Free and Low-Cost Information Resources for Supporting Local Entrepreneurs

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A White Paper from **Growing Local Economies, Inc.**

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Prepared by Christine Hamilton-Pennell, Growing Local Economies, Inc.
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General Sites (Business Advice)

AllBusiness, http://www.allbusiness.com/, offers a number of short articles on all aspects of running a small business. You can find information on topics such as starting a business, incorporation, sales and marketing, accounting and finance, franchises, buying and selling a business, insurance, and Internet and technology. A variety of business forms and guides are available for purchase.

BizToolkit, http://www.biztoolkit.org/, is a free gateway to "the Web's best business information sources, as selected by the nation's top Business Information Experts at the James J. Hill Reference Library." The site includes business information tools, databases, and research resources that are keyed to the stages of business ownership, from exploring, to growing, to selling a business.

Business Week Online – Small Biz, http://www.businessweek.com/smallbiz/index.html, offers news, articles, and advice for entrepreneurs on topics such as finance, innovation, management, and technology. The section on small business offers articles on sales and marketing, policy, and financing, and includes a small business blog.

Entrepreneur.com, http://www.entrepreneur.com/, has a vast array of practical resources for starting a business, buying a franchise, growing a home-based business, business opportunities, money and finance, sales and marketing, management, e-business, technology, and other topics.

EntrepreneurialConnection.com, http://www.entrepreneurialconnection.com, powered by the National Association of the Self-Employed, offers free weekly learning modules and trend alerts on topics vital to the success of the self-employed and micro-entrepreneurs (with less than 10 employees). A free e-newsletter, Get Connected, covers a range of small business issues such as hiring employees, where to find free legal help, going green, creating a marketing plan, avoiding home business mistakes, and succession planning.

My Entre.Net, http://www.myentre.net/Home/tabid/92/Default.aspx, provided by the University of Northern Iowa Regional Business Center, is designed for small business owners. It offers specialized resources tailored to the profile of the business (provided as part of the required site registration process). Through the website you can access free, interactive webinars on topics of interest to small business owners. One useful resource is a library of articles, presentations, and forms on topics such as pricing your product, marketing your business, avoiding patent and trademark problems, and developing an online presence.

My Own Business, http://www.myownbusiness.org/, is a free Internet course for anyone starting a business. It provides 12 lessons covering topics such as business communications, e-commerce and online marketing, international trade, and small business marketing. The course textbook may be purchased for $40.00. Note: the site appears to work best in Internet Explorer.

Reference for Business, http://www.referenceforbusiness.com/, includes several helpful resources for entrepreneurs. The Encyclopedia of Small Business has more than 600 articles that provide detailed information about topics such as financial planning, market analysis, sales, business plans, tax planning, and human resource issues. Business Biographies offer biographical information on industry leaders worldwide. The Business Plans section is composed of "actual business plans written by entrepreneurs in North America who are seeking financing for their business." The site also includes the Encyclopedia of

American Industries, a guide to more than 450 manufacturing industries organized by SIC code, and over 500 essays about non-manufacturing and service industries. While some of the information is not current, it provides helpful background information.

SCORE, http://www.score.org, offers a host of resources for people starting, growing, financing or managing their business. One of the most valuable services offered is "Ask SCORE," a database of retired business people who will provide free business advice. You can specify an area of expertise, for example, manufacturing, advanced technology, disaster recovery, or financial services, and also qualify your search by state. SCORE offers a number of free online workshops as well as e-newsletters on topics such as women in business and social media/networking.

Small Business Administration (SBA), http://www.sba.gov/, provides information about the SBA's programs and loans. It also offers tips and resources through its Small Business Planner, and provides a set of tools and resources covering topics such as starting a business, marketing, laws and regulations, managing a business, and disaster recovery. The Tools section provides a library of forms, publications, archived monthly web chats, videos and podcasts, and frequently asked questions. The **Online Women's Business Center**, http://www.sba.gov/aboutsba/sbaprograms/onlinewbc/index.html, provides an online course for women entrepreneurs on winning federal contracts and links to women's business centers in every state.

Small Business Development Center (SBDC) National Information Center Clearinghouse, http://sbdcnet.org/, features a directory of annotated links on topics such as business plans, demographics, international trade, company information, small business trends, and social media.
The site also contains industry profiles in more than 60 categories, and you can subscribe to an email update on industry trends.

Small Business Trends, http://www.smallbiztrends.com/, is "an award-winning comprehensive online publication for small business owners, entrepreneurs and the people who interact with them." The site features articles about trends driving the small business market, advice from well-known small business experts, a radio show (archived in podcasts), a free newsletter, a link to the Small Biz Trends Facebook Community, and a section of marketing tips.

Wall Street Journal—Small Business, http://online.wsj.com/small-business, includes how-to advice, news, videos, and articles on small business topics. The site's How-To Guide for Small Business offers tips from Wall Street Journal's reporters and columnists on funding, technology, franchising, starting a business, running a business, hiring and managing employees, and buying and selling a business. There is also a business plan starter template, more than 100 sample business plans, and a WSJ business start-up calculator.

Business Plans

BPlans.com – The Business Planning Expert, http://www.bplans.com/, offers more than 500 free sample business plans that you can view online. It also features videos and recorded webinars on business planning as well interactive calculators to determine cash flow, starting costs, conversion rate, and other figures to use in a business plan. How-to guides cover starting a business, getting funded, growing your business, running an online business, incorporating your business, and buying a business. The company's Business Plan Pro business planning software is available for purchase through the website.

Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh – Business Plans and Profile Index, http://www.clpgh.org/subject/business/bplansindex.html, lists hundreds of types of small businesses and

offers a corresponding sample business plan, profile or book about each type with sources provided for the entry.

SBA Business Plan Basics, http://www.sba.gov/smallbusinessplanner/plan/index.html, offers help in writing a business plan, including an outline of what should be included in the plan and an online tutorial.

