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## About FreePint

FreePint is an online network of information searchers. Members receive this free newsletter twice a month: it is packed with tips on finding quality and reliable business information on the Internet.

Joining is free at <<http://www.freepint.com/>> and provides access to a substantial archive of articles, reviews, jobs and events, with answers to research questions and networking at the FreePint Bar.

Please circulate this newsletter, which is best read when printed out. To receive a fully-formatted version as an attachment or a brief notification when it's online, visit <<http://www.freepint.com/subs/>>.

ISSN 1460-7239

## Editorial

Hands up. I may have made a mistake. Calling this newsletter 'FreePint' may not have been the smart move I thought it was back in 1997.

Not only do email spam filters object to the word 'free', but the name generally takes at least a little explanation in countries outside the UK: Europeans pronounce 'pint' with a hard 'i' (as in 'mint') and the attractions of a 'free pint' often require explanation across the pond.

Because only about 38% of our readers are in the UK, we've always been acutely aware of the cultural diversity of our membership. Never more so than the reactions to the running theme in the last few FreePints about the 'information mix' consisting of free information, paid-for information and promotional material. This has solicited comment from around the world, such as this excerpt from an email from a FreePinter in Cincinnati, Ohio, USA:

"I was surprised to find your statement [that the idea of promotion ... still has some way to go before becoming accepted, especially in the UK]. As you know, advertising and promotion are very common here in the States. Frankly, I thought that we had inherited advertising and promotion (along with English Common Law, the concept of individual rights and capitalism - - Thank you Adam Smith!) from you Brits since the founders of our country were virtually all of English ancestry.

In this country, advertising and promotion are essential to the cultural and economic progress of the nation. It helps to fuel demand for all manner of products and services. The popular culture is absolutely dependent on it as advertising pays for virtually all radio and television programming. Even high culture is partially funded through advertising or corporate sponsorship. Are advertising and promotion truly not accepted in the UK?

I hope that you will continue to find the right mix of content and promotion so that FreePint can continue on as the excellent source of information that it is today. Best wishes for continued success."

We definitely don't have the same views about commercialisation here in the UK as in the States (heck, we don't even spell it the same way). After a number of trips across the pond I'm getting fairly used to the different attitude towards commercialism: making sure you tip everyone; avoiding the television if you don't want your programming being interrupted every 8 minutes by advertising; extra taxes being added to advertised prices; etc.

On the flipside, entrepreneurialism is encouraged in the States like it has never been here in the UK. We also don't have the same attitude towards the benefits of learning from our mistakes.

There are, however, similarities in attitude too: towards celebrity in relation to business -- see the popularity of the television series 'The Apprentice' which came to the UK from the US recently -- or the importance of 'Doing Business With a Conscience' (the subject of yesterday's 'Shop Talk' on BBC Radio 4 <<http://digbig.com/4djnf>>).

Whatever the differences in attitude towards money, it is the quality of the people involved in any project that will define its success or failure. We're proud to have lined up some great content (see the long list of 'Forthcoming Articles') and to be able to publish the valuable contributions made in today's FreePint on job hunting and competitive research. We're not shy to mix this with contributions from sponsors and advertisers, without whom we could not publish FreePint for free.

So, wherever you are in the world and whatever your attitude toward money and commercialism, please join us in thanking those who contribute to FreePint financially and, equally, in thanking those who contribute editorially.

Best regards

William Hann  
Founder and Managing Editor, FreePint

e: [william.hann@freepint.com](mailto:william.hann@freepint.com)  
t: 0870 141 7474  
i: +44 870 141 7474

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## Jinfo :: Jobs in information

<<http://www.jinfo.com/>>

The Jinfo service enables you to search for and advertise information-related job vacancies.

The Jinfo Newsletter is published free every two weeks, and contains a list of the latest vacancies along with job seeking advice. The latest editorial is entitled "Putting No.1 First".

To read the latest Jinfo Newsletter and to subscribe to receive it twice-monthly by email, visit <<http://www.jinfo.com/newsletter/>>.

Here are some of the latest featured jobs:

### Freelance Researchers - Business Broking

<<http://www.jinfo.com/go/j4011>>

Expanding UK based business brokerage requires freelance researchers to support our deals on a project by project basis.

Recruiter: Churchfield Business Brokers

### Business Researcher

<<http://www.jinfo.com/go/j4018>>

Recent Library/Information graduate? Excellent training opportunity for bright person with potential and basic experience.

Recruiter: Glen Recruitment

### Librarian / Information Manager

<<http://www.jinfo.com/go/j4023>>

Duties in managing a large library budget and the running of two libraries in two different countries.

Recruiter: D A Solutions Ltd

### Information Officer

<<http://www.jinfo.com/go/j4039>>

Law library exp? Perm enquiries role in small friendly firm, salary 21-26,000 - also lots of temporary law library jobs currently.

