



Addressing the needs of **CENSUS BUREAU** customers



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A CX leader discusses how the Census Bureau identifies and addresses the needs of a wide range of customers, including 2020 census respondents

What is the Census Bureau's strategy for improving the customer experience?

As the nation's premier data agency, the U.S. Census Bureau likes to be data-driven in aspects of designing customer experience as well. We strive to hear the "voice of our customer" across both digital and "real world" touchpoints to develop insights about the customer experience we're delivering, whether it is the survey or census respondent experience, the data user experience, the partner experience, the stakeholder experience, the job applicant experience or the employee experience.

In the area of respondents, for example, we conduct extensive research on what questions to ask and how to work these questions, as well as how best to deliver the survey or census to the respondent (such as the envelope or postcard design). We also evaluate our offerings in the ways the respondent can provide answers to a particular survey or census, such as by mail, by phone, online or via an in-person interview.

For the decennial census in particular, the Census Bureau has conducted decennial census content tests to research and improve the design and function of different questions, including questions on race and ethnicity, since the 1970s. The Census Bureau also tests the wording of questions to ensure that census questionnaires are easily understood and reflect the population accurately. Various tests are held throughout the decade to test different aspects of the overall decennial census operation and help identify respondent customer pain points that the Census Bureau should address.

And a 2020 Census Barriers, Attitudes and Motivators Study was conducted with a

nationwide survey and multiple demographic focus groups around the country to allow the Census Bureau to understand and compare the different and similar barriers, attitudes and motivators about responding to the 2020 census across different social, economic and demographic characteristics and subsequently develop the appropriate creative and media strategy and demographic-specific messaging.

How does the bureau identify issues that need to be addressed, and how do you measure success?

In addition to the results of our extensive formal testing and research, we also evaluate other sources of customer interaction to glean insights. This can include direct customer feedback via our website feedback tool, our inbound email form, direct messages to social care, tracking surveys around the country and/or indirect feedback via issues heard and surfaced by our partners, field representatives, contact center agents or other frontline personnel. Other insights surface via end-user usability testing and human-centered design workshops with partners, stakeholders and staff.

We also performed a respondent experience journey mapping exercise last year to identify and prioritize anticipated experience gaps by phase of the decennial census, based on both historical trends and current research and feedback. A key point that arose was the need to provide extra clarifications during the self-response phase when respondents have the most questions about whether and how to respond to the census by providing answers via Census-owned channels like our 2020Census.gov website and our social channels while also "curating" and optimizing the experience



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in other channels where the public may be looking for answers, such as search engines and digital assistants.

We are aggregating these touchpoints into a customer experience management analytics platform and creating some alerting capabilities to surface “hot” issues, as well as having our 2020 campaign optimization team review analytics for emerging trends to monitor and react to.

How is the bureau addressing customer experience concerns in the 2020 census?

Because our goal for the 2020 census is to count everyone once, only once and in the right place, we’re giving people multiple options for how to self-respond – online or by phone in addition to the traditional mail-in option – and we are taking extra steps to reach people in special circumstances.

We have launched an expanded Partners webpage at 2020Census.gov to provide a one-stop for our many partners to easily find news, information and resources to help them engage respondents in their communities.

As a result of the respondent journey mapping, we implemented an expanded social care team this summer to provide both chatbot and agent support via inbound direct messages on social media channels. We also launched social listening to identify issues and opportunities in the total conversation being shared publicly about the Census Bureau and the 2020 census.

We are also working on an expanded, search-optimized set of frequently asked questions to post online and share with frontline personnel to provide consistency of response to inquiries. We also added a webpage to 2020Census.gov called

“Fighting 2020 Census Rumors” where users can check for debunked rumors or report directly to us any suspicious activities or incorrect information that they have encountered related to the 2020 census.

Finally, the Census Bureau has established an integrated “fusion center” with representatives from across the agency and key partners to help track and rapidly respond to disinformation or other activities that are negatively impacting response to or operation of the census.

What advice would you offer other agencies?

First, in this instantly connected world, a federal agency cannot just look at a one-way “push” of communications to the public. Agencies need a full 360-degree view of the information being pulled in by our customers or pushed to them to know the right messaging, channels, services and features we will need to provide. Second, we need to ensure a true omni-channel experience so that people get consistent, accurate and channel-appropriate answers via whatever channel they use.

On the first issue, agencies need to assess and monitor all the channels, not just their own, that are influencing their customers to ensure that the right message is getting to the right audience at the right time. For example, what does your agency “sound” like on digital assistants and smart speakers? Does it give a coherent, correct answer or no answer at all? What is your customers’ “search experience”? If they search on Google, Bing or another third-party engine or search your own website, what phrases are they using? Are they getting the correct answer from you or incorrect information from someone else because your website

used formal language such as “estimated population of the United States” when the user searched using plain language such as “how many people live in the US”? On others’ public social media channels and posts, are your users being advised to do the opposite of what they should do?

To deliver on the second piece of advice – a true omni-channel experience – agencies need to integrate across silos and program areas to rapidly surface, aggregate, triage and prioritize addressing the customer pain points and “moments that matter.” They then need to develop solutions – business processes, human resources policies and goals, and technology – that can deliver the right information in the right format to all the relevant channels. And remember, solutions don’t always have to cost a lot. It could be as simple as creating an internal email list of all frontline personnel and sending them the new FAQs added to your website that day with links to them so that the answers to the hot issues customers are asking about are immediately available to everyone who may need to respond to customers.

Overall, the important thing is to include the direct voice of your customer whenever possible and the proper surrogates when actual customers aren’t available. Your experienced contact center and social media agents and team leads, field representatives, subject-matter experts who are routed customer questions, and active partners who talk, email or chat directly with your customers should all have a seat at the table when providing input and helping prioritize what customer pain points are the most important. The closer you are to the customer, the more your opinion should matter as it relates to improving customer experience. ■