Best of the Best Business Websites (Free Resources)

The 2010 Selection

Business Reference and Services Section Education Committee

RUSA Business Reference and Services Section (BRASS) Education Committee contributing members are Paul Brothers, past chair and editor; Monica Hagan; and Shikha Sharma.

Welcome to the second annual presentation of the "Best of the Best Business Websites (Free Resources)." These three websites were selected by the Business Reference and Services Section (BRASS) Education Committee, which is a part of RUSA. The committee is responsible for compiling and selecting the best free online resources to meet business librarians' needs in serving their user populations. This year's selection deals with one site from financial markets and investments and two from international business. We hope you find the following sources helpful and encourage you to explore all of our other picks at the RUSA BRASS website (www.ala.org/rusa/brass). Additionally useful are the "Selected Core Resources," also found on the section website.

FINANCIAL MARKETS AND INVESTMENTS

BigCharts.com, http://bigcharts.marketwatch.com

The name says it all: BigCharts.com is big on charts! This site provides basic, advanced, and interactive charting tools; current and historical quotes; industry and market data; news and analysis; and screening tools for stocks listed on major American, Canadian, and other exchanges around the world. BigCharts.com is operated by MarketWatch, a leading multimedia source of financial news and information.

The website organizes information under tabs such as quotes, news, industries, markets, historical quotes, and big reports. A help link at the bottom of the screen leads to detailed information on how to use various sections of the site and to a glossary.

Creating a one-year price chart is easy: enter a ticker symbol and click on "Basic Chart," a blue button at the top of the page. To change the timeframe, use the dropdown menu that offers intraday and historical time series. You can build charts for periods ranging from one day to a decade, or even longer if the data are available for that security. The historical quotes are available from 1994 to present. Charts for up to ten days use intraday data and the longer time series use end-of-day pricing provided by Thomson Reuters. The charts for stocks traded on American exchanges are accompanied by links to related company and market adviser news, industry data, company profile, annual report, SEC filings, insider news and data, and analyst ratings.

Advanced charts offer a long list of charting options and allow customization to one's exact specifications. You can select start and end dates; compare up to ten stocks, mutual funds or indexes on a single chart; overlay moving averages and fundamental information on the chart price display;

and view up to three of the twenty-seven available technical indicators at one time. The interactive charts offer all the advanced chart features and more, including the ability to draw trend lines by selecting a timeframe and then zooming in on a specific timeframe on the chart.

Use the "Quotes" section to track up to fifty intraday quotes at a single time. There are two areas within this section: "My Favorite Quotes" and "Quick Quotes." Both offer basic intraday price information for each stock with links to news and charts for further research. The "My Favorite Quotes" page allows you to save your tickers for future visits to the page.

The "Markets" section provides a summary on current day's domestic stock market activity. It also provides links to current prices of major market Indexes, a stock screener that can perform simple intraday stock screens, and a "Search for Index" page that makes it easy to find a particular index.

The "BigReports" section gives you lists of reports that outline major stock market activity from the previous trading day, such as the largest money movers and the day's most active stocks on various exchanges. A dropdown menu offers similar reports for Canadian exchanges.

To a technical analyst, a chart is worth a thousand words. BigCharts.com offers charting tools with multiple timeframes, frequencies, indicators, and styles. You can print and e-mail your favorite charts and save your favorite chart settings. While certain services on the website require registration, an impressive amount of data can be accessed without any sign-up. This, along with an easy-to-use interface, makes BigCharts an attractive choice for both novice and expert investors.—*Shikha Sharma, Business, Economics, and Legal Studies Librarian, University of Connecticut Libraries, Storrs, Connecticut*

INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

Business Planet, http://rru.worldbank.org/businessplanet

Selecting the best country in which to do business has never been an easy task. One is always on the lookout for a reliable indicator, tool, or survey results to guide the process of measuring and ranking a country's attractiveness toward business establishment and in-country operations. Of late, the World Bank Group has produced not only periodic survey results of country business environments but a handy country-mapping tool that aids the potential investor in positively identifying and focusing further within high-, medium-, and low-performing economies.

Business Planet employs data mapped from five World Bank Group databases to cover more than 190 economies across issues: Doing Business (2004–present), Enterprise Surveys (2005, 2006), Privatization (2000–2008), Private Investment (2000–2007), and Entrepreneurship (2005, 2006, or 2007). Within each database, economies are ranked and assigned one of three color codes; the higher the country code ranking, the more closely the country meets the survey objective so that, in Doing Business, highly ranked countries typically demonstrate clearer, simpler business regulations

and stronger property rights protections. The composite databases provide a relatively complete picture of business environment regulations. Business Planet addresses questions such as, "How easy it is to . . . get credit? . . . register property? . . . start a business?" and can be filtered by topics, regions, and countries.

The map, powered by Google Maps, is the key feature of Business Planet. Its tri-color scheme to rank economies allows visual scanning, sorting, and country comparison in a global or regional context for possible investment and future analysis. It can be effectively used to facilitate group dialogue, motivate interest with its comparative country rankings, or allow one to delve into a single country's profile. A welcome element in Business Planet is the source link to the full surveys powering the Business Planet tool for current and historical data.

