

Why Research a Company?

Crucial to a successful job search campaign is knowing how to research companies and organizations. To tailor your resume and cover letter to a particular position and especially to prepare effectively for an interview, you need to know as much as possible about the company. Employers perceive “researching the company” as a critical factor in the evaluation of applicants because it reflects interest and enthusiasm. During 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.

Solid research will give you the information you need to determine if the company is a good match for you. You can also identify the needs of the company and market yourself appropriately. Company research gives you confidence in answering questions in your interview.

You will want to locate the following items of basic information about the company: age, services or products, competitors within the industry, 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. There is no need to memorize each and every fact but you want to have a base of knowledge from which to draw during the interview.

5 Things to Know Before You Start

- 1. It's usually easier to find information about publicly owned companies than privately owned ones.*
- 2. Generally, it's easier to find information about corporations as a whole than their subsidiaries or divisions.*
- 3. It's always easier to find information about large, nationally known corporations than about local or regional ones.*
- 4. Information in print materials may be dated. While newspapers and news magazines generally cover current events, other print resources may be several months to many years old. The Internet obviously provides up-to-the-minute news and daily information updates, but be sure the website is credible. Check dates where you can.*
- 5. In your search for company information, no single resource may have everything you need. In addition to the Compass Resource Room and Penfield, consider visits to your public library, the chamber of commerce, and government offices, as well as telephone calls or letters to trade associations.*

How Do I Approach My Company Research?

Approach your research in the same manner as you would a research paper or project. Put together a regular reading program of relevant sources of information which could include *The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, Forbes, Fortune, Business Week, Newsweek, Time*, etc. or industry, trade, or professional publications/websites. Remaining updated about the current state of the economy or your particular industry takes more than simply skimming a web site or magazine article the night before the interview - stay plugged in.

What Employers Say About Research

Time after time, when employers are asked what job candidates can do to shine in the job interview, the response is “thoroughly research the company and be able to talk knowledgeably about it in the interview.” According to employers responding to surveys conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, candidates who have done their homework are better able to discuss how their experiences and qualifications match up with the company's needs; prepared candidates who know the company can also talk about how they can make an immediate contribution to the organization. The candidate who can do this is typically the candidate who gets the job offer.

Gathering the

Is the Company Public or Private?

Since publicly owned companies make their shares available for purchase (privately owned ones do not), it is much easier to find information on publicly owned companies. You can check out stock price listings in the *Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, or a similar resource. The web sites of the three major stock exchanges where public companies are traded can also be helpful. Try the American Stock Exchange (www.amex.com), the New York Stock Exchange (www.nyse.com) as well as the NASDAQ (www.nasdaq.com). If your company is publicly owned, they will probably be listed in a number of helpful resources. These resources could include information such as: companies arranged alphabetically, geographically, sales, and/or size; information on addresses, top officers, annual sales and number of employees; brief corporate histories, lists of subsidiaries, statistics, securities data, financial profiles and more. Limited information is available on their web site at no charge.

1. *Standard & Poor's Register of Corporations* - covers 45,000 corporations. (www.standardandpoors.com)

2. *Million Dollar Directory* - covers 160,000 U.S. businesses with a net worth of more than \$500,000. (<http://mddi.dnb.com/mddi/>)

3. *Forbes Magazine* - provided information for the largest private companies in America. <http://www.forbes.com/2002/11/07/privateland.html>

4. *Thomas Register of American*

Manufacturers - more than 20 volumes provide a comprehensive directory of American manufactures, arranged by product.

(www.thomasregister.com/)

5. *Moody's Manuals* - covers companies listed on U.S. stock exchanges in a variety of business areas.

(www.moody.com)

6. *ValueLine Investment Survey* - analyzes and reports on 2,000 stocks in 90 industries. (www.valueline.com/)

7. *Corporation Annual Reports to Stockholders* - these reports contain current financial statistics and other information about the companies' operations - many libraries keep files of these reports and a growing number of companies keep these reports on their web site.

8. *10-K reports* - These financial disclosure reports contain a wealth of financial data and are submitted annually to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission. The full text of these reports is available at the SEC's Edgar web site (www.sec.gov/edgarhp.htm)

9. *Indexes* - provide current information on U.S. companies, background articles and more. These can include the Business Periodicals Index (covers 350 English-language periodicals in all areas of business), Predicasts F&S Index (excellent index for current information on U.S. companies), Wall Street Journal Index (covering articles on companies and industries of all kinds (www.wsj.com)).

