Blaise

Gaining **deeper** understanding
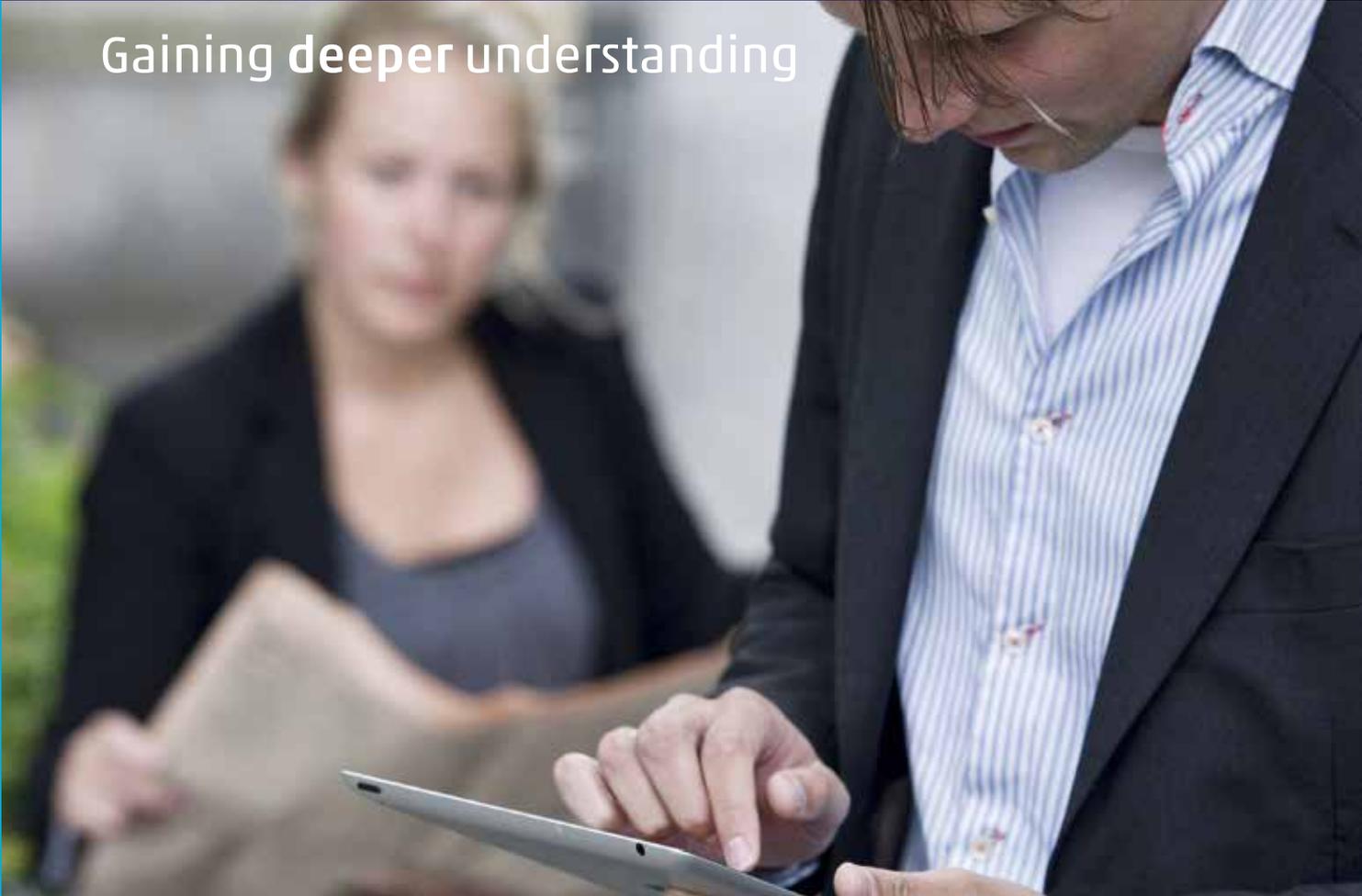
Blaise® 5 is the latest version of a widely used platform for computer-assisted data collection and survey processing which has been developed over the past 30 years. Blaise 5 continues to provide the best solutions for all survey instruments and runs on all major operating systems; in addition, Blaise 5 makes it possible to design any type of survey, from the simplest to the most complex.

All surveying modes are served by Blaise 5: CAPI, CATI, CAWI, including advanced options for mobile interviewing (CAMI). Its open-system architecture ensures flawless integration with non-Blaise systems, making it easy to link or integrate case and project management systems, other tools such as industry or job coding modules and relational database systems.

