



Yes – Even YOU – Can Do Business Reference!

With more confidence and on a limited budget!

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The Rules

according to your local accidental business librarians

1. Don't panic
2. Don't assume
3. Don't forget MeL
4. Don't forget The Google
5. Don't be shy
6. Don't do it alone
7. Don't feel bad

Rule #1: Don't panic

- **Activate your reference interview powers!**
 - Understand the question before diving in to look for answers
 - Partner with the patron
 - Where have they looked already?
 - What is the info for?
- Remember, you're a trained professional 😊

Rule #2: Don't assume

- It's easy to dismiss some business reference questions as “unanswerable” because your library just doesn't have the budget for some of the big name business databases (where all of the answers *must* be)
- Alternatively, some business reference questions (at least the way they are asked) really can't be answered
 - Ask yourself, would a company want their competitors to know this?

In both of these situations, your best approach is to start brainstorming and think creatively.

Big picture, then details

- Is your patron looking for iPhone 4 consumers in Southfield, MI aged 27-41 who earn over \$40K and Twilight fans?
- Or maybe they want to know how much a company spends on office supplies in their NH headquarters?
- Or maybe they want to know the sales figures for the only Starbucks in Traverse City?
- Or maybe they want to know how much consumers in Michigan spend on Christmas decorations?

Big picture (cont.)

Step back from these kinds of questions and look at the bigger picture(s):

- Maybe you can find some iPhone 4 sales data. Period.
- Or maybe you can find some spending behavior related to Twilight fans. Period.
- Or maybe you can find a study showing what companies spend on office supplies.
- Or find that company's overall spending and make some educated guesses on what percentage they might spend related to office supplies
- Or find total Starbucks sales as well as the total number of Starbucks (or the number of Starbucks in MI, even) and do some creative math.
- Or find what Americans spend on seasonal holiday decorations.

Rule #3: Don't forget MeL

- Explore what the Michigan eLibrary has to offer—it's **your** (and your patrons') consortium!
 - Most of the business-related databases (and lots of other cool stuff) can be found on the MeL Business & Jobs Gateway page
 - <http://mel.org/SPT--BrowseResourcesBusiness.php?ParentId=832>
 - ***Business & Company Resource Center*** is available through MeL & it is chock-full of goodness

Business & Company Resource Center

Southfield Public Library Your anytime, anywhere library at mel.org

BUSINESS & COMPANY Resource Center

- Help
- Gale Databases
- Search Tips
- List of Sources

HOME COMPANY SEARCH INDUSTRY SEARCH ARTICLES SEARCH PUBLICATION SEARCH ADVANCED SEARCH

Quick Search: kellogg In: Company Search SEARCH SEARCH HISTORY

Current Company: Kellogg Co.

Company Profile News/Magazines Histories Investment Reports **Financials** Rankings Suits and Claims Products **Industry Overview** Associations

Articles about this company

- Financial Data
- Legal Issues
- Management
- Operations & Technology
- People
- Products & Services
- Sales & Marketing
- Statistics
- Strategy & Planning

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Business

Kellogg Company was founded in 1906 and incorporated in 1922. The company and its subsidiaries manufacture and market ready-to-eat cereal and convenience foods. Kellogg's headquarters are in Michigan. Kellogg's principal products are ready-to-eat cereals and convenience foods, such as cookies, crackers, toaster pastries, cereal bars, fruit snacks, frozen waffles and veggie foods. The company manufactures these products in 18 countries and sells them in more than 180 countries. Typically, Kellogg company sells their products to grocery stores, for sale to consumers. Wal-Mart Stores Inc. is their largest customer and accounted for 19 percent of sales in 2007. Kellogg owns a number of trademarks pertaining to their cereals, including Kellogg's Corn Flakes, Fruit Loops

INDUSTRY OVERVIEWS provide statistical detail & suggest other sources.

