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10 Search Engines You Don't Know About

Go beyond Google and get vertical. These specialized search sites will help you find the business information you need--fast.

By **Laura Tiffany**
Entrepreneur.com

We've got some big news for you. Brace yourself. There are search options beyond Google--and we're not talking about Yahoo! and MSN. Vertical search is on the rise, and whether you're looking for business products, services or information, or a new place to advertise, vertical search sites can benefit your company. Market research firm Outsell predicts that the vertical search market will reach \$1 billion by 2009. While Google gets around 65 percent of search traffic today, it doesn't mean it's always the best place for your search.

"When we speak about an alternative search engine, we're speaking about something that's extremely industry-specific, very niche," says Jason Prescott, the owner of vertical search engine TopTenWholesale.com. "It's pin-pointing, accurate and only going to be for that topic you're searching for, [rather than] having to scour through the billions of search results you'll get on a mainstream, tier-one search engine."

The same logic applies when determining where to spend your search engine marketing dollars. If you sell a general consumer product, Google may be your best bet. But if you're looking for highly targeted business purchasers, it may be wise to go vertical. "[You get] a much more relevant user, a much higher conversion and a much better return on your investment," says Prescott. "User traffic might be a little less, but the visitor is highly more qualified."

Here are 10 vertical search engines we've identified as useful to any business owner. Be sure to research your own industry, however, for more specific verticals that can hone your searches or boost your advertising ROI for business customers.

TopTenWholesale.com: One of the biggest hurdles for new retailers is finding wholesale merchandise to sell. Prescott aims to place all those product sellers in one place so that when you search for shoes, you receive wholesale results, not Zappos.com. The site also offers news, a blog, directory listings, forums and classifieds, fulfilling Prescott's goal to create not just a wholesale search site, but a wholesale portal.

ThomasNet.com: ThomasRegister has been a leader in the business information field for more than 100 years, and ThomasNet.com is the place to go if you're in the market for industrial and manufacturing goods and services. This robust site allows you to search by product/service, company name, brand name, industrial websites or CAD models. You can narrow your search by U.S. state or Canadian province. Browse by category, download 2D and 3D CAD models of mechanical parts, and even download a search plug-in for your Firefox browser.

FindLaw.com: Both FindLaw.com and Lawyers.com serve the same primary functions: They allow users to search for attorneys by location and specialty. But FindLaw has an easier-to-use interface, making its extra information quicker to find, such as the free form examples, free full-text books and legal dictionary. Both have general search functionality, message boards and blogs, but again FindLaw.com wins us over with its [small business section](#).

USA.gov: The government has a labyrinthine web of sites, and if you're looking for information, it's easy to get lost. This all-things-U.S.-government portal/search engine has a tab specifically for businesses and nonprofits, and you can browse by topic. By far, the most helpful area in the business tab is [Get It Done Online](#), an area with links to business necessities that, yes, you can take care of online.

IT.com: Rather than offering a plain vanilla directory or just one basic search bar, IT.com provides several tech-oriented search options. This includes product and service categories (enterprise networking, open source, product development) or industry solutions (government, SMB, financial markets). The interface takes non-tech folks into consideration as well; each search choice has a roll-over with an explanation of the terminology. In the main search bar, you can choose to search for news, companies, white papers or webcasts.

Zibb.com: Reed Business is one of the leading vertical publishers with more than 200 business titles. Zibb.com is the company's new online venture, a vertical search service for business that offers not only websites and blogs in the results, but also Reed Business content. This site has a strong UK bent to its information, but it's one to keep an eye on because of its strong news element along with the typical search results and directory listings.

VerticalSearch.com: VerticalSearch gets super meta as a vertical search engine for vertical sites. The homepage offers pre-determined categories, but you also can choose your own keywords. Results pages offer feeds of headlines and research papers, and you can choose to pull an RSS feed from any search that you choose.

SearchFinance.com: This site bills itself as the "search engine for financial executives," making it quite the portal for corporate finance. While search is front-and-center, there are a ton of browsing options: blogs, podcasts, events, webcasts, magazines and alerts. Search results are particularly impressive. Directory matches pop up first, but you can also scroll over the results sources for more information on a particular company and choose to remove any "commercial" sources from your results.

Yahoo! Local: This site is the most consumer-oriented of the bunch, but a recent redesign with a focus on vertical categories makes it worth a look. Yahoo! Local has broken out of the restaurants-and-nightclubs city guide mold to offer a number of business categories like health and beauty, automotive, and real estate--useful information whether you're looking for professional service vendors in your neighborhood, a new bistro to take a client to, or a local advertising solution for your business.

Melissa Data: This is a slight fudge on our part as this site is more of a new customer enticement for data service provider Melissa Data than true vertical search, but there are so many free search options, it may become a favorite on your bookmarks. You can search for basic demographic and market data, maps and mailing information, statistics or specific data like SIC codes. There's a daily limit to your number of "lookups," so unless you subscribe, you'll have to curb your information appetite.

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