Small Business Development Center – Business Plans, http://sbdcnet.org/SBIC/businessplans.php, links to sites with specific business plans and other business planning tools and resources.

SCORE Template Gallery, http://www.score.org/template_gallery.html, offers templates for business planning, and also provides a link to contact a SCORE mentor for expert business planning advice.

Business, Demographic, and Economic Data

United States Data

EconData.Net, http://www.econdata.net/, is sponsored by the US Economic Development Administration as a service to regional data users. The site offers 1,000 annotated links to state and sub-state socioeconomic data sources, arranged by subject and provider, and indicating which sites charge for the data. For example, you can find sources of data for the nursing facility industry, state agricultural export activity, employment, and average hourly and annual wages for over 750 occupations.

Economic Indicators, http://www.gpoaccess.gov/indicators/index.html, is a monthly compilation of U.S. economic information on prices, wages, production, business activity, purchasing power, credit, money and Federal finance. Data is available from April 1995 forward.

Federal Communications Commission, http://www.fcc.gov, has a vast array of data and statistics on wireless and wireline communication services. For example, the **Industry Analysis and Technology Division**, http://www.fcc.gov/wcb/iatd/, conducts economic, financial, and statistical analyses of the common carrier telecommunications industry. Among the reports and statistics available are statistical trends in telephony, subscribership to high-speed services, financial information on local operating companies and interexchange carriers, statistics of communications common carriers, and data on international telecommunications service between U.S. points and international points. The **Wireless Telecommunications Bureau**, http://wireless.fcc.gov/, provides downloadable files for Universal Licensing System (ULS) radio services, updated weekly; federal regulations; licensee and consumer information, including a glossary of telecommunication terms; a list of wireless licensees; and free GIS licensing data (click on Geographic Data Extracts link on left side of page). In addition, this website gives you the tools to create, view, query and print customized maps showing FCC licensing data, regulated towers and market area boundaries. These maps are compatible with ArcExplorer® software produced by ESRI, Inc., which may be downloaded from the ESRI site.

Federal Reserve Board Economic Research and Data, http://www.federalreserve.gov/rnd.htm, has a data download program that allows users to download data related to selected Federal Reserve Board statistical releases on topics such as current interest rates (e.g., bank prime rates, foreign exchange rates, U.S. government securities rates, and conventional mortgage rates). Other regularly updated data cover industrial production and capacity utilization, household finance, and bank structure. Users can build custom data packages of statistics reported on the site.

FedStats, http://www.fedstats.gov/, is a "gateway to statistics from over 100 U.S. Federal agencies." Links to statistics are organized by topic, by geography, and through a general search. A section called Map Stats provides statistical profiles of U.S. states, counties, cities, congressional districts, and federal judicial districts. There are also links to published collections of statistics such as the *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, the *State and Metropolitan Area Data Book*, and reports on health, energy and transportation. Other useful resources include a list of agencies that provide statistics and links to selected agency online databases.

FreeDemographics.com, http://www.freedemographics.com, offers a free subscription option to access U.S. Census data from 1980, 1990 and 2000. Users can create custom market analysis reports based on a number of selected demographic variables for any geography. The free service does not include projections beyond the 2000 census.

The Gallup Poll, http://www.galluppoll.com/, contains links to various polls, reports, trends and audits of public opinion conducted by The Gallup Organization. Users can search for poll analyses and questionnaires by topic, for example, environment, immigration, or taxes. Free information includes articles, graphs and charts, video clips, and specific questions on a variety of topics.

National Center for Health Statistics, http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/, is the Federal Government's principal vital and health statistics agency. It includes healthcare industry trends, downloadable healthcare surveys, national health statistics reports, Fast Stats on a variety of topics, and information about vital statistics and topics such as health insurance coverage.

National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB) Research Foundation, http://www.nfib.com/research-foundation, is the research arm of the nonprofit small business advocacy organization with more than 600,000 members. NFIB produces the National Small Business Poll, a series of regularly published business survey reports based on data collected from national samples of small business employers. Eight business survey reports are produced annually. The website offers downloadable copies of recent survey reports, as well as the monthly *Small Business Economic Trends* and the Regulatory Impact Model Forecasts. NFIB also maintains **411 Small Business Facts**, http://www.411sbfacts.com/, a searchable database of approximately 2,000 facts about American small businesses and their owners (or managers).

North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), http://www.census.gov/epcd/www/naics.html, is "the standard used by Federal statistical agencies in classifying business establishments for the purpose of collecting, analyzing, and publishing statistical data related to the U.S. business economy." NAICS was developed jointly by the United States, Canada, and Mexico to provide new comparability in statistics about business activity across North America and has replaced the U.S. Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) system. The website contains a searchable list of 2007 NAICS codes (with links to definitions), as well as tables showing correspondence between NAICS 97 and SIC, and tables showing correspondence between NAICS 97, 02, and 07.

Salary.com, http://www.salary.com/, contains all kinds of information relating to compensation. While most of the content is fee-based, there are several free "wizards." The Salary Wizard lists salary statistics for hundreds of positions by geographic location. The Job Search Wizard allows you to search for jobs by keyword in different state and metro locations. The Cost-of-Living Wizard compares living-cost indexes and salary differentials between any combinations of 300-plus U.S. cities. It also reports the salary adjustment needed to maintain a particular standard of living, and what salary increase or decrease is likely given local market factors.

SBA Office of Advocacy, http://www.sba.gov/advo/research/, offers hundreds of downloadable research studies and data on small businesses (defined as businesses with fewer than 500 employees). Topics include finance, business owner demographics, regulation, exporting, and other topics. Among the available reports is *The Small Business Economy*, an extensive annual report that provides information on small business performance in the economy. You can also subscribe to a number of e-newsletters on small business research.

SBDCNet – Demographics, http://sbdcnet.org/SBIC/demographics.php, provides annotated links to sources of statistics from the Federal Government, as well as sections on sources of data by U.S. geographical area and by subject, for example, computer use, crime statistics, and religious affiliation.

