

Workshop A: How can we create valuable information from data.gov.uk's new free datasets?

The workshop began with position statements by Antonio Acuna on behalf of the Cabinet Office and Mark Bass (Tesco) and Mike Whitelegge (M&S) on behalf of DUG.

Participants in this workshop were much more likely to use Google to source information than data.gov.uk, especially when there was a geographical dimension to the search being undertaken. The government website did nevertheless attract wide usage, but the following impediments were identified to wider adoption and use:

1. Data linkage to enable more holistic analysis
2. Improved search facilities for spatial search
3. Coordinated efforts to reduce duplication and provide metadata to identify the likely provenance of data sources
4. Streamlining of access protocols and removal of remaining (small, but annoying) user charges
5. Updating – a regularly updated national address register would be very useful
6. Consistent UK-wide coverage

The ensuing discussion assessed the likelihood of this 'wish list' being delivered. Some particular points arising were that:

1. The site was unlikely to be able to coordinate local authority data
2. Licensing issues are being streamlined but will nonetheless remain a (residual?) problem
3. The devolution agenda made it unlikely that UK wide sources would become the norm
4. CSV files were likely to be the most common format for the foreseeable future.

Paul Longley, 14 October 2011