

DIGITAL DETECTIVE

EVEN IF YOU don't aspire to be another Sherlock Holmes or Kinsey Millhone, you still may want to use the Net for competitive intelligence. As you know, it's not always easy to get information about competitors. After all, you can't just stroll into their

and new markets. At the very least, you'll increase your own business acumen and become better informed.

Preliminary investigation

The first step, says Susan Greco in *Inc.* (October, 1996), is to plug a competitor's name into a search engine such as Excite, HotBot, or AltaVista. You'll probably be surprised about how much information most companies supply online. Ideally, the company that you're researching will have its own Web page. Then, you can

look at new products and services, contacts, and even financial information. You may even learn about new products that are still being tested. For instance, most software companies release beta versions of their software programs before they are commercially available. Beta means that the software is still in a developmental stage and may have programming glitches.

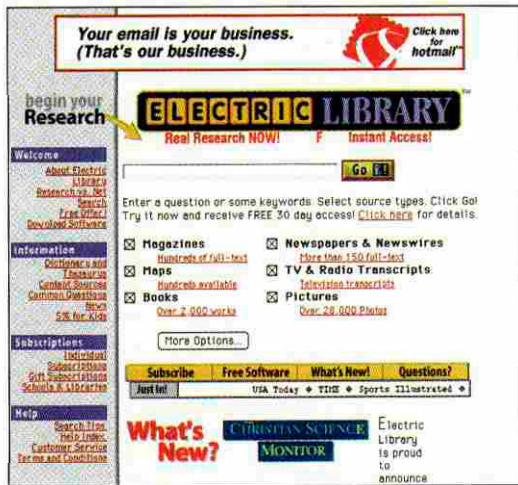
If you don't have a specific company name or if you want information

about general market trends, you might want to explore market-research or research-firm sites. Some of the better-known companies include Dataquest, <http://www.dataquest.com>; Forrester Research, <http://www.forrester.com>; Jupiter Communications, <http://www.jup.com>; and International Data Corporation, <http://www.idcresearch.com>. For an expanded list of market-research firms, try MarketPlace Reference Center <http://www.asiresearch.com:80/mri/mri.htm>.

Mark Van Buren, senior research officer with the research department of the American Society for Training and Development, suggests that users connect to online indexes of periodicals, publications, and

books, such as www.carl.org or the Electric Library, <http://www.elibrary.com>. As of this writing, the Electric Library is offering a 30-day free trial membership. After that, however, individual service costs \$9.95 a month and \$59.95 a year. Another notable index, Ecola's 24-Hour Newsstand (sounds like a disease) at <http://www.ecola.com/news>, links to more than 2,000 newspapers, magazines, business journals, and computer publications. You may also want to visit the online versions

Be sure to visit
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research and development labs or board meetings. But if you know where to look on the Net, you can boost your company's competitive intelligence with little or no financial investment. You may even gain insight into future trends in the profession

DIGITAL DUST BUSTER

If your computer has been running more slowly than usual, perhaps it's time for you to come clean. That means more than just using the uninstall feature that comes with most software programs. You see, each time you install a program on a PC, many files are dumped throughout various directories on your PC. Those files tell the new program how to interact with already existing programs. If you decide to get rid of a certain program using its uninstall feature, you still might not be able to remove all of the files that are hidden on your hard drive.

Quarterdeck's CleanSweep 3.0

uninstall utility, however, was designed to completely remove unnecessary files. It analyzes all of the files on your PC's hard drive and decides which files belong to which programs. Then, it guides you through a thorough uninstall process and lets you make compressed backups of every file you delete in case you deleted a file accidentally.

A demo version of the software is available at <http://www.download.com>. It runs on Windows 95, Windows NT, or Windows 3.1. A similar program, Spring Cleaning, which is designed for Macs, is also available at the [DOWNLOAD.com](http://www.DOWNLOAD.com) Web site.

NET TRENDS

According to a report from *Data-monitor*, European consumer online revenues are expected to increase from \$1.5 billion to \$13.7 billion between 1997 and 2001. In addition, the report estimates that online subscription revenues will rise from \$1.3 billion in 1997 to almost \$9.1 billion in 2001. The study also found large differences in the amounts that European countries charge for Internet and online use; Italy has the lowest charges and Austria has the highest. (Source: Reuters New Media)

of the *Wall Street Journal*, <http://www.wsj.com>, and *The Economist*, <http://www.economist.com>, to read about late-breaking industry news.

Debbie Wise, information center specialist at ASTD, suggests the StockMaster site, <http://www.stockmaster.com>, for comprehensive quotes and charts on U.S. stocks and mutual funds. More financial information can be found at *Research Magazine's* site, <http://www.researchmag.com>. It has investment information about 10,000 stocks and 3,500 mutual funds. On EBSCO Publishing's site, <http://www.epnet.com>, you can learn about a company's history, key competitors, and financial data, says Wise.

