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Conducting Secondary Research

Learning Objectives

- 1 Define secondary data, their benefits and the criteria that determine their usability
- 2 Discuss how secondary data can be used to examine the external environment, the industry and consumers
- 3 Explore the sources of quantitative and qualitative external data
- 4 Describe the steps in the secondary research process

EVERYONE'S INTO HEALTHY AND NATURAL – SO NESTLÉ AND COCA-COLA LISTEN AND ADAPT

Fizzy soft drinks are not selling as well as they used to. So Nestlé, the world's largest food company, and Coke, the world's largest producer of soft drinks, have reacted to this trend. Through research they have found that not only do people want to be healthy, they want to be slimmer. So the companies developed Enviga, a 'natural' drink containing green-tea extracts, caffeine, and other natural ingredients and this comes in green-tea, peach and berry flavors. The product's claim to fame? Drinking it helps burn calories. (Although a consumer would have to drink 20 cans to rid themselves of the calories of one Big Mac.)

Question: What other products could be developed in response to current social trends?

Source: The Economist, 2007

6.1 External Secondary and Primary Research Data

After a researcher has defined the problem using critical thinking skills and internal data, the next step in the research process is to determine what external information is already available that could assist in answering the research question. The two types of external research data that can be obtained by market researchers are commonly called 'secondary' and 'primary'. A researcher

will obtain primary data directly from research participants. In contrast, secondary data already exist as someone else has collected them as the result of previous research. Secondary data, despite the name, are the first type of data that should be used by researchers.

Why use secondary data first? Since secondary data already exist they are less costly than obtaining primary data. Not only do researchers not have to spend the money to conduct research, using secondary research data saves time. Finding information is much easier and quicker thanks to the internet, as there are a wealth of online sources of secondary data. In fact the amount of available data is so great that researchers need to develop skills in determining what information is relevant and credible.

6.1.1 Institutions that collect secondary data

Secondary data may have been collected as part of research conducted by an educational institution, a government department, a trade association or a commercial data provider. The faculties of educational institutions such as colleges and universities may conduct research that has been funded by a grant. In turn, this grant may have been received from a large corporation or government agency that needed research data on consumer preferences, or from a government agency that wanted information on social trends. If the grant was from a corporation, the data may not be available to the public. Research may also be undertaken solely as the result of professorial interest. Since the goal of professors is to publish research, this kind of data will be made available to the public.

Government agencies will conduct their own research to provide information to guide policy decisions (see box below). The information collected will include population demographics and economic detail, all of which should be available to researchers.

IF OTHER RESEARCHERS HAVE ALREADY ASKED THE QUESTION, THE ANSWER MAY BE WAITING ON A CENSUS WEBSITE

In the American fact finder section of the United States Census website (www.census.gov) there is a page that keeps track of questions that people have already used to query the huge database that results from census data. Here are some sample questions that have been asked:

- What are the fastest growing counties in the US?
- What is the latest estimate on the growth of the Hispanic population?
- What are the home ownership rate and rental vacancy rate?
- What business data are available for my area?
- What are the percentages of religious affiliation?

Source: AskCensus, 2006

In addition, trade associations will conduct research on products produced by members of the association. For example, the ACEA (European Automobile Manufacturers Association) gathers information on auto industry-related statistics. Therefore primary research on the auto industry should not be conducted without first ascertaining what secondary data are already available.

Not to do so is wasteful of researchers' financial resources. Finally, commercial research companies will provide data for a fee.

6.1.2 Benefits of conducting secondary research

Once a research proposal has been approved, researchers may be tempted to immediately start conducting the primary research methodology by designing a survey or holding a focus group. However, there are many benefits to first conducting external secondary research including lower costs, research answers, assistance with the design of research methodology, and providing industry information.

Lower Costs

The costs involved in obtaining primary data include determining and obtaining a sample, designing the research methodology and analyzing the findings. Because secondary data, unlike primary data, have already been collected they can be obtained at lower cost. However, not all secondary data are free. If the data are obtained from a commercial provider there may be a cost involved. If this is the case researchers may find that the cost of the secondary data is still much lower than the cost of obtaining the data through primary research.