Want to find newly improved countries for investment? Mapped economies identified by a star are the top ten reformers in the last year. Plan to share results with a work team? A site toolbar link allows information sharing with colleagues: paste a map link into your website, e-mail, or instant message and e-mail or print any of the twenty-seven Business Planet maps. Want to keep up with changes? Bookmark Business Planet in Delicious and reconnect when you have additional countries to investigate.

Some weaknesses suggest uneven results in Business Planet. For instance, results in Doing Business, the largest survey representing thousands of business firms in 183 countries, may not represent regulation of all businesses countrywide: surveyed firms represent one specific type of business, usually a limited liability company, located within the country's largest business city. Second, surveyed firms are allowed to participate in multiple surveys, where they could omit information or disregard procedures in one (Doing Business) but include complete information in another (Enterprise Surveys), skewing the results. Finally, it is advisable to check both terminology definitions and the data-collection method when comparing multiyear data within one indicator or cross-country data, as definitions and collection methods can vary by indicator, by country, or over time.

The World Bank Group is on a forward track in building on its data surveys and repackaging country business data via Business Planet. This creditable mapping tool of country business conditions is conducive to academic use (high school through university) and by the general public, though caution is advised to verify the method and against using this tool as the sole source of business investment or regulation strategy.—*Monica Hagan, Business Reference and Instruction Librarian, University of California, Los Angeles*

UNdata: A World of Information, http://data.un.org

In a perfect world of data collection and retrieval, reliable data are readily available at one entry point, staged through a system that allows for operative data processing, and produce a retrievable output in multiple formats suitable for user needs. Such a system is now available via the UNdata

gateway, and the international research world couldn't be more pleased.

Thanks are due to the United Nations Statistical Division (UNSD) of the United Nations (UN). The UNSD pooled data from the myriad UN databases that mushroomed over the sixty-plus years of collecting information on its 192 member states to produce UNdata, which opened in February 2008, replacing the United Nations Common Database. From the onset, UNdata established 6 glossaries, and it has increased coverage from 14 databases and 55 million data points to 32 databases and more than 60 million data points at last count, including the last two decades of UN Comtrade, representing more than 95 percent of the world's merchandise trade. UNdata magnetizes a vast array of themes: agriculture, education, employment, energy, environment, health, human development, industry, information and communication technology, millennium development goals indicators, national accounts, population, tourism, and trade. Begun in 2005, this project was developed in partnership with the Gapminder Foundation and Statistics Sweden, with some funding provided by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.

UNdata provides live data and static sources hosted within a seamless, online environment. Keyword searching dominates UNdata, pulling two types of results from UN sources: dynamic data series and static tables. Data series enables table manipulations, data preview, and advanced downloading options. Static tables, grouped separately and available as published by the data owner, have fewer options and download in Microsoft Excel only. Keyword searches recognize subjects, countries, and years, and multiple search terms do not require connectors. Additional search options are under the "More" heading: "Advanced Search," "Country Profiles," and "Explorer," the primary index for UNdata. Users can further filter results by source.

Inventions abound for UNdata. Learn to place the UNdata search bar in your website with an iframe or host the code on your server in About UNdata. Get the UNdata plug-in for Firefox or connect with UNdata on Facebook and Twitter. Anticipate data publications with the Update Calendar, or use what's new in Updates. Visualizations and Tools is impressive, offering tips and projects for ways to process results from UNdata using graphic applications. UNdata is also available in an API (application programming interface) version.

There are some limitations to UNdata. First, the array of search options is not well displayed but is hidden within the "More" category, and users may miss ways to pinpoint data or focus within a timeframe unless using the options, "Country Data" or "Advanced Search." Second, browsing the "Explorer" option by topic might result in unexpected findings: The Sex Ratio of Newspaper Journalists is a data table in the Education database, and the Adult Literacy Rate (not listed within the Education database) is in the Health database. Third, with spelling in UNdata set for British English, results retrieval is limited—e.g., a keyword search of *enrollment* (American spelling) yields zero results, while a keyword search of *enrolment* (British spelling) identifies seventy-seven entries. Fourth, in a "Country Data" display, there is no custom print option, so one must print the entire screen or file. Finally, it is advisable to check the term definitions and data collection method when comparing multiyear data within one indicator or cross-country data, as definitions and collection methods can vary by indicator, by country, or over time. Reassuringly, UNdata sources uniformly provide thorough notations and documentation for verification.

With the UNSD's monumental ability to produce UNdata as an entryway to international statistical data collection at no cost to the user, the UNSD has just raised the bar for data sharing and dynamic access, and we all benefit from their marvelous work. Recommended for all users of international and country-specific statistics: students and faculty, analysts, investors, and citizens worldwide.—*Monica Hagan, Business Reference and Instruction Librarian, University of California, Los Angeles*