

12.0 References, Referrals and Resources

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12.1 Introduction and Summary

In the formative stages of a starting a company or in writing a Business Plan, there is a critical need for information about the market served. It's necessary to know details about potential customers to be reached by the product or service, where the customers are located, the competitors and how they operate, the dollar size of the market, whether it is growing and at what rate. This information is of course not easy to obtain; here are some ideas that are useful to any prospective business startup.

12.2 Information Sources In General:

Customers. . . will often share information about the competition, if asked.

Suppliers. . . same comment applies.

Competitors. . . should be called or visited. They are surprisingly willing to share critical information. They may expect reciprocity at some time in future.

Business Reference Service. . . See below.

Trade Associations. . . maintain a database on their membership and can answer many questions about market size and demographics for the industry they represent.

12.3 Small Business Information Sources On The Internet:

12.3.1 Small Business Administration: <http://www.sba.gov/>. This is a superb source of information on U. S. businesses, business planning, trade, financing and regulations and is also a portal to government programs as well as to federal and state offices. This is a huge and complex site that one could spend days sorting through. The site contains a broad mixture of material from basic to complex and points the way to countless other sites.

12.3.2 California: www.ca.gov. This offers a very comprehensive treatment of services provided and state regulations, with sections devoted to small business. Information can be found, for example, on the various business structures and laws applying to each.

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12.3.3 American Institute of Small Business: www.bizoffice.com represents a vast reservoir of small business information, providing a good treatment on developing a Business Plan, including a checklist.

12.3.4 Formerly a supplement to Inc. Magazine: www.inc.com. is a lively on-line community of small business owners who exchange comments on developing and maintaining business.

12.3.5 Various providers of services to small business: www.allbusiness.com. This site, recently acquired by NBCi, is divided into three categories: 1) Learn, 2) Solve and 3) Save. You must register to gain the complete benefit of site access.

12.3.6 Starting and Growing Your Business: www.entreworld.org. Tremendous reference site; this is a must for a startup business.

12.3.7 Products and Services to Small Business Owners: www.bcentral.com. Products and services for small business developed by Microsoft and associated companies.

12.3.8 The site [http://www.refdesk.com/](http://www.refdesk.com) offers information on a wide variety of subjects.

12.4 General Business Information on the Internet:

12.4.1 Research on businesses of all sizes and types: www.dnb.com. This is the Dunn & Bradstreet website, devoted primarily to financial information on companies of all sizes (see below.) For comprehensive reports there is a charge. Be sure to check on costs up front.

12.4.2 General and late-breaking business news: www.wsj.com. This *Wall Street Journal* website is tied also to Barrons and other Dow Jones reference material. For access to detailed company reports, etc. they charge a subscription price of \$60.00 per year, an excellent value. www.msnbc.com and www.nytimes.com are multifaceted and detailed, offering extensive free information. www.newsdirectory.com is another source of news clippings and articles, but there is a charge for the complete service.

12.4.3 Extensive corporate research reports: www.wsrn.com, a website operated by the Wall Street Research Net, providing information on about 16,000 companies. <http://www.thomasregister.com> is a catalogue of all U. S. manufacturing companies.

12.4.4 Administrative Functions and Services: www.digitalwork.com. Help on such tasks as writing a press release is just a mouse-click away.

12.4.5 Patent & Trademark Resources: www.uspto.gov. The U.S. Patent Office website permits searches on-line for patents and research documents files since 1976. This is a broad, comprehensive website that requires patience. Also see www.micropat.com. There is a fee for use of this latter resource, but the trademark segment is extensive.

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12.5 Internet Information on Markets and Marketing

12.5.1 Market research and intelligence: www.imarketinc.com. A vast site devoted to information-based marketing for business-to-business organizations and marketing professionals. Also see <http://www.aismarketres.com>, a site sponsored by AIS Market Research, a firm specializing in the market research industry.

12.5.2 Trade Show Information: www.techweb.com/calendar/ offers a calendar of conferences worldwide focusing on computers, communications, software and the Internet. www.expoweb.com helps you locate conventions and exhibitions specializing in the computer and telecommunications fields, among others.

12.5.3 Tools and engines for B2B Commerce: See <http://www.smartonline.com/> for downloaded software applications to facilitate e-commerce. www.businesscreditusa.com provides credit reports on many companies at minimal cost. The site <http://www.fedbizopps.gov> provides requirements on doing business with the government.

12.6 Demographic Information on the Internet:

12.6.1 American Demographics, Inc.: www.demographics.com, a site requiring a subscription of \$58.00/year offers useful features designed to facilitate searching archives of American Demographics and Marketing Tools Magazines (which of course can be found at the library, as well.)

12.6.2 U.S. Gazetteer: www.census.gov/cgi-bin/gazetteer is a simple, straightforward collection of information from the census bureau organized for ease of use. Offers a linkage to the U.S. Census site at the bottom of each page. Lots of information on people, businesses, housing, sliced and diced in countless ways.

12.6.3 Area and Business Specific Lists: www.infousa.com provides mailing lists and statistical data, but the information is not free; they are in the business to sell CD-ROM's and other media.

12.7. General References

12.7.1 The Internet Public Library: www.ipl.org. A comprehensive source of all kinds of information.

12.7.2 Encyclopedia Britannica: www.britannica.com. This well-known reference is on the web, but requires a modest subscription payment. It is arguably the most comprehensive collection of timely information anywhere, with hyperlinks to more.

12.7.3 Economic and General Statistical Information: www.bea.doc.gov is a large collection of economic data that can be read only with Adobe 3.0 or 4.0. www.stat-usa.gov is an integration of several searchable government databases; it could be particularly useful in finding international trade data.

12.7.4 General information available from the Federal Government: www.FirstGov.gov is a very comprehensive website that ties into many other sites concerning government operations or others related to it.

12.8 THE BUSINESS RESOURCE CENTER An Overview of Resources

THE BRC at the San Diego SBA offices is maintained as a state-of-the-art facility dedicated to providing business owners, planners and managers with access to information concerning their markets, competition, and other questions vital to a small or startup business. Resources at the Center include current business periodicals, a comprehensive business reference library, networked computers with access to the Internet, self-contained CD-ROM databases, specialized business software and video presentations.

12.8.1 Summary of BRC Inventory

- An inventory list of available documents, videos and software. This list is available in a three-ring binder normally kept on the table in the center of the room.
- Comprehensive background materials on 186 different kinds of businesses (the *Entrepreneur Series*)
- Local, regional, national and international marketing information
- Guides to start-up, finance, accounting etc.
- Franchise materials
- Government contract information
- Policies (management, personnel, contracts, etc.)
- Government regulations
- Business encyclopedias(Trade associations)
- Sample business contracts
- Video tapes, VCR and television for viewing
- Magazines and publications for use in the BRC only
- Publications, free distribution

- Sample exercises are provided for the following BRC resources:
 - *Census Information*
 - *California Census Data*
 - *JIAN/Claris Data Base Access*
 - *Business Planning Software*
 - *Internet Access*

12.8.2 Business Reference Service provides financial-, employment-, sometimes sales- information on any company that has established credit through banks or with suppliers. D & B is nationally recognized as a comprehensive source of timely information on the credit rating of other companies. The vast majority of companies throughout the country register with D&B, since they recognize the value of being included in their database. The cost of a D & B inquiry depends on the size and complexity of the inquiry, often not more than \$50. Summary and statistical information is also available on companies for any given NAISC code. Prior to launching an inquiry, however, the client should secure a quotation on the service from D&B; they can be very expensive!