The FINANCIALS tab makes it a snap to find detailed financial info & to identify a company's competitors.

SWOT analysis provides valuable insight into what makes a company successful in an industry.

Internet 100%

Rule #4: Don't forget the Google

Or Wikipedia, for that matter

- Useful for quickly orienting yourself on a particular topic
- Google's site search is invaluable for using big sites, like the State of Michigan's, for example [tire recycling **site:michigan.gov**]
- Try to identify trade associations and publications when faced with industry research by Googling the industry and "association".
- Search for pathfinders/guides from other libraries (add the word "library" or "guide" or limit to .edu, etc.)
- Google scholar is another useful tool
 - For academic libs: your patrons can set Scholar to point to your institution's holdings
 - For public libs: your patrons may have access to another institution and this would help you do a top-level search across some of the content.
- You'll probably stumble upon press releases or abstracts for pricey industry reports, which may contain a few nuggets of data.

Rule #5: Don't be shy—steal stuff!

- Lots of great pathfinders out there
 - Not all point to just fee-based content. Try to identify similar institutions (either public or academic) and see what kinds of guides they offer.
- A few good ones:
 - NYPL: <http://www.nypl.org/locations/sibl> (check out their research guides section)
 - Harvard: <http://www.library.hbs.edu/guides/>
 - Canton PubLib: <http://www.cantonpl.org/database/iereferrerhelp.html>
 - BizLink (from Charlotte/Mecklenburg PL): <http://www.plcmc.org/bizlink/>
 - Library of Congress Business Reference Services: <http://www.loc.gov/rr/business/>

... and learn from others

- Marketplace – business segment on public radio
- New York SBDC Research Network:
<http://sbdcrn.blogspot.com/>
- Terese M. Terry's blog:
<http://bizrefdesk.blogspot.com/>
- SCORE has excellent templates:
http://www.score.org/template_gallery.html

Rule #6: Don't do it alone!

Lots of national, state, regional groups out there willing to come in to offer workshops, handouts, etc.

- Michigan Jump\$tart Coalition
- Investor Education in Your Community
 - Contact Peg Beckwith (517) 241-5519 or beckwithm2@michigan.gov.
- Federal & State government offices
 - Patent & Trademark Office
 - Economic Census
- SCORE, SBA, MISBTDC

A little help from your friends

Where to turn for help and support:

- Buslib email group
- MLA Econ Dev Community of Practice:
<http://www.mla.lib.mi.us/cops>
- BRASS: <http://www.ala.org/rusa/brass>
- SLA BusFin section:
<http://units.sla.org/division/dbf/>

Rule #7: Don't feel bad

- Business types can seem demanding – don't let them intimidate you
- Focus on your library's strengths
- Manage expectations
- One library can't have it all

That question about spending on holiday decorations ...

- The common denominator:
 - “The gift, novelty, and souvenir stores industry was highly fragmented, and characterized more by the diversity of products sold than by similarities between individual industry leaders.” - "Gift, Novelty, and Souvenir Shops." *Encyclopedia of American Industries*. Online Edition. Gale, 2009. Accessed through Business & Company Resource Center
- For further reading:
 - U.S. Census Bureau County Business Patterns. *U.S. Census Bureau Facts for Features: The 2007 Holiday Season*. 25 January 2008. Available from http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/county_business_patterns/010192.html.
- From a \$3,500 report:
 - “In 2009 Americans spent nearly 40 percent of their annual seasonal decorations budget on new outdoor decorations, up from only 22 percent back in 2004, according to a recently released report from Unity Marketing, *Christmas and Seasonal Decorations Report 2010 UPDATE*.”
- Associations are everywhere:
 - National Christmas Tree Association published industry statistics on their web site.

Keep these rules in mind ...

... and with your creative thinking, your knowledge of information plus some great free sources ensure that you **CAN** tackle business questions!

See our list o' free & helpful web sites on the MLA Conference web site.