Recruiter: Sue Hill Recruitment

[The above jobs are paid listings]

NB: There are 24 other jobs in the current edition of the Jinfo Newsletter

<<http://www.jinfo.com/newsletter/>> and over 80 in the Jinfo database <<http://www.jinfo.com/>>.

## In-depth information management reports from FreePint

Topics include: Freedom of Information; Information Auditing; Publishing eNewsletters; Acquiring Skills; Info-Entrepreneur Marketing

"Well written and concise. Particularly like the coverage, e.g. pleasing range of chapters, links made to other relevant and related issues such as FoI, records management, info policy, etc., and theresources lists. Up to date, easy to digest and nicely structured."

Read about the full range of reports from FreePint at: <<http://www.freepint.com/shop/report/>>

## Three Information Today conferences, Paris, 1-2 June

- WebSearch Academy: Carrying out research on the net?
- Enterprise Search Paris: Developing an internal search capability?
- e-Workplace Collaboration: Implementing collaboration technologies?

For more information and to register: <<http://www.infotoday.com/Paris/>>

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## Hoover's reviewed in April's VIP

Hoover's UK Pro Premium provides a mix of proprietary and D&B data on UK and international companies. Read what VIP has to say about company coverage, searching, and generating lists and reports. This issue also includes the first in a new series of Source Guides:

<<http://www.vivaVIP.com/>>

## FreePint Newsletter Archive and Formatted Editions

A full archive of FreePint Newsletters is freely available online, alongside fully-formatted editions of the newsletter. These are printable, and include photos of the authors and colour advertising.

Check out the archive and have selected issues emailed to you:

<<http://www.freepint.com/issues/>>

## First review of China Insight in May VIP

The May issue of VIP includes the first extensive review of China Insight. Newly launched by Xinhua Finance, it combines data on Chinese publicly listed companies with software developed by Mergent. This issue also carries an in-depth review of Mergent Online.

<<http://www.vivaVIP.com/>>

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## My Favourite Tipples

by Carolyn Eager



Carolyn Eager is Health Information Officer for NHS 24 in Glasgow. NHS 24 is a telephone triage and health information service.

Submit your top five favourite Web sites. See the guidelines at <http://www.freepint.com/author.htm>.

- BBC Health - Extensive health information with sections on men's, women's and children's health, as well as advice on nutrition and fitness <http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/>.
- CancerBACUP - Their patient information leaflets are comprehensive and pitched at just the right level <http://www.cancerbacup.org.uk/>.
- NHS Direct - Our colleagues down south. NHS Direct Online is an excellent, detailed source of patient information <http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/>.
- Patient UK - They have over 500 printable patient information leaflets on health and disease, arranged alphabetically and by topic. Invaluable <http://www.patient.co.uk>.
- Health Scotland - Includes a database of Health and Support Groups which we can recommend to callers <http://www.hebs.com/>.

### Register for Search Tips from Factiva

Factiva's monthly newsletter, "InfoPro Alliance" gives you the inside scoop on latest search tips, research tools and new sources.

Register today and you'll find credible information faster.

<http://www.factiva.com/emails/2005/freepinttx512>

### VIP, VIP Eye and VIP Wire :: Business information

VIP reviews information products; VIP Eye analyses the news; VIP Wire lists the latest press releases.

Where else can you get such coverage of business information?

<http://www.vivavip.com/>

## FreePint Bar

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Thank you to all those who responded to our request to report on the SLA Conference 2005 in June. It should make interesting reading for all those who can't attend <http://www.freepint.com/go/b32059>.

One FreePinter would like to find the proceedings of a conference held back in 2003, called "Tank Tech" <http://www.freepint.com/go/b32042> and another is looking for one or two day conferences/exhibitions that won't break the bank <http://www.freepint.com/go/b32048>.

Running out of reading material? Three free newsletters have been publicised in the last two weeks: the Internet Resources Newsletter for academics, students, engineers, scientists & social scientists <http://www.freepint.com/go/b32052>; the Jinfo Newsletter - latest jobs, tips and advice in the information industry <http://www.freepint.com/go/b32051>; and the SLA Europe Newsletter <http://www.freepint.com/go/b32033>.

Do you know of a free newsletter service on the U.S./North American telecommunication industry with daily or weekly updates? <http://www.freepint.com/go/b32080>. How about a book on Red Howler Monkeys? <http://www.freepint.com/go/b32085>.

What's the situation for people who are looking for work in a library without librarian education? <http://www.freepint.com/go/b32065>.

VIP Eye No.32 has been published <http://www.freepint.com/go/b32041>. Among the new products covered are new indexes for Chinese companies, Kompass' extranet product, a new summit from TFPL, and much more.