Research answers

There are occasions when only secondary research is conducted. By analyzing the secondary data researchers might find an answer to a research problem. This is most likely to happen if the research question is general in nature. For example, if the research question is the percentage of people in the city who are concerned about weight gain, these data might have already been collected by a local health organization. However, most research questions are more specific to a company's product or target market segment and the data collected through secondary research data will not be specific enough to provide the necessary answers.

Research methodology design

Secondary research can provide information that will help to design the primary research methodology. Data from existing sources of consumer preference can provide information on desired product benefits that will help in the design of a questionnaire or focus group script. For example, if a company is considering designing a new accessory for use with cell phones, research of articles on cell phone design might find an industry study on consumer preferences regarding features. This information could then be used to develop a questionnaire that could be used with local consumers.

Industry information

Another benefit of secondary research is that it can provide background information on an industry. Even if the secondary data that are analyzed do not directly provide the answer to the problem, their collection and analysis are still helpful in providing background information and context on the research issue. Using this knowledge can help a researcher choose the correct research method and design a better research tool.

6.1.3 Requirements of secondary data

Secondary research for existing data is always the first choice for researchers as it saves time and money. However, secondary data should only be used if the data are relevant and relate

appropriately to the problem. The data should also be credible, timely, accurate and affordable. Ensuring the usability of secondary data is the responsibility of researchers.

Data used by the researcher should not only deal with the consumer market segment or the product category, they must be relevant by specifically addressing what researchers need to know. With vast amounts of information available online, it is relatively easy to find data. However, researchers must take the time and effort to verify the credibility of sources of data to ensure these come from reputable organizations or publications. If the source is a website it can be more difficult to determine credibility. Researchers must verify which individual or organization is responsible for the content of a website.

Besides the relevance and credibility of a source, researchers should determine the date when a study was published, as the data should be timely. What is considered outdated depends on the product or consumer groups being studied. Fashion and technology information becomes dated very quickly. In other fields, the opposite is true.

When evaluating the accuracy of data, a researcher should ascertain who it was who originally collected the data included in a study. It is not necessary to know researchers personally, but it is necessary to know that the specific organization for which researchers collected the data is reputable. How the data were collected should also be examined. Data that have been collected using the wrong method or a flawed sample will result in erroneous results. Finally, the cost of the data should be considered. Even the best data cannot be used if they cannot be afforded.

Secondary data requirements

- Relevant – they must address the issue being researched.
- Credible – the source is a respected provider of information.
- Timely – the data are not outdated.
- Accurate – the data are correct.
- Affordable – if not free, the company can afford the data.

6.2 Secondary Research Uses

Three major issues that a marketing researcher should use secondary research to explore are the external environment, the industry as a whole, and consumer segments. Fortunately much of this research can be conducted right from a researcher's computer. However, a visit to a public or business library to use online databases may also be necessary.

6.2.1 Secondary research on the external environment

Research on the external environment should include searching for data on social, economic, legal and technological issues that might affect the research question. When researching the external environment the secondary research might focus on social changes that could affect the benefits that consumers desire from a product. Another example of research on the external environment would be general economic news, as this would affect the pricing of a product. Researchers might examine the legal environment for changes in laws that could affect how a product may be packaged and promoted. Finally, the technological environment needs to be

researched for any implications it may have on new product development. Below is an example of how Folgers used research to create a new product.

WHAT'S NEW WITH COFFEE? RESEARCH GAVE FOLGERS AN IDEA

Folgers was looking for a competitive edge for a new coffee product. Consumers were buying more upscale coffee and both gourmet and flavored coffees were selling well. But Folgers wanted a new breakthrough product rather than merely a 'me-too' product. Researching the external marketing environment they found that 35–40 million Americans had reduced their coffee consumption because drinking coffee irritated their stomachs.

As a result, Folgers is marketing the first new coffee product in 20 years (since decaffeinated coffee was introduced). Folgers 'stomach friendly' coffee is made from specially roasted beans that do not cause irritation. So coffee drinkers with delicate stomachs can now drink again!