A major benefit of Blaise Developed, produced and used by a national statistical institute (CBS), it is by definition suitable for the core business of official statistics production.

What's new in Blaise 5?

1. Advanced features

a. Blaise 5 is completely multimode with the capability to run all survey modes using one single data model and combine modes in one dataset. This includes use of the same instrument for self- and interviewer-administered modes.

b. Versatile mode-switching allows users to switch between devices during a survey, picking up where they left off.

c. The full-responsive design means the same instrument runs smoothly on devices ranging from smart phones to desktop computer screens. This includes running on all major operating systems, differing controls, keyboards and screen sizes.

d. For apps running on mobile devices, Blaise 5 can be used online and offline. Users can even go offline and back in the knowledge that data will be stored securely on the device until a connection is re-established and it can be transmitted to the server.

2. A complete overview

a. Paradata – data on the survey process itself – is available extensively in Blaise 5. E.g. number of times a respondent logs in, history, timing data, CATI reports, outcome status codes across the sample, time taken to complete the survey and its components, whether the survey was completed successfully. These Paradata can be used to monitor, analyse and optimise survey design during data collection, thus improving productivity and response rates. You can adjust your survey strategy as you go.

b. Metadata – variable names, labels, valid values, question statements – can be used very effectively, e.g. for an automated generation of SAS®, SPSS®, and Stata® data descriptions.

c. Audit trails track how people use the system. Blaise lets you specify the level of audit detail. You can use audit data to assess the performance of the instrument and to determine user issues to be corrected.

d. The unique Blaise checking mechanism ensures that routing and consistency checks take place automatically and quickly, even for large instruments. Users can navigate the survey and correct responses while the checking mechanism ensures that the questionnaire continues to work properly.

3. Blaise for non-programmers

Blaise Colectica Visual Survey Designer offers an intuitive survey design surface and questionnaire palette, allowing survey designers to build questionnaires without learning a domain-specific language like Blaise. Surveys designed with this tool can be fielded using Blaise 5 on a desktop, via the Web, and on mobile devices. The software stores questionnaire specifications using open standards, and can connect to metadata repositories and question banks powered by Colectica software.

For more complex surveys the powerful Blaise language and the full developer's environment can be used.

4. Integration with other systems and software

a. Blaise APIs make it easy to integrate Blaise into IT infrastructure. Blaise can work with existing systems.

b. Blaise works well in secure environments and has passed several security audits.

c. Blaise data can be stored using the Blaise SQ-Lite database or by connecting to SQL Server, Oracle or another RDBMS system.

d. Blaise can be connected to SAS®, SPSS®, Stata®, and other down-stream systems. All descriptive data found in a Blaise data model can be shared with down-stream analysis systems.

e. Blaise data can be encrypted during data collection. It is possible to separate survey data from personally identifiable information (PII).

f. Blaise can preload large amounts of sample information, collect updates or additions to these data and subsequently export them back to the sample frame.

5. For data analysts

a. Blaise handles the world's largest and most complex government and scientific surveys. These surveys can easily have many thousands of variables each.

b. Blaise works with flat file, hierarchical and relational databases.

c. Powerful metadata capabilities provide connections to SAS®, SPSS®, Stata® and other down-stream systems. All descriptive data found in a Blaise data model can be shared with the down-stream analysis systems.

Background

Statistics Netherlands (CBS) is the official statistical institute of the Netherlands. Its main mission is to publish reliable statistical information which is used for policymaking and research, but also responds to the needs of society.

In 1986, CBS decided to develop its own software tool in order to streamline the production of surveys using personal computers. In the space of 30 years, this tool – named Blaise – has evolved into a complete data collection platform. Blaise has become the 'industry' standard of the statistics community and is licensed in more than 40 countries. There are over 110 users worldwide including many national statistical institutes as well as large and renowned universities.

CBS – with approximately 2,000 staff – uses Blaise at the heart of its data collection and its case and project management infrastructure. It is fully committed to the continued development of Blaise to keep pace with and to define future data collection technologies. The CBS Blaise team can draw on the vast knowledge and experience available within statistical production and data collection divisions at CBS, the fundamental research carried out by CBS methodologists as well as contributions from its widespread user network and fellow NSIs across the world.

CBS Blaise
USPs

Completely multimode The capability to run all modes with one datamodel operating on one dataset. This includes the use of the same instrument for self- and interviewer-administered modes.