StateMaster, http://www.statemaster.com/index.php, allows you to research and compare data on US states. Data has been compiled from various primary sources such as the US Census Bureau, the FBI, and the National Center for Educational Statistics. Citations are provided for all statistics. You can browse the site's facts and statistics by topic, e.g., immigration, energy, and transportation. The site also features thousands of maps, images of flags, and state profiles. A related site is **NationMaster**, http://www.nationmaster.com/index.php (see below under International Data).

Statistical Resources on the Web, http://www.lib.umich.edu/govdocs/stats.html, from the University of Michigan Documents Center, is an annotated index to statistical websites and individual statistical publications arranged by dozens of subject categories. Among the more than 130 topics covered are agriculture, banking, business and industry, consumer expenditures, cost of living, demographics, economics, education, energy, environment, finance and currency, foreign trade, health, housing, labor, military, politics, science, sociology, transportation, and weather. The site also provides a list of government documents that contain statistical data.

StatUSA, http://www.stat-usa.gov/, is a low-cost subscription service (around $200/year) offered by the U.S. Department of Commerce. It is "a single point of access to authoritative business, trade, and economic information from across the Federal Government." The site's State of the Nation library contains over 50,000 current and historical U.S. statistical releases, state and regional analysis reports, forecasts, and financial data relating to the U.S. economy. These include general economic indicators, employment data, information about the housing and construction industry, quarterly financial reports on manufacturing and retail, and monetary statistics.

Unlocking Rural Competitiveness: Industry Cluster, Workforce, and Demographic Indicators, http://www.ibrc.indiana.edu/innovation/data.html, contains federal data selected "to support development of industry cluster strategies for rural areas throughout the United States." You can develop a customized report that allows you to form your own region by aggregating counties (even across state lines). Data elements include industry clusters; educational attainment; employment and wages; household types; housing, including building permits and estimate of units; income and poverty; labor force; per capita income; population; and USA Counties in Profile. Measures of rurality include the Index of Relative Rurality, USDA rurality codes, and distance to nearest metro area.

U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (**BEA**), http://www.bea.gov/index.htm, offers information on key issues such as U.S. economic growth, regional economic development, and the position of the United States in the world economy. **BEA's National Economic Accounts**, http://www.bea.gov/National/Index.htm, provides "a comprehensive view of U.S. production, consumption, investment, exports and imports, and income and saving. These statistics are best known by summary measures such as gross domestic product (GDP), corporate profits, personal income and spending, and personal saving." Here you'll find downloadable interactive tables providing figures for

such things as U.S. motor vehicle output, compensation of employees by industry, and expenditures in the U.S. by nonresidents.

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Databases & Tables, http://www.bls.gov/data/home.htm, contains time-series data covering inflation and prices, employment and unemployment, pay and benefits, spending and time use, productivity, workplace injuries, international data, employment projections, regional resources, and historical news release tables. In addition, the site provides customized maps, tutorials, and calculators.

U.S. Census Bureau Economic Programs, http://www.census.gov/econ/www/, provides economic indicators by geography, sector (e.g., construction, retail trade, and transportation), and frequency. The site includes the Survey of Business Owners, Nonemployer Statistics, Current Industrial Reports, and the Annual Survey of Manufactures. Another key data source is the Economic Census, http://www.census.gov/econ/census02/, which profiles American business every five years, from the national to the local level. You can select data sets by sector or keyword, and filter the results by geography, industry, or data item. The latest economic census reports are from 2007, and not all have been released yet. You'll also find statistics on county business patterns, e-commerce, foreign trade, monthly wholesale and retail trade, and many other economic topics.

USA Today Money, http://www.usatoday.com/money/front.htm, provides charts, calculators, and tips on a broad range of economic topics such as mortgage rates, bank interest rates, taxes, insurance rates, and retirement. In addition, you'll find information on commodities, currencies, key interest rates, and other economic indicators. Each section features calculators where you can find quotes for local or national financial products.

International Data

FAOSTAT, http://faostat.fao.org/, from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, provides access to time-series and cross sectional data relating to food and agriculture for more than 200 countries. Major data categories include agricultural production, trade, food supply, food security, prices, and resources. Limited access to FAOSTAT records (up to 4,000) is available for free. There are also subscription options for unlimited access.

International Telecommunication Union, http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/, offers free statistics such as telephone lines by country, broadband penetration by country, and telecommunications indicators. The site provides links to telecommunication statistics compiled by national telecommunication ministries, regulatory agencies and industry associations as well as international organizations and consultancies. You can also find many free regional and global reports as well as conference presentations and a section of standards and definitions.

NationMaster.com, http://www.nationmaster.com/index.php, allows you to graphically compare economic and demographic statistics among nations. The site seeks to be a "one-stop resource for country statistics on everything from soldiers to wall plug voltages." Data is compiled from such sources as the CIA World Factbook, United Nations, World Health Organization, World Bank, World Resources Institute, UNESCO, UNICEF and OECD. The site features facts and figures on individual countries and regions as well as maps, flags of the world, a searchable encyclopedia, and time-series statistics on a variety of topics such as disasters, immigration, sports, and taxation.

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), http://www.oecd.org, issues 250 demographic and economic reports yearly for their 31 OECD member countries, as well as occasional

reports for several non-member countries. These resources cover gross domestic product, international trade statistics, price statistics, economic projections, labor force statistics, and many more topics. The site also offers a free online version of the *OECD Factbook: Economic, Environmental and Social Statistics*, http://titania.sourceoecd.org/vl=1531468/cl=23/nw=1/rpsv/home.htm, as well as information about a number of OECD databases, most of which are only available through a paid subscription. You can browse the site by topic, country or OECD department.

Statistical Sites on the World Wide Web, http://www.bls.gov/bls/other.htm, provides links to government statistical agencies in the United States and in several dozen countries around the world.

