

Finding Background Information on People

One of the most complex types of research is trying to find background information on people. The starting point is to have the exact spelling of the name. It is of course easier if the person is prominent. Once you have the correct name, start with a web site for the company where the person is employed (if you have it). Look for an 'About Us' page, or search for other information if the site has a search feature or site map.

Another approach is to use a search engine such as www.google.com, www.yahoo.com, www.live.com, or www.ask.com where the person's name might find results (even typing in a phone number or address in quotes sometimes finds them). If they have a common name, you can include something about them that narrows the search to the person you are looking for. For example, your search could look like this: +“Jack Welch” +“international business”. The plus sign tells the search engine to require that phrase.

Local network/people search sites such as www.zabasearch.com, www.linkedin.com, www.spock.com, and www.ryze.com, offer good searching in Internet databases for professionals. Other networking databases also include www.plaxo.com, www.spoke.com, www.jigsaw.com, www.zoominfo.com and www.ziggs.com can also yield results. One site that searches several social networking sites at once is www.spokeo.com, and Yahoo! has a people search capability at <http://people.yahoo.com/>. Other good Internet people search engines include www.whozat.com and www.pipl.com.

Newspapers, magazines and journals can also be searched in databases available in library web sites. In these databases, use variations of the name that might include their nick names or abbreviated first name, or an initial next to the last name. Make sure the database you are searching would have the newspapers that are published in the subject's area of residence, and if not then review the American Journalism Review home page to see if the paper has a web site (<http://newslink.org/>).

If your target is prominent, historical, an author, or professional you have a chance at finding them in some of the many unique directories that your local library can tell you about (there are too many to mention here). If the organizations are scholarly you can first look up different types of professional groups using www.scholarly-societies.org web site. If they have an occupation that might be regulated by a government agency you can look up web sites for certifications or licenses organized by state or occupation at <http://tinyurl.com/6npgwr>. Here you will have to navigate through the particular web site to validate their license or certification.

There are many other substantial sources for biographical information, such as the *Biography Resource Center* located on most area library web sites. This source lists most of the Who's Who directories for the past ten years. In addition, one of the best overall indexes for the many Who's Who-like directories is *Biography and Genealogy Master Index*, which can be found at most good libraries. Another good series is *Wilson's Biography Plus*. These work well for prominent people, not so well for the everyday person.

No mention of biographical sources would be complete without the Library of Congress reference page www.loc.gov/tr/genealogy/other.html; the Church of the Latter Day Saints free database at www.familysearch.org; the A&E network biography page www.biography.com; Gale's Literary Index <http://tinyurl.com/5dtrcb>; and www.ancestry.com.

Some other sites that charge a simple fee include the on-line reputable Detective web sites such as www.choicepoint.com; www.knowx.com; www.baionline.net/index.cfm; and www.factfind.com/database.htm.

If you have found other biographical resources please send them to rguffey@e-clarity.com and they will be included in the next update of this paper.