Versatile mode-switching Allows a case started in one mode like web to be completed in another mode like CATI, continuing where the first mode stopped.

Full device adaptation The same instrument can run on devices ranging from smart phones to desktop computer screens. This includes running on all major operating systems and their differing controls and keyboards.

Running online and offline For apps running on mobile devices, Blaise 5 can run both online and offline. This includes the situation where the user moves from a connected status to a disconnected status and back. Data are stored securely on the device until a connection is re-established, then data are transmitted to the server.

Support

Training and education

A wide range of training courses and educational materials are available for new and existing users to learn how to get the most out of Blaise. Both general and in-depth tailor-made training courses can be delivered in-house or at a central location. >

Version 4 to 5 transition service

Blaise 5 opens up the entire world of survey-taking. To take full advantage of Blaise 5 capabilities, existing Blaise 4 instruments require conversion and adaptation. The Blaise 4 to 5 conversion handles the bulk of this job, but manual intervention may be necessary to incorporate new layouts and multimode features. The CBS Blaise team will provide support to make these changes as smooth as possible.

Assistance will also be available with building special interfaces, making it easier for data collection programs to continue with limited disruptions.
CBS will help minimise time and cost on your part while you perform the upgrade to Blaise 5 with the least disruptive and lowest-risk technology change for all current Blaise 4 users.

More about Blaise

Blaise 5 can be used to conduct surveys on smartphones, tablets and computers. Respondents can enter data directly, but Blaise is great for interviewers, too. Blaise works as a native app on iOS and Android devices, both online and offline. It handles all major browsers. It is used for personal, household and economic surveys. Blaise easily handles hierarchical and relational data structures. It has been used for surveys on labour force, expenditure, agriculture, business, health, nutrition, time use, transport, crime and victim surveys, living conditions, social policies and many other complex subject matters.

Blaise 5 is designed for multicultural, multi-device, multilingual, multimodal, multinational, multi-operable, multi-platform, multi-structural, and multi-version surveys. Some studies combine different instruments across modes. Blaise 5 handles these too, with one questionnaire and one database, making it easy to link or transfer data from one mode or instrument to another.

Blaise 5 encourages a design-once paradigm: concentrate on the questions and let Blaise handle modes, devices, and screen sizes through the Blaise implementation of responsive instrument design. For look-and-feel, and for methodology options, you can use Blaise 5 defaults or implement your own.

Underlying all this power and flexibility are the Blaise programming language and the layout implementation. The Blaise selective checking mechanism is a unique capability that enforces survey flow and edit checks and allows incredible instrument navigation whilst ensuring complete data integrity.

For government and scientific surveys, no other system matches the range of Blaise 5 capabilities. You have to live these demanding surveys to produce software for them. CBS-Blaise is the only commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) survey software produced and updated continuously by a national statistical institute.

Join our user community

The Blaise user community spans the world. An International Blaise User Conference is held every 18 months offering opportunities to share experiences and ideas. The 17th edition – IBUC 2016 – is held in The Hague, the Netherlands.
An active online user forum is also available for information exchanges, updates and bug-fix downloads. This way, the user community also invests in Blaise, co-creating tools and combining knowledge to advance the capabilities of Blaise as the world's leading CAI platform. This input is used to further improve and develop the system for the benefit of statistical organisations worldwide. Blaise users and in particular other NSIs have made numerous and major intellectual contributions over the years.

Longstanding Blaise partnerships
- **Westat** continues to be the North American distributor and supporter of Blaise
- **University of Michigan Survey Research Center** – methodological, operational and documentation expertise
- Through **Colectica**, Blaise will have a Data Documentation Initiative (DDI) connection, DDI metadata, Visual Survey Designer and Colectica Repository/Question bank benefits

About Team Blaise and its partners

A staff of around 25 work on Blaise 4 support and Blaise 5 development.
The core programming staff have been working on Blaise for years and are now incorporating additional programming resources into system development.

Team Blaise:
- designs and develops Blaise
- has a full service department that provides documentation, support, and training
- includes a dedicated testing group
- works closely with Statistics Netherlands' Methods and Operations Departments
- has participated in the production of hundreds of challenging surveys worldwide and has responded quickly to new demands over the past three decades
- fully participates in the International Blaise Users Group conferences (every 18 months) and in the annual BCLUB meetings

For more information on Blaise® and related products
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Gaining deeper understanding