

Using digital tools to hear from a more diverse public

Department for Business, Industry and Skills

The Focus on Enforcement policy team at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) used digital tools to listen to their customers alongside more traditional engagement methods to achieve a far richer picture of how businesses and individuals experience regulations. This enabled them to develop a more responsive policy solution.

Seeking the 'worm's eye view'

In March 2012, the Focus on Enforcement policy team, who are part of the Better Regulation Executive within BIS, launched a series of sector-focused reviews, looking through the lens of those who are regulated rather than the different national regulators (such as the Health and Safety Executive and the Environment Agency).

In order to get a sound evidence base which drew on a broad range of experiences, the team needed to hear directly from businesses and individuals to get a 'worm's eye' view of where enforcement could be improved, reduced or done differently, and where it worked well and could provide useful insight to regulators.

Using digital tools to reach different people

The team developed a [microsite](#) with the help of digital experts in Government. The site enabled businesses and individuals to comment on the different reviews, hosted a platform where ideas for future reviews could be shared, and published a variety of data about local and national regulators to increase transparency.

The team piloted the site and continued to make improvements to it as they learnt what prompted responses. Using Google Analytics, they tracked when changes to the site or its publicity resulted in more visits and comments. They also blogged about the progress of the project, and used Twitter to highlight their work to new people and drive traffic to the site.

The team continued to implement the more traditional paper-based consultation approach, but it enriched this insight through its digital engagement.

Developing a strong evidence base with a breadth and depth of insights

The responses received went far beyond the usual audience (compared with previous traditional consultations): the team received responses from SMEs, individuals and front line enforcement officers as well as 'the usual suspects'. More than 85% of the responses provided useful evidence for the reviews. This depth and breadth in insight contributed to a rich evidence base and the team strongly believes that it has in turn led to better policy. The speed at which the responses were received through the digital channels allowed the reviews to be responsive to emerging issues, testing them with the various audiences. This would not have been possible if they had waited until the end of the consultation period to receive paper responses.

Sustained promotion activity (particularly via social media) maintained the level of traffic to the website such that the first responses were received within hours as opposed to months, and the review teams could identify issues and probe these further in real time. The team greatly increased their knowledge of and confidence in using digital tools. The

data they gathered on its effectiveness enabled them to convert the digital skeptics who had originally questioned the value of the approach. For example, Google Analytics demonstrated that tweets were correlated with spikes in visits to the site and responses to the consultation.

Lessons learned

- Anyone can learn to use new digital tools (with a little help from the experts!)
- Keep the questions focused, in plain English, and appealing directly to what you believe to be your audiences' priorities
- Not everything will work – you need to be prepared to change and refine your approach as you go along
- Keep people engaged, including by providing feedback to let people know how the review is progressing. You can use a blog or social media such as Twitter to do this, rather than individual responses.
- Not everyone will feel comfortable commenting publically (especially on sensitive issues) so remember to allow people to comment / submit responses anonymously.
- Digital is not the only answer but it has huge benefits. In this case, it complemented rather than replaced the more traditional stakeholder engagement.

Find out more

[The focus on enforcement site](#)

[The FoE Twitter feed](#)

[Example of how a digital interaction led to change](#)

[Jo Kaczmarek's post on the Open Policy Making Linked In group](#)