

How Could the BEA Communicate Better?

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BEA Advisory Committee Panel

Washington, November 4, 2005

My Third Powerpoint Panel Discussion of the Week

- None of them have created any GDP or Personal Disposable Income
- Tuesday afternoon in Evanston for a bunch of transportation executives: Past and Future of Airline Industry
- Last Night at National Press Club for DC-Area NU Alumni Club: Three Journalists and me about how Journalists Cover Economics
- This one is the hardest

This is a Hard Assignment Because the BEA is Already So Good

- Compare to Ten Years Ago
 - Copying Data out of Overlapping SCB's
 - Books of Historical Data Years Late or didn't Exist
 - Industry Data years late
 - No Such Thing as FAQs
- Now
 - Flashing Katrina bar on BEA Home Page
 - FAQs about almost everything

With Whom is the BEA Trying to Communicate?

- Readers of Press Release
 - 10/28/05 Flags Katrina Issue
 - 10/28/05 Flags Negative PS Issue
- Casual Visitors to Web Site
 - FAQs are There
 - New FAQs are Highlighted

For these Users, What's Missing

- Katrina Discussion doesn't cite 9/11
- As a User, I remember 9/11 did bizarre things to PCE vs. GDP Deflator
- Katrina makes me curious: When, how, and why was 9/11 treatment revised?
- No FAQ or cross-links between Katrina and 9/11 (I did find a link to 2004 FL Hurricanes)

This Example Raises Issues about the *SCB*

- Maybe I'm Supposed to Know, but if the *SCB* had an article on revision of 9/11 treatment, how would I find it?
- Should be cross-linked in disaster FAQs
- Where is search window on BEA home page for history of articles in *SCB*?
- Click on *SCB* on BEA home page
 - No search function
 - 2004 subject index doesn't even exist!
 - 2003 subject you have to choose category (national etc.)
 - Or slog through each monthly Table of Contents

Another Audience: Frequent Users

- They click on “interactive tables” / all tables
- They go to their own tables
 - Recently for me, compensation by sector
 - They bypass FAQs and barely look at home page
- Why not link explanations to individual tables?
 - Link personal saving tables to Marshall’s *SCB* box
 - Currently in Table 1.10 there is a clickable footnote, this should be made standard throughout NIPA
 - Use a standard icon that is explained on each page

Additional Topics for FAQs

- Cost of Iraq War, by Quarter and Cumulative
- How does a \$10 per barrel increase in the price of oil enter into the NIPA?
 - Where in PCE deflator?
 - Where in imports, net exports?
 - How Does it Affect Real PDI?
 - How is Seasonality of Winter Heating Costs Handled?

Another Question

- Paradox:
 - BLS says aggregate business sector hours in 2005:Q3 were 2.7 percent *BELOW* 2000:Q1
 - BEA says real GDP 15.5 percent *HIGHER*
 - How to Reconcile with Real Compensation per Hour?
- If BEA thinks this is a BLS question, then link to the BLS explanation

Another Constituency: the RAs of the World

- Let's Bring Ian into the Dialogue
 - Who is He?
 - RA since 10/03, then aged 19
 - Master of Macro and Micro
 - Summers at Chi Fed and SF Fed
 - BPEA Co-Author, 5 million observations from IRS micro data files

Ian Thinks You Put the Wrong Guy on this Panel

- BLS vs. BEA
- Lack of Explanation of Where the Data Come From
- Or the Explanations are Hidden
- Phoning the BLS vs. Phoning the BEA

Conclusion

- Keep Adding FAQ Topics on Traditional Questions, not just the New Hot Topics like Katrina and Negative Pers. Saving
- Introduce Links into Interactive Tables
 - To *SCB* articles
 - To basic *Handbook of Methods*, NIPA 101
- Be nicer to the lans of the world the next time they phone you