Database of Integrated Statistical Activities (DISA), http://www1.unece.org/stat/platform/display/DISA2010/Database+of+Integrated+Statistical+Activities+(DISA), is produced by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). The database lists the activities of over 30 statistical organizations active in the UNECE region. "Updated every January, DISA is a coherent catalogue of planned work in international statistics over the coming year." The website allows you to determine which database to use in order to find statistics from any of UNECE's 56 member countries. You can search by keyword, or browse by statistical topic or domain, organizations, or meetings.

UNdata, http://data.un.org/, is an internet-based data service provided by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). It provides a single entry point for UN statistical databases covering a wide range of topics such as population, industry, energy, trade and national accounts. Some 30+ databases, tables and glossaries contain more than 60 million data points that "cover a wide range of themes including Agriculture, Crime, Education, Employment, Energy, Environment, Health, HIV/AIDS, Human Development, Industry, Information and Communication Technology, National Accounts, Population, Refugees, Tourism, Trade, as well as the Millennium Development Goals indicators." Research aids include country profiles, an advanced search feature, and glossaries.

US Energy Administration – International Statistics, http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/international/contents.html, provides information about international production, consumption, imports/exports, prices, and other data about all types of energy, including petroleum, natural gas, electricity, coal, and renewables. You can also find information about carbon emissions by country; browse the country profiles; and access the international energy statistics database, a portal for detailed country and regional energy data.

Export/Trade and International Business Information

Doing Business in..., http://www.hlbi.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=37&Itemid=19, is a set of around 40 booklets prepared by accounting giant HLB International for their staff and clients. Covering countries from Argentina to Vietnam, each booklet is designed to provide some general information to those contemplating doing business in that country. They are not intended to be comprehensive documents. Booklets include general information on the country and its population, investment factors, types of organizations, workforce regulations, and taxation regulations.

Export.gov, http://www.export.gov/, brings together resources from across the U.S. Government "to assist American businesses in planning their international sales strategies and succeeding in today's global marketplace." The site offers an Export Basics primer as well as international market research, trade leads from the U.S. Department of Commerce's Commercial Service, export finance information

from Export-Import Bank and the Small Business Administration, and agricultural export assistance from USDA. The "Find Solutions" section provides help with international sales and marketing, international finance, international logistics, licenses and regulations, trade data and analysis, and trade problems.

Federation of International Trade Associations, http://fita.org/index.html, maintains a Global Trade Portal, which is a source for international import and export trade leads, events, and links to 8,000 international trade (export/import) related websites. The website features country profiles for dozens of countries, each of which contains sections that cover general information, market access, practical information, economic indicators, market research, country risk, doing business, agriculture, taxes and accounting, labor market, media, and other useful links. Other useful resources on the site covers topics such as transportation and logistics, trade finance and currencies, trade law, and trade shows.

globalEDGE™, http://globaledge.msu.edu/, created by the Center for International Business Education and Research at Michigan State University, offers information on global business activities. A section of Country Insights provides current information on the business climate, news, history, political structure, economic landscape, and relevant statistical data for around 200 countries. The Industry Profiles section offers information, news, events, and statistical data for 20 broad industry sectors. The Resource Desk offers Market Potential Indicators for Emerging Markets, which ranks the market potential of 27 countries identified as "emerging markets" by *The Economist* magazine. Among the other useful resources are an annotated list of global, regional, and county-specific statistical data sources, and a list of international trade shows and events.

Market Research, http://www.export.gov/mrktresearch/, a service of the U.S. Commercial Service, offers more than 100,000 industry and country-specific market reports authored by on-the-ground specialists. The Library includes country commercial guides, industry overviews, market updates, multilateral development bank reports, best markets, and industry/regional reports.
You must be a U.S. company, student, or researcher to access the Market Reports, and you must register with Export.gov. Reports cover industries ranging from the bottled water to aquaculture equipment, to the automotive aftermarket.

StatUSA – GLOBUS & NTDB, http://www.stat-usa.gov/tradtest.nsf, is a low-cost subscription service (around $200/year) offered by the U.S. Department of Commerce. The website provides trade leads and international trade resources, including the NTDB Global Trade Directory, Country Commercial Guides, International Market Insight (IMI) reports, agricultural market research, and Industry Sector Analysis reports, all organized by country. There is much useful information here, but the search interface leaves something to be desired. A separate subscription ($300/year) is required to access USA Trade *Online,* http://www.usatradeonline.gov/, the official source for U.S. Export and Import Statistics. The database features current and cumulative export and import data on more than 18,000 export commodities and 24,000 import commodities worldwide, using the Harmonized System (HS) up to the 10-digit level, and the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) commodity classification codes up to the 6-digit level.

Trade Data Online, http://www.ic.gc.ca/epic/site/tdo-dcd.nsf/en/Home, is the best free source of trade statistics for Canada. The Web site provides customized reports on Canadian and U.S. trade in goods with more than 200 countries. Two types of reports can be created: by product or by industry. You can select criteria such as trade type (export, import, etc.), trader (Canada, U.S. or province), value, trading partner, time period, and product (by Harmonized System codes) or industry (by NAICS codes) and generate a graph or report including those elements**.** Data for these reports comes from Statistics Canada and the U.S. Census Bureau.

UN Comtrade, http://comtrade.un.org/db/, provides access to the United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics Database. Upon free registration, the user has access to one billion trade data records from 1962 forward. The search query has a set of drop-down boxes that allow the user to search for imports or exports of selected commodities during a specified period of time from one country to another; for example, you can find the quantity of bamboo products imported by the United States in 2007 from any country in the world.

U.S. Census Bureau – Foreign Trade, http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/index.html, provides a broad and comprehensive range of foreign trade statistics that are available on a monthly, annual, and historical basis. Statistics include quantities, values, shipping weights, methods of transportation (air or vessel), duties collected, unit prices, and market share. Most detailed reports are available for a fee, but there is some general free data as well.