Go deeper

Databases such as Dun & Bradstreet's Online Access, <http://www.dnb.com>, or Hoover's Online, <http://www.hoovers.com>, are best for more in-depth company profiles, and they charge for some of their services. Hoover's, for example, lets you search profiles of 10,000 mostly public companies. It charges \$9.95 for detailed company profiles, but you can download half-page company profiles for free. D&B offers short reports on 10 million U.S. companies; it charges \$30 for full online credit reports.

Most information professionals consider Lexis-Nexis and Dialog to be invaluable information resources. Lexis-Nexis, <http://www.lexisnexis.com>, has more than 5,000 full-text news sources, 230 business and financial sources, reports on legislative activity in Congress, and more than 200 trade and industry sources.

WEBPRINTER

Sometimes, reading text online just isn't the same as having a crisp, hard copy. That's why Forefront developed WebPrinter, a program that turns any Web page into a numbered, double-sided booklet. The interface is similar to Microsoft Word's print-preview option. The program lets you shrink text and graphics to fit any size paper.

WebPrinter costs \$24.95.

For more information, contact Forefront Group, 800/653-4933.

COOL SITES

Workforce Online, <http://www.workforceonline.com>, is the new home of *Workforce Magazine* (formerly *Personnel Journal*). There are six main areas on the site, including *Workforce Magazine*, *Workday Digest*, Research Center, Dialogue, Post-a-Job, and Winning Ideas. The site houses a database with more than 400 articles from the magazine, interactive forums, and surveys for "business leaders in human resources management."

Team Center, <http://www.teamcenter.com>, is crammed with information about self-directed work teams. You'll find team FAQs, products, magazine articles, and a bibliography of books about teams.

FAQ Finder, <http://ps.superb.net/FAQ>, is a compilation of FAQ files from around the world. You'll find links to approximately 1,800

FAQs in such categories as art, software, personal finance, and education. For example, in the Software category, you can access FAQs on almost anything from fonts to viruses.

TV.COM, <http://www.tv.com>, is the online companion to a nationally syndicated television series about the Internet. The site changes weekly and includes popular software downloads, "cool links," online events, and how-to tips.

KEY WORDS

Here are some words that will help you communicate in geekspeak.

Asynchronous communication. This is the way in which a computer uses a modem to connect with other computers.

Cache. The space on a computer's hard drive that stores information. A Web browser's cache stores the pages, sounds, graphics, and URLs of the Web sites that you visit.

Then, when you return to those sites, all of the information doesn't have to be downloaded again. It's important to clean out your browser's cache occasionally to free disk space.

Inktomi. A research project

at University of California-Berkeley that is a prototype for commercial search engines.

IRC. Internet Relay Chat is an area on the Internet in which real-time conversations among two or more people take place in virtual "chat rooms."

ISDN. Integrated Services Digital Network is a fast, commercially available link to the Internet. ISDN is a set of communications standards allowing a single wire or optical fiber to carry voice, video, and digital network services.

Server. A computer that provides information, files, Web pages, and other services to another computer called a *client*. (Source: Net Lingo Web site, <http://www.netlingo.com>)

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Dialog, <http://www.rs.ch/krinfo/products/dialog/index.com>, includes hundreds of databases, and it offers full-text and abstracts of journals, newsletters, and newspapers. Profound, <http://www.profound.com>, has several online databases with more than 20 million articles. Its sources include 4,700 newspapers, magazines, and trade journals from more than 190 countries, as well as stock reports, economic forecasts, and analyses.

If you want to read what individual Web users are saying about a certain market, go to the Deja News Research Service, <http://www.dejanewss.com>. On that site, you can search through archived Usenet newsgroups. Or use Excite, <http://www.excite.com>, or HotBot, <http://www.hotbot.com>, which also let you sift through Usenet newsgroups. One note of caution: Some information on the Web can be unreliable. Stick with better-known databases and sites, and double check data if at all possible.

It's elementary, my dear Watson.

CYBERSTATS

Here's a glimpse at online trends, based on a survey of 11,700 World Wide Web users:

► Number of items bookmarked or hotlisted

1 to 10 items	18%
11 to 50 items	39%
51 to 100 items	19%
More than 100 items	19%
No response or don't use	5%

► Problems using the Web

Speed	81%
Organizing information	34%
Finding information	32%
Returning to a page	13%
Cost	9%
Not knowing where I am	5%
Other	11%

(Source: Georgia Institute of Technology's Graphic, Visualization, and Usability Center's Fifth WWW User Survey, Georgia Institute of Technology, 1996.)