Does anyone know the approximate development costs for the Church of Fools site? <http://www.freepint.com/go/b32061>. Perhaps you know where to find the record signings in football from 1988 through to 2004? <http://www.freepint.com/go/b32030>.

Can you help with finding inflation rates and interest rates? <http://www.freepint.com/go/b32084>. Or what about a (free) website containing prices of particular shares in the past? <http://www.freepint.com/go/b32099>. One person is looking for excise duty rates for tobacco in USA, Japan, China and many countries outside Europe <http://www.freepint.com/go/b32087>.

Here is an interesting posting that received an immediate answer -- a website showing examples of excellence from the banner ad world <http://www.freepint.com/go/b32022>.

Thank you to everyone who has posted questions and replies, making the Bar such an interesting and thriving destination.

Penny Hann, FreePint  
[penny.hann@freepint.com](mailto:penny.hann@freepint.com)



# Join Information Today

*in*  
**Paris!**

**1-2 June 2005**  
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Information Today returns to Paris in 2005, in conjunction with i-expo, to present three two-day conferences for internet researchers, information managers and IT professionals.

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- How to deploy and manage collaboration and social networking tools
- How to use weblogs and wikis in a business environment
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- Tips for managing a successful collaboration projects

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<http://www.infotoday.com/Paris/>

## Tips Article

### "Ready, Steady, Go! Finding the right time for job hunting" By Sue Hill and Nicola Franklin



*Sue Hill FREC Hon FCLIP is the founder and Managing Director of Sue Hill Recruitment.*



*Nicola Franklin is a Senior Consultant at Sue Hill Recruitment <http://www.suehill.com>*

*Sue and Nicola are frequent contributors to the Jinfo Newsletter, with job listings and career advice for information-related vacancies <http://www.jinfo.com/>*

Everyone always wants to know the secret. When is the right time to be looking for a job? Well I don't believe there is a right time. You should always be ready to go for a job, because you never know when the right one for you is going to come along.

#### Myths abound

Myth: It's no good looking around Christmas.

Why not? We have had jobs come in on Christmas Eve, and candidates go for interviews between Christmas and New Year.

Myth: There won't be any jobs in the New Year as everyone is looking at their budgets.

Not true. In fact this is one of busiest times for temporary work as organisations may have funds to spend before their next budget.

Myth: Of course it's summer now so no one will be hiring.

Again not true. We are always busy in summer, sometimes things can move a little slowly as everyone seems to be on holiday, but there are always plenty of jobs around.

We can always see when people think it is a good time to be looking, as we receive a higher number of CVs. Those New Year resolutions have a lot to answer for. Once bonuses have been paid in the 'City' then the CV intake goes up as well.

When an organisation has a job to fill or a project to do, they will start recruiting. They are not going to wait for a right or a wrong time. So get going now and make sure that your job hunting strategy is well defined and that you are ready for action when the right job for you comes along. As Linford Christie said when he won his gold medal (and job hunting is a little like winning gold medals), "I needed to learn to GO on the B of the BANG."

To ensure that you can APPLY on the 'A' of Advertisement then there are 3 key things to be sure you have right:

#### 1. Continuing Professional Development

As the title implies, professional development must be continuous.

- What have you done this week about your Continuing Professional Development?
- Have you promoted your own or your teams' achievements outside of the department?
- What professional activities are you involved in outside of your work?
- What are you doing now in your job that you

#### What is ResourceShelf?

<<http://www.resourceshelf.com>>

ResourceShelf is a free daily update containing news of interest to information professionals around the world.

Topics include the latest news with web search engines, research tips, new web resources, and much more.

weren't doing three months ago?

- When did you last look at or revise your CV?
- Where do you see your future?

Questions, questions, questions!

As recruiters, we often see people who are what my old headmaster Bernie (to us) Brown would have said were "wallowing in a slough of iniquity and sloth". I was never quite sure what it meant back then but I knew it wasn't good. I think the modern equivalent might be something along the lines of "not pulling out the proverbial finger".

We cannot sit back and expect things to come to us. The modern way of education and development at work very much encourages us to take care of our own development. We must grasp the nettle and get things moving. Perhaps your appraisal is due. What are you planning to say to your line manager about your development? Have you investigated what the organisation you work for offers in the way of Continuing Professional Development? An example here from the University of Bradford:

"There is a strong link between the development of staff and the University's overall success. It is important therefore that the University supports you in your development.

The Staff Development Team aims to provide a wide range of opportunities for staff and postgraduate students, details of which can be found on this Web site. Our learning events are designed to help you develop your knowledge and skills in support of your current role, or to prepare you for a future role.

We encourage you to make use of the opportunities available. In doing so you will undoubtedly increase the value of your contribution to the success of the University, helping us all to meet the increasing challenges faced within the higher education sector.

