



Online Research Guide for HBS Alumni

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Table of Contents

Online Research Guide for HBS Alumni	3
A Step-by-Step Approach.....	3
Resources for HBS Alumni.....	4
Hints and Tips.....	5
Guide 1: Examine Trends and Disruptors	6
Guide 2: Analyze an Industry	7
Guide 3: Research a Market.....	8
Guide 4: Analyze a Company	9
Guide 5: Value a Company.....	10
Guide 6: Analyze a Country or Region	11
Guide 7: Launch a New Venture	12
Appendix A: Alumni Access to Harvard Resources	13
Appendix B: Free Databases	14
Privacy, Use of Information, and Copyright.....	15
About Baker for Business.....	16

Online Research Guide for HBS Alumni

*Knowledge is of two kinds. We know a subject ourselves,
or we know where we can find information on it.¹*

The commercialization of the Internet and World Wide Web during the mid to late 1990s and early 2000s resulted in an explosion of easily available real-time information that can be used to stay up-to-date on the latest trends and opportunities, analyze the business model for your current company, develop a business plan for a new venture, and more. While online information is never a substitute for first-hand experience or discussions with customers and experts, the data available on the Internet are nonetheless a valuable resource for analyzing industry structure and trends, estimating market size, analyzing competitor positioning, obtaining macroeconomic data on a country you wish to enter, and a broad range of other topics.

This tool provides tips for how to search online for information to support business analysis and decision-making, and includes lists of sources where this information can be found. These sources include websites that are free to the public, as well as premium resources licensed for HBS alumni on [eBaker](#).

A step-by-step approach to finding and using online information is presented below. More in-depth research guides are then presented. These guides, organized by research area, provide specific starting points where you can find information to analyze a current business or industry, start a new business, perform a country analysis, find resources (e.g., business advisors, talent), and more. Companion tools are available from Harvard Business School Publishing to assist you in your analysis.²

A Step-by-Step Approach

Start by determining the purpose of your research. For example, are you trying to stay up-to-date with the latest industry news and trends, or are you looking for a specific type of information (e.g., market size projections, competitive positioning of key players in your industry, company information and ratios)? Identify the information you need and what you will do with the information once you find it—for example, are you: preparing a business plan or pitch for a new venture; analyzing a new opportunity; deciding whether to enter a new market; or conducting a strategic review of your business model? Use the clarifying questions on the next page to help you focus your research goals.

Based on the purpose of your research and type of information you need, use the Guides on pages 7-12—which are organized by research goal—to identify sources you can use to find the information you

¹ Attributed to Samuel Johnson (1709-1784), English author, critic and lexicographer, as quoted in Boswell's Life of Johnson. Sourced from [The Quotations Page](#).

² Lynda M. Applegate, "Crafting Business Models," HBS No. 808-705 (Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2008); Lynda M. Applegate, "Jumpstarting Entrepreneurial Innovation," HBS No. 1841C (Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2008).

need. For example, if you are trying to identify potential competitors and understand their financial performance, Guides 2, 4 and 5 will probably be most useful to you. On the other hand, if you are simply interested in the latest news on a new technology, you may find Guide 1 to be of help.

As you search, keep track of where you find each piece of information and how you got there, including any search keywords you used. If you discover at a later point that you need to access one of these sources again, keeping track of the way you found your information prevents you from having to reconstruct your steps all over again. See the table below for clarifying questions to ask when approaching your research.

Clarifying Questions	
Why?	<i>Why am I asking this question? Why do I want to know? Why am I asking now?</i>
What?	<i>What type of information am I looking for? What format of information do I need?</i>
Who?	<i>Who is my audience? Am I focusing on a specific demographic? What geographic region am I exploring?</i>
How?	<i>How am I going to use the information? How deep do I need to go?</i>
When?	<i>What timeline or dates am I interested in? Is the data time-sensitive in its use?</i>
Where?	<i>Where can I find the information I need?</i>
Assumptions?	<i>What do I assume to be true about my topic? Will my assumptions need to be substantiated?</i>

Resources for HBS Alumni

As HBS alumni, you have access to a wide range of resources and services from Baker Library and beyond, including:

- **eBaker:** Baker has licensed business research resources exclusively for HBS alumni through [eBaker](#); you can access these 24/7 from anywhere in the world.
- **Baker Library privileges:** HBS alumni have lifetime privileges in the Stamps Reading Room at Baker Library. When you visit the library in person, you can access [additional specialized databases](#) and get research help from Baker librarians.
- **Baker for Business:** [Baker for Business](#) is a premium service for HBS alumni; our expert researchers will uncover and synthesize information from a broad array of trusted sources, providing you with a custom deliverable focused on your key research questions. For more information and pricing, contact b4bresearch@hbs.edu.

- **Harvard University alumni resources:** The Harvard Alumni Association licenses additional [online resources for all Harvard alumni](#).
- **Public library:** Many public libraries provide access to online resources, including resources that support small business owners and entrepreneurs.
- **Your alma mater:** Your undergraduate alma mater may provide additional alumni library resources.

