmonisation and standardisation of the new survey system will also be achieved thanks to the introduction of an extrapolation framework management and a general survey framework. Thanks to the survey framework management system, an excessive burden on certain businesses can be avoided.

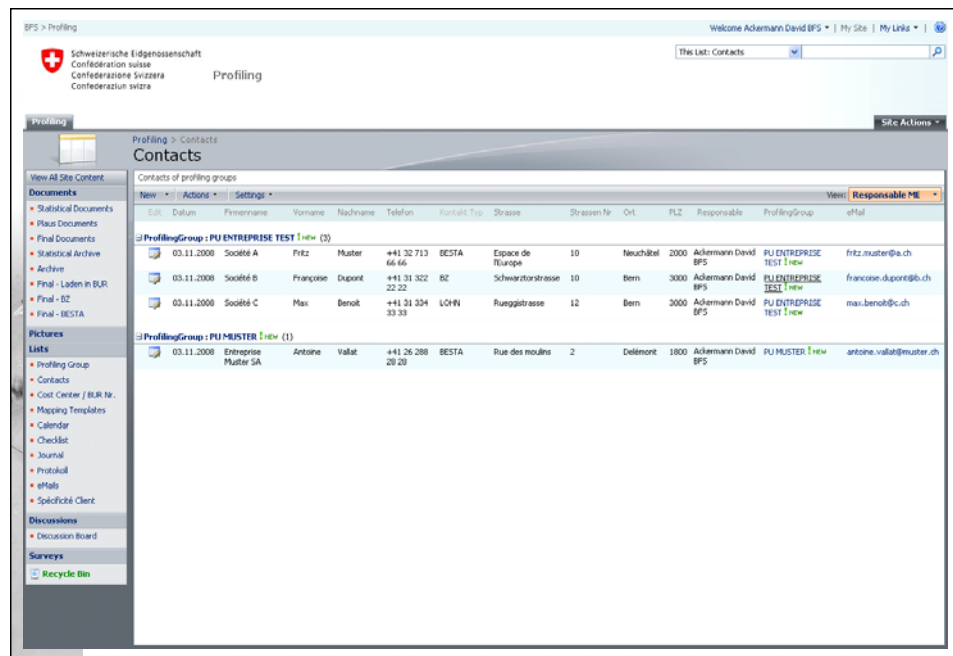
### **Development in 2008**

In 2008, encouraged by the success achieved with the 40 largest businesses, the FSO created a team of nine people in the BR to further develop its profiling activities. The main objective is to ensure, from the end of 2008, the inclusion of the most important clients within the framework of the continuous programme of employment statistics.

In September of this year, the FSO carried out the business census 2008, which enabled them to approach new businesses in order to promote their profiling activities. To this end, the new profiling team visited approximately 80 businesses in June and July. So far, approximately 60 new businesses have reacted positively to our visit, agreeing to enter into this partnership.

At the same time, the FSO has invested in the development of an application which allows the members of the profiling team optimal processing of the administrative information on contact persons as well as simplifying the processing of employment statistics. This application is an interesting and important tool which ensures the quality and uniformity of work processes in a team that is still gathering experience.

## Example of profiling application



In 2008 preliminary steps were also taken to identify possible future developments for profiling which could be of use for other business statistics.

## Profiling costs for the FSO

The main costs to the FSO for the moment are those arising from the hiring of staff and their specific training. This involves training and instruction in connection with the BR and statistical definitions. The FSO also provided a two-day training course on how to conduct interviews with businesses and the difficulties involved.

There were also computer costs for the development of the application mentioned above.

However, experience showed that the greatest costs of all were maybe in terms of the amount of time invested. In fact, it took a considerable amount of time to convince management and the statistics producing units to work with profiling.

To date, only the units of employment statistics have really established a link with the BR and profiling. The time involved in upgrading these statistics in terms of units should also be emphasised.

## **Profiling costs for the businesses**

Businesses invest time during the start-up phase of profiling to consolidate data and to carry out any adaptations to software necessary in their personnel management systems.

