

Census 2000: New Technology for an Old Job



The Census Bureau has used computers to aid them in counting since 1890. This year, 110 years later, almost the entire census will be collected, computed, and published using computers.

Some of the biggest changes in Census 2000 are in collecting the data. With approximately 118 million forms to be counted and processed, a new way of gathering the information was needed. A new automated scanning system was designed by Lockheed-Martin Mission Systems that will power all four of the main census counting centers. The Data Capture System 2000 (DCS 2000) will take a digital "photograph" of each page. A computer that uses optical recognition software then analyzes this photograph. This sophisticated software reads the strokes written on the form and compares the writing to its large database to see what is on the page and to translate the data into computer code. If by chance some writing is unreadable, human operators will be standing by to make corrections when they are needed.

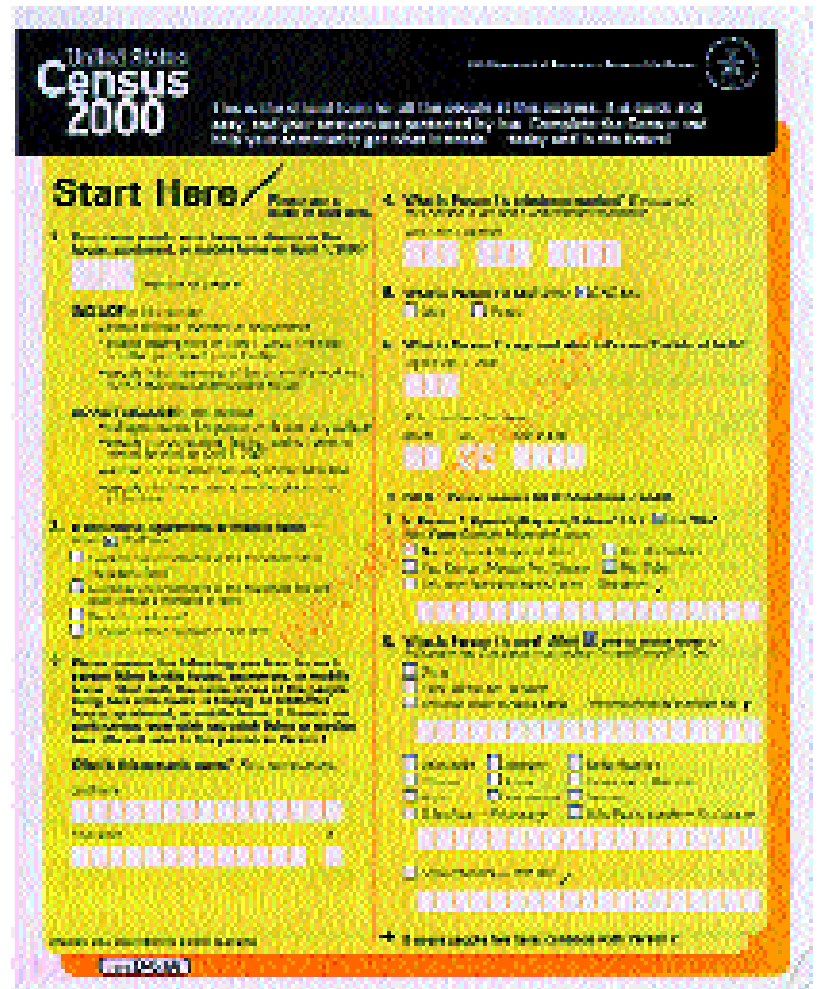
The now digitally-encoded data will be transmitted to the Census Bureau headquarters where it will be processed to find out various statistical information, some of the most important concerning our country's population.

In the 1990 Census the Internet was mostly known only to the academic world and the government. However, in 1999 hardly a soul has not heard of some implication that the Internet is having on our world. With this in mind, it only seems natural that the Census Bureau would choose to publish its findings on the Internet. For the first time in history, millions of people will have access to the data whenever they so desire it. For the most part, the data on the Internet will be free, however if customization of tabulations of data is needed, a fee will be imposed. The most desired of the data will also be published in print form and on CD-ROM.

Provided all of the new hardware and software go as planned, this system is expected to speed up the processing

of the forms by nearly 20 times.

Along with technological changes, there have been several changes made to both the long and short forms given out by the Census Bureau. About 83% of the households in the United States will receive the short form for which the most basic of information is gathered. The more detailed long form will be delivered to the rest of the population. Five subjects were dropped from the long form, and five subjects were moved from the short form to the long. Those that were dropped are: *children ever born, year last worked, source of water, sewage disposal, and condominium status*. The subjects moved to the long form are: *marital status, units in structure, number of rooms, value of home, and monthly rent*. It is believed that the questions moved to the long form can be reliably assessed using a sample of the population.



Sources: www.census.gov; www.policy.com/iss-suewk/; and the UMD Bureau of Business and Economic Research, a Census Data Center



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