Appendix A provides step-by-step instructions for accessing HBS and Harvard alumni resources. Appendix B collates the resources featured in these guides.

Hints and Tips

This guide covers just a fraction of available resources. For additional suggestions and guidance, get in touch with a Baker research specialist through infoservices@hbs.edu. We'll help you identify starting points and sources.

Using online information resources can be tricky. Sometimes it's difficult to find information that answers your specific questions; other times the search interface of a database may be confusing. Again, if you have any questions or difficulties using a resource, [Baker research specialists can help!](#)

Some resources use the North American Industry Classification Systems (NAICS). Visit the [NAICS website](#) to learn more about industry classifications.

Researching a company that is small, new, or privately-held can be challenging. You may be able to find information about the company or their products on their website, social networking sites like LinkedIn, and startup resources like Crunchbase. Keep in mind that these sites are free and may rely on their users to supply data, so the information is not guaranteed to be correct or up-to-date.

A final caution on using free sources: while free information from publicly available sources can be extremely useful, it is important to remember that this information has not been validated by a neutral third-party information provider and may not always be accurate. The following questions may help you determine the validity of free Web content:

- What type of individual or organization produced the site? Is there a bias or commercial interest? Who is the website's target audience?
- Is an author listed? If so, what credentials does this author have?
- How current is the website and the information on it?
- Are references, citations, or links to other resources included?
- Can you confirm the information with a second, independent source?

Guide 1: Examine Trends and Disruptors

When you want to keep up with news and trends, packaged market research reports can be useful but they are expensive, quickly out-of-date, and don't always cover new developments. Instead, use the resources suggested below to broaden your approach.

Examine Trends and Disruptors	
Why	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore social, economic, and industry trends in the business environment • Keep up-to-date on general business or targeted news • Uncover insights from global experts • Search for topics of interest, including new technologies (e.g., 5G or nanotechnology), new products, trends (e.g., consumer-driven health care or green energy), and best practices
What	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articles in news, business, and industry publications • White papers from consulting firms and think tanks • Company press releases and product listings
Where	<p>Free resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Google News • Company websites • Consulting firm websites • Think Tank Search <p><u>eBaker</u> resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ABI/ProQuest and Nexis are comprehensive sources for information from newspapers, press releases, trade publications, and more.

Guide 2: Analyze an Industry

Analyze an Industry	
Why	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze and understand trends, key players, power dynamics, and performance drivers Develop an industry profile or a list of competitors
What	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Profiles of industries or segments, including structure, channels to market, performance criteria Industry statistics and financial ratios Key competitors in an industry Contact information for industry experts; information on conferences and networking events
Who	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NAICS industry codes are standard identifiers for industries, segments and sub-segments. They can be more useful for researching established industries than emerging ones. Trade associations and government agencies both track and promote activity in industry sectors. Trade show exhibitor lists can provide insight on emerging trends and key players; Trade Show News Network provide lists of events organized by industry.
Where	<p>Free resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bureau of Labor Statistics, Census Bureau, and other federal agencies have industry data and forecasts Trade Show News Network <p>eBaker resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mergent Intellect offers First Research industry reports Plunkett Research covers industry trends, market share, and forecasts

Guide 3: Research a Market

Research a Market	
Why	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct market research on a specific topic or segment • Identify market size, market share, growth trends, and projections • Segment the market and identify market needs
What	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market research information, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Market size ○ Market share ○ Growth trends ○ Projections • Market segmentations and data on particular segments
Where	<p>Free resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Export.gov international market intelligence covers market conditions, opportunities, and regulations for 125 countries • The Census Business Builder: Small Business Edition tool allows you to build a detailed profile of local customers and markets in the US <p>eBaker resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research Monitor has consumer demographic data and market forecasts from Euromonitor covering 80 countries • Statista curates consumer demographics and market data from research providers, trade groups, government agencies and others

Guide 4: Analyze a Company

Analyze a Company	
Why	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Analyze a company's business model to understand key drivers of business performance• Evaluate potential partners, customers, competitors, or investments
What	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Company profiles and financial data• Management team biographies• SEC filings• Company valuation data and corporate earnings call transcripts• Comparable company valuations
Where	<p>Free resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Company websites, including Investor Relations sections and press releases• Google Finance• SEC EDGAR and stock exchange websites offer company financial data <p>eBaker resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Earnings call transcripts are available through ABI/ProQuest and Nexis• Company financial information can be found in Mergent Online

Guide 5: Value a Company

Value a Company	
Why	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a list of comparable companies or deals, obtain comparison data, and find financing sources • Value your current company or an investment in another company
What	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparable company lists • Valuation data, deals, and financing
How	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When searching for comparables, look for firms that display similar “value characteristics” to the company you wish to analyze. These value characteristics include key business model drivers (such as market size and growth rate), industry power structures and competitive intensity, supply chain, production, service and R&D intensity, risk profiles, capital structure, and the size and timing of cash flows
Where	<p>Free resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>New York Times</i>' Dealbook tracks deal activity • SEC EDGAR has public company filings related to mergers and acquisitions <p>eBaker resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a list of comparable companies using Mergent Intellect or Mergent Online <p>Additional resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding deal data on free sites can be challenging. Some public libraries license specialized databases like Preqin, Capital IQ, or Eikon. If your library does not have access to a specialty resource, you have access to some databases onsite at Baker Library, or, if you are unable to visit Baker in person, Baker for Business can conduct a deal screen for you for a fee.

