

INFORMATION SOURCES FOR A GLOBAL ECONOMY

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I'm often asked about the availability of information regarding non-U.S. companies – either information relevant to companies based outside of the U.S. or with company subsidiaries in non-U.S. locations. Similar challenges are experienced by non-U.S. competitive intelligence (CI) practitioners tasked with finding information regarding U.S. companies. This column provides some suggestions relative to finding such information and addressing these challenges. It will focus on collecting published information on companies in “foreign” countries – that is, any country not our own.

First, consider two characteristics applied to sources of information about global companies – the source's perspective and its proximity to our competitor. In-country published sources, which obviously are closer to and presumably more familiar with the target company, provide important advantages. The sources are capable of collecting the information we need more effectively and completely, and provide the subsequent findings from a more relevant perspective. Sources established within our competitor's native country can deliver findings in a more relevant business and cultural context, as well as in the local business language (in addition to English, in some cases) and currency, with related meaning and insights.

COMMERCIAL DATABASE SOURCES

Many useful sources of global company information are aggregated by **CRIBIS** Corporation, a business unit of Grupo CRIF, the Italian credit bureau. The *Skyminder* service provides worldwide access to

CRIBIS content. CRIBIS currently partners with nearly fifty company profile and financial credit information providers located in and covering numerous regions and countries, including Asia, Australia, Central and South America, and Western and Eastern Europe.

In addition to providing “mini” company profiles and credit information through Skyminder, CRIBIS will create and deliver custom company reports upon request. CRIBIS and its worldwide source partners generate unique and fresh company profiles as requested by each individual subscriber. According to a source at Skyminder, no other company offers such services in the U.S. The custom reports can be obtained directly from CRIBIS or requested through the Skyminder service.

Skyminder offers information for both public and private companies. Examples of Skyminder's sources are

referenced in Figure 1 – a full list can be found on Skyminder's website.

Other Skyminder advantages include attractive subscription and pricing models. With no monthly or annual spending commitment required, subscribers simply set up a deposit account, upon which they draw to purchase the information they need. Mini-profiles generally cost between \$3 and \$8 each, and the CRIBIS Company Reports cost from \$110 to \$150 per report, depending on the turnaround time required.

While *Dun & Bradstreet* (D&B) content is available through such aggregators as Skyminder and LexisNexis, D&B also offers its information directly to business customers. D&B, known as a reliable vendor of information about non-U.S. companies, offers varying types of financial and other information for companies in more than 200 countries – from Albania to Zimbabwe.

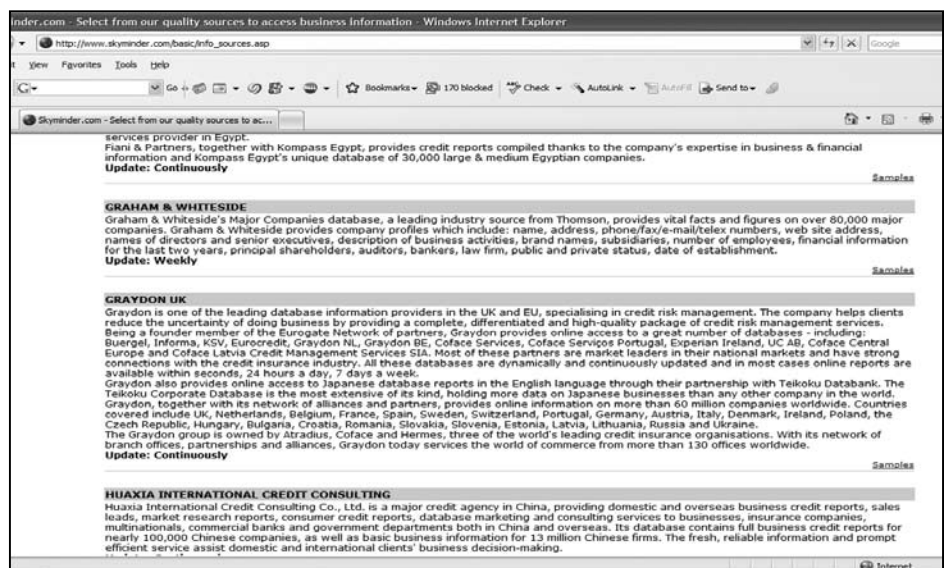


Figure 1: Examples of Skyminder's sources

SIDEBAR 1 – LINKS TO INFORMATION SOURCES

CAROL

www.carol.co.uk

D&B

www.dnb.com

Google Language Tools

www.google.com/language_tools

SEC Int'l Registry

www.sec.gov/divisions/corpfint/internat/companies.shtml

Skyminder

www.skyminder.com

World Fed of Exchanges

www.world-exchanges.org

GOVERNMENT SOURCES AND WEB PORTALS

For publicly-traded companies, SEC filings are a useful and cost-effective source of information. While the filings are primarily for U.S. companies, non-U.S. companies that trade stock on U.S. exchanges are also required to file 20-F forms, which contain information comparable to 10-K filings. If you are unsure whether your non-U.S. competitors are required to report through the U.S. Securities & Exchange Commission, you can access a list of these companies on the SEC website.

Numerous other stock exchanges exist around the globe as well. To access securities forms filed by public companies outside of the U.S., we can learn about and gain access to nearly 60 stock exchanges in all of the Americas, Europe, Asia and Africa, through the *World Federation of Exchanges* (WFE) web portal. Once we link to specific, relevant stock exchanges, the information is mostly available for free, similar to SEC content in the U.S. Some of the WFE exchanges are referenced in Figure 2.

Another web-based service, Company Annual Reports On-Line (CAROL), offers the ability to search for stock exchange information and

annual reports for public companies in Europe and the U.S. Some of CAROL's information is available for free, while some can be purchased directly from CAROL's vendor partners.

CorporateInformation.com also provides access to financial information regarding global companies. Its company research reports cover "over 31,000 companies from over 55 countries." Company snapshots are free, while subscribers can purchase six different types of reports. Subscriptions cost from \$200 to \$975 annually, depending on how many individuals using the service in your company.

TRANSLATION TOOLS

Competitor websites also serve as productive information sources. When we're researching non-U.S. competitors that publish website content in the native language of the country where it is located, translation tools can be effective in giving us a basic understanding of the information provided (assuming it is not a language we understand as well). Google provides one of the most prominent language tools, which will translate specific text and/or full web pages from twelve different languages into English, as well as other languages.

Generally, machine translation tools are improving in terms of their coverage and capabilities and are increasingly available via the web. For example, at *ForeignWord.com*, text can be translated using 24 different free, web-based tools, depending upon the language being translated.

As the world grows smaller (figuratively speaking), our need to access information regarding competitors doing business outside of their respective home countries and traditional boundaries grows larger. Fortunately, access to information regarding these companies is becoming more readily available, and easier and more cost-effective to collect.

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Figure 2: WFE stock exchanges