



RESEARCH



Business Information Use in Small to Medium U.S. Businesses: 2005 Survey

by

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1. REPORT PROFILE

FOCUS

This report provides the results of a detailed quantitative study of business information usage in more than 200 small to medium businesses in the United States. The study focuses on purchasers of business information who make purchases for their entire company, a business unit or a workgroup. The report reveals how and how often business information is purchased, used and shared by surveyed companies with key trends and preferences. The report includes extensive charts and analysis of the results and reveals best practices for purchasing, using and redistributing business information used in today's small to medium U.S. businesses.

AUDIENCE

Senior management involved in market strategy and product planning, operations, and information technology for business media, business information services and aggregators. Business information technology companies will also discover key trends and insights that will guide their development of services for small to medium businesses. Small to medium businesses will learn about best practices in similarly sized companies to guide their acquisition and development of business information services.

CONTENT

A complete presentation and analysis of the data from the study. Data collected in this study focuses on the usage, sharing, purchasing, media and tools used to access business information. The study looks at both business information generated within a company and business information obtained from outside a company. The study examines:

- Current and projected 2006 budgets for business information
- Mixture of centralized and decentralized purchasing and purchasing roles
- Frequency of credit card use in purchasing business information
- The frequency of business information usage
- Which sources are considered most important
- Preferred media for accessing and sharing specific source types
- What business roles are responsible for purchasing business information for entire companies, business units and workgroups
- Effectiveness of Web search engines and subscription services
- Importance of specific source types researching companies
- Importance of tools that find companies based on filtering criteria
- Required length of business information archive availability

Sources examined in the study include internal documents, newspapers, information from other companies, subscription online information, books and reference materials, weblogs, market research reports, magazines and scholarly journals. The report includes 25 tables and charts that highlight key findings of the study along with statistics tables collected from the study's questionnaire.

USE

A comprehensive benchmark resource for planning business information strategies for small and medium U.S. businesses, with analysis that highlights key trends and effective strategies for sales and service deployment. Data will effectively support strategies for many specific kinds of business information across the general breadth of surveyed companies.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Small and medium businesses in the United States are very active users of internal and external business information and growing their budgets for business information rapidly. Small to medium U.S. businesses obtain their business information from a wide and sophisticated array of sources, making very active use of Web sites on the public Internet to gather information from original sources but also making active use of aggregation and subscription services. Integration of internal business information with external sources is very limited in small to medium U.S. businesses, with most preferring print or Web access to external sources while relying mostly on email to distribute business information internally. Web search engines, especially Google, play a highly respected role in obtaining the correct business information but for the most part it's the original Web sites that are the most important online sources of business information for surveyed companies. Online subscription services are respected and play an important role for surveyed companies but not a dominant role. With direct high-speed access to the Web where many of their sources of business information are found and powerful search engines to help them locate these sources small to medium U.S. businesses bypass subscription database services in many instances.

The most important external source of business information for surveyed companies is information about other companies. Small to medium business mostly use the Web sites of other companies to get company information but also use services that help to collect and organize company information. Business information from newspapers and magazines is used frequently but so are weblogs, which were ranked by survey respondents to be as important a source as newspapers or magazines. Sharing business information with associates is quite common in small to medium U.S. businesses, but most share it with very limited audiences. External sources of business information are rarely accessed from in-house systems and portals.

Business information budgets are either very stable or growing very quickly: very few surveyed companies report likely cutbacks in business information purchases. There is a mixture of centralized and decentralized purchasing of business information, most of it by relatively senior management. Corporate librarians do not play a large role in purchasing business content for surveyed companies. Purchasing business information via credit cards plays a key role in surveyed companies' content acquisition, with many respondents reporting both significant frequency and percentage of purchases via credit cards for business information acquired outside of central budgets.

While this study reflects the content usage and purchasing activities of small to medium sized U.S. businesses, their activities reflect general trends in business information usage that are affecting all business information users. As the Web makes it easier to acquire business information from original sources the nature of business content aggregation is shifting the aggregation of business information towards the users and companies that consume this information. Traditional business publications have opportunities to expand their sales base to businesses accessing their content directly via Web sites and via those sharing it with their colleagues. Aggregators need to attune themselves to an audience highly familiar with the strengths of major search engines and the ability of their competitors, customers and suppliers to communicate business information to them directly.



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