

DO YOU KNOW?

ISSUE 2 - JULY 2011

A free periodical to promote education and alert you to important areas of interest in the financial valuation, fraud and litigation services profession.

DO YOU KNOW...

...whether the information you find on the Internet is reliable?

When writing a valuation report, it is necessary not only to analyze the client-provided data but also to obtain “outside” information from independent sources in order to analyze economic and industry conditions, to review guideline public company information and transactions, and in some cases to verify data provided by the client. Today, the process of finding this external information will almost certainly involve an Internet search, but how do you know if you can trust what you find?

The amount of information available on the Internet is staggering, and it varies widely in its accuracy, reliability, and value. Anyone can place a page on the Internet. Unlike most traditional media, no one has to approve the content before it is made public. It is up to the researcher to evaluate information found on the Internet.

Sometimes evaluating information is fairly easy. Official data from government and public corporate sites are generally reliable. Many government agencies digitize their printed reports so that you may access online the same information you could get from the print version of the document. If you are dealing with less familiar sources, determining whether the information is legitimate can require more analysis.

The Georgetown University Library¹ suggests some questions to ask when considering information found on the Internet.

- Is the name of the author/creator on the page?
- Are his/her credentials listed (occupation, years of experience, position or education)?
- Is the author qualified to write on the given topic? Why?
- Is there contact information provided?

- Is the author with an organization? If so, does the organization support or sponsor the page? Does the author's affiliation with an institution or organization appear to bias the information? Does the content of the page have the official approval of the institution, organization, or company? Can you find more information about the organization?
- Is the information covered fact, opinion, or propaganda?
- Is the author's point-of-view objective and impartial using language free of emotion-rousing words and bias?
- Are the sources for factual information clearly listed so that the information can be verified?
- Is it clear who has the ultimate responsibility for the accuracy of the content of the material?
- Can you verify any of the information in independent sources or from your own knowledge?
- Is the information free of grammatical, spelling, or typographical errors?
- Does the information appear to be valid and well-researched, or is it unsupported by evidence?
- Are quotes and other strong assertions backed by sources that you could check through other means?
- Is there a non-Web equivalent of this material that would provide a way of verifying its legitimacy?
- If timeliness of the information is important, is it kept up-to-date?
- Is there an indication of when the site was last updated?
- If the site contains links, are they current, or have they become dead ends?
- What kinds of sources are linked?

Be very critical of any information you find on the Web and carefully examine each site. Web pages are susceptible to both accidental and deliberate alteration, and may move or disappear with no notice. Document your sources by printing or downloading the original pages. Always look at Internet sources with a skeptical eye.

¹ <https://library.georgetown.edu/tutorials/research-guides/evaluating-internet-content>

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 WITH 140 TOP-50 FIRM LITIGATION EXPERTS ON BUSINESS, FINANCIAL, FRAUD AND ECONOMIC DAMAGES

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