

Tips for Finding Quality Cost-free Internet Resources in International Business

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You are probably accustomed to using the Internet heavily and sometimes preferentially or exclusively for academic assignments, but are you familiar with effective Internet search methodology? The Internet provides cost-free access to valuable and practical foreign and domestic news, information, and analysis sources in many languages. Really effective and efficient research on the Internet, however, is definitely much more difficult and complicated and takes far more patience and efforts to stay current than the traditional and relatively static paper-based library research. Drifting off-point through interesting but unrelated hyperlinks is a constant temptation. Misinformation, out-of-date information, and deception are all too easy to come by. The international business searcher who wishes to go beyond random or haphazard gleaning of chance bits of information or analysis must learn the basics of serious Internet research just as thoroughly as one must learn library research for printed materials. Only an informed, careful, disciplined, and patient strategy with discerning techniques can overcome the overwhelming information overload in Internet use and allow focused, thoughtful consideration, context, and analysis from the most valuable sources for the topic being researched.

Internet indexing and searching has become a highly specialized major industry in rapid change, presently trending toward natural language, visualized, clustered, more relevant, contextual, deep web, and personalized search capabilities. Be alert to the basic operational characteristics of search engines and to new user-friendly and more specialized features constantly appearing by following sources such as the very valuable Search Engine Watch site <http://searchenginewatch.com>. Web searcher behavior is being thoroughly researched and the results very much affect what you see online. Search engine optimization (SEO), or coding webpages to rank higher on search results, is an established and widely used technical and marketing skill and definitely affects the order of the retrieved results that you see. There are now thousands of local, regional, national (country-specific), global, and limited topic or file-type search engines <http://www.search-engines-2.com>. The currently dominant Google search engine <http://www.google.com> indexed over 8.1 billion webpages in mid-2005 and is constantly being refined and augmented. It is so complicated in its features, possibilities, and changes that there are numerous websites, weblogs, and printed users' manuals that one can consult to increase its research functionality for a given purpose. Definitely look at the advice at <http://www.google.com/help> and <http://www.google.com/help/cheatsheet.html> for elaboration on how to use Google more thoroughly. See http://www.google.com/language_tools for the national versions and the language tools for Google. Google's specialized sites include two fine ones for academic use, Google Scholar <http://scholar.google.com> that is limited in its searching to scholarly sources and Google News <http://news.google.com> for searching through thousands of online news sources around the world.

Find some search engines that match your purposes and master at least one, but use several in each search, because they each yield somewhat different results. To be preferred now for general use are Google <http://www.google.com>, MSN <http://www.msn.com>, Yahoo! <http://www.yahoo.com>, and Ask Jeeves <http://www.ask.com> because they all have their own (and different) indexing systems. Meta-search engines such as Dogpile <http://www.dogpile.com>, Mamma <http://www.mamma.com> and ProFusion <http://www.profusion.com> compile responses from several major search engines into one set of results. Clusty <http://clusty.com> and Gigablast <http://www.gigablast.com>, among others, helpfully cluster

results by categories. Strictly “national” or language-based search engines such as MetaGer <http://meta.rrzn.uni-hannover.de> and national versions of Google and Yahoo! are best for results from specific countries or in specific languages.

The major issue for most academic users of the Internet is not really a scarcity of quality web sources, but rather learning how to find more readily the best ones out there. For those needing a broader orientation on search techniques, excellent free online tutorials on effective Internet use are available. An annotated list of quality tutorials is available from Academic Info at <http://www.academicinfo.net/reffind.html>. Several of the best free tutorials and tips websites on the Internet are linked and annotated at <http://www2.etown.edu/vl/starter.html>. Do take some time to try these out, because the skills that you learn there will help your research in all college subject matters.

