Best of the Best Business Websites (Free Resources)

The 2013 Winners

BRASS Education Committee

BRASS Education Committee members: Natasha Arguello, Chair; Kim Bloedel; Leticia Camacho; Louise Feldman; Dan Hickey; Jared Hoppenfeld; Penny Huffman; Hiromi Kubo; Peter McKay; Rhonda Kleiman; Tom Ottaviano; Lee Pike; Susan Schreiner; and Christina Sheley

The Best of the Best Business Websites (Free Resources) is a RUSA BRASS Award, established in 2009, which recognizes three highly relevant business websites as selected by Business Reference and Services Section (BRASS) Education Committee members. The winners are announced at the RUSA Book and Media Awards reception at the ALA Midwinter Meeting. You may view previous winners at www.ala.org/rusa/awards/bestofthebestbus. To access other BRASS-recommended resources, go to brass.libguides.com.

CATEGORY: INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT/ ECONOMICS

World Bank Data, http://data.worldbank.org

Whether you're a researcher, a policy developer, or an entrepreneur, the need for robust and reliable information is paramount to success. Wouldn't it be nice if access to some of the world's most influential data and information were equally accessible regardless of one's socioeconomic standing? In recent years, the World Bank has adopted this policy and has opened up all of their data and information globally to anyone with Internet access.

The World Bank's current mission is to eliminate the "extreme poverty" (earnings of under $1.50 per day) experienced by over one billion people, and to boost shared prosperity around the world by 2030. To meet these lofty and admirable goals, the World Bank is taking a radical approach: in 2010 they opened all their databases to the public free of charge. Since then, they have continued to adopt a policy of openness and transparency in the collection, calculation and distribution of all World Bank knowledge. While they still continue to lend money, they've increased their efforts to support developing nations through policy advice, data collection and analysis, and technical support.

The resources available on the World Bank site are extensive, and include an Open Knowledge Repository (this went active in July of 2012), several research, teaching, and learning tools, news, live sessions with experts, widgets to push data to user websites, API downloads for developers, and much more. Among all these impressive options, at the very heart of the World Bank's website, is the data portal. The World Bank helps to develop internationally accepted standards, methodologies, sources, definitions, and classifications and uses these to gather and create data of the highest quality. The vast majority of the data found on the website are annual "development indicators" for over 200 economies

across the globe, and nearly all of the data used to calculate these indicators come from official government sources and other widely respected sources such as UNESCO and the IMF. Since many of these sources are not released annually, the World Bank will frequently make estimates based on accepted statistical method. Any questionable results or data are simply not added.

World Bank Data provides you with several options for navigation and information retrieval. You can conduct research by country (or region), browse in broad categories such as "Agriculture & Rural Development" and "Gender" or search for specific indicators. With over 200 different countries represented and over 1600 different indicators with data in some cases going back as far as 1960, there are millions of data points available to everyone. Just about everything is linked together by toolbars, making navigation from one page to another quick and intuitive. For those looking for more refined data or more flexibility in their searches, there are options to search in the "World Databank" (a customizable database of all World Bank Data) or the Data Catalog (the original sources for all World Bank Data).

Be aware that the World Bank is frequently adjusting many of the pages on their website (including, earlier this year, an overhaul of the databank). There is a two year lag for almost all data, and the sheer number of indicators available can make navigating the page a time consuming process. Finally, because the World Bank gathers data from a number of different sources, inconsistencies can occasionally be found. When necessary, they will make revisions to already published data to improve accuracy.

As the international push toward openness and transparency continues to grow, look for more of the World Bank's peers to follow their lead and either contribute to the World Bank's open repositories, or to create similar resources of their own. World Bank Data brings tremendous value to governments, educators, researchers, students and the civil society around the world. Highly Recommended. All levels/libraries.—*Thomas Ottaviano, Business and Economics Librarian, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York*

CATEGORY: INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS/ ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Doing Business: The World Bank and the International Finance Corporation, www.doingbusiness.org

Decades of experience and empirical research in economic development has shown that the business climate in individual countries greatly influences the success of the private sector which generates an estimated 90 percent of jobs in developing countries. *Doing Business* (DB) is a joint project of The World Bank (WB) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) that provides unbiased measures of business regulations for local firms in 185 countries and a selection of sub-national regions and cities. DB establishes annual benchmarks to compare starting, operating and growing small and medium-sized

companies over the life cycle across these economies, regions and cities. The purpose is to encourage governments to foster entrepreneurial start-ups by developing reasonable regulations, laws and institutions.

Three principles guide what DB measures: (1) less regulation promotes growth; (2) lending and investment require strong property rights and the enforcement of debt collection; and (3) lighter regulation and taxes encourage firms to shift from the informal (underground) economy to the formal sector. DB publishes a composite ranking of the "Ease of Doing Business" in each economy. Singapore, Hong Kong, New Zealand, and the United States are foremost while the worst are the Central African Republic, Chad, the Republic of Congo, and Eritrea.

