

My favorite sites for digging up the dirt and getting things done

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The Web has so much to offer, you just need to know where to find it. Here's how I've been using the Web lately:

- Organizing my life
- Backgrounding people
- Backgrounding businesses
- Finding historical content
- Discovering what, or who, is behind a site

Here are the links I use to get all this done – the best thing is these sites are all free.

Organizing my life:

- I use RSS (really simple syndication) feeds so I can go to one location instead of many sites to catch up on the day's events. I use Google Reader to manage my feeds, ([://www.google.com/reader/](http://www.google.com/reader/)), but there are plenty of other services available such as Yahoo! Some of my favorite feeds: Docuticker ([://www.docuticker.com/](http://www.docuticker.com/)), Lifehacker ([://lifehacker.com/](http://lifehacker.com/)), Freakonomics blog from The New York Times, ([://freakonomics.blogs.nytimes.com](http://freakonomics.blogs.nytimes.com/)), local and national news sites, etc.
- Google docs allow me to work on spreadsheets and documents anywhere. I can also share them with other folks. I've found this application to be very useful for collaborating on projects. (docs.google.com)
- If you find yourself going back to a site day after day to see if it's changed, you should monitor it with Change Detection ([://www.changedetection.com/](http://www.changedetection.com/)). Simply enter the site address and your email. The service will check your page daily and send you an email when it has changed. (Note, there are other services that do this, but this is the one that I've used.)
- Sometimes email is just too clunky to share files. I've been using drop.io to upload files and share them with people. Check it out at [.drop.io](http://drop.io)

- Today's search engines cover only a fraction of the Web. The most popular ones don't always return the same results, so you should be searching more than one. To help with this, check out jux2.com - it searches multiple engines at once. Twingine.com shows side-by-side comparisons of Yahoo! And Google search results. Very cool.

Backgrounding people (Remember that all of these sites are simply starting points. You must be skeptical and you must verify everything):

- Start with Google.com
- Check LinkedIn profiles at .linkedin.com
- Get a Facebook account and search for people here (note, the best search available can be found when you are signed in to your account):
[://www.facebook.com/srch.php?s=0&sid=bf0b4d2d78f86a5f5e366519e58a4957](http://www.facebook.com/srch.php?s=0&sid=bf0b4d2d78f86a5f5e366519e58a4957)
- Use zabasearch.com to find addresses and birthdates
- Use Whitepages.com for reverse lookups, land line phone numbers and neighbors
- Pipl.com and 123people.com are good searches to find photos, Facebook and MySpace profiles, documents, etc. about a person.
- Icerocket.com allows you to search blogs, twitter tweets and more.
- Find out if someone has tweeted (twittered? I'm still working on the terminology) about a person by using the advanced search at search.twitter.com
- Always check sex offender registries here (or your state's search):
[://www.nsopw.gov/X\(1\)S\(e2igms55njade1550ciqba45\)\)/Core/OffenderSearchCriteria.aspx](http://www.nsopw.gov/X(1)S(e2igms55njade1550ciqba45))/Core/OffenderSearchCriteria.aspx)
- Find online property records and court records by looking at the public records directory provided by BRB Publications here: [://www.brbpub.com/freeresources/pubrecsites.aspx?h=1](http://www.brbpub.com/freeresources/pubrecsites.aspx?h=1)
- Criminalsearches.com provides a search for criminal and some other court records at criminalsearches.com.

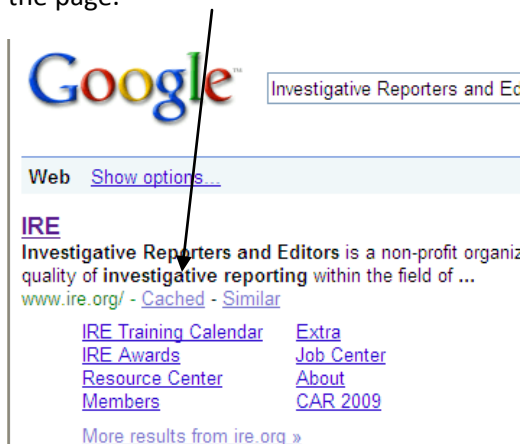
Backgrounding businesses and other organizations (Remember that all of these sites are simply starting points. You must be skeptical and you must verify everything):

- Find your state's corporation records online for annual reports, registrations, etc. For example:
 - Maryland - [://sdatcert3.resiusa.org/ucc-charter/](http://sdatcert3.resiusa.org/ucc-charter/)
 - Missouri - [://www.sos.mo.gov/categories.asp?id=2](http://www.sos.mo.gov/categories.asp?id=2)
- Find your state's trademark records. For example:
 - Maryland - [://www.sos.state.md.us/registrations/trademarks/TMSearch.htm](http://www.sos.state.md.us/registrations/trademarks/TMSearch.htm)
- Check out professional licenses (This is also useful for backgrounding individuals). For example:
 - Find state sites such as Maryland - <http://www.dllr.state.md.us/pq/>

- Get help from Portico [://indorgs.virginia.edu/portico/](http://indorgs.virginia.edu/portico/). This site acts as a gateway to public records sites. It's especially useful for professional records and property records by county.
- For publicly-traded companies, make sure you get familiar with the Security and Exchange Commission's site, [.sec.gov](http://sec.gov). Look at 10K filings for board members and proxy statements for compensation information.
- For nonprofit organizations, check out 990 filings at Guidestar.com. (Note: You can get a lot of information without getting the premium service, but if you want that service, IRE members can get a discount. Information available here: [://www.ire.org/join/Guidestar/](http://www.ire.org/join/Guidestar/))
- Zoominfo provides profile information on companies and people. [.zoominfo.com](http://zoominfo.com)

Find historical content online:

- Use Google's cache – Google stores a backup of most pages. This backup is called the cache. The link is useful if a server isn't responding when you click on a link, or if the host has taken down the page.



- The Wayback Machine from the Internet Archive captures and saves images of web sites. Not all sites are included, but it's likely that most you'll look for are. [://www.archive.org/index.php](http://www.archive.org/index.php). (For music buffs, the Internet Archive also has a Live Music Archive.)
- MINERVA from the Library of Congress collects sites that relate to very specific events such as the Iraq war, September 11, etc. [://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/lcwa/html/lcwa-home.html](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/lcwa/html/lcwa-home.html)
- The CyberCemetery is a library of sites for defunct government agencies - [://govinfo.library.unt.edu/default.htm](http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/default.htm)

Discover who is behind a site:

- Search for a site using [.domaintools.com](http://domaintools.com)