Source: Folgers, 2006

For example, if a research question is designed to determine the reason for a decline in consumption of a company's preprepared chocolate dessert, there are probably no legal issues that need to be researched as these would not affect consumer consumption of that product. However, there may be social and economic issues. Researching the social environment might lead a researcher to articles and other information regarding the increase in obesity and the resulting popularity of low calorie diets. Researching economic issues might reveal that consumer spending has fallen. If so, it may also show that economic hard times have resulted in consumers buying less of expensive preprepared food products. Both of these facts will be worth considering when designing the research study.

There will be occasions when an organization is conducting research when there are little secondary data available. This may be particularly true when research is focused on an ethnic group with a small population. In this case little may have been written about the group and even less research conducted on the behavior of its members. However, there are qualitative techniques that can be used when the available secondary data are limited (Pires et al., 2003).

6.2.2 Secondary research on the industry

Secondary research could also gather information on an entire industry to see if there are changes that might affect a research question. These would include general data on changes and trends in that industry. In the case of the dessert product, data might reveal a trend toward smaller portion sizes or packaging that will go directly from the microwave to the table. A final issue to be researched might be of competing products. A researcher will need to know if there are new competing dessert products that consumers are purchasing. In the box below is an example of how an industry organization can provide access to secondary data.

LOOKING FOR INFORMATION ON RETAIL SPENDING? YOUR FIRST STOP MIGHT BE AT THE NATIONAL RETAIL FEDERATION WEBSITE

Consumers spent over \$3.8 trillion in a single year at more than 1.4 million US retail establishments. Where is this fact found? The National Retail Federation describes itself as the world's largest retail trade association with membership including department, specialty, discount, catalog, internet and independent stores. One of the ways the organization serves its members is by conducting research. Here are two studies that anyone with an interest in retail purchasing could access:

Moms Worth More Than \$10 billion This Year – Average Consumer Spent Nearly \$100 on Holiday

This study provided secondary data that managers of flower shops would find helpful. The study found that Mother's Day is the second most popular flower buying holiday (Christmas is first). Of all the flowers purchased on Mothers' Day, 45 per cent of shoppers will buy cut flowers, 32 per cent will buy outdoor bedding and gardening plants, and 22 per cent will purchase houseplants.

Parents Heading to Stores Before Kids Go Back to School – Spending on Electronics up Nearly 15 Percent

This study provided secondary data that would be of interest to managers of local stores that sell school supplies. The study found that besides the usual purchase of paper and pencils, 41.7 per cent of parents will also buy electronic or computer-related equipment for their children.

Source: National Retail Federation, 2006

6.2.3 Secondary research on the consumer

One last general issue that might need to be researched would be information on consumer segments. This secondary research could be on the current market segment or on a new potential market segment. For example, the current market segment targeted by the company for the dessert product might be families. In this case research should focus on any changes in consumption patterns for families. Research might reveal that families are serving less sweet desserts because of health concerns. A researcher might also focus on new target market segments, such as young single professionals and their dessert preferences.

Research findings on new industries can quickly become available. Academic researchers are often interested in studying what is new. For example, online auction retailing as an industry segment was soon an object of study to researchers. Research findings on how consumers use these online auction websites could also help researchers to design new studies (Weinberg and Davis, 2004).

What to research using secondary data

- External environment
 - social
 - legal

- economic
- technological
- Industry
 - trends in consumption
 - competitor growth or decline
- Consumers
 - current customer segment preferences
 - potential consumer segments preferences

6.2.4 Organizing secondary data

Since there is a wealth of information available to researchers keeping track of it all is a critical issue. A means to organize data while keeping track of all the sources of the information will save time in the long run. Carefully noting the source of data will save a researcher time if they need to verify the credibility of the information. Also, any questions as to the accuracy of information can quickly be addressed, as researchers will know the exact source of any data.

To organize data, researchers should keep a log of where information was found, how it was obtained, the name of the publication, database or document and the date of the source. This information, when entered in a software database program, then forms part of a marketing information system or MIS. Even information that isn't of current interest to researchers might be of use to a marketing department in answering a future research question. Therefore maintaining relevant information can save time in future research.