About's “Web Search” <http://websearch.about.com> explains search engines and techniques, and offers a weekly newsletter. “Recommended Web Finding Tools” <http://infodome.sdsu.edu/research/guides/recommend.shtml>, from the San Diego State University library, thoroughly reviews search engines, subject directories, website reviews, and other finding tools. Information specialist Phil Bradley's website <http://www.philb.com> has lots of tips to help you select the proper search engine or technique for your task at hand. Marcus Zillman has produced a large series of fine cost-free online Internet guides in PDF <http://www.whitepapers.us> that include academic and subject matter topics such as business resources. The Business Reference and Services Section of the American Library Association has a very useful page directed to reference librarians but applicable to all serious searchers, “Core Competencies for Business Reference—International Business” <http://www.ala.org/ala/rusa/rusaourassoc/rusasections/brass/brassprotools/corecompetencies/corecompetenciesinternational.htm> with key terms, pointers, links, and answers to frequently asked questions in that subject.

It is vital when doing research on the Internet to think in terms of a coherent research strategy while online. A common mistake is to prefer “bursts” of information (“infoclips”?) and to scan webpages far too rapidly, which will frustrate your effectiveness. Haphazard and hasty approaches are common, but produce mediocre results at best. Be sure to consider carefully the trustworthiness, bias, or reputation of the source of the information or the perspective that you include and cite. As a general (but not absolute) rule, for higher degrees of credibility, prefer sites that are educational (.edu), governmental (.gov), military (.mil), organizational (.org), and international organizational (.int) in origin. You can limit Google searches to include only any one of these types of sites—see the Google helps page above.

Orientation for the international business searcher is available through the extensive WWW Virtual Library: International Affairs Resources <http://www2.etown.edu/vl> Internet directory, especially its “Starter Tips,” “International Business,” and regional areas pages. Plentiful sources for reliable statistics and authoritative country profiles are found on the “General Resources for all Countries” page. Also see the article “Use of Internet Sources in International Studies Teaching and Research” that is available in PDF on the “Starter Tips” page.

Not everything necessary to do your assignments well is easily available online somewhere, either free or by institutional subscription. Vesey (2005) notes that a wise academic research strategy is like a **tripod** and will always incorporate both print and electronic sources from 1) copyrighted books in paper copy, 2) copyrighted peer-reviewed journal articles in fiche and paper copy, and 3) copyrighted full-text online databases that the college library subscribes to and cost-free reputable Internet sources. It is also advisable to use longer and more in-depth analytical online sources instead of the usual shorter and merely descriptive ones, because shorter ones tend to be very focused on details or a certain point in time and are often superficial.

For greater effectiveness, the key beginning principles and skills to observe in your Internet search and usage are the following.

1. One of the most basic skills is more effective use of search engines, with which you are already basically familiar. It is important to:
 - A. be skeptically aware of the engines' algorithmic and mechanistic methods in their inclusion and ranking of results and therefore of their weaknesses relative to human reasoning;
 - B. recognize the limitations of essentially advertisement-driven search engine companies in producing the most relevant academic results. The top results returned for your search are not automatically the best or most authoritative ones for your specific purposes;
 - C. identify top-of-page sponsored results (paid inclusion, usually advertisements) in contrast to generated ("organic") results;
 - D. master one search engine well but use several search engines for best results, plus "national" versions for results from specific countries or in specific languages. Results definitely vary by search engine. Be sure to use the advanced search page on each engine, not just the simple initial interface;
 - E. frame queries properly, vary wording of queries, and use advanced features including Boolean and appropriate "operator" terms to refine results by varying the syntax and the wording of search terms. Prefixes such as *near:*, *inurl:*, *site:*, *intitle:*, *daterange:* and many others allow considerable search refinement in Google, for example. Use of quotation marks around string of words in Google will treat the string as a phrase instead of as separate words. See <http://www.google.com/help/operators.html> for more explanations;
 - F. go well beyond the first two or three pages of results (a common error—many users do not even go beyond the first page, according to surveys);
 - G. go beyond the default features of the search engine to use some of the advanced refined features that are constantly cropping up as customizing improvements;
 - H. distinguish between "vertical" versus "horizontal" search methods and their best uses; i.e., delving more deeply into a topic (say, specifics of U.S. agricultural trade policies) as contrasted with moving outward into related topics (concepts or theory about trade policies in general);
 - I. avoid wandering away from the main topic "horizontally" through less relevant hyperlinks or distracting advertisements on a webpage, a constant temptation, especially for the easily bored.
2. There is a huge "invisible," "deep," or uncataloged portion of the Internet that search engine robots do not penetrate and integrate into their retrieved results, especially in the cases of databases and very large websites such as those of the United Nations, the European Union, the World Bank, or the International Monetary Fund. The **deep web** is far larger than the indexed portion of the Internet, so you should learn how to try to find items there, mainly through top-quality subject matter directories. See Complete Planet <http://www.completeplanet.com> for further explanation about searching the deep web.
3. Knowing how to find something of **real value** is more desirable than just "finding something." Sheer information or data (as disconnected bits of facts) is less useful than analysis, yet serious analysis is much harder to find than mere facts on the Internet. Use persistence in locating and evaluating quality and in-depth sources to avoid a two-screen scroll hit-and-run attention span.
4. There are many kinds of reliable and content-rich web sources of various sponsorships—intergovernmental organizations, governments, academic institutions, research foundations,