- Statutory / Essential (i.e. staff development / training that is required by legislation, or is a condition of employment, or is compulsory for a specific role)
- Encouraged (i.e. explicitly linked to the

**Related FreePint links:**

- 'Employment/Recruitment/HR' articles in the FreePint Portal <<http://www.freepint.com/go/p39>>
- Jinfo <<http://www.jinfo.com/>>
- Post a message to the authors, Sue Hill and Nicola Franklin, or suggest further resources at the FreePint Bar <<http://www.freepint.com/bar>>
- Read this article online, with activated hyperlinks <<http://www.freepint.com/issues/120505.htm#tips>>
- Access the entire archive of FreePint content <http://www.freepint.com/portal/content/>

achievement of agreed objectives, for which resources will be prioritised)

- Personal preference (Staff Development activities chosen by individuals that may take place in work time or outside, and may be fully or only partly funded by the University)"

I particularly like the sentence that acknowledges that if you do attend to your CPD you will increase the value of your contribution to the success of the organisation. I would add that you will increase your own sense of self-worth and esteem, your marketability and your value to the outside world and perhaps encourage your colleagues to grasp the CPD nettle as well.

If you are doing something for yourself make sure that you let the people who matter know. If it is work related in any way record it. This is no time to hide your light under a bushel.

Now you have got that right it is time for:

## 2. Ensuring you have an up-to-the-minute CV

As part of the induction training for our new team members we have been including training on giving presentations on effective CV writing. This has involved reading a 'how to write a CV' book, and listening to existing team members deliver this type of presentation, as well as learning how to stand up and give presentations professionally.

All this activity has led to our uncovering some amusing howlers that various consultants (or clients, in some cases!) have spotted on CVs we have received. Some examples include:

- 'Martial Status' (instead of Marital Status - spot the difference!)
- '... have outstandings proofreading skills.' - noticed by a client, who decided not to invite the candidate in for an interview
- Cases where the date of birth given is for this year
- 'Have an influential impute into ...' (right after a sentence saying they were responsible for advising on Plain English for documents)
- 'Lamp making is also a passion' - perhaps a bit over-enthusiastic?

Some of the most common CV feedback that we receive from clients, given as a reason for deciding not to interview candidates, is lack of attention to detail, and/or poor writing style, spelling or grammar. All of this goes to show that it is not just having a well-formatted CV or an impressive list of experience and skills to offer, but also the 'little things' that count.

Should you be offered some advice on your CV - on the content, formatting, layout or style, you need to consider where that advice is coming from and make a decision on whether to follow it. If a recruitment agency is giving you some free advice, it is probably based on their experience of

'what sells' to their clients, so it is probably a good idea to incorporate their ideas into your CV and send them a new copy in order to maximise your chances of securing interviews with those organisations. Of course, you can always keep copies of several different versions of your CV - it is very useful to use a tailored CV for each type of job/type of organisation to which you want to apply, and this principal applies to different agencies you register with as well.

If you want to make sure that your CV doesn't let you down and that you secure all the interview invitations possible, then it is vitally important that you review what you have written carefully. Do not rely on scanning it through on the screen as it is virtually impossible to see your own mistakes; the eye sees what the brain tells it you have just written, even if that isn't the case! It is much better to print out your CV and re-read it a day or so after you initially wrote it. Ideally ask someone else to read it through for you and proofread it as well. A polished CV will secure you more interviews - and hopefully lead to your next step on the career ladder.

Once you have the interview you should pat yourself on the back. However you are not there yet. You need to be sure that you attend to:

## FreePint Forthcoming Articles

[Provisional]

- Legal tribunals
- Cross-cultural management
- Business information in Germany
- Bullying at work
- Review of SLA 2005
- Asperger's syndrome and autism
- Applying governance to the management of information
- Seeking the value proposition for the information professional
- The 9 Ps of publishing
- User employee abuse of the Internet
- Promoting information research and skills
- Plain English
- Setting up as a consultant
- Workplace health promotion
- Free public domain and copyrighted e-books online
- Government metadata and taxonomy standards
- Google answers
- Competitive intelligence
- Developments in local search

If you have a suggestion for an article topic or would like to write for Free Pint then please contact <[penny@freepint.com](mailto:penny@freepint.com)> or sign up for the Author Update at <<http://www.freepint.com/author.htm>>.

### 3. Interview Preparation

After the elation of getting the letter or phone call inviting you in for an interview for the great role you have applied for, the nerves set in. What questions are they going to ask? Who will you be seeing? What are they expecting to hear from you? Will you forget what you want to say? How should you dress? What questions should you ask them? ... the list goes on.

The key to success in interviews is the preparation you do before hand. Without preparation you really are preparing to fail. Although it is tempting to think that, since you know yourself well, you will be able to answer questions about yourself 'off the cuff' on the day, this is almost never the case. Even if you are a confident person and fluent communicator, it is very hard indeed to present the best answer you could have given off the top of your head.

