

Company Research Resources

Indian Hills Community College

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How to Research Companies

To prepare for the job search, you need to know as much as possible about the organization. Employers perceive "researching the company" as a critical factor in the evaluation of applicants because it reflects interest and enthusiasm. In the interview, it shows that you understand the purpose of this process and establishes a common base of knowledge from which questions can be asked and to which information can be added, thus enabling both applicant and interviewer to evaluate the position match more accurately.

Try to locate the following items of basic information about the company: age, services or products, competitors within the industry as a whole, growth pattern, reputation, divisions and subsidiaries, location/length of time established there, size, number of employees, sales, assets, and earnings, new products or projects, number of locations, and foreign operations.

Company Research Reference Guide

Before you begin:

Here are some simple rules of thumb to remember before you begin your search for company information:

1. Publicly owned companies are usually easier to find information about than privately owned ones.
2. Corporations as a whole are generally easier to find information about than their subsidiaries or divisions.
3. Large, nationally known corporations are always easier to find information about than local or regional ones.
4. Information found in a library may be somewhat dated, from several months to several years old, depending on the level of current interest in a subject or the requirements for making data available to the public. You are unlikely to find much, if any, information on very recent developments (last six weeks) unless they are newsworthy enough to be covered by a national newspaper such as the Wall Street Journal or the New York Times.
5. No single library may have everything you need. In addition to your college or university library, consider visits to your public library, the chamber of commerce, or government offices, as well as telephone calls or letters to trade associations, in your search for company information.

Where to Begin

OPTION 1: Determine if your company is publicly owned. Once you know whether shares of stock in a company are publicly traded on a stock exchange, you will have a clue as to the best places to begin your search for information. Publicly owned corporations make shares available for purchase; privately owned ones do not. It is usually much easier to locate information on publicly owned companies listed on a national or regional stock exchange, for they are required by law to make certain kinds of information available to stockholders and, thus, to the public at large.

OPTION 2: Determine if your company is privately owned. If your company is privately owned but has sizable assets or sales, you may find it listed in a directory and be able to confirm from the brief information given there that it is, indeed, privately owned. However, directories that list private firms will probably include only the largest companies. Therefore, even if you do not find your company listed, it is still possible that it is privately owned.

OPTION 3: Determine if your company is foreign owned. It may be surprising to find that a company which you thought to be American is actually foreign owned. If a company is foreign owned, finding information may be more difficult, as most libraries will have only a limited collection of foreign business materials.

OPTION 4: Determine if your company is local or regional in scope or otherwise small in size. If you have not found your company listed as publicly trading stock, as a subsidiary or a foreign corporation, or as privately owned, consider whether it may be only a small, locally or regionally owned company.

Computerized Information Sources

Many libraries offer access to additional sources of company information through computer, data base search services. Using this service, a librarian can search a data base, or computer readable file of information, for material on your specific company. This may be directory, financial, statistical, or bibliographic information. Some databases are "user-friendly" and you may be able to search them yourself with minimal training. While data base searching can be a timesaving and efficient procedure, it can also become an expensive option because a fee is often charged for the use of the service. Be sure you have investigated your other sources of information before you discuss this option with your librarian.

OPTION 1: If the company is publicly owned. Once you have determined that shares of stock are traded in your company and it is listed on a major stock exchange, a number of sources may be consulted for a variety of information. Here are some possibilities:

Directories -- Useful for addresses, telephone numbers, and names of top executives.

1. Standard and Poor's Register of Corporations, Directors, and Executives. This directory lists 45,000 corporations with addresses, officers, stock exchanges, annual sales, employees, etc.
2. Thomas Register of American Manufacturers. A directory of American manufacturers, trade names, company and product information. Available online at www.thomasregister.com.
3. Specialized single-industry directories. Hundreds of such directories are available for the industry you are interested in -- e.g., advertising agencies, electronics, sporting goods. The entry in the card catalog will look like this:

Advertising Agencies -- Directories

Financial Sources -- Useful for balance sheet and income statements, stock and security data, product lines, or organizational structures.

1. Corporation annual reports to stockholders. An annual report contains a variety of current financial statistics and other information about the operation of a publicly traded company. Many libraries keep files of these reports, and many companies provide financial information through web pages on the Internet.

Indexes -- Useful for background articles on all aspects of the company.

1. EBSCO Periodical Index. On-line periodical index to articles on a wide range of topics including business and financial matters. The Internet-based product covers several years, and is updated daily. This subscription database is available on college computers via the college library home page.

Additional Sources -- Useful for the specialized information needs listed below.

1. For company history, try:

International Directory of Company Histories. Details 1250 of the world's most influential companies. Grouped alphabetically by product or service.

Library card catalog. Company histories will be listed in your library's card catalog under the name of the company.

2. For information on an entire industry, try:

U.S. Industrial Outlook, U.S. Government Printing Office. Annual survey of current trends and outlook for more than 200 industries, produced by the U.S. Department of Commerce.

