

Online Research on Canadian and US Corporations: An Activist Guide

**Mining Justice Action Committee,
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Workshop Outline

- Why research corporations
- Tools and Techniques
 - Other research guides
 - Online tools and methods
 - Research questions and sources
 - Digging for dirt
- Learnings
 - Sharing your results
 - Successes

Why research corporations?

- Corporations pursue private agendas that are exploitative of workers and frequently destructive to communities and their environments.
- "The earth is not dying--it is being killed, and those who are killing it have names and addresses."--Utah Philips
- Community action can make a difference.
- Ethics and investment; pension funds.
- Individual reasons. What are yours?

Corporate research guides

- The Data Center: [Researching a Corporation](#)
 - Has very handy listings of sample research questions with search terms to use.
- [Corporate Research Project](#)
- Corporate Watch (UK):
[DIY Guide: How To Research Companies](#)
 - Useful guide, UK focus.
- [Follow the mining money-Canadian resources](#)

Online tools and techniques

- Internet research usually just the start
 - follow-up email, interviews
- Static vs. Dynamic (database) pages > search engine for static, visit dynamic and enter search terms
- Don't reinvent the profile or exposé. E.g.,
 - Corporate Watch UK profiles
 - Corporate Research Project “rap sheets”
 - <http://crocodyl.org>

Online tools and techniques

- Document document document!
- Watch for libel
 - Canadian Bar Association BC on defamation
 - SLAPPs
- Who's monitoring your monitoring?
 - Google gets worst ranking from Privacy International in 2007 survey
 - Your visits and searches appear in corporate website logs
 - Duckduckgo as an option, <https://duckduckgo.com>

What companies to research?

- Some companies are household names, but...
- “Junior” companies often do the dirty work, especially in resource extraction—work up a prospect and then sell it off

What to look for?

- History and character of the company. What does it focus on? What is its strategy? What stage of production does it focus on?
- Problems and impacts, but equally...
- Positive characteristics. Can serve as an example—if there, why not here?

Compile a basic profile

- Company web page (search for company name on Google or Duckduckgo)
 - Look for what's there--and also what isn't.
 - What face are they putting forward? Read between the lines: what issues are they trying to address?
- Full name, where incorporated, public or private?
- Home stock exchange; handy to look up by "symbol" ("ticker symbol")
- Annual reports: <http://www.annualreports.com>

Investor-oriented sites

- **Globe Investor**
 - Look for 'Recent news' links and **top 1000** public and top private companies
- **Yahoo finance**
 - Good source of news articles.
- **Stockhouse Canada**
 - Includes “Bullboards” (investor chat) that can generate leads on what investors are concerned about
- Many others: **MarketWatch**, **Advice for Investors...**

“Ethical” investment

- Is the company included in one or more so-called “ethical” funds?
- The **Social Investment Organization** provides a list of Canadian “ethical” funds.
- However, it’s hard to determine just what funds a given company is included in.

What are the company's main sites/installations/products?

- Company web site to identify sites, then...
- Web search by site name
- Websites specific to given sectors. Example (mining):
<http://www.infomine.com/minesite>
- **National Pollutant Release Inventory** (Canada). Use sidebar search form. Sample search: Highland Valley.
- For the US, use the **Scorecard site**
 - Can search by company to discover sites

Who are the directors & officers?

- Company web page, annual reports, or filings; often with bios. Keywords: director, ceo, board
- Web searches by individual's name
- AFL/CIO's [PayWatch](#) site
- [They Rule](#) has a flashy interface for mapping the interrelations of corporate boards.
- For individual campaign contributions
 - [Elections Canada](#)
 - [Open Secrets](#) (US). Search by company name.

Who are the shareholders?

- You could buy shares! But otherwise...
- **Yahoo Finance** lists top investors info for US firms.
- **Stockhouse** (paid subscription).
- In BC, search **Securities Exchange Commission** for "exempt distributions"
- Monitor shareholder activism:
 - **Shareholder Association for Research and Education (Canada)**. Look in:
shareholder resolution database
- Search for annual meetings:
 - **Database of upcoming corporate AGMs (Canada)**

What has the company disclosed as risks?

- Legal requirement to disclose risk to investors
- What's a risk to profits may also be a risk to communities or ecologies
- In Canada, **SEDAR** system
 - Follow the "Company Profiles" link, then click "View this public company's documents" at bottom of page
 - Look particularly "Risk Factors" section in "Annual information form", "MD & A", or "Final Long Form Prospectus"
- In US, **EDGAR** database:
 - Look for "Risk Factors" section in company's annual report (Form 10-K)

What are the company's political connections?

- Political donations
 - Elections Canada **searchable database** but only individual donations allowed so have to go through directors etc.
 - For the US, see **Open Secrets**. Enter company name in search box and select "Organization".
- Federal contracts (US): <http://www.usaspending.gov>
- **Standing committee** documents, House of Commons (Canada)
- **Lobbyist database** (Canada): search by company

Making the connections

- What are the links you've found? What new links can you make? Who should you be talking to?
 - Example: **BHPBilliton's global operations** from the Peruvian highlands to the Canadian north, tracing BHPBilliton's different record.
- What organizations will be active on/knowledgeable about this company?
 - Search by sector. keywords: [sector] watch (e.g., mining watch). Sector-specific, e.g., sweatshop for apparel
 - Search by issue: Labour keywords: union, labour, strike. Environmental: keywords: environment
 - Example: **Miningwatch Canada on mining companies**

Digging for details

- "Thesaurus" searching: single-keyword searches with company name (in quotes if more than one word).
Sample keywords: abuse, disaster, fined, massacre, multinational, protest.
- **Impact Benefit Agreements**—can serve as an example of benefits provided to indigenous groups
- Progressive news services
 - **Common Dreams, Rabble.ca, ZNet**, and your own favourites. See **independentmedia.ca**
 - Customize your search to specific sites:
site:commondreams.org OR site:rabble.ca OR site:zmag.org

Digging for details

- Buying research: [Integrity in Science](#)
- Crimes and infractions
 - [Federal Contractors Misconduct Database](#) (US)
 - [Cease Trade Orders database](#) (Canada)
- [Wikipedia](#)
 - Look at “Talk” and “View history” links for articles on company and sub-articles
- Go back in time
 - Research the changes in a company's site (e.g., in response to a particular event) with the [Wayback Machine](#)

How can you share your information?

- Post it directly on a publicly-accessible site:
 - <http://crocodyl.org>—you can put in links to the information you found about a company
 - <http://theyrule.net>—you can put in links to the information you found about a company (provided the company is already listed)
 - **Wikipedia**—enhance an existing article or write a new one
 - Make a short video and post on a video sharing site
 - Blog
 - Post to an online forum, like Rabble.ca's "**babble**"

How can you share your information?

- Send it to the people you contacted during your research
- Contact the company and/or government to raise issues and call for action
- Send it to organizations active on your issue and communities impacted by the company

Making a difference

- No matter how big, corporations aren't all powerful.
Informed community action does make a difference
- Sometimes we win
 - When Talisman corporation announced in October, 2002 that it was pulling out of its energy projects in war-torn Sudan, it cited public criticism as a major factor in the decision
 - United Students Against Sweatshops
campaign win in 2009
 - Tambogrande mine