nongovernmental advocacy groups, portals, gateways, academic databases, etc. Try to identify and favor such academically-sound sites and to search thoroughly within megasites such as those of the European Union, the United Nations, the U.S. and other governments, and major research institutions to find relevant material.

5. **Limited area search engines** search only high-quality sites in a specific subject matter rather than the whole Internet and thus produce more relevant results per page of "hits." Google's news search page <http://news.google.com>, as an example, is an excellent and focused news search engine to retrieve world news from many sources and offers an e-mail news alert service. Look for such limited area search engines for your research topic.
6. **Subject matter directories, databases, or gateways** such as the **WWW Virtual Library system** <http://vlib.org>, the **Social Science Information Gateway** <http://www.sosig.ac.uk>, and the Economic and Social Research Council's **Society Today** <http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk> (all searchable) are mediated by subject matter experts, virtual information specialists, or "cybrarians" (as Webster's Dictionary now calls them) These sites index, annotate, and link key sites in a subject matter or provide a search facility that accomplishes that purpose from a database of the current content of high quality sites. Searchers thus have mediated access to optimum, refereed locations where they can seek more precisely, say, professional and corporate papers or reports that a major search engine would miss or would rank very low on the most likely search terms. Become aware of and use such directories and gateways in your topics of interest.
7. **Online Portable Document Format (PDF)** files are common as especially valuable "containers" for academic and research institution information such as scholarly papers and U.S. government or international organization studies. Few persons recognize this fact and tend instead to prefer shorter html-based information pages. Some attention should therefore be given to proper use of the Adobe Acrobat reader for PDF files. Search engines index both the titles and the contents of PDF files.
8. The Internet makes **cut-and-paste plagiarism** a strong temptation, so proper usage and citation style for online sources must be specifically learned and observed. You are expected to abide by the Elizabethtown College Pledge of Integrity in all of your work at the College, in and out of class. It is online at <http://www.etown.edu/web/policies/academicPolicies.html#pledge>. Also see the yearly booklet Academic Integrity at Elizabethtown College, used in the Freshman Seminar and available in the Office of the Dean of College Life.

Subject Matter Directories, Databases, and Gateways for International Business

International business researchers should seek out such large sites in their own areas of interest. Examples are the following.

1. **global EDGE** <http://globaledge.msu.edu/index.asp> World class international business portal site from the Center for International Business Education and Research (CIBER), Michigan State University, with resource desk, news, knowledge room, country insights, discussion forum, diagnostic tools, learning and teaching resources, course modules, and more.
2. **Global Trade Negotiations Home Page** <http://www.cid.harvard.edu/cidtrade> From the Center for International Development at Harvard University, a quite comprehensive site on the topic, with "a collection of research papers and articles, links to other websites, as well as contact information for additional sources."
3. **International Business Resource Connection** <http://www.ibrc.business.ku.edu> This excellent website of the University of Kansas (known as the IBRC) is definitely one of the very best and most

comprehensive collections of international trade and business resources on the Internet. Note especially the country, statistical and intercultural resource sections.

