

**Dr. Morton Marcus**

*Director, The Indiana Business Research Center, Kelley School of Business at Indiana University*  
**ISDC: The Making of a State Data Center**

Dr. Marcus discussed the origin and operation of the state data center in Indiana.

**The Indiana State Data Center Does Not Exist.** However, the Indiana State Library does exist. It is the lead agency for the nonexistent Indiana State Data Center (ISDC). The library covers the administrative details and phones. The ISDC is a “wholesaler” of information, while the library covers the “retail” end.

**History:** The Indiana Department of Commerce originally commissioned the data center project as the Indiana Business Research Center at the Indiana University Kelley School of Business in 1970. Dr. Marcus was in charge, and realizing that there was no verification of the data being entered, he subsequently closed it down and got set up in the State Library system using Library Services and Construction Act funds. Later, the State Data Center Program was formed. The money is allocated to the Indiana State Library and the director of the library directs the funds to the State Data Center Program. Currently, there is an appropriation of approximately \$500,000 per year to the Indiana Business Research Center at the Kelley School of Business, which supports the ISDC’s activities.

**Purpose:** The ISDC provides information to the Lieutenant Governor, economic development organizations within Indiana, and to anyone else who needs data. The problem that arises with any data center is that you can only work with the data that is available, and you must decide how to organize it so that people can use it.

**Important Players:** The **unit of analysis** (the person or business being monitored or measured)

The **recorder** (the person or agency that records the data)

The **storage agent**, (the person or agency that stores the data)

The **reporter**, if any (the person or agency that reports the data)

The **analyst** (a person who wants to get into the details)

The **user** (the person who makes policy or business decisions)

The **storage agent** is very often the same as the recorder, but can be a separate entity such as a library. The storage agent is very important because some recorders discard information after a certain period of time. In that case, the storage agent will have data that the recorder no longer does. The reporter is very often the same as the recorder, though a great deal of information is never reported, either due to budget constraints or lack of willingness to report. “A state data center has to be concerned about the legitimate interests of each of these individuals.”

**The State Data Center** need not know everything or take a position on anything. It is important, however, to understand where the numbers are coming from and what they mean. Dr. Marcus stressed that you must talk to the people who put the numbers together to understand what the numbers mean at the recording level. The State Data Center also does not need to exist as a formally funded entity. For that, you would need an appropriation as such. It is sometimes easier to get different pieces of funding from different sources and then put it all together.

**Outputs/Products: Websites** can contain static components (such as reports), dynamic components (such as unemployment figures), and interactive components (wherein the user has more control over the specific data output they get). Dr. Marcus noted that multiple websites that are linked together make sense. “Every agency wants its own website...Let them have it. Don’t fight duplication of effort.” The marginal cost of this duplication is very small. **Publications** are also very important. It is necessary for every agency involved in supplying the data to have ownership of it. Relationships with the agencies are vital to maintaining the data. Printed publications, press releases and profiles can give the people who supply the data visibility by allowing them to publish where their own agency may not have the resources to do so. **Presentations** are also important—talk to anyone who will listen.

**In response to a question from a conference participant**, Dr. Marcus explained that over time, you can build relationships with agencies and play a role in the generation of data. The ISDC currently works with the Census Bureau and the BEA in Washington on how to improve the entering and presentation of data, both off the record and without charge. But these kinds of roles and relationships happen over an extended period of time.

**Perhaps most important**, Dr. Marcus stressed that a state data center in Connecticut should be a broad attempt to bring information collected by state and federal agencies to the State of Connecticut. The specific kinds of data are not important—the agency should be concerned with the organization and dissemination of what is available.