In order to prepare for the interview, you need some material in front of you beforehand. The minimum you need is: your CV (or application form) and their advert. It is much better to also have: their job description and a person specification and their web site address. For more senior posts it is also useful to have a copy of their company brochure, financial accounts and any press articles about the organisation.

You should read through the job description carefully, taking note of each of the responsibilities it lists, and considering which skills are needed to carry them out. Then think of what evidence or examples you can offer to demonstrate that you have those skills - not necessarily from doing exactly the same task, but perhaps from an allied activity.

You should also read through the person specification - sometimes a separate document to the job description and sometimes a part of it - which usually lists the qualification, skills, experiences and aptitudes that the organisation considers essential and desirable for applicants to have, in order to be able to do the job successfully. You should carry out the same exercise and imagine what questions they could ask you based on the points in the person specification, so that you can plan what examples you will give them to show you have as many of the attributes they are looking for as possible.

You should also prepare for the interview by researching the organisation you are going to see - especially as information professionals! Try not to restrict this to a quick glance at their web site, but read it through more carefully and with an analytical eye - what are their products/services? Who are their customers? Who are their competitors (i.e. who else offer the same products or services)? What do they see as their key selling points? You may well find that they ask you the question 'what do you know about

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For ratecards and details about advertising across the range of sites and publications in the FreePint network, visit Onopoly:

<<http://www.onopoly.com/>>

our organisation?' Or 'Why are you interested in coming to work here?' Knowing this information will help you tailor your answer to these questions in the most effective way.

Preparation can also help you with the thorny issue of personal presentation - if you have planned which suit, shirt and tie, or which skirt/trouser suit and top to wear, with which accessories, how to have your hair, which watch/shoes, etc. to have, and have made sure in advance that all these things are washed, pressed and shined ... then getting ready on the big day will be much less stressful. The same goes for having planned your route/travel and being sure that you will arrive an hour early (if all goes well en route) or at the very least on time if you have a bad journey.

If you turn up to your interview composed, looking your best, with a clear idea of what sorts of questions you are likely to be asked and confident that you have good examples to offer to demonstrate your skills, then you are much more likely to be successful in securing an offer for the role. Putting in the time, effort and thought required to be prepared is down to you.

All of this investment will ensure that the next activity is offered to you.

### 4. A new job!

The new job offer is not necessarily the end. Not everyone wants to accept a job offer, or they may want to negotiate first. However, to do this you need to have paid full attention to Step 1, CPD. If you end up with a job you didn't want you will have no one to blame but yourself. Attending to your CPD puts you in the strong position of knowing what job you want, what job is right for you and what you are ready for. The interview process, Step 3 also helps here. You should have gleaned sufficient information from the interview to know that the job is right for you.

So repel the myths about right and wrong times for job hunting and remember that to get the right job you need to be ready with the right approach and preparation. Job hunting is a 365 day per year activity. Good luck!



# Know your customer...

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## FreePint Bookshelf

<<http://www.freepint.com/bookshelf>>

### "Knowledge Management for SMEs - Solutions and Strategies"

Reviewed by Sean McManus



Sean McManus is a business and technology writer. He is the founder of media careers advice site [JournalismCareers.com](http://www.journalismcareers.com) <<http://www.journalismcareers.com>> and fun mood-surfing website [Wild Mood Swings](http://www.wildmoodswings.co.uk) <<http://www.wildmoodswings.co.uk>>. You can download free chapters from his books 'Small Business Websites That Work' and 'The Customer Service Pocketbook' (co-authored) at his website at <<http://www.sean.co.uk>>. The website also hosts a wide range of website development resources and a selection of original JavaScript games.

#### Related links:

- Find out more about this book online at the FreePint Bookshelf <<http://www.freepint.com/bookshelf/kmsme.htm>>
- "Knowledge Management for SMEs - Solutions and Strategies" ISBN 0-9543897-7-8, published by Ark Group
- Search for and purchase any book from Amazon via the FreePint Bookshelf at <<http://www.freepint.com/bookshelf>>

'Knowledge management' is not a term you hear much in SMEs. Partly it's because they're too busy getting on with doing the work of running the business to worry too much about analysing it and partly because knowledge management has been associated with big business. Corporates operating internationally with thousands of employees need to share information in order to be competitive. In small businesses, there's a large enough informal network to enable people to get the job done. With most of the literature focusing on big biz, it's easy to see why SMEs on the whole show little interest in knowledge management.

The irony is that small businesses have much more at stake: because there are fewer employees, each one is likely to be more important to the business's continuity. When an employee dies, a significant chunk of business expertise and experience might die with them. If it's the founder or a key salesman, the business itself could go under. SMEs that don't plan knowledge management measures are tempting fate.

