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HOME

## Diggin' deep online to profile an executive – Part 2.

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This is part two of a two part series on conducting secondary research to profile executives and leadership figures in business. Because it has been very warm out, you'll notice that I'm actually reusing entire sentences below in this intro. How cool is that? The editors at SCIP are very progressive, very flexible. I'm typing in flip-flops with my dog by my side.

Last time I covered compensation, political donations/affiliations, and corporate governance (participation). You can find that column online at [http://www.imakenews.com/scip2/e\\_article000153473.cfm](http://www.imakenews.com/scip2/e_article000153473.cfm). This time around, I'm steering toward a few things you probably should keep an eye on as well as a few things you possibly should not know.

I'm going to restate this point from last time: when it comes to profiling executives – and people in general -- you've really got to pause up front and make a clear choice between the deep ocean or the big blue sky. With the Internet and a few hundred dollars in hand, there is almost no limit to what you might uncover about any individual. Start by listing what you need to know, then add in what you'd like to know, and get rid of what you do not want to know – unless you're particularly curious, or unless that is your real goal.

There is a big difference between personality profiling through primary research and profiling people through secondary research (namely online and database resources). Most importantly, a profile in either case is not a deep background check. A deep background investigation is a whole lot more than what I'm getting into in this particular column.

Most of my experiences with requests for such information have revolved around profiling leaders of specific organizations for the purposes of organizational research or talent discovery and acquisition (aka headhunting). With that in mind, I've included some very popular areas of interest within traditional profiles, as well as other ideas that have come up in past experiences.

What you'll find below are some broad topical areas of interest followed by a set of relevant resources and possible approaches to using such resources. Use your best judgment when determining how far to go with a profile through secondary research – don't get yourself into trouble, and don't waste your time on meaningless resources. Always put your client's interest first in this case, and discuss with them the information that you're after before you start digging.

### How much can I dig up on this person? Take a trip to a search or metasearch engine.

I am not promoting any one search engine here. However, for quick background information on any one individual, I often turn to traditional engines like Google or metasearch tools like Copernic. Both will yield tremendous volume if you type in your queries carefully. Don't chase herrings, think carefully about what you need or what you might like to know. For example, if your target or his/her employer has been involved in a scandal, try searching for the name and include the specific industry or scandal

(e.g. Enron, Valdez, 'Union Carbide and India').

Remember to use common sense here. Is your target's real name 'Dick' or does he go by Richard? Honestly, the industry might only know him as 'Dick.' Keep this in mind as you modify search strings. Try adding in confirmed data to ease the pain of researching plain names like Smith and Jones (such as employer name, undergraduate institution attended, etc.).

Personally, I get a kick out of Google's image search. It is typically accurate with well known figures (try Bob Dylan or Larry Ellison). However, with lesser known figures you might wind up looking at anything from a ball of yarn to a loaf of bread. With that said, gathering a current photo is a nice touch in a detailed profile. I used the image engine to chronicle Michael Jackson's metamorphosis.

### **Hey! They earn a lot, I wonder how much their house is worth.**

Last time we covered compensation. This is a bit of a variation on that theme and in particular, requires a little guesswork. Historically, this has been of tremendous value to executive search people, who often require this data in the relocation process for a number of reasons. However, if you're not recruiting your target, then it is unlikely that he/she will disclose such information.

For starters, let's just hope that your target has an unusual name. Now, call the corporate switchboard and confirm that the target works at the main office (or find out where they do work, if not at HQ). Next step: go online and search those white pages. Look at the addresses of the returns. If you are not familiar with the area, you might consider a call to a local realtor to inquire about 'upscale towns' in that geography (this assumes that executives live in style, many do, because it's all about the bling-bling).

Hopefully at this point you've got one address to investigate. If you have more than one, try looking again at the towns and the neighborhoods. Are several in the same town? Get creative, and get that list down to one address. Review executive resumes and bios to see if they identify their hometowns or cities by name. If they are registered officers of the corporation, this information might also be buried within a filing or registration.