World Trade Organization Statistics Database, http://www.wto.org/english/res_e/statis_e/statis_e.htm, provides trade statistics covering WTO member nations. The statistical database allows you to view trade profiles, tariff profiles, and service profiles, or to create a custom data set by selecting from a series of data points. For example, you can determine the amount of merchandise trade for a specific commodity. These time series reports can be downloaded in a variety of formats, including Excel. *International Trade Statistics* is a downloadable annual compilation of statistical information that offers a comprehensive overview of the latest developments in world trade, covering the details of merchandise trade by product, and trade in commercial services by category. You can also search for regular published statistical reports through the site. You can perform more sophisticated searches from the Documents Online search facility, http://docsonline.wto.org/gen_search.asp?language=1, by defining multiple search criteria such as document symbol (i.e. code number), notification number, requirement subject, trade coverage, full text search or document date.

*See also the entry above for **Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD),** http://www.oecd.org.*

Funding and Finance Resources

Business Finance.com, http://www.businessfinance.com/, allows you to search the funding criteria of over 4,000 sources for business loans, venture capital, equipment leasing, and commercial real estate financing. You can search by type of funding (e.g., working capital or equipment finance), or you can use the search form to enter all the data about your business and financing needs and get a matched list of funding sources.

Fintel Scorecard, http://www.fintel.us/products/BusinessScorecard.html, is a free online tool that allows businesses to benchmark their financial performance against similar-sized firms in their industry. Businesses need only enter their SIC or NAICS code, eight figures from financial statements, and the number of employees to see how their company ranks in its industry, based on nine core financial ratios. Click on an individual ratio name to read about ways to improve the firm's performance on that ratio.

SBA – Financial Assistance, http://www.sba.gov/financing/, provides information about raising capital for your business. It includes information about eligibility and preparation, SBA loans, contract surety bonds, equity capital, and special purpose loan programs.

Entrepreneur.com – Money, http://www.entrepreneur.com/money/index.html, offers dozens of articles organized by topics such as angel investors, bank and microloans, government funding, self-financing,

and startup financing. There are also tips on payments and collections, taxes, money management, and several business calculators related to financial management, online business, and investing.

Marketing Principles and Strategies

Business Owner's Toolkit: Marketing Your Product, http://www.toolkit.com/small_business_guide/sbg.aspx?nid=P03_0101 introduces the small business owner to some of the concepts and strategies that professional marketing experts in large companies use. It offers articles and tips on analyzing the market environment; market research; developing and refining your product; packaging and pricing your product; choosing distribution methods; promotion, advertising and PR; building a successful marketing plan; and total quality management.

Duct Tape Marketing, http://www.ducttapemarketing.com/, offers an award-winning blog as well as articles and online training sessions on marketing topics such as Twitter for Business, public relations, pay-per-click advertising resources, and a free online press release creator. The site also hosts the Duct Tape Marketing Blog Channel Digest that features posts from 22 small business experts. You can sign up for a free weekly marketing e-newsletter that provides very useful content on a wide variety of marketing topics

MarketingSherpa, http://www.marketingsherpa.com/index.html, is a subscription service that offers a number of free reports and open access content on its site. You can also sign up for MarketingSherpa's free weekly case studies, new research data, how-tos, interviews and articles.

Mplans.com, http://www.mplans.com/, contains a collection of several dozen free sample marketing plans. It also offers how-to articles and advice for writing a marketing plan; a library of articles on all aspects of marketing; and a Business in General blog that offers commentary on small business, marketing and lead generation, business planning, and winning strategies and tactics for growing your business.
The website is a free resource owned and operated by Palo Alto Software, Inc., which also sells its marketing software through the site.

SBA – Market and Price, http://www.sba.gov/smallbusinessplanner/manage/marketandprice/index.html, has a useful section of articles that provides information about all aspects of marketing. Topics include the basics of marketing, international sales, customer service, competitive analysis, tradeshow marketing, and target marketing. You'll also find a list of 100+ marketing ideas, advertising advice, and a marketing FAQ.

Marketing and Competitor Lists

*Several companies sell customized business and consumer marketing lists online. The same data can be used to create lists of competitors. **InfoUSA** offers pay-as-you-go options for business (B2B) and consumer (B2C) lists. A nonprofit version of their product, **ReferenceUSA**, is available through libraries, but offers a limited number of downloads per screen. Other commercial web-based companies include **Zapdata** (B2B only), and **AcuLeads** (B2B and B2C). These websites allow you to create marketing lists of businesses or consumers based on multiple criteria, usually downloadable in a variety of formats. You can figure roughly $.25-$.50 per single-use lead for a standard mailing list; additional demographic features (e.g., age, gender or lifestyle information) will add to the fee.*

*You can also purchase direct marketing lists that have been compiled by a third party through services such as **SRDS** or **List Finder**. List prices generally range from $.08 to $.20 per single-use lead for a direct mail consumer list. Other parameters, including email addresses, are available for an additional fee. Direct marketing lists are especially helpful for specific targeted audiences, such as people who travel to the Caribbean, own toy poodles, or suffer from headaches.*

AccuLeads, http://www.acculeads.com/, offers leads from more than 25 million businesses and 160 million households. The site also provides lists from real estate records, lists of new borrowers, and a list of affluent professionals. You can search the database for free and create customized lists based on a wide range of parameters. There is a $100.00 minimum order.

InfoUSA, http://www.infousa.com/, lists more than 14 million businesses and 210 million consumers in its database. You can create a customized list of businesses or residents based on dozens of categories such as geography, demographics, and sales figures. You can also purchase lists of new homeowners or new business owners. Searching the database is free, but you can't obtain the cost of a particular list until you have completed a search. There is a $99.00 minimum order. An important feature is the business specialty lists, which allow you to filter your search by parameters such as home-based businesses and growth businesses. List formats are compatible with Excel, Act, Word, Goldmine and other programs.

ListFinder, http://listfinder.directmag.com/market, offers a searchable database of more than 50,000 direct mail lists. You can select the type of list you want (e.g., e-mail, postal mail, or telephone), the target market (consumers or businesses) and search by keyword. Summary information is provided for each list, with the option to pay for a subscription for more information or to contact a list broker. You can also send a message requesting information or a quote directly to the list manager. In addition, the site features articles about direct marketing, web marketing, direct mail legal and regulatory issues, and other topics.

