



Created by RHONDA ABRAMS

Excerpted from **Successful Business Research: Straight to the Numbers You Need—Fast!**

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## RESEARCH SOURCES

The following partial list describes just some of the research resources available to you. Many free resources are available through government agencies, such as the U.S. Census Bureau. Free access to some of the fee-based resources may be available through your public, college, or university library.

### Researching an Industry

You don't build a business in a vacuum. Trends affecting your industry affect your business, too. Knowing what's going on in your industry enables you to better compete and succeed.

#### Free Resources

- **American FactFinder Quick Reports.** Your source for population, housing, economic, and geographic data in the U.S. Use it to uncover everything from economic projections for specific industries and geographic locations to population trends and housing statistics by country, state, county, or city. [www.factfinder.census.gov](http://www.factfinder.census.gov)
- **Economic Census.** The U.S. Economic Census provides a detailed portrait of the nation's economy once every five years, from the national to the local level. Use it to gauge what is likely to happen to a particular industry or geographic region. [www.census.gov/econ/census02/](http://www.census.gov/econ/census02/)
- **Industry Trade Associations.** Trade associations offer a wealth of industry resources ranging from books, white papers, and PowerPoint presentations to industry experts who can provide insights and data for original research. The best resources are often available only to association members (who usually pay a fee to join the association), but with careful searching, you can find some excellent free resources as well. [www.planningshop.com/associations](http://www.planningshop.com/associations)

#### Fee-based Resources

- **ABI/INFORM Global.** Offers abstracts and full-text articles from leading publications. You can find out anything that's been published about a particular market or industry in a major business or trade magazine by searching through this database. [www.proquest.com](http://www.proquest.com)
- **Standard & Poor's NetAdvantage.** Comprehensive gathering of in-depth business and investment information. One of the top business databases, this provides independent research, data, and commentary on stock, bonds, funds, and industries—all of which helps entrepreneurs get the “big picture” of what's going on in their chosen markets and/or industries. Note: Available only through libraries. [www.netadvantage.standardandpoors.com](http://www.netadvantage.standardandpoors.com)
- **Business & Company Resource Center.** A premier online research site that is of special use to entrepreneurs, Business & Company Resource Center has its own content and search engine that allows users to look up detailed information about potential competitors; often available at public libraries. [www.galegroup.com/BusinessRC](http://www.galegroup.com/BusinessRC)



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## RESEARCH SOURCES

### Researching a Company

Conducting research about individual companies offers you many benefits, from identifying your biggest or toughest competitors to determining whether a potential customer is credit-worthy.

#### Free Resources

- **Company Websites.** Corporate websites offer a wealth of information on specific companies, from biographies of their executive teams to company news. If you're researching a competitor, that company's website is a great place to start.
- **U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission: EDGAR Database.** As all public companies, national and global, active in U.S. markets must file their financial information with the SEC, its EDGAR (Electronic Data Gathering, Analysis and Retrieval system) database serves as a primary source of investment information. The database works best when you are looking for information on a specific company. [www.sec.gov/edgar.shtml](http://www.sec.gov/edgar.shtml)
- **U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.** Provides public access to its database of registered patents and trademarks over the Web. This information is especially helpful when developing a potentially competitive product or trying to find a name or slogan for your own company. Doing your homework here may help you avoid a legal patent- or trademark-infringement quagmire later. [www.uspto.gov](http://www.uspto.gov)

#### Fee-based Resources

- **Standard & Poor's NetAdvantage.** In addition to providing solid business and investment information for industry analysis, this site also serves as a good resource for company research and competitive intelligence. As it is stock market oriented, its focus is on public companies. Note: Available only through libraries. [www.netadvantage.standardandpoors.com](http://www.netadvantage.standardandpoors.com)
- **Plunkett Research Online.** Provides market research, company profiles, analysis, trends, statistics, data, and business information. This is an excellent resource for researching potential competitors. [www.plunkettresearchonline.com](http://www.plunkettresearchonline.com)
- **Dun & Bradstreet.** Offers a vast amount of financial and market information on virtually any businesses you could research. There are thousands of financial reports on potential partners, suppliers, and competitors. The reports vary in price and cover everything from credit history reports to investigations of a company's background to check for the presence and value of any suits, liens, or judgments. [www.dnb.com](http://www.dnb.com)



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## RESEARCH SOURCES

### Researching a Target Market

Understanding your customers is essential to business success. You need to know who they are, where they are, what they want, how they behave, and what they can afford.

#### Free Resources

- **U.S. Census Bureau.** Provides the most comprehensive body of demographic information for target market research. Many companies and nonprofits that provide target market research and demographic data rely to some extent on census data. [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)
- **U.S. Census Bureau: International Data Base.** Provides worldwide demographic and socioeconomic data from 227 countries and areas (including the U.S.). Find international statistics, including population projections. [www.census.gov/ipc/www/idb/](http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/idb/)
- **Sperling's BestPlaces.** An easy-to-navigate site for comprehensive information on county, city, and neighborhood demographics across the U.S. The profiles include snapshots of local economies, housing, health, crime, climate, education, transportation, and cost of living as well as hard-to-find breakdowns of an area's religious affiliations by percentage of population. Click on Zip Profiles at the top of the home page to access profiles of all U.S. zip codes. [www.bestplaces.net](http://www.bestplaces.net)

#### Fee-based Resources

- **Mintel.** A global supplier of consumer, media, and market research. Provides detailed, up-to-date information on consumer behavior as it relates to a variety of industries, products, and life stages. An excellent resource for gathering detailed consumer demographic, lifestyle, and psychographic data. [www.mintel.com](http://www.mintel.com)
- **MarketResearch.com Academic.** Offers consumer, industry, demographic, and lifestyle-oriented reports designed to help companies create their marketing strategies. In addition to comprehensive analysis, these reports contain charts, tables, graphs, and key facts about the topic area. Note: Reports accessed through the site can cost thousands of dollars. Access for free through college/university libraries. [www.marketresearch.com](http://www.marketresearch.com)
- **Stat-USA.** This subscription-based service, available through the U.S. Department of Commerce, provides access to business, economic, and trade data. Daily, quarterly, and annual subscriptions available. The global feature of this service is particularly good for finding information on international markets. This site is suited for sophisticated researchers. [www.stat-usa.gov](http://www.stat-usa.gov)

For a comprehensive guide to business research, including the very best strategies and resources for finding critical business information fast see The Planning Shop's Successful Business Research.