This information can also be used as an example of what research can accomplish. For example, an organization may be interested in conducting research on the connection between price and perceived quality. A previously conducted study that has been presented in a journal may give marketing researchers some useful ideas for conducting their own research (Zhou et al., 2002).

6.3 Sources of Quantitative and Qualitative Secondary Data

Quantitative secondary data are numerical information on the external environment, industry and consumers that already exist. Most of this information will be from statistical studies conducted by academic institutions, trade associations, government agencies or marketing research firms. Researchers will find numerous sources of information on the external environment and consumers. However, they may also discover that finding data on competitors can be challenging. Qualitative secondary data are not statistical and will be gathered from sources such as magazines and newspapers. This type of information is very important when researching consumer preferences and competitors.

6.3.1 Quantitative secondary data

Most external quantitative secondary data result from statistical survey research that has been already conducted. Common sources of this data are academic institutions where professors

conduct statistical research. In addition, trade associations will collect statistical data for their members. Local or federal government offices collect data as part of the services they provide while commercial research firms collect statistical data to sell. These organizations have the financial and staff resources to be able to conduct a survey with a large enough sample to ensure that data are statistically valid. Academic and government data are often available to a researcher at no cost. Trade association data are usually available only to member organizations and commercial research data must be purchased.

Academic researchers

The secondary data that result from studies conducted by academic researchers can most often be found published in academic journals. However, often the studies are basic and not applied research. While such data may provide the researcher with insights as to the causes of a problem, they will rarely answer a research question directly. However, examining the research of others can provide information on some basic questions. The two databases described in the box below would be helpful to those starting research for nonprofit arts organizations.

QUESTION: WHAT ARE A CPANDA AND A E UCLID?

Possible answers:

- a) small furry animals
- b) free databases

If you guessed the second answer, you are correct. If you work for a non-profit arts organization these databases are an excellent source of free information. CPANDA is a new interactive digital archive of secondary data on US consumer attendance at the arts. It also contains data from studies on artists, arts and cultural organizations, audiences and arts funding. The databases can answer such questions as:

How many people participate in arts and cultural activities?
How do people find out about arts events in their communities?

EUCLID has been around longer and has a database called ACRONIM that contains thousands of entries on cultural research, including government reports, and academic conference papers. The database is searchable by theme, geographic area and key words. And it's free to the public.

Source: CPANDA, 2006 and EUCLID, 2006

Trade associations

The secondary data compiled by trade associations are usually specifically focused on the consumers who purchase a product, such as orange juice or women's fashions, sold by member companies. This information can provide very specific and therefore valuable data on consumption trends and changes in consumer preferences. However, because detailed information on consumer preferences would be helpful to competitors selling substitute products, this information may only be available to those companies that belong to the association.

Less sensitive data on consumption trends may be available to the general public on the association's website (see the box below).

FACTS JUST WAITING FOR YOU TO FIND THEM

As CASRO is a trade association representing survey research companies, they do know something about collecting information. On their website they provide the following list of survey research databases:

Community Research and Development Information Service (www.cordi.lu/en/home.html) – News databases in English but also in German and French.

The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research (www.ropercenter.uconn.edu) – A collection of domestic and international survey data.

OhioLINK Database (www.ohiolink.edu/resources.cgi) – List of databases on the arts, humanities, business, law, health science, science and technology.

National Bureau of Economic Research (www.nber.org/data_index.html) – Macroeconomic data, industry statistics and demographic facts.

Industry Research Desk (www.virtualpet.com/industry/rdindex2.htm) – Practical information on researching industries.

LawRunner (www.lawrunner.com) – A comprehensive listing of legal information available on the website in both the USA and other countries.

FedStats (www.fedstats.gov) – A site that lists statistics from over 100 US government agencies that can be searched by location or by subject.

Source: CASRO, 2007

Government sources

Government departments and offices usually collect data about social trends or issues. These data are almost always available to the general public and can be accessed directly on websites or by visiting a business library. Each government office will be responsible for conducting studies in their area of concern. For example, the US Department of Commerce conducts studies on business activity in different regions of the USA. Likewise in Europe, the European Union website can be searched for industry information.

