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STRATEGIES

Web research techniques can make you an online Einstein

To prepare for a business meeting — whether it be negotiations with a potential new client, an internal discussion about sales strategies or a roundtable with fellow board members — it's often necessary to utilize a wide range of online tools for business research.

No matter what industry you work in, these business research strategies offer the best low- or no-cost Internet resources that can aid in your intelligence-gathering.

- Research in online aggregators for industry information.

First Research (www.FirstResearch.com), which Dun & Bradstreet acquired in 2007, offers individual industry profiles for \$129 each. Profiles are available for 287 industries and are updated every 90 days.

There are other pricing options available for small business and corporate subscriptions. You just can't beat this source for staying abreast of your own industry or familiarizing yourself with a new one.

- Search in SEC filings for public company particulars.

10K Wizard (www.10KWizard.com) has developed a high-quality, sophisticated system for searching the 5.4 million-plus real-time and archived SEC EDGAR (Electronic Data Gathering Analysis and Retrieval) public company filings.

There are many search options available, including the unique ability to search by keyword. The sometimes extensive reports are downloadable into Excel, PDF, RTF (Word) and HTML formats.

A basic subscription runs only \$35 per month, with no required contracts. Other subscription options are available.

Navigation is straightforward and easy to use. This comprehensive public company information source has received recognition from leading business publications, including Forbes, Fortune and Money magazines.

- Comb regional and local sources for elusive private company information.

Locating private company information can be tricky at best. In general, the larger the private company, the better luck you'll have finding the information you need because, in theory, more is published about it. Regional



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and local news sources can be a great starting point for private company research.

HighBeam Research's (www.HighBeam.com) home web page touts "Professional-grade search anyone can use." And it's not kidding. For only \$29.95 per month for a subscription, users have

access to more than 3,000 publications, including newspapers, magazines, journals and transcripts.

Its library boasts more than 35 million articles. HighBeam offers a yearly subscription for \$199.95.

Check out the Save Articles feature. It's a great tool for saving retrieved articles to view at a later time. The HighBeam Research Engine is a three-year Codie Award winner.

Access 41 local business journals throughout the country (including the Denver Business Journal) via www.BizJournals.com. Registration is free and archives date back to June 1996. Keep in mind that each local paper's print edition is not available in its entirety via the website. Their Search Watch feature is free for registered users.

- Conduct reverse-link lookups to locate company suppliers and vendors.

One possible approach to locating supplier and vendors to a specific company is utilizing the reverse link feature in the Google (www.google.com) and Yahoo! (www.yahoo.com) search engines.

That feature helps reveal which companies or organizations link to a specific company's website.

In Google, click on the Advanced Search link on the home page. Scroll down to the Links search option and type in the company's web address. In Yahoo!'s web browser, type link: and the company's web address. When using Yahoo!, be sure to preface the web address with "http://".

- Familiarize yourself with web sources for market research.

MarketResearch.com offers more than 160,000 market research reports from more

than 600 leading global publishers.

Market research reports can cost thousands of dollars for a full report. However, on some reports, www.MarketResearch.com offers a Buy by the Section option to purchase a portion of the report for less money, making your investment more affordable and a bit easier to swallow.

MarketResearch.com has been around for a long time, and many researchers include this source among their market research products.

Customer service is topnotch. Business professionals can contact customer service to talk with a research specialist. The specialist will walk the customers through the purchase options to ensure they are purchasing only what they need.

Locating private company information can be tricky at best. In general, the larger the private company, the better luck you'll have finding the information you need **because, in theory, more is published about it.** Regional and local news sources can be a great starting point for private company research.

Note that it's usually best to complement your web research with information derived from professional online databases, such as Dialog, LexisNexis and Factiva). Professional systems offer comprehensive libraries for business research, but they can be quite expensive, with steep learning curves.

If becoming versed in these professional systems (or hiring someone who is) isn't an option, consider investing the time to become competent in using the resources listed above. You'll dazzle your colleagues with your research findings without breaking the company's research budget. And you just might be considered the Online Einstein of your office.

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