4. **eco5.com** <http://www.eco5.com> Research portal for finance and economics from the European Business School of the International University Schloß Reichartshausen.

5. **Business and Economics section of INFOMINE**, from the University of California at Riverside <http://infomine.ucr.edu>.

6. **Social Science Information Gateway (SOSIG), Business and Management Gateway** <http://www.sosig.ac.uk/business>.

Governmental and International Organization Sites for International Business

The U.S. government posts a huge quantity of information on global international trade and investment issues, including statistics. See the WWW Virtual Library: International Affairs Resources' pages for International Business and U.S. Government Sources for the best ones. Export.gov <http://www.export.gov> is "the portal to all export-related assistance and market information offered by the federal government." The U.S. International Trade Administration <http://www.ita.doc.gov> and the International Business Information section of the Canadian government's fine Industry Canada Strategis site <http://strategis.ic.gc.ca> are excellent. The U.S. government's Overseas Private Investment Corporation's "Investor's Information Gateway" <http://www.opic.gov/links/links-main.htm> "can connect you with more than 20,000 documents and other sources of economic, business, political and social data for all of the countries and areas in which OPIC can currently do business." Of special interest are the objective Congressional Research Service Reports, prepared by a special office of the Library of Congress at the request of members of Congress or their staff. Information on these reports and how to find the international business-related ones online in PDF format is explained the top of <http://www2.etown.edu/vl/usgovt.html>.

The megasites and databases of the United Nations, the European Union, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, the International Finance Corporation, and the International Monetary Fund have huge amounts of cost-free resources for international business that are poorly indexed on major search engines. An example would be the content available on the World Bank's Trade Research and Data and Research pages accessible from <http://www.worldbank.org>. The Market Access Database <http://mkaccdb.eu.int/mkaccdb2/indexPubli.htm> from the Commission of the European Union provides market and trade flow data by country, sector, or measure for scores of non-E.U. countries. Also see the Directorate General Trade site of the European Commission http://europa.eu.int/comm/trade/index_en.htm for much information on EU trade matters. The World Bank Group has a large site of great use to international businesspersons at "Doing Business" <http://www.doingbusiness.org>. Such authoritative and content-rich sites should be consulted directly and offer high-quality internal search facilities.

Miscellaneous Organizational Sites for International Business

There are other types of reliable and content-rich and (at least in part) cost-free web sources with various uses in international business, from academic institutions, business schools, firms, professional associations, research foundations, nongovernmental advocacy groups, and academic databases. The International Chamber of Commerce maintains a site at <http://www.iccwbo.org> and the United States

Council for International Business site is at <http://www.uscib.org>. Some outstanding research organizations feature careful methodology and post sizable, updated databases with accompanying analysis relevant to international business, as in these examples.

