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## Principles and practice of sharing and trading Government information

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### Abstract

This paper describes the results of a study carried out by the Intra-Governmental Group on Geographic Information (IGGI) into sharing and trading Government Information. A guide has been produced to illustrate how Government departments and agencies can develop sharing and trading information as formal business areas. The paper and presentation will describe the outcome of the study, both in terms of the guidance and the issues raised.

### What was the purpose of the study?

The Intra-governmental Group on Geographic Information (IGGI) was established in 1993 following the publication of the Chorley Report. IGGI promotes the effective use of government geographic information (GI) by increasing awareness of GI within government, acting as a forum for GI issues, encouraging the use of standards and producing Best Practice guidance.

An IGGI Sub-Group on Sharing and Trading Government Information was tasked with the preparation of guidance and signposting good practice in respect of sharing information as well as in relation to the process of commercially exploiting official data

It is intended that this new summary guide and the supporting main report will be of help to all governmental organisations who are currently confronting the challenges of rapid change in information value management, new legislative frameworks and evolving public expectations.

It is also hoped that some of the ideas and thinking set out in this guide will be of interest to private sector users of official data, such as researchers, publishers and value-added resellers. The guide touches upon commercial awareness, creativeness, experience in the marketplace and profit motivation as being essential to the process of identifying and exploiting commercial marketing opportunities for a wide range of government data and information.

### Why Now?

The White Paper *Modernising Government* is at the heart of the Government's programme of renewal and reform, centring on five key areas:

- Forward-looking policy-making
- Responsive public services
- Quality public services
- Information age government
- Public service

The *Cross-cutting Review of the Knowledge Economy: Review of Government Information*, published as part of the government's *Spending Review 2000*, accepted that the development of the government information sector is of considerable importance in the growth of the UK's information business.

As a key objective within this policy framework, it is intended that providing access to government information more easily at a fair price will stimulate innovation and private sector business activity to the ultimate overall benefit of the UK economy.

There has been a good deal of guidance covering public access to official information, but rather less on the more complex questions of information sharing and trading strategies.

It is clear that government information will need to be made more accessible to a wider audience, and that the development of value-added information products and services is something to be encouraged, possibly in co-operation with the private sector.

New legislation, such as the Freedom of Information Act, has also contributed to growth in both public and marketplace expectations. This in turn has created the need for government departments and agencies to take a fresh look at how they manage the demands upon resources which this generates.

The summary guide and the main IGGI report: *A Guide to the Principles and Practice of Sharing and Trading Government Information* are designed to help clarify some of the issues which determine policy, and to provide practical guidance for strategists and planners in this important and growing area of government business.

### Reviewing the Present

There are wide variations in the extent to which the policy or regulatory functions of different government bodies commercially exploit their data and information resources. Figure 1 illustrates the range of some of the business models currently in use:



Figure 1

Some organisations have long experience and considerable expertise in operating in the open marketplace with information products. Others have seen their roles differently, choosing to gather, process and distribute information as a public duty, the fulfilment of which might be impaired by the introduction of commercial drivers.

Sharing or exchanging information on a non-commercial basis rather than selling it may be more appropriate for certain kinds of information compared with other types, but it is nevertheless always important to ensure that the needs of all the participants, stakeholders and customers are properly met.

Figure 2 illustrates how official information flows through three main channels. One is generally closed to public access, the data being used internally only (at least, in its original form), a second, which is generally

open and freely accessible by the public, and a third which represents the option of commercial exploitation.

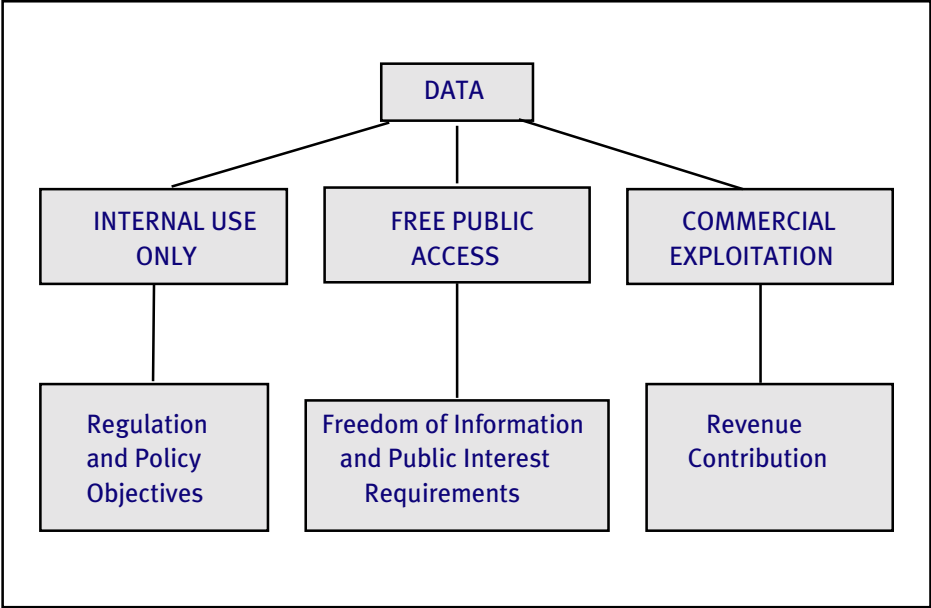


Figure 2: SIMPLIFIED CUSTOMER NEEDS MODEL

### Thinking About Marketing

Although the *Guide* covers aspects of sharing and the exchange of data both within government circles and externally, an important presumption is that there must be an intention to market a government information product or service *proactively*.