Marketing research firms

Marketing research firms are also a source of quantitative secondary data. These companies specialize in researching a certain product category or consumer market segment on a continual basis. These data are then available for purchase by any interested company or individual.

6.3.2 Types of qualitative secondary data

Secondary data, other than statistical information, are also available to researchers. Qualitative sources such as general newspapers and magazines are sometimes overlooked by market researchers as sources of information on consumer choices and competing products. These types of publications are

often aimed at consumers who belong to a specific demographic group or consume specific types of products. These lifestyle publications are particularly useful for consumer marketing research.

Popular magazines

Many magazines are written to appeal to a specific demographic group. For example *Retirement Living* magazine would be read by people who are either already retired or who are still employed but planning their retirement. If marketing researchers were interested in what types of issues are of concern to this group, examining the table of contents from several issues of the magazine would help to provide this information. A travel company may also notice that many issues of the magazine had articles that addressed the new trend of grandparents traveling with grandchildren. These data could be used to develop new types of tour packages.

Other publications are aimed at groups of people who share a specific psychographic interest or lifestyle. *Car & Driver* magazine and, even more specifically, *Volkswagen Driver* would have articles focused on readers' automotive interests. Market researchers in the automotive industry should make a habit of reviewing such publications to keep abreast of consumer trends in this area. These lifestyle magazines would also provide valuable information to market researchers in related industries such as automotive supply stores. If a certain type of car accessory is being heavily promoted, such as heated cup holders, then eventually consumers will be looking for this product and stores should have them in stock.

Business and trade publications

Magazines and newspapers that cover business subjects are also a source of qualitative secondary data. They will often carry articles that relate to new consumer interests or product trends. Trade publications will also focus on a single product or industry. These business publications should be received by marketing departments and kept on file for research purposes. Likewise any trade publications pertaining to specific industry trends should be received regularly to appropriate trade association publications should be readily available in a marketing department along with competitors' catalogues and other promotional material.

Websites

Many websites also contain information that is pertinent. This includes 'zines, traditional publications that are online and websites devoted to groups that share a specific interest. Blogs, chat-rooms and social networking websites are easy ways to research consumer interests, particularly those of younger consumers. Likewise websites that allow people to post reviews of products and services can provide valuable insights. An example of their use is given in the box below.

ONLINE COMMUNICATION LEADS TO NEW RESEARCH TOOLS

Traditional research tools have been adapted for use on the internet. Not only surveys, but also focus groups and interviews, are now conducted online. However, there is also research activity that has been developed specifically because of use of the internet.

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Cymfony is a research firm that collects data for companies on how their products are perceived by consumers. While this is certainly not a new type of research, what is new is the way they obtain the data.

Cymfony gathers these data from traditional sources, such as newspaper stories, but also by searching online chatrooms and message boards. Their software searches out the company or brand name to see what people are telling others about their attitude toward a company and their product. After all, these are the sites where consumers will most likely sound off about their purchase and consumption experiences. The results are then analyzed and reported back to the relevant company on a scale of 'extremely positive' to 'extremely negative'.

Source: Bray, 2004

6.3.3 Competitor secondary data

When considering the cause of a problem that is being researched, it is important to consider the actions of a company's competitors. A large corporation might have an established system for gathering information on competitors' new products, promotions or new target market segments. However, even small companies can keep abreast of competitor actions. Besides the usual sources of quantitative and qualitative data available to track competitor actions, researchers may need to take a more creative approach to finding the required information.

Marketing researchers should obviously routinely read all types of newspapers and magazines that focus on business issues to learn about competitors. However, other methods will also be needed because not all of the relevant information will be published. Here, observation of competitors should be considered. For example, the owners of a music store might note what music is being carried at other stores or played at entertainment venues. In addition, useful information can be obtained by visiting competing companies or places where competitor products are sold.

