



James J. Hill Center

Guide to Researching a Company

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This guide highlights some of the more frequently used sources for company research at the Hill Center. For further information and other sources, call our reference line at 651-265-5500, or email us at info@jjhill.org.

The Hill's Reference Library is open to the public. Please check out our [web site](#) for current hours.

General Considerations

The following questions are designed to help you develop a research strategy for locating the information you need:

Private/Public

If you are researching a public company (one which sells stock to the public and must report information the U.S. SEC), you likely will have access to large amounts of information, and you may want to narrow your focus to a particular aspect of the company's operations. If you are researching a private company, you may find that much less information is published, as they are not required to file with the SEC. You may need to estimate some figures, or draw conclusions from peripheral information about the industry as a whole, or from competitors.

Headquarters/Subsidiary/Division

If you are researching a subsidiary or a division, you may need to look for information on the parent company as well as the individual subdivision. Many directories give information only for parent companies.

Local/National/International

Many information sources are limited by geographic area. Determine the location and scope of your company's headquarters and business early in your search.

Manufacturer/Wholesaler/Retailer/Service/Other

Determine in which line of business your company operates, as there are many specific sources that may apply.

Newsworthiness

Consider whether events have happened at your company that makes it newsworthy. Have they hired a new CEO, or produced a new product, or introduced a new marketing strategy? Indexes may help you locate useful information in newspapers and magazines.

James J. Hill
Center

80 West Fourth Street
St. Paul, MN 55102

PH: 651.265.5500
FREE: 800.877.4455
FAX: 651.265.5520

EMAIL: info@jjhill.org

What information do you need about the company?

You may be interested in securing one specific piece of information or you may be interested in finding everything available. If the company is large or well known, you may want to be selective. Aspects to consider include:

- History of the Company
- Personnel
- Marketing Strategy
- Financial Information
- Products or Services
- Recent News

Sources of Information

Study the various sources you consult carefully. Note the kinds of information the source provides. Always analyze and compare your sources as to currency of the information. Where and how do the authors get their data? Review the introductory sections to determine the methodology used to obtain information and the timeliness.

Company Databases

Company databases are listings of companies or individuals and usually include basic information such as company name, address, telephone number, SIC or NAICS code, number of employees, and sales or revenues. Other information, such as fax numbers, web addresses, and officers may sometimes be included. Industry-specific directories, such as the Chain Store Guides, can provide more detailed company information and an alternative source for size/revenue estimates.

American Firms Operating in Foreign Countries / Foreign Firms Operating in the United States

Subscription database available at The Hill

This source answers the questions: Who Operates Where, Worldwide? It provides multinational business contact information with listings in over 200 countries. If you are looking for companies in your local area that may have offices in another country (and vice versa), this is the tool to use. Information can be downloaded to spreadsheets.

Gale DemographicsNow- Business & People

Subscription database available at The Hill

Gale DemographicsNow covers 20 million public and private companies in the U.S. The database may be searched by industry, geography, size of company (employee or sales size) and other criterion such as location type, year established, etc. Company lists can be downloaded or emailed.

GuideStar

Subscription database available at The Hill; some free access available at www.guidestar.org

The GuideStar database of over 1.8 million non-profit organizations can be searched using twelve different criteria, including geography, income, IRS subsection, and NTEE (National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities) codes. Using the library's subscription, advanced searching is possible as well as downloading lists of organizations. GuideStar also provides access to nonprofit 990 filings.

Company Profiles

Company profiles are typically restricted to large, public companies. Information can include History, Executives, Products, SWOT analyses, Locations, Top Competitors, and so on.

EBSCO – Business Source Corporate

Subscription database available at The Hill

EBSCO's Business Source Corporate provides access to over 10,000 detailed company reports from Datamonitor, covering basic company facts, history, key employees, products or services, top competitors, and SWOT Analyses. (Keep in mind that large, public companies will generally have much more information available than smaller, private companies).

Gale's Business and Company Resource Center

Subscription database available at The Hill

This resource covers thousands of the world's largest and most influential companies, with entries that provide information on financials, history, news articles, principal divisions, subsidiaries, and competitors. SWOT analyses are available for U.S., public companies. Some analyst reports are also available.

SEC

www.sec.gov/edgar.shtml

If you are researching a publicly-traded company in the U.S., you can access detailed company information from the SEC's EDGAR database. The database has recently been enhanced with some advanced search options, including full-text searching for the last four years of filings. Corporate annual 10-k filings provide financial data and management statements reviewing results and discussing future plans.

Business Periodicals, Newspapers, & Trade Journals

Industry trade publications can provide articles focusing on a company's key personnel, business strategies, new products, or marketing initiatives, while local newspapers can provide information about the activities of smaller private companies.

BizJournals.com

www.bizjournals.com

Full text access to articles from business journals in over 40 U.S. metro markets.

EBSCO Business Source Corporate

Subscription database available at The Hill

This resource contains over 3,300 full-text industry and management journals; over 70 local and regional U.S. newspapers, newswires, and business journals; company profiles; and country economic reports. Search this database to find company and industry news; management trends and topics; and information on smaller companies and international business.

Gale's Business & Company Resource Center

Subscription database available at The Hill

Business and Company Resource Center provides quick access to company histories, directory listings, industry overviews, company rankings, market share information, and investment reports, as well as select articles from trade journals and other news sources.

Google News

news.google.com

Google News does a pretty good job of catching the recent online versions of magazines, trade publications and newspapers. You can search by state or locality and filter results by relevance or date. Local sources are often the most useful for coverage of smaller privately held companies.

Minneapolis Star Tribune / St. Paul Pioneer Press

<http://www.startribune.com/> and <http://www.twincities.com/>

Local newspapers are an important source of information on local industries and companies, so when researching Minnesota companies - especially in the metro-area - you'll want to check the local newspapers for relevant stories.

Other Sources of Information

Government Agencies

The company you are researching may be required to report information to national, state or local regulatory agencies and that information may become publicly available.

Trade Associations

There is a trade association for most types of businesses in the U.S, and the Library has several directories of local, national and international associations. If your company is a member of an association, information may be included in association publications or on their web site.

Competitors

If you phrase your questions carefully, a competitor may give you valuable information. For example, asking questions about the industry, than zeroing in on two or three competitors of the company you are interviewing might lead your source to comment on the size, strength or strategy of your target company.

Suppliers

Suppliers and wholesalers are sometimes willing to provide size of shipments or other comparative information on the companies they serve.

Labor Unions

If there is an organized labor union in the company you are researching, the union may provide you with information on the number of employees and the type of work performed.

Local Public Libraries or Newspapers

These local institutions often maintain local company rankings or other publications that are not widely available outside of their region.

The Company Itself

In some cases, a skillful, knowledgeable interviewer can call a company directly and successfully learn a great deal about its operations. Your reception may be warm and cooperative, or you may be immediately dismissed. This kind of call may be necessary when you have exhausted all other sources of information. Again, reasonable, well-informed questions will be most productive.

Questions? Consult with a Business Librarian
877-700-HILL / 651-265-5500 / www.jjhill.org / info@jjhill.org