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In this Folio

By Marcy Phelps,
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I recently read a news article about using the web to find free business and market information, and it contained an alarming quote by a professor of business at a top university: "You can find anything on the web and you shouldn't have to pay for it". It's frightening to think about what he's teaching his students, because – as any experienced researcher knows – no matter how hard you try, you won't find everything on the web.

Sometimes what you're looking for can only be found through conversations with people, including experts, your buyers or your competitors. Perhaps the information you need is so cutting edge that it hasn't yet made it to the internet. Then there are the times when your online sources appear to contradict each other, or when it's easier just to pick up the phone.

Unlike online research, you unfortunately don't get any second chances when gathering information from human sources. Mistakes lead to wasted time and opportunities. Knowing where to find the right people and what questions to ask will definitely increase your odds of getting it right the first time.

In this Folio, I've compiled the top articles, written by the experts, on best practices in gathering information from human sources. In the first, Risa Sacks provides examples of 10 situations when you would want to use telephone research. Risa's wisdom in "Search beyond the web: When to pick up the phone" quickly dispels the "everything is on the web" mentality.

Next we offer a two part article by Vernon Prior, with what is probably the most unique FUMSI title to date: "DIY detection: Softly, softly, catchee monkee". In part one, you'll learn three techniques for effectively gathering soft information, those "flecks of gold" not usually discovered through

"Not everything can be found on the web, and taking the time to gather information from human sources often answers the questions we didn't think to ask."

About the Editor

Marcy Phelps is the founder and president of Phelps Research, a provider of business and market research services for info pros, entrepreneurs and marketing professionals. She started the company in 2000 after obtaining a master's degree in library and information services from the University of Denver. Marcy is a past president of the Association of Independent Information Professionals (AIIP).

Marcy blogs at www.MarcyPhelps.com, and she publishes ResearchNOTES, a monthly e-mail bulletin with tips and sites for Internet research (<http://www.digbig.com/4yeps>).

She is the author of the forthcoming book, "Research on Main Street: Using the Web to Find Local Business and Market Research".

online sources. Part two delves into what suppliers, journalists, customers and even competitors have to offer, and where we can find these sources.

While trade shows and other industry events provide the kind of intelligence not found elsewhere, they are resource-intensive. To get the best results and avoid costly mistakes, Judith Binder says you must plan and prepare. In "Tricks of the trade show: Making the most of your field research", Judith offers several useful tips and lessons learned for doing that.

Finally, in "Finding expertise inside the organisation", Connie Crosby points out that our most valuable sources are often in our own workplaces. Again, we see how some types of information can only be found offline. Connie also shares a handy checklist to use when searching for the experts within our organisations.

Not everything can be found on the web, and taking the time to gather information from human sources often answers the questions we didn't think to ask. I hope the professor's students eventually learn this important research lesson.

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