Valuable information can also be gathered through networking. If funds allow, researchers should attend trade association events so they can network and hear the latest industry news. In addition, researchers will hear all the informal gossip regarding those competitors who are thinking of introducing new products or promotions. If trade shows are out of the question all business people can afford to network in the community by attending local business meetings and events. At such events a researcher might find him or herself in conversation with a local media representative who might know about the future promotion plans of competitors or the local business reporter who should have the latest news about new products being introduced by competitors. Even real estate agents are sources of information, as they will have information on what companies are looking for new space because of expansion plans.

6.4 Steps in the Secondary Research Process

Any researcher shouldn't start the secondary research process without a plan. After determining the research objective and the research question, a researcher should then review all the

available internal data including written sources and interview notes. The next step will require online access or the use of a business library, either academic or public.

Researchers should first familiarize themselves with the services such a library offers, including the use of a reference specialist. A reference librarian is familiar with all of the resources that are available and can help in guiding researchers to the best sources of information. Some libraries even offer an orientation or classes on the available resources to help business people gather market research data.

External sources of information available at a business library would include general newspapers and magazines for information on social changes. Business newspapers and journals are sources of information on industry and economic news and statistics. Government documents are sources of information on legal issues. Current information from these sources might be available in paper format, but most of the information will be contained online in specialized databases. Figure 6.1 below outlines the process.



Figure 6.1 Secondary research process

6.4.1 Finding data online

Much of the required secondary research can now be conducted online using websites and databases. This has made life simpler for researchers because much of the research can be conducted in the office environment. However, it has also made life more difficult. Because there is so much information available, it is up to researchers to plan and conduct secondary research in a manner

that doesn't just obtain information, but also obtains the right information. Previously the issue facing a researcher was finding any information; now the issue is finding the correct information. Researchers will never quite know where the relevant information will be found. One example of a surprising source of data is given in the box below.

LONDON IS NUMBER ONE PLACE TO DO BUSINESS! ACCORDING TO MASTERCARD

You never know who might have the answer you need. MasterCard does more than just process credit card charges – they also conduct research. The company has constructed an index that rates cities by many factors including their legal and political systems, the stability of their economy, how easy it is to conduct business, and how easily capital can enter and leave. London is Number One with a score of 77.79 out of 100, followed by New York City with 73.80. Tokyo is third with a score of 68.09.

Secondary research is conducted because respected companies may have already found information that can provide essential background material. When conducting the research, researchers should never assume who has the information. Half the fun of research is the surprising nuggets of information from unlikely sources.

Source: CNN Online, 2007

6.4.2 Planning the search

The first step in the process of accessing online information is to decide what type of information is needed. If researchers are conducting secondary research on the external environment they may need factual information on economic news, legal issues and technological developments. If the research is on consumer preferences researchers may need information on demographic data and social trends. In addition, researchers may need information on the names and locations of competing companies.

All of these needs will have different sources of information. For example, if researchers are searching for information on trends in the sporting goods industry, there are a number of different online sources that could provide information. It would be useful in this case to analyze statistical information on what percentage of young people aged 16–22 engage in various sports activities – but such a large-scale study would be very expensive to conduct. However, if the information is already available a government agency or trade association will probably have collected it. The government agency that would collect this information might also be interested in health or tourism. The trade association might be for sporting venues, sporting good manufacturers or a league of sports teams.

Information on sports participation might also have been collected by companies that manufacture or sell sporting goods equipment. Because these companies will have collected this information for use in developing corporate strategy, it might not be in the public domain. However, the results if not the details of these types of studies may have been published in press releases that are readily available to the general public.

Table 6.1 Example of a search strategy

1	<i>Statistical information on sports participation among the young</i>	Government health or sports agency websites Trade associations Sports teams
2	<i>Industry information on sporting equipment manufacture and sale</i>	Sporting goods manufacturers and retailers websites Press releases Industry directories
3	<i>Lifestyle information on popularity of sports</i>	Books Magazines Newspapers
4	<i>First person online sources</i>	Personalized websites Blog information on sports participation Chatrooms focused on sports activities

Researchers will also want to analyze qualitative data. Books and articles on sports participation may contain statistical information on popularity that the authors were able to gather from other sources. Even if the books and articles do not provide statistical information, they will provide information on what sports are popular and also give insights into why some sports are gaining in popularity whilst other sports are declining.