In addition to this, the maintenance of the partnership, in other words regular contact with the FSO, could also be seen as an additional cost, but this is largely compensated for by the time saved on surveys.

## **Benefits of profiling for the FSO**

As already mentioned, the main advantages so far can be seen in the improved quality of both the structures of these large businesses in the BR as well as that of employment data. In fact, the improvement in quality is mainly in the area of better data comparability between the two statistics mentioned but also improved comparability between two survey periods. Furthermore, data collection using profiling ensures a 100% rate for the businesses concerned with these two surveys. Profiling also ensures the uniformity of definitions of statistical data at the time of survey.

Experience has therefore shown that when businesses make the transition from the traditional paper method to a profiling method, for example for the business census, that the quality is greatly improved.

The partnership established with the business also helps the work of other units in collecting statistical data. A simple collaboration consisting for the time being of assistance with earnings statistics, for example by providing them with the address and telephone number of contact persons which have been established as part of the partnership between the business and the FSO, has shown to be advantageous to both parties.

Experience has also shown that businesses appreciate the fact that an administrative body such as the FSO takes the trouble to introduce itself and to explain its work on a one to one basis. The clients we visited very much appreciated being able to put a face to our office at last. During the first interview, they at last have in front of them a person who can explain to them the why and the how of the statistics they are asked to provide.

## **Benefits of profiling for the business**

In conclusion, the businesses which have now established this partnership with our office enjoy the main advantage of a considerable reduction in the work burden by dispensing with the paper questionnaires. They also have the advantage of a contact person who can reply to their questions regarding all the administrative tasks connected with the FSO. At present, the profiler cannot solve all their problems in connection with statistics but they do have a personal contact person to assist them.

## **Future challenges**

In the future, profiling will be developed as a central element of business statistics in Switzerland. The FSO wishes to develop larger profiling in terms of the quantity of business but also to expand to a maximum the coordination with economic and monetary statistics (data collection).

On an in-house level, profiling will in the future provide assistance to businesses for the units of statistical production. Externally, profiling will be seen by businesses not only as a statistical constraint but also something that may interest them.

This will come about through the establishment of simple and centralised processes for the collection of all business statistics. To meet this need, the FSO intends to create an internet portal between the business and the FSO. This portal should enable the business to obtain an overview of the statistics it

has to provide but also to benefit from the advantages brought about by the creation of a benchmarking system based on various statistics.

## Example of business portal (project)

The screenshot shows the 'Portail entreprises' website. The address bar displays 'http://unternehmen.bfs.admin.ch'. The page header includes the Swiss Confederation logo and the text 'Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft', 'Confédération suisse', 'Confederazione Svizzera', and 'Confederaziun svizra'. The main navigation bar contains links for 'THÈMES', 'ACTUALITÉS', 'LES RÉGIONS', 'LE MONDE', 'BIBLIOTHÈQUE', 'SERVICES', and 'INSTITUTIONS'. The 'Portail entreprises' section is divided into 'Actualités' and 'Profiling'. The 'Profiling' section contains the following text:

Le Profiling est une méthode permettant d'analyser la structure juridique, opérationnelle et comptable d'un groupe d'entreprises au niveau national et mondial, afin d'établir les unités statistiques présentes au sein de ce groupe, les liens qui les unissent et les structures les plus efficaces pour la collecte des données statistiques.

Les entreprises sont plus uniquement des répertoires mais travaillent aussi avec les registres et les statistiques. Grâce au Profiling, vous pouvez profiter d'un service personnalisé, permettant d'une part de réduire la charge administrative de travail de votre entreprise et de bénéficier de résultats statistiques personnalisés...

Vous êtes intéressés ? Contact...

Accès sécurisé Profiling

login :

Mot de passe :

The page also features a search bar, a 'de A à Z' section, a 'À consulter' section with links to 'Encyclopédie statistique', 'Statbase', and 'Statistiques', an 'RSS' section, a 'Mises au concours' section, and a 'Contact' section with the address: 'Office fédéral de la statistique, Espace de l'Europe 10, 2010 Neuchâtel / Suisse'. A large 'MUSTER' watermark is overlaid on the page.