REVIEW OF DATA DISSEMINATION POLICY

Report prepared by the OECD

Printed publications

1. Despite the growth of other forms of data dissemination, traditional printed publications continue to sell well, and there is no evidence yet of their being displaced to any significant extent by the dissemination of statistics in machine readable form.

Microtables

2. Detailed Foreign Trade statistics are sold on microfiches and there is a small but steady demand for them.

Magnetic tapes

3. Statistics have been disseminated on magnetic tapes for about 12 years. All OECD data bases and their corresponding printed statistical publications are available on tape, the most popular being Main Economic Indicators (MEI) which consists mostly of monthly and quarterly statistics.

4. The main policy issue concerning tapes is their pricing. The OECD now has a four tier discriminatory pricing policy: for example, the following prices are charged for an annual subscription for twelve monthly issues of MEI:

   1) Government agencies receive the tapes free, provided they return them: otherwise a charge of FF 600 per tape.
   
   2) Academic institutions: FF 9,000.
   
   3) General public (except time sharing companies) FF 22,000.
   
   4) Time sharing companies with secondary distribution rights FF 88,000.
Diskettes for micro-computers

5. The OECD started to disseminate data on diskettes at the end of 1985. Five different data bases are offered, including MEI. The data are provided on 5 1/4 inch, double-sided, double-density diskettes suitable for IBM or IBM-compatible microcomputers and are formatted on both sides. The data are in an OECD specific format and the diskettes include a simple program for transferring the data into DIF, SYLK or LOTUS WKS formats. The data can therefore be readily used with software packages such as LOTUS 1-2-3, VISICALC, SYMPHONY and MULTIPLAN.

6. As in the case of magnetic tapes, the main policy issue concerns pricing. The OECD is really still in the experimental stage both with respect to the way in which the data are packaged on diskettes and with respect to the prices charged. At the present time, an annual subscription to MEI (which covers a set of historical data as well as monthly updates) costs FF 7,600, to the general public with a reduced charge of FF 2,400 for government agencies in Member countries. National Accounts (Vol. I, Main Aggregates), which appears only once a year has a correspondingly smaller subscription of FF 1,400 to the general public and FF 320 to government agencies. It is still far too soon to know what level of sales can be expected at these prices.

On-line dissemination

7. The OECD has also started to disseminate small amounts of data on-line to a limited number of government agencies in Member countries. Micro computers are being used, both for on-line data capture and on-line dissemination. This project is still in the process of development but it is planned to expand the facility as rapidly as possible, depending upon the availability of the appropriate hardware and software. Up to now, Member governments appear to be more interested in the on-line dissemination of documents than data.