Guide 6: Analyze a Country or Region

Analyze a Country or Region	
When	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze a country in which you currently do business or one in which you are considering doing business in the future Obtain macroeconomic and demographic statistics on a country or region Analyze country risk
What	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information on macroeconomic indicators, demographics and statistics Political and regulatory environment Trends in foreign trade in countries and regions around the world Country profiles, news and risk
How	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A significant amount of macroeconomic data can be obtained from government and free public websites. These demographics and statistics databases can provide information that is useful in analyzing regional market size, and the influence of country context on the cost of risk of doing business in a specific country or region. They can also be used in constructing economic forecasts.
Where	<p>Free resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> GlobalEdge reports on the history, government, economy, and culture of almost every country in the world IMF Article IV Staff Reports provide an excellent overview of a country's current economic issues UN's Comtrade and Statistics Division provide global trade and development statistics World Bank's DataBank and Doing Business cover economic indicators and regulatory environments World Federation of Exchanges publishes market statistics from exchanges around the world The Bureau of Labor Statistics maintains a list of international statistical agencies and the official statistical agencies of other countries <p>eBaker resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> OECD Economic Surveys review member nations' economies US regional data is available in the American City Business Journals collection

Guide 7: Launch a New Venture

Launch a New Venture	
When	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find information on start-ups and other companies that are too small or too new to be listed in other resources listed in this guide • Keep up with company news, find out the fate (e.g., acquisition, IPO, bankruptcy) or current progress of a start-up • Evaluate potential partners, customers, competitors, or investments
What	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General company information: contact info, history, recent news, etc. • Company profiles, financials, and funding • Management team biographies • Current information on a start-up, IPO/acquisition information
Where	<p>Free resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crunchbase may have basic company financial and funding information • LinkedIn may have basic company information along with names and profiles of executives • Small Business Administration lists lenders, investment, and development companies, as well as loans, grants and other types of financial assistance. • National Venture Capital Association tracks startup activity and the financing environment • PwC's quarterly MoneyTree reports also track venture capital trends <p>eBaker resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directory of Venture Capital & Private Equity Firms lists firms and contact information

Appendix A: Alumni Access to Harvard Resources

HBS Username: Your HBS username (formerly called your LEFA) and password allow you to access resources on [eBaker](#) licensed for HBS alumni by Baker Library.

- Where to get it: www.alumni.hbs.edu
- Problems with your HBS username? Contact HBS Alumni Records: 617.384.5977

Harvard Key: Your Harvard Key provides access to [alumni resources](#) licensed by the Harvard Alumni Association for all Harvard alumni.

- Where to get it: key.harvard.edu
- You'll also need your Harvard Alumni Association (HAA) ID, which you can find in the footer of Harvard alumni emails such as HAA eVENTS or the Harvard Alumni Gazette
- [Detailed instructions](#) for claiming your Harvard Key are provided by Harvard University's IT department
- Problems with your Harvard Key? Contact Harvard University IT, ithelp@harvard.edu or 617.495.7777

Appendix B: Free Databases

Resource Name	URL
Bureau of Labor Statistics	http://www.bls.gov/home.htm
Census Bureau	http://www.census.gov
Census Business Builder: Small Business Edition	http://www.census.gov/data/data-tools/cbb.html
CIA World Factbook	https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html
Crunchbase	http://www.crunchbase.com
Doing Business	http://www.doingbusiness.org/
Export.gov	http://www.export.gov/
FedStats	http://www.fedstats.gov/
GlobalEdge	http://globaledge.msu.edu
IMF Article IV Staff Reports	http://www.imf.org/external/country/
International Economic Statistics	http://liber8.stlouisfed.org/iesd/
International Statistical Agencies	http://www.census.gov/aboutus/stat_int.html
LinkedIn	http://www.linkedin.com
NAICS	http://www.naics.com/search.htm http://www.census.gov/eos/www/naics
National Venture Capital Association (NVCA)	https://nvca.org/
NYT Dealbook	http://dealbook.nytimes.com/
PwC MoneyTree reports	https://www.pwc.com/us/en/industries/technology/moneytree.html
SEC EDGAR	http://www.sec.gov/edgar/searchedgar/companysearch.html
Small Business Administration (SBA)	http://archive.sba.gov/advo/research
Statistical Abstract of the US	http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/
Think Tank Search	https://guides.library.harvard.edu/c.php?g=310680&p=2072552
Trade Show News Network	http://www.tsnn.com
UN Comtrade	http://comtrade.un.org/db/
UN Statistics Division	http://unstats.un.org
US Statistics	https://www.usa.gov/statistics
World Bank Data Bank	https://databank.worldbank.org/data/home.aspx
World Federation of Exchanges	http://www.world-exchanges.org/

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