The overall ranking is derived from rankings on 10 topics using 11 "indicator sets." The Topics are: Starting a Business; Dealing with Construction Permits; Getting Electricity; Registering Property; Getting Credit; Protecting Investors; Paying Taxes; Trading Across Borders; Enforcing Contracts; and Resolving Insolvency. For example, "Starting a Business" assumes that the firm is a limited liability company located in the largest business city with 10–50 employees conducting general commercial or industrial activities. The indicators used are the number of procedures required to legally start and operate a business; time required to complete each procedure; official cost of each procedure measured as percent of income per capita (*does not include bribes*); and minimum capital required (percent of income per capital). The data are compiled from reports provided by 9,600 in-country contributors: lawyers, accountants, judges, businesspeople, and public officials, all of whom are identified with full contact information.

The DB rankings can only measure regulatory performance of the economies relative to one another. WB has devised a "Distance to Frontier" measure to show how the regulatory environment is changing over time and the size of the gaps for each indicator between the highest ranking and each individual economy's rating. Rankings do not consider many other factors that influence business success such as proximity to large markets, infrastructure, security, economic conditions, and transparency in government procurement. DB covers only the formal sector.

The DB project has been the subject of some controversy because it measures regulations from the firm's point of view. Critics allege that the rankings encourage countries to relax standards that protect workers, women, and the environment. In response to the criticism the WB president has appointed an independent review panel whose report will be released to the public this year.

The DB website has an impressive array of resources and is remarkably easy to use. Current and historical data on all 185 economies can be viewed and downloaded into Microsoft Excel, including topic rankings, indicator values, and lists of regulatory procedures and details underlying the indicators. The entire 282-page 2013 DB report can be downloaded as a PDF. Each individual country report can be viewed and

downloaded as well. Abstracts of recent research with full citations are covered. Brief summaries of business regulatory reforms undertaken in the past year and lists of reforms since DB2008. A ranking simulation tool explores how changes in regulations impact rankings. An online law library links to the full-text of business laws and regulations and gender issues. There are links to related World Bank data and publications.

Doing Business is part of the World Bank's initiatives to encourage a dynamic business environment in developing and developed countries. It has been very successful in providing objective measures and benchmarks for reform. Since its first publication 10 years ago 180 economies have implemented nearly 2,000 regulatory reforms.—*Peter Z. McKay, Business Librarian, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida*

CATEGORY: CAREERS/HUMAN RESOURCES

Occupational Outlook Handbook, www.bls.gov/ooh

Whether you are seeking information on a specific profession or are just browsing for a potential career change, this resource is a helpful starting place. Sponsored by the United States Department of Labor and complied by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH) website offers all of the information from the BLS annual publication *Occupational Outlook Handbook*. The site data mirrors the information offered in the print version with some minor exceptions—charts, graphs, and photos are in color instead of cheaper-to-print black and white, and different aspects of the profession (Work Environment, Education/Training, etc.) are broken down via separate tabs rather than headings allowing easy access to the areas of most interest. The website goes beyond the print publication with helpful search boxes and easy access to further research via the BLS's other websites and data.

Three hundred forty one occupations are profiled, covering 85 percent of the jobs in the national economy. Each profile offers general information on what the work entails, what the work environment is like, how much one can expect to earn, and how to train for the job, as well as helpful links to professional organizations for getting started in the profession. The BLS employment projections of growth rate and number of new jobs for the 2010–2020 decade are included with each occupation's profile.

Contained within the BLS website, the top of the OOH site has seven tabs: OOH Home, Occupation Finder, OOH FAQ, OOH Glossary, A-Z Index, OOH Site Map, and En Español. The homepage contains a multitude of ways to search for occupational information. The easiest is by selecting one of the 25 "occupational groups" listed (from 'Architecture and Engineering' to 'Transportation and Moving Materials') and reviewing the list of occupations contained within. The homepage also features an occupation search box where the user can limit choices to factors such as median pay, education required, and growth rate, while a browse feature allows the user to search predetermined parameters including Highest Paying, Fastest Growing (Projected), and Most New Jobs (Projected).

An easy to miss but important link at the bottom of the homepage under additional data is "data for occupations not covered in detail," which covers an additional 162 occupations not featured in the 341 primary occupations. Covering about 11 percent of all jobs, this link provides details on occupations as diverse and specialized as "Mathematical Technicians" and "Clergy," and gives some valuable basic information when a full profile is not feasible.

The Occupation Finder presents a simple grid with important information about each occupation including Entry-Level Education, On-The-Job Training, Projected Number of New Jobs, Projected Growth Rate, and 2010 Median Pay. Utilizing this tool, a searcher can narrow down professions to the factors most relevant to them. For example, searching for occupations that only require a high school education yet pay over $75,000, one learns they are required to either become an "administrative services manager" or a "nuclear power plant operator."

The FAQ is broken down into seven subsections, including "Employment Estimates and Growth" and "Military Careers," each answering to a series of questions about that section. However, the list of the subsections at the top is counter intuitive and may easily be missed, forcing the user to either scroll down to see additional questions or leave the page not realizing there are more FAQs further down the page. The Glossary defines hundreds of terms used throughout the website, whereas the "A–Z Index" features an alphabetical listing of formal job titles and cross-listed popular job titles. The OOH Site Map deserve some special recognition as it is the only place that simply lists the occupations contained in each of the 25 occupational groups. This is probably the best starting point for someone aware of what occupation they wish to search, but foggy on where it may be located. Most of the data, especially the homepage, are replicated in a linked Spanish language site. This free website is appropriate for everyone interested in learning more about specific occupations.—*Susan A. Schreiner, Access Services Librarian, Axe Library, Pittsburg State University, Pittsburg, Kansas*