

Researching Industries and Companies

Samford University Career Development Center

Birmingham, Alabama 35229

Before an interview, or even during career exploration, it is important to learn as much as possible about a particular company and its industry. This research will most likely lead you to information about many different employers and will allow you to make the most informed decision possible. One effective way to research a particular company is to break down the process into 3 parts: 1) take a broad look at the target industry, 2) compare and contrast a small group of companies, and 3) research one particular company in depth.

Researching an Industry

The purpose of researching an industry is to get a "big picture" of the business environment. Look at industry needs, research and development projects, and future outlook.

Sources:

- Standard and Poor's *Industry Surveys* - Identifies economic conditions, future outlooks, recent developments, and major industry players. DAVIS LIBRARY, Reference Section.
- *US Industrial Outlook* by the US Department of Commerce - Basic statistics for nearly 350 manufacturing and service industries are given, along with a prospectus for the next five years. DAVIS LIBRARY, Government Documents Section.
- *NTPA: National Trade and Professional Associations of the US*, Columbia Books, Inc. - Another listing of national trade organizations and their contact information. CDC LIBRARY or LAW LIBRARY.

Researching a Specific Company

There are numerous publications that profile companies. They range from general to specific, covering particular companies in particular regions of the country. Some may be targeted to gender, ethnicity, or age. Most of these publications can be found in a book store, however, some will only be found in libraries. (Keep in mind that some company profiles are written to assist investors, but they still provide excellent information.)

Sources:

- The CDC Resource Center houses company files which are especially helpful if your interview is on-campus.
- *Moody's Manuals*, including the *Complete Corporate Index*, the *Bank and Finance Manual*, and the *Industrial Manua* - Read-only CD-ROMS in the DAVIS LIBRARY Reference Section.
- Standard and Poor's *Register of Corporations, Directors, and Executives* - DAVIS LIBRARY, Reference Section.
- *Million Dollar Directory* - DAVIS LIBRARY, Reference Section.
- Periodicals such as *The Wall Street Journal*, *Fortune*, *Forbes*, or *Business Week*.

Internal Company Information

Internal company information can be helpful for large and small companies. With this information, simply try to get an overall picture, so that you don't get bogged down in details. Here are some helpful publications:

- Company Newsletters
- Job postings / employment brochures
- Annual company reports or quarterly reports
- Proxy statements (list of compensation of upper level executives, directors, and CEOs)
- 10K reports (reports of publicly traded companies that are given to the Securities and Exchange Commission - provides financial information, affiliations with other companies, competitors, outstanding litigation, and biographies of officers and directors)

Small, Local, or Privately Owned Companies

Small, local, or privately owned companies may have limited published materials. For information on these types of companies, the following resources may be helpful.

- Local/National Chamber of Commerce directories - Several of these are located in the CDC Resource Center.
- Local/State Industrial Boards
- State and government publications - Each state publishes a directory of manufacturers found in the state.
- The company itself - Don't be afraid to ask!

THE WORLD WIDE WEB

The World Wide Web can be an excellent source of information, if you know where to look for it. Otherwise, the Internet can be a confusing, time-consuming service. Following this section, you will find some gateway sites that will lead you to websites for specific companies or industries. If you have a specific company in mind, but you cannot seem to find a link anywhere, it is usually a good bet to type in <http://www.companyname.com> and see what happens. Often, you will find the web page for your company of interest.

Sources:

- <http://www.virtualpet.com/industry> (see bottom of sheet for index)
- <http://www.nlsearch.com> - Click on the "industry" section. From there, choose the options that most interest you.
- http://www.yahoo.com/Business_and_Economy/companies/ - Do a search at this site for a particular industry, then a particular company within that industry.
- <http://www.Hoovers.com> - Hoover's Online Company Directory is a valuable resource to gain contact information, as well as general company information (size, industry, age, etc.).
- <http://home.sprintmail.com/~debflanagen/index.html> - This is an interactive tutorial on the usage of over 50 free online company research resources.
- <http://www.samford.edu/groups/cardev/careerdv.html> - Samford's Career Development Homepage. At the bottom of this page, click on the question "Would you like to research a company or non-profit?".

INFORMATION TO LOOK FOR

1. **The company's standing in the business world:** what is its history, how has it changed in the past 10-20 years, what is its market share, what is its reputation, who owns it or what does it own, etc.
2. **Financial stability**
3. **Work atmosphere:** what are the personnel policies, what is the turnover rate, what is the average age of the employees, are the employees of good character, etc.
4. **Benefits and pre-requisites:** what are the insurance/retirement benefits, what about vacation and sick leave, will the company assist with continuing education costs, etc.

OUR STEP BY STEP PROCESS

<http://www.virtualpet.com/industry/howto/search.htm>

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|---|---|
| 1. Identify the Industry | 10. Define the Type of Competition in the Industry |
| 2. Seek General Industry Information | 11. Examine the Geography of the Industry |
| 3. Identify Trade Organizations, Publications & Trade Shows | 12. Search the History of the Industry |
| 4. Learn About the Consumers of the Product or Service | 13. Determine the Importance of Weather and Climate |
| 5. Examine the Patent and Trademark Situation in the Industry | 14. Government and/or Military Implications |
| 6. Determine the Legal Issues in the Industry | 15. The International Market |
| 7. Examine the Regulatory Issues of the Industry | 16. Miscellaneous |
| 8. Find Information About Specific Companies | 17. Interview People from the Industry |
| 9. Market Data on Specific Brands or Models | 18. Use Information Providers to Fill in the Gaps |
| 10. Product and Service Reviews | 19. Office Tools |

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Company Information Form

Company Name _____ **Time in Business** _____

Address _____ **City** _____ **State** _____ **Zip** _____

Subsidiaries/Divisions _____

Names of key personnel _____

Financial information _____

Gross sales/net profit last year _____

Plans for expansion (personnel, buildings) _____

Company goals _____

Company's competitors _____

Ranking in the industry _____

Company's community involvement _____

Employee turnover rate _____

Particular areas _____

Organizational structure _____

Recent Developments _____

Work Environment (Talk to people who work there) _____

Product and Services _____