3. For product information, try:

Thomas Register of American Manufacturers. . A directory of American manufacturers, trade names, company and product information. Available on-line at www.thomasregister.com.

4. For Biographical information about top executives, try:

Standard & Poor's Register of Corporations, Directors, and Executives. Volume 2 contains brief biographical data on directors and officers of major U.S. corporations.

OPTION 2: If your company is privately owned. Once you have ascertained that your company is private, you will need to be creative in your approach to finding information. Printed sources may have only brief and incomplete data on private companies, and you may need to search outside the library for additional information. Before trying this, however, examine materials in the library thoroughly; it will help you ask better questions as you continue to search elsewhere.

Try the following source:

Indexes -- The information you will find on private companies is most likely to be in periodical or newspaper articles. Thus, these indexes should be where you spend the most time and effort in your company search. Remember, however, that private companies may be secretive about many aspects of their organizations, particularly financial data. Reporters and observers, because of the difficulty of obtaining information, may write only infrequently and superficially about such companies.

This does not mean that private companies are undesirable employers. On the contrary, many of America's most successful companies are private. Consider, for example, Hallmark Cards, Bechtel, Cargill, UPS, Mars Candy, Johnson's Wax, and the Reader's Digest. Try any of the periodical indexes listed above under public corporations for articles about your privately owned company.

OPTION 3: If your company is a foreign company. An increasing number of companies have established a U.S. division or subsidiary. Most libraries will have only a limited collection of materials on such companies. Thus, you may encounter many of the same difficulties as you would in researching a private company.

OPTION 4: If your company is local, regional, or otherwise small in scope. When seeking information about companies of this kind, the best approach is usually the direct one -- talk to the company itself. In this case, however, you want to learn about the company before you speak directly to its representative at your interview. Printed sources of information will be little, if any help. A library may not gather any information on such companies except those in its immediate area. Keep in mind, however, that this does

not mean that small, local companies will not be good employers. Try some of the following ideas for gathering information on your company:

1. State Industrial directories. Nearly all states have a directory of industries or manufacturers located in the state. Most give limited information, usually directory information and perhaps sales and number of employees. Libraries usually have a copy of their own state directory and may have those of surrounding states.
2. Chambers of Commerce. The local chamber in the city where a company is located may be able to fill in some background information for you. For a list of chambers, with addresses and telephone numbers, see World Chamber of Commerce Directory.
3. Better business bureaus. The local BBB where the company is located will be aware of problems reported about the company, particularly if the company's product or service is consumer oriented. Remember that the BBB will not have any information if no complaints have been filed against the company.
4. Public libraries. Many public libraries maintain clipping files of local information from area newspapers and may also have other unique sources of information for local businesses. For a list of public libraries, with addresses and telephone numbers, see the American Library Directory.

Finding that Elusive Small Company

When targeting companies for your job search, don't overlook "the little guy." According to a recent Small Business Administration study, companies with fewer than 100 employees generated 51.5 percent of new private-sector jobs from 1982 to 1986 (Wall Street Journal, March 16, 1990). And many experts expect that figure to either hold steady or trend upward over the next decade.

But how do you find these small, growing companies? Where do you learn about their products and services, their market potential and prospects? Try these techniques for breaking into the network:

1. Call the local chamber of commerce in the area in which you would like to work (note that in large cities there is usually several chambers). Speak with the membership director. Ask for the names of growing companies and those involved in the industry of your choice and for the chamber's calendar of activities, newsletter, and membership directory.
2. Participate in professional trade associations in your functional area. Professional associations usually have local chapters associated with a national group. If you're interested in relocating to another city, you can tap into contacts in your targeted city through the association's national directory. Send prospects a cover letter and a resume, and cover up with a phone call.
3. Contact vendors for the industry in which you are interested. Ask them which companies are growing and which need your type of educational background and experience. To identify vendors, review the ads in journals for the industry you're targeting -- again, these can be found in your local library. Then use the phone book to find local vendor representatives.
4. Speak with lenders that specialize in assisting small firms, such as bankers, venture capitalists, and small-business investment companies (SBICs). Start by calling banks in your neighborhood and asking for the commercial lender who works with small businesses. Venture capitalists and SBICs are usually listed in directories in the local library.

You have many other potential networking contracts...just use your imagination. Consider family, friends, neighbors, members of clubs and other organizations to which you or your friends belong, church

members, professionals who serve your family -- doctors, dentists, attorneys, bankers, etc. Dig out the family Christmas card list.

Now, once you research you contacts, what do you say? Develop your script beforehand; planning is critical. Your script should begin with a brief statement about your degree and work background and then an explanation of how you came to this particular contact. For example, was it a referral from a publication? What is your interest in this company or this industry? Next, have a series of questions for your contacts. Ask how they were successful in reaching their current positions. Ask for assistance; people love to give advice. Ask for an opportunity to meet face-to-face to discuss the industry and its opportunities. And always be sure to ask for referrals.

These are but a few of the powerful networking techniques that can help you uncover tremendous opportunities for that small business offer. Take the time to develop your networking skills and you will discover the best jobs available among the best small companies.