The book 'Knowledge management for SMEs' by Jela Webb is more of an analysis than a how-to guide. Good ideas for knowledge sharing can be lifted from the case studies, such as having a policy to copy others on emails and conducting vivas before promotion to identify knowledge gaps. But the book presents more analysis than advice - there's a whole chapter dedicated to defining the SME and several pages discussing the EU's plans to become a leading knowledge-based economy by 2010. While this will be of interest to researchers - and will provide many jumping-off points for deeper research - I can't imagine many small business owners finding these sections useful in their work.

The size of the companies profiled in case studies varies significantly with companies of 40, 75 and 200+ employees all telling their story. For small

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business owners, the most compelling case study will be that of Bailey Solutions, a business with just five employees. This study revolves around succession planning and knowledge transfer to ensure that the business is not forever dependent on its founder. The solution Bailey adopted was a combination of using IT to provide secure access to information and holding meetings to share knowledge. The knowledge discussed in this case is mostly relating to client relationships, and it would have been interesting to see more discussion of process documentation in a business of this size so that everyone knows - as far as is predictable - how each job is to be done in the absence of the leader. Nevertheless, any small business owner with aspirations to retire will find this a thought-provoking read.

The book is written in a friendly business magazine style, with chapters concluding with summaries, key points and action lists. This helps make the material accessible to everyone. Its core audience though is likely to be among researchers, analysts and those in medium sized companies about to undertake a major knowledge management project. For them, this book is strongly recommended.

## FreePint

#### Contributors to this issue:

William Hann (FreePint Managing Editor), Penny (FreePint Administrator), Arthur Weiss, Sue Hill, Nicola Franklin, Carolyn Eager, Sean McManus, Plain Text <<http://www.plain-text.co.uk/>> (proofreading).

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## Contact

**WEB:** [www.freepint.com](http://www.freepint.com)

**EMAIL:** [support@freepint.com](mailto:support@freepint.com)

**SUBSCRIPTIONS:** [support@freepint.com](mailto:support@freepint.com)

**AUTHORS:** [www.freepint.com/author.htm](http://www.freepint.com/author.htm)

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#### Free Pint Limited

4-6 Station Approach  
Ashford, Middlesex  
TW15 2QN, United Kingdom  
Tel (UK): 0870 141 7474  
Tel (Int): +44 870 141 7474

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### Free Pint Limited

4-6 Station Approach  
Ashford, Middlesex  
TW15 2QN

T: 0870 141 7474  
I: +44 870 141 7474  
E: info@freepint.com



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- Mergent Online
- ISI Emerging Markets
- ISI CEIC Asian Databases
- OneSource Global Business Browser: Europe
- Emerald Management Extra

#### Published Reviews:

- Hoover's
- CorpfinWorldwide v. ZEPHYR v. Thomson ONE
- Factiva SalesWorks and Factiva Companies & Executives
- EBSCO Bus. Source Corporate Business Monitor Online
- Corpfin's CompanyQuery
- BvD's Mint
- Dialog Newsroom v. Factiva v. LexisNexis
- D&B's Global Reference Solution and MarketDirect
- Gale Virtual Reference Library vs. xreferplus
- Find.com
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## Feature Article

### "Analysing corporate websites for competitive intelligence"

By Arthur Weiss



*Arthur Weiss is a UK-based consultant specialising in competitive intelligence and strategy. He started using online sources for competitive intelligence in the late 1980s and since then has become expert in all aspects of online competitive intelligence research. In 1997 he offered the first training course on using the Internet for Competitive Intelligence (at the Online Information Conference) and has continued offering training courses on this topic - most recently at the SCIP 2005 annual conference in Chicago. Arthur has written and presented on competitive intelligence, marketing and Internet related topics globally. He is the managing partner of AWARE, offering clients CI research, analysis and training and can be contacted through AWARE's website at <<http://www.marketing-intelligence.co.uk>>.*

You've found your competitor's site (and the chances are that you didn't even need to Google it - you guessed or knew the domain name). Now what? Well, obviously you want to visit as much of it as you can to vacuum up any tidbits of information that will tell you about their strategy, their values and what they want to tell the world. At the same time you'll be aware that much of the information is there to sell the company and may not be 100% reliable: 'brochure-ware' is a term sometimes used.

Yet is this all that can be done?

Is there more that could be found if you just knew how?

The answer is usually yes!

In fact, a better way to view a corporate web presence is similar to the way you would view it in the offline world. You need to look at it in its entirety, searching for things that are below the surface, while focusing on your own strategic and organizational needs.

As well as the content itself, the design can provide hints to how the company sees itself. Other clues can come from identifying site ownership, and also related or sister sites. Sometimes you can find information that should have been protected or removed but is available for all who know where to look. A clue to company strategy can come from an examination of how the site has changed over time and also how the company sees itself in the web-environment: how easy it is to be found for search terms, etc.