Several other business news sources are available through the web. Check out "Top Money News" (www.usatoday.com/money/front.htm),

CNNfn (www.cnnfn.com) or Bloomberg Personal (www.bloomberg.com). Each of these contains today's business news stories, plus a limited number of stories from the past few months.

Is the Company a Subsidiary?

If the company is a subsidiary or division of a publicly owned corporation, you'll find information less readily available. The parent corporation is not required to divulge financial information for the separate divisions; therefore, the details of the financial status of the subsidiary will be difficult to verify. You can't purchase shares of stock in a subsidiary, only in the corporation as a whole, so investment advisory services won't include these small parts of the corporation. You may try these options:

Directories - any of the directories suggested for publicly owned companies may also list subsidiaries or divisions. You can also check out the Directory of Corporate Affiliations and America's Corporate Families. *Financial Information* - you won't find the detailed financial data available for parent corporations broken down for the subsidiaries. However, the parent does occasionally include some data in its annual report to stockholders or in its 10-K report.

Is the Company Privately Owned?

You will need to be creative in your approach to finding information since these companies are not required to publish information. Research any

Info. You Need

of the aforementioned directories and indexes. You'll likely have the most success researching periodical or newspaper articles, but keep in mind that reporters and observers, because of the difficulty of obtaining information, may write only infrequently and superficially about such companies. Some of the best-known companies are private and worth the extra legwork to obtain information (Hallmark Cards, Levi Strauss, Domino's Pizza, etc.). Many private companies have web sites that provide brief facts about their services and accomplishments.

Is the Company Foreign Owned?

As with private companies, you may encounter difficulties researching information about these companies. Foreign companies may have established a U.S. division or subsidiary and you'll need to be creative in your approach as they are not subject to the same financial disclosure laws as U.S. companies (unless listed on a stock exchange). Check out:

1. *World Business Directory* - this provides brief profiles of 100,000 businesses worldwide - including many small firms - that are involved in international trade.

(www.importexporthelp.com/dirindex.htm)

2. *Moody's International Manual* - offers brief company histories, personnel, product lines, financial statements, etc.

3. *Global Company Handbook* - profiles more than 10,000 multinational corporations with general and financial data.

4. *EIU International Business Newsletters* - provides access to newsletters covering current news of interest to international managers about business and the economy in various geographic regions around the world. (www.lib.uwo.ca/business/eiunweb.htm)

Is the Company Local, Regional, or Otherwise Small in Scope?

When seeking companies of this kind, the best approach is usually the direct one - talk to the company itself. Try to learn as much as you can prior to calling however, and these resources may help:

1. *State Industrial Directories* - all states have a directory of manufacturers located within their borders. Libraries usually have a copy of their state's directory and at times, surrounding states.

2. *Local Newspapers* - most college libraries have a collection of newspapers from around the country. You may want to contact the newspaper in that company's location - or even subscribe for a few months. Keep in mind that the Sunday editions are full of job ads!

3. *Chamber of Commerce* - may be able to provide some background information for you. You can find many chambers on the web at (<http://www.2chambers.com/>).

Researching companies and organizations is a critical step in your preparation for a job search. For each new position you seek, always do your homework in this area. Your future depends on it.

Reference USA

Career Services maintains an exclusive subscription with an online database available for students to conduct company research in our office.

ReferenceUSA is an excellent resource that allows you to search for companies by selecting various criterion related to company name, executives, business type, geography, size, ownership, and financial data. The resulting company profiles offer a company history, location/contact information, industry information, maps, business demographics, a management profile, company news, stock data, and a competitors report. Then, a summary of data points selected by you can be downloaded to an excel sheet for your own record.

With information for over 14 million U.S. businesses, ReferenceUSA is a perfect tool for interview preparation, and can also be used for relocation purposes. Access is limited to select computers within the Compass Resource Center:

(<http://www.referenceusa.com>).

Excellent Research Web Sites

We have dedicated a section of our web site to Company Research. Get to us at: www.oswego.edu/careerservices; click on "Job Search Strategies." You'll find our best picks for outstanding web resources to help you find the information you need.

Company Research Checklist

Age	Number of Employees	Connections on LinkedIn
Location/Length of Time Established There		
Number of Locations		Size
Divisions and Subsidiaries		
Reputation		
Competitors Within the Industry		
Sales	Growth pattern	
Assets and Earnings		
Services or Products		
New Products or Projects		
Foreign Operations		