Manta, www.manta.com, is a free site that contains profiles of more than 64 million businesses and organizations. "The basic company information on Manta is collected by third-party publishers through multiple sources, including public company financials and trade records; public records such as business registrations and government registries; and direct phone calls to businesses." Using the site's search function, you can find U.S. companies by business name, business category and geographic location; or you can browse company profiles by location or line of business. Company profiles include address, SIC code, contact name and title, annual sales, number of employees and other data. You can also browse businesses located in Canada, UK, South America, and other worldwide locations. Free registration is required to access some of the options. Additional features, such as lists of new businesses, are available through subscription options.

SRDS.com, http://www.srds.com/, is the granddaddy of direct marketing lists. It requires an annual subscription fee (around $750) to search the database of over 60,000 domestic and international lists. The subscription includes the printed version of the list as well (which is cumbersome and difficult to use).

Superpages, http://www.superpages.com/?SRC=insp, uses local search directories to allow you to search by category or business name, and then by geographic location to find businesses within a 1 to 100 mile radius. Using the advanced search function, you can do a search by radius by checking the "Search by Location" box, choosing a distance under "Select a Radius," and entering an address.
This site can be used to identify competitors or find potential new business customers.

Zapdata.com, http://www.zapdata.com/, from Dun & Bradstreet, offers business-to-business marketing leads from their database of nearly 16 million businesses. Selection criteria include location, number of employees, annual sales, SIC code, job function, and specialty data such as import/export flags or IT demand. Lists are priced on a per-record basis with optional subscription features available. Price is

calculated based on the number of records in a list as well as individual parameters selected, and ranges from $.16 to almost $3.00 per record. On the free side, Zapdata will allow you to view a list of up to 25 customers or competitors by name, city and state, as well as two company reports at no charge. You are not limited on the number of searches.

Market Research - General Sources

AllBusiness - Secondary vs. Primary Market Research,
http://www.allbusiness.com/articles/salesmarketing/1286-26-1818.html, explains the difference between secondary and primary research, and links to several short articles that provide information on conducting market research.

Market Research, Industry Research, Business Research,
http://www.virtualpet.com/industry/howto/search.htm, offers a step-by-step organized procedure to learn about an industry or a specific company. The author is a mechanical engineer, and the site is particularly helpful for those who want to launch a technical product in a new market. The site appears to be updated once a year.

Inc.com – Market Research, http://www.inc.com/guides/marketing/24018.html, offers a research primer that has a collection of archived Inc. articles about market research, including low-budget suggestions for conducting your own market research.

Market Research – Secondary Research

Secondary research refers to data that has already been collected. Many government websites contain free or low-cost information about demographics and markets (see the section above on statistics). Generally speaking, there are no free sources of market research reports published by commercial firms such as Gartner, Frost & Sullivan, and Datamonitor. You can often find useful market information and research from industry and professional association websites.

BizMiner, http://www.bizminer.com/index.asp, offers moderately priced subscriptions ($625/year) for unlimited access to more than two million online industry reports. These include market research trends for 16,000 lines of business at the national level, and local industry reports for 250 US market areas. Other subscription options include industry financial profiles, competitive market analyses, and industry sector trend statistics for any county, metro area or state.

First Research Industry Reports, www.firstresearch.com, provides industry profiles for more than 700 industries that can be searched by keyword, SIC or NAICS code. The reports provide a snapshot of individual industries, including an overview, recent developments, business challenges, trends and opportunities, executive insights, call preparation questions, financial information, industry forecast and rating, and web links and acronyms. A full subscription is $3,000/year, but you can purchase individual reports for $129.00 apiece.

Manta, www.manta.com, provides more than half a million reports from market research firms like Datamonitor, SGA Executive Tracker, Wright Reports and ICON. You can use the free search feature to find in-depth reports and research, or browse by companies, report type (company, financial, market research), publisher or year published. Some entries provide summary information, and all include purchase prices and file types.

MarketResearch.com, http://www.marketresearch.com/, is a searchable database of more than 250,000 market research reports from over 650 global publishers. Reports cover all industry sectors, both domestic and international. The site offers free searching, abstracts, and tables of contents, but the actual reports are fee-based, often costing thousands of dollars. You can sometimes buy "by the slice" to get specific pieces of a report.

Mindbranch, http://www.mindbranch.com/, is similar to MarketResearch.com in that it aggregates syndicated and custom industry research (more than 90,000 market research reports) from more than 650 independent research firms through a searchable interface. You can also browse by industry or publisher. Searching is free; the actual reports are fee-based. Description and table of contents are available for most reports, and purchased reports are downloadable in PDF format.

Market Research – Primary Research

There are hundreds, if not thousands, of market research firms that conduct primary research (e.g., surveys, focus groups, and interviews) on behalf of companies. In addition, some college and university business and marketing programs offer student internships or class projects to conduct market research on behalf of individual companies. If you want to conduct your own primary research, here are a few tools:

Conducting Focus Groups, http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/sub_section_main_1018.htm, is part of a set of tools for community development. This section provides information about when and how to use focus groups, including real world examples and a checklist that summarizes the key points.

Focus Group, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Focus_group, offers a complete explanation of what focus groups are and when they are used. The article links to additional resources, including a handbook on focus group principles from the American Marketing Association.

SurveyMonkey.com, http://www.surveymonkey.com/, allows you to create professional online surveys, collect responses, and analyze results via the web. A basic subscription is free and includes all of the basic features of SurveyMonkey. Basic subscribers are limited to a total of 10 questions and 100 responses per survey. A professional subscription is $19.95/month (or only $200.00/year), and includes an unlimited number of surveys, and up to 1,000 responses per month. The service is straightforward and easy to use. Numerous competitors, including **Zoomerang**, http://www.zoomerang.com/, and **ConstantContact Online Surveys**, http://search.constantcontact.com/survey/index.jsp). **Vanguard Vista** offers a robust subscription-based survey product, but also provides a free "quick poll" tool, http://www.vista-survey.com/features/quick-poll.htm.