A first step is to identify site ownership and sister sites. This is a relatively straightforward process in which you know the domain or where there are links to the site. Domain ownership can be checked at domain registries - for example: Network Solutions <<http://www.networksolutions.com>> or Nominet <<http://www.nic.uk/>> for UK registered domains. Worldwide domain ownerships can be checked at Checkdomain.com <<http://www.checkdomain.com>>. Things to look for are any linked domains mentioned, especially when checking first level addresses (.com, .org, .info, etc.) as additional contact information is generally provided for these. As well as checking known domains it can also be worth searching for all domains owned by a competitor or with specific keywords in the URL - and tracking these. Currently it is not possible, unfortunately, to search for all names owned by a company worldwide. However it is possible to search for all .com domains and some others using Dialog - via Dialog file 225. Sometimes this can throw up some surprises. For example the domain "roll-back.com" is not owned by Asda supermarkets - even though "roll-back" is a slogan Asda use to emphasise their price competitiveness. Instead it is owned by arch-competitor, Tesco! B&Q owns a variety of domains such as bandq.co.uk, b-and-q.com, etc. They also own diy.com. In this case,

diy.com is B&Q's main domain but in other cases a dissimilar domain could indicate plans for the future. (As an example, check the ownership of <<http://www.find-it-out.co.uk>> - we registered it in April 2005).

After checking for ownership through the domain registries, the NetCraft Search DNS service <<http://searchdns.netcraft.com>> can be valuable. This allows you to list all active domains using specific keywords. For example, there are 10 domains which include "freepint" in the name - including freepintvip.com. The NetCraft service allows you to also see any domains that are similar but not owned by the company - in the case of 'freepint', 'freepints.com' appears not to be owned by FreePint. This example is relatively simple - with only 10 domains. Often there are hundreds to check but some of those appearing would not be easily found through other routes. They can include specific customer, supplier or employee sites that would be hard to find through

## Gold

- FreePint No.159 6th May 2004. "Working in Older Age" and "Marketing for the Info-Entrepreneur"  
<http://www.freepint.com/issues/060504.htm>
- FreePint No.136 1st May 2003. "Risk Management: An Additional Axis For Information Professionals?" and "UK Freedom of Information Act 2000: The Road To Implementation"  
<http://www.freepint.com/issues/010503.htm>
- Free Pint No.111 2nd May 2002. "International Law" and "Weblogs and Blogging - Part 1"  
<http://www.freepint.com/issues/020502.htm>
- Free Pint No.87, 10th May 2001. "2001 - The Internet Election?" and "Information Provision for the Information Providers"  
<http://www.freepint.com/issues/100501.htm>
- Free Pint No.62, 11th May 2000. "Idiots' guide to UK employment law sites on the Internet" and "Gimme a G for Global, a G for Geography"  
<http://www.freepint.com/issues/110500.htm>
- Free Pint No.38, 13th May 1999. "Patent information on the Internet - can you afford to ignore it?" and "Lurking on Lists"  
<http://www.freepint.com/issues/130599.htm>
- Free Pint No.14, 14th May 1998. "Six Opinions on Internet World UK" and "Deafblind access to the Web"  
<http://www.freepint.com/issues/140598.htm>

Penny <[penny@freepint.com](mailto:penny@freepint.com)>

a search engine and tend to be known by the people who use them but not otherwise promoted.

#### Related FreePint links:

- 'Information and Libraries' articles in the FreePint Portal <<http://www.freepint.com/go/p69>>
- Post a message to the author, Arthur Weiss, or suggest further resources at the FreePint Bar <<http://www.freepint.com/bar>>
- Read this article online, with activated hyperlinks <<http://www.freepint.com/issues/120505.htm#feature>>
- Access the entire archive of FreePint content <http://www.freepint.com/portal/content/>

Further clues to the company can come from links to and from the various company websites. Links to the website can be checked using Yahoo and the linkdomain field (e.g. linkdomain:freepint.com). Links to specific pages can be done with the link field on several search engines, or via the incredibly useful Faganfinder URL Info facility <<http://www.faganfinder.com/urlinfo>>, which allows you to check the same site with several tools. URLInfo offers a wealth of other options for investigating competitor websites, including link finding and domain ownership identification. It also allows you to estimate competitor site usage and traffic via Alexa and view a sites page-rank, check the validity of its HTML code, track site changes, and view cached pages.

Alexa (accessible from Faganfinder, above, or at <<http://www.alexa.com>>) is a free tool for examining competitor websites. Although its traffic estimates will not be the real traffic, they should allow you to compare sites. Alexa also gives indications of whether the site is becoming more or less popular, and allows you to see what other sites people are visiting. A paid alternative to Alexa giving more reliable statistics can be obtained from Hitwise <<http://www.hitwise.com>>.