Some online information exists only in the cyberworld. This type of information includes personalized webpages and blogs. Personalized webpage sites such as Facebook and MySpace are particularly popular with young people. They will use these pages to post information on their interests, including sports participation. Blogs are sites that allow for online discussion and are usually formed around a specific topic, including sports participation. Analyzing these sites can provide valuable insights into trends before they are documented in books and articles. Table 6.1 above provides an example of the process.

6.4.3 Online search strategy

Once the source of online information is decided upon, the next step is to construct a search strategy that involves identifying key words and terms to be used in searching the database. The success of accessing the correct information depends on using the correct search terms. It is rare that a researcher will identify the correct terms on the first try. For example, researchers might want to know which sports are gaining in popularity among young people. Terms such as ‘sports young’ might bring up too many sources of information, including data on the health benefits of sports, sports injuries, and sports for children. On the other hand, the search term of ‘winter sports participation young people in Germany during 2006’ would bring up few or no sources of information. Finding the correct search terms is often a matter of trial and error.

Unfortunately, researchers often have a ‘microwave’ mentality. They believe they should be able to put search terms and within 60 seconds they will have results, just as a microwave heats a cup of coffee. A successful online search will take time and effort because of the vast amounts of information that exist. It is unrealistic to expect that one or two tries will result in accessing relevant data.

6.4.4 Retrieving online information

Online search engines such as Yahoo! and Google are useful in looking up routine information, such as a store’s opening hours or the location of the nearest hotel. These search engines are

designed to help a user browse the web. The definition of 'browsing' is to look around or look through. Browsing can be an enjoyable activity as the web is full of interesting sites with fascinating details. However, these search engines are not designed for serious research.

The definition for 'search' includes the words to hunt or investigate. While browsing skims along the top of all the available information, searching explores a limited amount of information in depth. Instead of browsing the web using search engines, more specialized databases are needed to conduct research. These specialized databases are already available through public, business and academic libraries, if a company does not subscribe.

Statistical information can be obtained through official government websites or sites that access government information from many different sources. For example, demographic information on the USA can be obtained through the official US Census website of www.census.gov. However, it can also be retrieved from Ustats – a database that contains not only census but also other demographic data sources. Other statistical databases include Reference USA. British sources of demographic data are available through the Office of National Statistics website of www.statistics.gov.uk/

Corporate and trade association information would be contained in industry databases such as Edgar and ThomasNet. Other specialized databases for company information include Hoover's Online, WorldScope Global and Business Orgs. All of these contain information on businesses in many countries. There are even specialized websites that display information on business press releases, such as Business Wire.

Almost all the books in the world can be searched using WorldCat that allows searching by topic, author, title and language. Articles can be found using databases such as Business Source Premier, LexisNexis Academic, JSTOR, and Academic Search Elite. These sources are not available to the general public but are available at many libraries.

6.4.5 Combining the uses of secondary and primary data

Researchers will need to understand how to use secondary research to design primary research. For example, a researcher may be presented with the problem of declining sales of an orange juice product. One of the first questions they would want answered is whether orange juice consumption as a whole is declining or whether it is just that company's product that is not being purchased.

To conduct a statistically valid study of all orange juice drinkers in the USA would be an expensive and time-consuming effort. Fortunately, such a study is not necessary if secondary data are available. In fact the data are readily available on the US Department of Agriculture website (www.fas.usda.gov). Here researchers could find that orange juice consumption in the USA was 1.1 million tons in 2003/2004, a 9 per cent increase from 2002/2003.

A researcher will now know that people are indeed drinking orange juice. However, consumers have been shown to be buying other brands. Further external research might provide the information that orange juice is not being given as prominent a shelf space in local grocery stores because of all the new health drinks on the market. This knowledge gives the researcher a good indication of what the problem might be. However, the secondary quantitative and qualitative data do not answer the question as to whether the lack of shelf space is actually the problem for their product. A research question or hypothesis is then developed that consumers do not notice the orange juice display and therefore are not motivated to purchase. The researcher can now design a primary research study to obtain data on whether this hypothesis is true.