Now, take a trip to Domania ([www.domania.com](http://www.domania.com)). There are many sites on the Internet tracking home price sales, recording historical data, etc., but this has always been my favorite. You might visit historical sales and dig up the actual record of sale for the target's home, or you might visit current area homes for sale to see how the whole 'hood is living. If you don't find the exact number, don't get discouraged. You'll still get some insight by looking at area home prices.

### **Gosh, she doesn't look a day past 50. How might I find out for sure?**

This tool is a bit smarmy, but interesting nonetheless, so I'm mentioning it here. Based on public registration records (voter, driver, etc.), a site called Anybirthday launched a while back ([www.anybirthday.com](http://www.anybirthday.com)). They claim to have over 135 million birthday records, and it's still growing. That's got to be at least twelve thousand tons of melted candle wax.

What's particularly interesting about this site is that you don't even need the individual's maiden name (where relevant). You will need to do some guessing as you view returns (having viewed a photo or chronological bio including college attendance dates will be helpful here). In the end, you might wind up getting quite close, and will likely uncover the exact record. If you have additional data, such as a Social Security Number, you will get the exact information.

I'm personally not so comfortable with this kind of information floating around on the Internet. However, information wants to be free, and so I'm passing it along to you.

### **Have they done something really bad?**

Any consultant can search a local court house for records and filings, or any actions brought against an individual. But why get in the car when somebody else will do it for next to nothing? Use your time wisely.

There are now countless sites promoting background check services on the Internet. My personal favorite is KnowX ([www.knowx.com](http://www.knowx.com)). They can get at a tremendous amount of information, and can deepen responses based on your requests for more information. They have access to skip tracing tools for a return of unlisted address and phone information, as well as access to myriad county level filings and news bytes (wonderful if you need to make personal contact with these targets outside of the office).

By the way, that skip tracing tool can also be used to get the exact address for the home price search mentioned above, but it's unfortunately not available to the mass market, only approved requestors (there are several vendors of skip tracing services, you might try different vendors if you really, really need this information for some reason). On a related aside, KnowX and many of the other services are able to use similar tools to gather background information on owners and officers of a company.

Other popular low cost services in place of KnowX come from vendors such as [BackgroundsOnline.com](http://BackgroundsOnline.com) and [ChoicePointOnline.com](http://ChoicePointOnline.com) (public records). A quick search on the Internet will lead you to dozens of others. However, if you are using a background check as part of an employment/recruitment process, think twice. There are laws that specifically govern the use of such practices; consult your attorney – or your client's own counsel.

#### **My final comment regarding these resources:**

In general, many of the approaches described will uncover information about almost anybody, regardless of corporate affiliation. There are many ethical and moral dilemmas presented with access to such information, and I urge you to think carefully about why you need this information and where you're going to put it.

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As mentioned in earlier columns, please feel free to send me an email if you have some area of interest that you would appreciate seeing here. My email address is [contact@clew.us](mailto:contact@clew.us)

#### **Background:**

David R. Carpe is principal of Clew, LLC [www.clew.us](http://www.clew.us). He received his BFA from the George Washington University and his MBA, with a concentration in Finance and Entrepreneurship, from Babson College. David has authored a case on Valuation for the Division Chair and has also served as a Volunteer Teacher with the National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship. Professionally, he has worked in research with Fidelity, served as a Management Consultant, acted as the founder and CEO of a venture backed software company, and most recently has been working with Clew, LLC serving some of the world's most formidable organizations through Clew's CI & Strategic Human Resources practice (HRCI). David, his two sons, and their dog reside in Lexington. He is a member of SCIP, MIT Enterprise Forum and IRE and has spent the majority of his career involved, somehow, with research, analysis, consulting and planning. – Direct: 781.674.CLEW (2539)

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