1. **Index of Economic Freedom** <http://www.heritage.org/research/features/index> "A [searchable] practical reference guide to the world's economies. It includes country-by-country analyses and the most up-to-date data available on foreign investment codes, taxes, tariffs, banking regulations, monetary policy, black markets, and more," from the Heritage Foundation and the Wall Street Journal.
2. **Transparency International** <http://www.transparency.org> The "leading global non-governmental organisation devoted to combating corruption." Their many corruption surveys, indexes, and reports rank "the home countries of the payers of international bribes" and rank "countries in terms of the degree to which they are perceived to be the homes of bribe-takers-- public officials who abuse their office for personal gain."
3. **Freedom House** <http://www.freedomhouse.org> Many online studies ranking countries on measures of freedom, informative backgrounders, and other publications are offered by this nonprofit, nonpartisan U.S. organization dedicated to promoting democracy around the world. Note especially their yearly online report Freedom in the World.
4. **Doing Business in...** http://www.hlbi.com/DBI_list.asp From HLB International, a fine set of country business guides..."prepared for the use of clients, partners and staff of HLB International member firms. It is designed to give some general information to those contemplating doing business in other countries and are [sic] not intended to be comprehensive documents."
5. **Cato Institute** <http://www.cato.org> Libertarian U.S. think-tank with a large online library of free policy studies and briefings, including those of the Center for Trade Policy Studies <http://www.freetrade.org>, publicizing the benefits of free trade and the costs of protectionism. Note the Institute's annual Economic Freedom of the World report, free online, that ranks countries on dozens of measures of economic freedom.
6. **World Economic Forum** <http://www.weforum.org> A world-class organization of leaders from business, government, academia, and the media in a partnership to create new business opportunities and to address in an action-oriented way the key issues on the global agenda. The site has many online publications about international business. Note the Global Competitiveness Programme section, including the excellent yearly Global Competitiveness Report.
7. **Pew Global Attitudes Project** <http://pewglobal.org> "A series of worldwide public opinion surveys that encompasses a broad array of subjects ranging from people's assessments of their own lives to their views about the current state of the world and important issues of the day."
8. **Eurointernet** <http://eiop.or.at/euroint> Excellent collection of information resources related to European integration on the Internet, including many full text professional papers online.

Portal Sites and Annotated Collections of Links for International Business

Many university or business school libraries, professional associations and businesses, government sites, and professors post sizable collections of links or maintain portal sites that are well worth perusing for topics and sources of your regular interest. Some may merit inclusion in your list of

favorites, including Professor Hossein Varamini's collection of links at <http://www2.etown.edu/business/faculty/Varamini/Links.html>.

1. **Global Gateway** <http://globalgateway.t-bird.edu/GlobalGateway> from the American Graduate School of International Management.
2. **Virtual International Business and Economic Sources (VIBES)** <http://library.uncc.edu/vibes> from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.
3. **International Business Resource Connection (IBRC)** <http://www.ibrc.business.ku.edu/> From the University of Kansas, definitely one of the very best and most comprehensive collections of international trade and business resources on the Internet.
4. **Resources for International Business** http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/rr_gateway/research_guides/busi/intbus.shtml from the Rutgers University Libraries.
5. **International Business** <http://www.ipl.org/div/subject/browse/bus45.00.00> from the Internet Public Library of the University of Michigan's School of Information.
6. **Federation of International Trade Associations' International Trade/ Import-Export Portal** <http://www.fita.org> Excellent source for annotated links and also offers a free newsletter "Really Useful Sites for International Trade Professionals" and a Job Bank. Also see their "Tools of the Trade" site <http://fita.org/tools> for a listing of gateway sites to international trade information.
7. **TradePort** <http://www.tradeport.org> "California's Gateway to Global Trade," a "repository of free information and resources for businesses that seek to conduct international trade to and from California." (This site is of great use to American business interests in general.)
8. **California's Centers for International Trade Development** <http://www.citd.org/index.cfm> Service to assist local businesses to start up in the export market.
9. **Trade Information Database** http://latrade.cmtac.org/trade_info/index.cfm From the California-Mexico Trade Assistance Centers.
10. **Global Resources for International Trade** <http://www.expandglobal.com/library> from the International Import-Export Institute.
11. **ENTERWeb** <http://www.enterweb.org> from the Enterprise Development Website.
12. **International Business and Technology--World Level** <http://www.brint.com/International.htm> from the BRINT Institute.
13. **Statistical Sites on the World Wide Web** <http://www.bls.gov/bls/other.htm> from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, listing U.S. and international online sources of all kinds of reliable statistics.

Reference: Vesey, Ken. "Eliminate 'Wobbly' Research with the Information Resource Tripod." Teacher Librarian. Vol. 32. No. 3 (February 2005): 35-37.