

Think Marketing by Susan Henken and Patricia Huff

Singin' the Research Blues

Good data is hard to find. It's so easy to get the other kind!" If you feel like singin' the blues whenever you try to find reliable business information, you're not alone. A lot of other marketers are singing the same tune.

Solid information is critical, the basis for making any marketing plan or decision. Yet, finding that information is easier said than done. The Internet seemed like it would be a quick fix to the problem. While the Internet does serve as a bountiful source of business statistics and information, it has thus far proved both a blessing and a curse for business research. The information on the Net can be inaccurate and difficult to locate without spending a lot of time with fruitless searching.

Clifford Stoll says in his book, *Silicon Snake Oil*, "There is no easy, complete access to information. Never was. Never will be." Although there may be no quick and easy source for accurate business information, we offer in this article a few places to look for helpful data.

The Personal Touch

Unlike much Internet information, libraries are not only catalogued and organized, they offer the most user-friendly sources of business information available: librarians. These wizards of information provide the personal touch by expertly guiding us through the ever-increasing maze of available knowledge. Infinitely patient people, librarians spend most of their time gently guiding those of us who search for business information but don't know where to find it. Whether your questions concern finding dates of trade shows or defining prospect lists in a special database, the staff of a good business library is trained to help.

The Internet

You don't need to end up disappointed when you try to collect business facts on the Internet. To help lower your frustration level, we recommend the following addresses for free on-line research. Groups such as universities, governments or professional associations generally maintain these sites.

U.S. PATENT & TRADEMARK OFFICE

patents.uspto.gov

Completely devoted to patent information, including search engines for a variety of categories.

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

www.lib.umich.edu/lib/home/IDocuments_center/frames/statsfr.html

Well organized and maintained site with a variety of hyperlinks to useful information including Census Bureau data, Securities Exchange Commission (EDGAR) filings and U.S. Industrial Outlook statistics.

SPECIAL LIBRARIES ASSOCIATION

www.sla.org/pubslitotp/

Another excellent site with hyperlinks to the *Wall Street Journal* Interactive edition and Hoovers On Line Research, among others.

U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

www.census.gov/econ/wWW/econ_cen.html

Economic census data including industrial products overview, annual survey of manufacturers and other good industry information.

WALL STREET JOURNAL

www.wsrn.com/

Stock market information, excellent research hyperlinks including one providing connections to local newspapers and periodicals throughout the country.

DEMOGRAPHICS JOURNAL

www.amcity.com/journals/demographics

Articles about demographics and trends throughout the country including a search engine.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

ciber.bus.msu.edu/busres.htm

Excellent site with a series of hyperlinks useful for general international marketing research and a list of international trade shows.

INDUSTRYNET ASSOCIATION

www.industry.net

Great site for industry news/information including press releases and hyperlinks to companies.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

www.fedworld.gov

Hyperlinks to a wide variety of federal departments including WorldTech-Foreign Technology Alerts.

Just be careful, information alone can only take you so far. As Clifford Stoll says, "No amount of data, bandwidth or processing power can substitute for inspired thought. " We hope you use the research tools presented here with confidence, but always remember, it is up to you to process this data and convert it into good, profitable business decisions.