The process of conceiving and developing a product in this context may be illustrated as a series of four consecutive phases, each comprising three distinct steps (see Figure 3). The initial hypothesis must be based firstly on an audit of information assets, followed by a decision as to whether or not the potential for an information product exists in theory. From there, a product idea can be developed and a strategy for exploiting it and taking it to market can be formed.


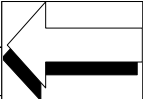
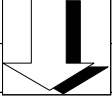
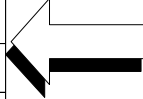
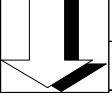
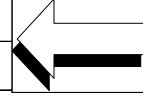
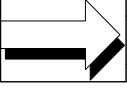

PHASE	STEP	ACTIVITY	FEEDBACK
 HYPOTHESIS	1	Audit Information Asset Register	
	2	Categorise Core and Non-core Information	
	3	Define Added Value	
 CONCEPT	4	Brainstorm and Visualise Product	
	5	Research and Analyse Market	
	6	Agree Business Strategy	
 PLANNING	7	Develop Marketing Plans	
	8	Test and Set Pricing Levels	
	9	Confirm Partnership and Licence Arrangements	
 IMPLEMENTATION	10	Initiate Controls and Support Systems	
	11	Activate Processing and Distribution	
	12	Launch Product	

Figure 3: The Twelve Steps of New Information Product Development

## Making It Happen

There are several essential principles which are central to any successful government info-business strategy:

- Understanding customer needs is of paramount importance
- The private sector can simultaneously represent both custom and competition
- There are two strands to the issue of data quality: operational efficiency and fitness-for-purpose.
- Business managers must bear in mind the uses to which their customers put the information which they supply
- Customers and end-users are not necessarily synonyms
- The public's expectations have to be managed in the same way as those of the immediate paying customer
- Where third parties are involved as distributors, the end-user's trust and confidence is often based on their perception of the distributor's professional competence
- Profit need not always be defined in terms of the so-called "bottom line"

Participants in all forms of government info-commerce, whether they are experienced and active or simply at a preliminary planning stage, are encouraged to engage in active dialogue with each other and with outside centres of excellence and expertise. This can be through the various forums provided by IGGI, the AGI, IDeA and other organisations who are willing to offer advice and practical help wherever possible.

## The Need for Policy Clarification

There appear to be two approaches to trading and sharing government data and information.

*Modernising e-Government*, sub-titled “A Strategic Framework for Public Services in the Information Age” was published in April 2000, a year after the first *Modernising Government* paper was presented by the Prime Minister and the then Minister for the Cabinet Office. It laid down four guiding principles:

- building services around citizens’ choices
- making government and its services more accessible
- social inclusion
- using information better

At the same time, it urged all public sector organisations to establish new ways of doing business and developing e-business strategies which should include accessibility through government and other portals. This echoed several key points in the Treasury’s Policy and Guidance Note of July 1998 *Selling Government Services into Wider Markets*:

- Government departments, agencies and NDPBs are encouraged to make better use of their assets by engaging in commercial services based on them, where appropriate and within certain rules
- The policy applies to the commercial exploitation of . . . non-physical assets: intellectual property, data and skills
- The revised policy on selling services into wider markets includes incentives, such as the right to retain the benefit of such receipts generated by sales and the ability to use receipts to offset running cost expenditure
- Departments will be responsible for signing off wider markets projects except where they require approval by the Treasury because they raise issues of propriety or have the potential to affect the government’s overall spending plans and priorities.
- Activity must be financed from within existing cash and running cost limits. Receipts will be subject to the usual arrangements on annuality.
- The case for any new assets needs to be based on delivering core departmental objectives, and substantial investment in PPPs should normally be undertaken by the private sector.

Various “vision” statements (as distinct from policy statements) at senior level suggest that the government wishes to move towards a model which is closer to the US federal example. Most advocate freedom of information in the sense of “at little or no cost” as well as “readily available” is more prevalent than is currently the case in the UK. However, this has not been borne out in practice.

## Recommendation for IGGI and AGI

Organise a workshop to explore options for more joined up approaches to sharing and trading information. Invitees to be drawn from both IGGI and AGI membership in order to bring non-governmental opinion and experience into the debate.

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A full IGGI Guide to the Principles and Practice of Sharing and Trading Government Information

has been prepared from the results of a wide-ranging study of current practices and issues commissioned during 2001 by the IGGI Sub-group on Sharing and Trading Information.

Other IGGI publications, The Geographic Information Charter Standard Statement and The Principles of Good Data Management, provide useful and relevant additional background.

Copies of the summary guide and of the full report are available from:

The IGGI Secretariat  
Planning & Land Use Statistics  
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