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The birth of the bulletin

Joseph M. Hilbe

I have been a Stata user for nearly 16 years now. I have watched StataCorp grow out of a small company called Computing Resources Center (CRC) to being the producers of what is now possibly the third most well-used statistical software in the world. I would like to share my perspective on why I believe Stata has been so successful.

Stata 1.0 was released in 1985. Five years later, Stata had grown, but not by very much. Advertisements stressed Stata's speed and graphics. But there were many competitors. In the decade following the birth of the PC, it seemed that small company statistical packages were everywhere on the market. I myself developed Accusoft in 1988, which, after development costs, sold enough copies to buy the family a steak dinner. Nearly all of these packages, including mine, disappeared within a short time. Stata, however, was not one of this group.

Two events occurred around the end of 1990 that were crucial, from my perspective, to the growth and success of Stata. A Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) project, entitled the Medicare Infrastructure Project, was initiated in the United States under the direction of Henry Krakauer to develop statistical and data-management tools by which Peer Review Organization (PRO) analysts were to evaluate Medicare data during the so-called 4th Scope of Work. PROs are private corporations under contract with HCFA that perform analyses of Medicare patient care and facility costs. As part of this project, Bill Rogers wrote a Stata program to estimate the Bailey–Makeham survival model, which was to be used to establish annual national parameters. I was hired by HCFA to serve as the biostatistical consultant to the Project and to conduct national and regional workshops, using Stata, for PRO biostatisticans and epidemiologists. By 1993, Stata had become an integral part of federal health-care analysis, which considerably boosted its reputation and user base.

Since its inception, CRC had periodically published the *Stata News*. Occasionally the *News* included various utility programs written using Stata's high-level programming language. A few statistical programs were also presented. Support disks, containing the electronic versions of the printed programs, could be purchased from CRC. Then in the January 1991 issue, two user-written statistical programs were published. Lawrence Hamilton wrote an enhancement of Stata's robust regression program `rreg`, and I wrote `logiodds`, a program incorporating the Hosmer–Lemeshow goodness-of-fit statistics together with the kinds of residuals defined in their recently published text on applied logistic regression. `logiodds` became `logistic` soon thereafter.

Given my experience in using Stata for the development of statistical and data-management tools for Medicare analysis, I felt that Stata's offerings could be easily expanded by having users contribute routines. I called Bill Gould in February 1991, suggesting that CRC publish a technical journal or bulletin that was to include programs and articles on how to use Stata. To my surprise Bill agreed but argued that it should

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be primarily managed by users. We decided on the name *Stata Technical Bulletin* and on an Editorial Board. I was to be its first editor. I was also hired part-time by CRC to devote time to launching the STB project and to help develop programs and assist with technical support. Given the considerable skills of Stata's own developers, together with the many excellent statistical routines submitted by users to the STB, by 1993 Stata had a strong worldwide user base and was well on its way to becoming the superb statistical package that it currently is. I resigned my positions in May 1993, moving on to other endeavors, but I have remained a strong advocate of Stata. I believe it to be the finest overall statistical and data-management package available. And it is getting more comprehensive and useful with each passing year.

About the Author

Joseph Hilbe is Professor Emeritus, University of Hawaii, and Adjunct Professor of Sociology and Statistics, Arizona State University. He is also software reviews editor of the *American Statistician* and is on the editorial boards of *Health Services and Operations Research Methodology* and the *Journal of Modern Applied Statistics*.