The way a site changes over time can give a major clue as to how the company sees itself in relation to the web, and sometimes to its general strategy. Sites do change over time - with useful pages disappearing. The Wayback Machine <<http://www.archive.org>> is a facility that allows you to see the changes or locate lost pages (so long as they are around a year old). In some cases it is possible to view sites as they were in the mid/late 1990s - and to track their development over the years.

Generally companies want to be found on the web - but not all are as good as they would like to be. How would a customer search for them? Think about the search terms a customer would use, and see where they appear on Google, Yahoo! or other search engines and directories. If they are not in the top 10 or 100, is it because they have not optimized their website or is it because you have entered in the wrong search terms? A utility for checking the position on Google or Yahoo! for several different search terms is Google Rankings at <<http://www.google rankings.com>> and Yahoo! Search Rankings at <<http://www.yahoo searchrankings.com>>. Sometimes you can identify the search terms they would like to be seen under by examining their source code: look for the "metatag keyword" or "metatag description" sections at the top of their HTML source code, and note the terms used.

A few years ago metatags were much more important as an indicator, but as they fell from grace for search engine optimization, they also disappeared from many sites. However, some sites still use them and so it is still worth a look. Similarly, the robots.txt file is not used as frequently as in the past. This tells search engines which directories NOT to visit. Of course, as a competitive intelligence expert that is just where you want to go and generally these un-indexed directories are publicly available without any password protection. (Breaking passwords is hacking - and completely unethical. Don't go there!)

Other things to look for on competitor sites are hidden links - links to other web-pages that are masked or hidden in some way, for example through using a single pixel image, etc. These can be found by browsing the source code, or more quickly using the "page-info" tool on Mozilla-based browsers such as FireFox and checking the links shown on each page. As well as searching for hidden links, look for hidden pages through the site search box: use search terms such as "logs" to pull up the site log-files, "supplier" to pull up supplier listings or any other term that would bring up pages that may not be immediately found. ("Confidential" for example may pull up items marked "confidential" - although whether or not these can be used is another question. Marking an item as confidential, but then making it publicly available removes the confidentiality - but what happens if it is then removed from the website. Can you prove that you got it without going through illegal routes?)

Finally, look to see if there are any PowerPoint presentations or Microsoft Word documents on the website. Sometimes these have embedded Excel files which contain a lot more information than intended. (My favourite example was a security company website. The company was probably fine when it came to protecting buildings and people, but not data. Their corporate presentation - in PowerPoint - included a graph that when clicked on gave an Excel spreadsheet with a second worksheet containing details of several customers and their purchases from the company!)

In summary: there is a lot more that can be found on corporate web sites other than just the text and sales patter. Knowing where and how to look is the first step. Knowing how to use it, however, is more important - and any information found should be seen in the context of the overall competitor's strategy and approach, rather than as standalone facts.

## Events

### United Kingdom:

- "Untangling Your Web: effective website management" 17th May  
<<http://www.freepint.com/go/e430>>
- "Private Equity Info Pro Group" 18th May  
<<http://www.freepint.com/go/e487>>
- "SLA EUROPE PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT SEMINAR: Making a business case" 25th May  
<<http://www.freepint.com/go/e489>>
- "Making Knowledge Work" 17th - 18th May  
<<http://www.freepint.com/go/e503>>
- "FOI SOS - Manchester" 25th - 26th May  
<<http://www.freepint.com/go/e450>>
- "Intranet Usability" 31st May - 1st June  
<<http://www.freepint.com/go/e494>>
- "Developing a classification scheme for Information and Filing" 31st May - 1st June  
<<http://www.freepint.com/go/e497>>

### United States:

- "Streaming Media East" 16th - 18th May  
<<http://www.freepint.com/go/e474>>
- "Enterprise Search Summit" 17th - 18th May  
<<http://www.freepint.com/go/e457>>
- "WebSearch University" 17th - 18th May  
<<http://www.freepint.com/go/e459>>

### Canada:

- "2005 Wireless & Mobile WorldExpo" 18th - 19th May <<http://www.freepint.com/go/e465>>
- "Special Libraries Association 2005 Annual Conference" 5th - 8th June  
<<http://www.freepint.com/go/e462>>

### Czech Republic:

- "INFORUM 2005 : 11th Annual Conference on Professional Information Resources" 24th - 26th May <<http://www.freepint.com/go/e412>>

### France:

- "Collaboration in the e-Workplace" 1st - 2nd June <<http://www.freepint.com/go/e452>>
- "Enterprise Search Paris" 1st - 2nd June  
<<http://www.freepint.com/go/e453>>
- "WebSearch Academy" 1st - 2nd June  
<<http://www.freepint.com/go/e454>>

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Penny <[penny@freepint.com](mailto:penny@freepint.com)>

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