Company Information

Most in-depth private company information is not available for free, although there are a number of websites that provide some information for free or at low cost. Company websites are often a valuable source of information on all aspects of the company. You can usually find annual reports and other basic information about the company, as well as press releases about new products and developments, key personnel, and financial information.

Morningstar Document Research (formerly 10KWizard), http://www.10kwizard.com, is a fee-based service that provides expanded coverage and advanced search capabilities of the SEC's EDGAR

(Electronic Data Gathering, Analysis and Retrieval) database. It allows you to perform keyword searches on up-to-the-minute SEC filings and set up alerts for companies you want to track. The database includes all 418 electronically filed forms, EDGAR Archives through 1994, pre-EDGAR Historical Index (listing) of all SEC filings to 1966, and foreign filers. Subscriptions start as low as $249/year.

AnnualReports.com, http://www.annualreports.com/default.aspx, is a free directory of company annual reports. You can look for a company through six search criteria: by company name, by ticker symbol, by exchange, by industry, by sector, or alphabetically. Once a company is found, the annual report can be viewed in either HTML or PDF format.

BizJournals.com, http://www.bizjournals.com/, offers recent news from more than 40 local business journals. You can search and view articles by topic, industry, or market location. When researching a particular company, this is a good place to view recent news articles about them.

ChubbyBrain, http://www.chubbybrain.com/, provides information about high growth private companies and investors that back them. Their goal is "to aggregate information about high growth private companies and build a new type of data & information services company - one that is transparent and accessible to all those who can use this information - entrepreneurs, investors, corporations, etc." It aims to be a competitor to more expensive subscription services offered by Thompson and Dow Jones. In its beta version, this free service has garnered a lot of publicity. The database has information on more than 47,000 angel and venture capital-backed startups and more than 18,400 investor profiles gathered through "mass collaboration" as well as the company's proprietary technologies. Advanced search forms allow you to find matching companies and investors by a number of parameters, including geographic location, products, industry sector, and investor type.

CrunchBase, www.crunchbase.com, is a free database of technology companies, people, and investors that anyone can edit. You can search for startup companies by location (e.g., Boulder, Colorado) and specify a radius from that location. Specialized search forms also allow you to create lists of companies, financial organizations, and people. The number of records in the database is growing rapidly and currently includes more than 41,000 companies, 57,000 people, 4,900 financial organizations, and 3,000 acquisitions.

EDGAR Company Search, http://www.sec.gov/edgar/searchedgar/companysearch.html, allows you to search the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) EDGAR database for company information, including real-time filings. All companies, foreign and domestic, are required to file registration statements, periodic reports, and other forms electronically through EDGAR. The website offers links to the complete list of filings available through EDGAR and provides instructions for searching the EDGAR database. Company filings are available from 1994.

High Beam Research, http://www.highbeam.com, is a low-cost search engine that allows you to search more than 80 million articles from the archives of over 6,500 newspapers, magazines, journals, and other publications. HighBeam Business (currently in beta) is a service that provides access to more than 450,000 company reports, as well as industry reports and business articles. Searching is free, but access to full-text articles requires a subscription, which is $29.95/month or $199.95/year. Note: you must sign up for a free seven-day trial to get information about current subscription fees.

Hoovers.com, http://www.hoovers.com, is a robust subscription database of company and industry information. More than 65 million public and private companies are profiled by Hoover's, and individual company or industry reports can be purchased for a fee. On the free side, you can get a profile of a company or industry, including revenues and number of employees, plus a sampling of key personnel and competitors. You can search for a company by name, or browse companies alphabetically, by geography,

or by industry. You can also find executives by name and view the top companies within an industry segment.

LLRX.com – Business Filings Databases, http://www.llrx.com/columns/roundup29.htm, is a helpful compendium of annotated links by state to corporate and business filings available online. "All 50 states make some level of corporate and business filings available online. In a few instances only limited information (such as name availability) is retrievable. The majority of the states, however, use their Web presence to disseminate a range of public business records -- and most of them offer access at no charge."

Thomas.net, http://www.thomasnet.com, is an industrial search engine that allows you to browse suppliers in more than 67,000 categories. You can search for product information by category or brand name; for example, glass bottles, fence posts, or Teflon. You can also search for company information by region or for the entire United States and Canada, find millions of CAD drawings, and do a radius search from a specific location. The website is free.

*You can also find quite a bit of useful information on companies and other economic data through **state agencies**. Most states collect information on corporations, sales tax revenues, demographics, wages and employment, licensed professionals, and other data that you can access via the Web, usually for free or a small fee.*

Industry and Market Information

Alacra Industry Spotlights, http://www.alacrastore.com/search-by/industry, provides a good starting place to gather industry information for more than 70 industries. The entry for each industry lists trade and industry associations, market research reports, and other major sources of information about that industry. You can also view a list of companies that fall within each industry sector. Full profiles are available for a fee. The industry information is global in scope.

Hoovers.com, http://www.hoovers.com, (also listed above under Company Information), is a robust subscription database of company and industry information. On the free side, you can browse a selection of brief industry overviews, organized by sector. You can also browse alphabetically by sector. When you select an industry from the list, you can view the top companies within that segment. The site also links to more in-depth industry reports provided for a fee through **First Research**, http://www.firstresearch.com/, which covers more than 900 industry segments. Individual First Research reports can be purchased for $129.00, and the website contains excerpts from the full reports.

Industry Portals / Industry Hubs, http://www.virtualpet.com/industry/mfg/mfg.htm, provides links to major sources of information for more than 100 U.S. industries, from adhesives and sealants to the work boat industry. These sites often include industry news and statistics, as well as information about business-to-business commerce. A section at the end contains links to industry portals outside the US, including Canada, UK, Europe, and Asia.