Summary

- 1 Secondary data will have already been collected by academic institutions, government offices, trade associations and research firms. The advantages of using secondary data include lower cost, the possibility of finding the research answer, assistance with methodology design and background industry information. Secondary data must be relevant, credible, timely, accurate and affordable.
- 2 Secondary data can be used to research the external environment including social, economic, legal, and technological issues. In addition, secondary data can be used to research industry trends and competitors. Finally, secondary data can be collected on consumers, including current and potential segments. It is important to record and organize data in a logical manner so that they can be easily retrieved when needed.
- 3 Secondary data can be quantitative statistical information or they can be qualitative information on lifestyle and attitudes. Quantitative data of use to the researcher may have been collected by from academic institutions, trades associations, government agencies, and marketing research firms. Qualitative data can be found in magazines, newspapers and websites. Data on competitors can be difficult to obtain and besides the usual sources, observation and networking can be used.
- 4 Conducting secondary research involves determining the sources of information that are available on the external environment, the industry or the consumer segment. Planning the search should include determining the key words for it. The vast amount of information available online means that the search terms may need to be modified a number of times before the relevant information is found. Such information needs to be retrieved from websites, databases, books, articles, personal websites and blogs.

Key Terms



blogs a website where a person can post thoughts and ideas, comment on other users thoughts and ideas and interact with people

credibility the level at which a source of information is seen as an authority

personalized webpages websites that are created by individuals which are then posted with other websites for mutual browsing and comment

search terms the words used to locate information online and in databases

secondary research process the process of determining the necessary information that already exists and how it will be located

trade associations organizations whose members all belong to a specific industry or business

Discussion Questions

- 1 What is the difference between primary and secondary data?
- 2 Give an example of both secondary and primary data that a researcher could compile about your class.
- 3 Why is credibility such an important issue when conducting secondary research?
- 4 What would be the benefits of conducting secondary research on why a certain group of students is not enrolling at the university?
- 5 For what type of research questions might government data be helpful?
- 6 For what type of research question would popular magazines such as *Better Homes and Gardens*, *Beautiful Home* and *Designer Today* be useful as secondary data sources?
- 7 Use the secondary research process to explain how you would go about researching the problem of declining enrollment at your college or university.
- 8 What key words would you use in searching online for information on soft drink consumption among athletes?
- 9 What databases would be useful for determining the demographic characteristics of the population of your home town?
- 10 Under what circumstances would secondary research be particularly useful?

Recommended Reading



Berkman, Robert I. (2004) *The Skeptical Business Searcher: The Information Advisor's Guide to Evaluating Web Data, Sites and Sources*. Information Today. While the book provides information on finding sources of business data, it also emphasizes how to distinguish trustworthy sources from all the others.

Dobson, Chris (2004) *An Introduction to Online Company Research*. San Francisco, CA: The Benjamin Group. The major sources of business information are critiqued by cost and rated on the value they provide to the researcher.

Grover, Rajiv (2006) *The Handbook of Marketing Research: Uses, Misuses and Future Advances*. London: SAGE. The book has excellent information on all aspects of marketing research.

Munger, Dave and Campbell, Shireen (2007) *What Every Student Should Know About Researching Online*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education. This book goes beyond providing the reader with information on how to research online databases by providing information on using online discussion groups, blogs and social networking sites.

Schlein, Alan M. (2004) *Find it Online: The Complete Guide to Online Research*. Tempe, AZ: BRB Publications. Besides the usual information on web sources of information, the book also

tackles the subject of filtering and managing data. It also takes a global approach and is useful for researching in any discipline.

Vibert, Conor (ed.) (2004) *An Introduction to Online Competitive Intelligence Research: Search Strategies, Research Case Study, Research Problems, and Data Source Evaluations and Reviews*. Boston, MA: Thomson/Texere. Provides a guide, step-by-step, through the process of researching competitors. It also includes a critique of sources and case studies.