

But why should the census-takers want to know whether a household owns a dishwasher, clothes dryer, deep-freezer, electric refrigerator, or a black or colour television set? There is more to this than giving an indication of living standards. These appliances use electricity or fuels. Energy producers need to know the likely trends of energy consumption. Manufacturers, distributors and retailers also require such statistics as a guide to production and marketing.

Census figures need to be carefully analyzed to produce meaningful information, as one Canadian salesman discovered back in the Thirties. Census figures for 1931 indicated that only a tiny percentage of homes in Northern Ontario communities were equipped with radios, compared to the rest of the province. It looked like a good territory in which to launch a sales campaign. He did and it failed miserably.

It didn't take him long to discover the reason. There were no radio stations that provided good reception in the area. Being an enterprising man, he quickly established one. Soon his radios were selling like hotcakes.

And that was the beginning of an amazingly successful career in the communications industry for the man who is now Lord Thomson of Fleet.

Selecting the Questions

Census information is so useful that individuals and organizations constantly suggest questions that they believe should be included.

One manufacturer thought it would be helpful if the questionnaire were to ask how many of the company's appliances were in each home. Such special-interest questions are always rejected. Only questions that will yield information useful to many Canadians are included.

Long before each census is taken, working groups and committees intensively discuss the questions to be recommended for inclusion. Representations are made by federal and provincial government agencies, businesses, universities, town-planning experts, financial institutions and many others.

Much time and thought goes into these recommendations. The final selection, which must be submitted to the federal Cabinet for ratification and approval, is made on the basis of the usefulness of a question, the cost involved in asking it, the relative difficulty of getting reliable answers, and the amount of effort it will take for the householder to provide the information.

Because of the recent emphasis on manpower-training programs, new questions were asked in 1971 about the time people devoted to vocational and occupational courses. Town-planners have long wanted to know where people lived in relation to where they worked, so this time the address of the place of work was included.