Market Potential Index for Emerging Markets, http://globaledge.msu.edu/resourcedesk/mpi/, is designed to assist businesses in determining which international markets to enter and the appropriate marketing strategies for those countries. The focus is on comparing the market potential of emerging markets, as identified by *The Economist* magazine, across eight dimensions on a scale of 1 to 100.

SBDCNET – National Information Clearinghouse: Industry, http://sbdcnet.org, provides Industry Profiles for more than 70 industries such as apparel, construction, and energy through the drop-down menu in the middle of the home page. The profiles are geared to actual business owners in mostly local

retail and service sectors. This is a good place to start a search for industry information. The site also has a section of small business links on topics such as demographics, international trade and e-commerce

SpecialIssues.com, http://www.specialissues.com/, tracks "special issues" of trade and industry journals in dozens of industries. These publications include industry outlooks, overviews, or surveys; statistical issues; company ranking lists; buyers guides; salary surveys; product/industry focus issues; membership directories; who's who registers; tradeshow specials; etc. A link is included to the actual article or issue, when available on the web. Otherwise, you will need to obtain the issue through a library or obtain it for a fee from a document delivery service or the publisher. Annual subscription fees start at $300 and include a monthly newsletter and access to reference help from site founder Trip Wycoff.

U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis—Industry Economic Accounts,
http://www.bea.gov/Industry/Index.htm, prepares and publishes a variety of economic statistics on industries. It offers gross domestic product by industry, input-output accounts, and four satellite accounts—innovation, health care, transportation, and travel and tourism. The website offers information guides that explain each type of statistics and how to use them. You can view the interactive tables online or download the Excel files.

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics—Industries at a Glance, http://www.bls.gov/iag/home.htm, consists of profiles of 100 industries. You can browse the industries alphabetically or in numerical order by NAICS 2007 industry codes. Each profile contains a variety of facts about the industry and additional statistics such as workforce trends. Several industry supersectors such as construction, financial activities and manufacturing are listed on the left side of the page and link to an overview of the supersector.

U.S. Census Bureau—Economic Census, http://www.census.gov/econ/census02/, profiles American business every 5 years, from the national to the local level. The 2002 Economic Census covers nearly all of the U.S. economy—services-producing industries as well as goods-producing industries—in its basic collection of establishment statistics. Reports are based on 2002 NAICS categories. Several key statistics are tabulated for all industries covered in the Economic Census, including number of establishments (or companies), number of employees, payroll, and measure of output (sales, receipts, revenue, value of shipments, or value of construction work done). Other items vary by sector. 2007 Economic Census results are being published during 2009 and 2010.

U.S. Census Bureau—Current Industrial Reports,
http://www.census.gov/manufacturing/cir/index.html, provides monthly, quarterly, and annual measures of industrial activity. "The primary objective of the CIR program is to produce timely, accurate data on production and shipments of selected products. The data are used to satisfy economic policy needs and for market analysis, forecasting, and decision-making in the private sector. These surveys measure manufacturing activity in important commodity areas such as textiles and apparel, chemicals, primary metals, computer and electronic components, industrial equipment, aerospace equipment, and consumer goods." You can browse the reports by subject title or NAICS subsector.

Valuation Resources—Industry Information Resources,
http://www.valuationresources.com/IndustryReport.htm, is a free resource guide to industry resources and data for more than 400 industries. Individual pages for each industry list resources and data available from trade associations, industry publications, and fee-based research firms such as IBISWorld and First Research. Each industry profile contains overviews, trends, and outlook; industry financial information and financial ratios; compensation and salary surveys; and business valuation resources.

You can also find useful industry statistics and trends on many trade and professional association websites.

People Information

Jigsaw, http://jigsaw.com, is an online directory of more than 21 million business contacts. Every contact in Jigsaw includes full name, title, postal address, email address and telephone number. You can often find people who are buried deep in an organization. It has safeguards built in to protect qualified names and email addresses, but you can get a name around 70% of the time.

LinkedIn, www.linkedin.com, can be mined for personal or business information. You can search for a person or company through the advanced search feature.

Spokeo, http://www.spokeo.com, is a people search engine. Spokeo allows you to find information about people, including their demographic and psychographic (lifestyle information) profiles. You have to pay to see some items such as photos and profiles.

Yasni, http://www.yasni.com/index.php?action=search, is a new people search site that allows you to find information about old friends, co-workers, business partners, job applicants, and neighbors, among other connections. Yasni crawls more than a hundred people-related websites, including social networking sites like LinkedIn; Google results; Amazon listings; pictures; and blog postings. It provides you with publicly available information such as web links, addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, social network profiles, pictures, videos and news.

ZoomInfo, http://www.zoominfo.com, is a search engine that finds and extracts the latest online information about people and companies and delivers it in concise and useful summaries. You can search for people by name and find their work history, education, and cached links to internet references on them. You can also find links to employees from the same company, link to the company's profile; and search job openings on the company profile page.

Christine Hamilton-Pennell

Christine Hamilton-Pennell, M.L.I.S, M.A.R., is Founder and President of Growing Local Economies, Inc., a company that provides consulting and training to economic development, small business, and library audiences.

Christine is an accomplished speaker and trainer on topics such as Supporting Local Entrepreneurs as an Economic Development Strategy, Starting an Economic Gardening Project, Meeting the Research Needs of Small and Growing Businesses, and The Role of Libraries in Economic Development. Over the past several years, she has made dozens of presentations to local, state, national, and international groups.

Previously, she served as the Economic Intelligence Specialist for the Business/Industry Affairs department of the City of Littleton, Colorado. In this position she provided strategic consulting, competitive intelligence, marketing support, and customized research to businesses within the city as part of their Economic Gardening project. Prior to joining the City of Littleton, she owned an independent research company for five years.

With a background in both economic development and business research services, Christine is uniquely qualified to assist communities in implementing a local entrepreneurship support project. Her particular passion and expertise is "economic gardening," an entrepreneurial approach to economic development that seeks to support local entrepreneurs by focusing on the three pillars of information, infrastructure, and connections.

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